

BRIDGING THE GAP

February – August 2007



Project Description

Tasmanian and African born secondary school students came together to explore issues around cultural identity. The result was a play *'Madam Tojo's Café'*, and a DVD with teacher resource component.

Host Organisation

Hobart City Council in partnership with Kickstart Arts and Elizabeth College.

Funding sources

Dept. of Immigration and Citizenship

Outcomes

Play: Toured performance 27 Aug – 5 Sept, to Sorrell and Tasman Schools. DVD. Improved cultural understanding amongst students.

Highlights

Some of the African born students were so incredibly shy - watching them progress and perform. Some have only been speaking English for a couple of years, there were astounding changes. Response from audiences. Figuring out a reasonable communication process between partners ... all that red tape!

Project workers

Jami Bladel (Writer/Director)
Mathew Fargher (Youth Worker)
Jamin (Artist)

Keywords

Performance, Hobart, Youth

Project Contact

Kickstart Arts T: 6224 2362
kickstart@internode.on.net

This project began when the Networking for Harmony Committee identified a need to address cultural issues amongst young people aged 12 - 17. Elizabeth College has a growing number of African born students. At the time of this production it was more than 80.

In 2005, a working party formulated some ideas with Kickstart Arts and applied for funding. A steering committee was formed, comprising members from all partners and the Dept of Education and the Anti Discrimination Office.

Workshops with the 21 participants took place three times a week, over 6 months and began with many discussions on the idea of cultural identity. Using story telling sessions and improvisation, characters and a theme emerged. Jamie took these ideas and wrote *'Madam Tojo's Café'*. There were 6 songs in the play; *'Our Place'*, *'War'*, *'Dreaming Of Freedom'*, *'Human Just Like You'*, *'I Never Will Marry'* and *'We Are Only Human'*, the lyrics were mainly written by students, with Mathew writing the music. Craig Wellington, who also mentored students on production management, produced the play.

Everyone took part in the play, which was performed to audiences of up to 160 and made up of students from 12 schools, as well as the public. They received many standing ovations, with people often moved to tears. Evaluation revealed extremely positive feedback from the audience, teachers and participants. The Principal expressed great interest in finding ways to embed such projects into the curriculum.

This project also produced a DVD, distributed to all schools in Tasmania. It includes a teacher resource component, a 'making of' documentary and footage of one entire performance.

www.kickstart.org.au

Image: Birzaff Gebreselaisie performing *'Madam Tojo's Café'*
Photographer: Louise Conboy

