Arts engagement programs with Warlpiri communities sharing traditions and stories

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InCite’s partner, the Mt Theo Program is nationally recognised for prevention, aftercare and support for petrol sniffers and is repeatedly cited as ‘the success story’ in petrol sniffing intervention.

Strong trust relationships exist between Warlpiri communities, InCite and Mt Theo as a result of the long-term investment and use of skilled community artists. Without this trust it’s impossible to achieve this engagement. The collaboration involves two programs of delivery: the ‘Red Sand Culture’ and the ‘Southern Ngalia’. Both initiatives support re-engagement with culture, family, education, numeracy, literacy, and other health and wellbeing outcomes, all integral to the personal and professional development of young Warlpiri individuals.

Since 2007 ‘Red Sand Culture’ has been steadily developing with the delivery of hip hop music and dance skills workshops, starting in Yuendumu and expanding to include Willowra, Nyirrpi and Lajamanu. Participation numbers have far exceeded expectations. The repeat visits by artists/mentors has proven vital to establish trust relationships and have been a key to the increased participation and quality of the work engaged with and produced by the young people.

‘Red Sand Culture’ is now ready to take new steps in achieving sustainable outcomes for Warlpiri youth, including tailor-made professional development and mentoring for identified individuals and young leaders in each community.

The concept of ‘Southern Ngalia’ began in 2007 with discussions with senior Yuendumu Warlpiri women over their disappointment that younger generations did not seem interested in engaging with traditional dance and opportunities to do so were diminishing. In 2009 the Mt Theo Program supported three days of consultation meetings as the basis for the 2010–11 successful pilot stages of the project.

Southern Ngalia is a three-way intergenerational collaboration between Mt Theo, senior Warlpiri women and InCite. Built on trust relationships it responds to senior women’s requests to build this platform for opportunity to collectively explore, share, record and the transmission of Warlpiri culture. It is a program of women’s dance camps and presentations.

Mt Theo has identified the need to target young teenage girls who are on the verge of dropping out of secondary school for participation to increase re-engagement with Warlpiri culture as a successful strategy for building self-esteem and curbing anti-social behaviour.

Southern Ngalia focuses on achieving: stronger links with traditional song and dance; creating new generations fluent in the ceremonial and cultural knowledge of their
parents/grandparents; strengthening of Warlpiri culture; showcasing within and beyond the region.