What the world needs now is Love Punks: using digital media for positive change

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The YijalaYala Project is a long-term, multi-platform arts project based in Roebourne, WA focused on telling the story of the community in a range of media. Through arts and digital media skill development and content creation, it explores the inter-connection between past, present and future, young people and older generations, and ancient and modern culture, while engaging young people at risk of offending, substance abuse or leaving education in activities that may assist them to make positive life choices as they grow into adulthood.

Roebourne has long been viewed as one of Australia’s most socially dysfunctional towns, with a long history of trauma that plays out in behaviours such as substance abuse, crime, domestic violence, unemployment and truancy. While many programs and projects introduced into the community focus on the problems, the YijalaYala Project wanted to find a way to change the narrative into something more positive. The focus on new media came about in an unexpected way in 2011 when a group of Roebourne’s young people got together with Big hART’s mentors to make a zombie satire film about how youthful energy can bring about change to situations that are stuck, and is essential in keeping individuals and communities healthy and strong. The film has adults as zombies, trapped by bad habits and repetitive tasks, meeting the young, trickster Love Punks who ‘doctor them up’ with a bit of fun and Burt Bacharach. The film was a huge success both in and outside of the community and it left the kids wanting to do more ‘Love Punk’ stuff. Big hART’s mentors saw how keen on computer games and mobile devices young people in the community were and introduced workshops in digital media and literacy that led to the making of an online game starring themselves, followed by an interactive comic for iPad that combines animation, music, voice-overs, live action films and text that tell stories of their world, culture and country.

The workshops and the products that have been created have brought the stories of this previously troubled community into the public sphere and generated much-needed positive media attention for a community that the media and outside public love to fear. This presentation will introduce you to the power of combining digital media, positive role-modelling, life-skill building and the energy of youth to bring about positive health consequences and social and emotional wellbeing in a Western Australian Aboriginal community.