

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE ARTS IN REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT KALGOORLIE
ON FRIDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2003**

SESSION 4

Members

**Mr D.A. Templeman (Chairman)
Mr L. Graham (Deputy Chairman)
Mr J.N. Hyde
Mr A.P. O’Gorman
Ms S.E. Walker**

[2.05 pm]

BOASE, MRS CHRISTINE JANE
Aboriginal Economic Development Officer,
Goldfields Esperance Development Commission,
examined:

GUNTHUR, MRS LEANNE MICHELE
Board Member, Freefall Theatre,
examined:

OXENBURGH, MRS SANDY
Board Member, Freefall Theatre Company,
examined:

MOODY, MR GERALT
Board Member, Freefall Theatre Company,
examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Welcome to representatives of the Freefall Theatre. The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the House demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Unless otherwise directed by the committee, witnesses' evidence is public and may be published, including on the Parliament web site, immediately after correction. Have you read the notes on giving evidence to this committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you also read the "Information for Witnesses" sheet?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: The committee is conducting an inquiry into the arts in Western Australia, specifically regional Western Australia. We have five terms of reference, which you may have seen. We are very interested in looking at the impact and effectiveness of arts outcomes that are being delivered in regional Western Australia. That is one of the reasons we are making sure that we visit every region in Western Australia. The goldfields is our fifth so far. We are very keen to find out the sorts of outcomes that your organisation delivers, the types of funding opportunities that you may or may not access, and any impediments or issues relating to accessing not only funding but other resources that your organisation might need. We are also interested to hear how you perceive the importance of the arts to this region specifically. Various government agencies are funded to deliver arts outcomes. How does your organisation or you as individuals believe that delivery might be improved or issues relating to it could be addressed? Perhaps you could give a brief outline of the Freefall Theatre and tell us what the company does. I am sure that will give us some background.

Mrs Oxenburgh: The Freefall Theatre is a youth focused theatre. It provides activities for young people from five years of age to about 22 years of age. It was initiated by a group of young people in the goldfields in 1998. It began as the Desert Drama Club and then later was

the Desert Drama outreach project. They sought out Leanne and me initially to get some support. We assisted those young people in writing their funding application along with a lot of other people. From there, as the young people's ambitions grew, what they wanted to achieve required the setting up of a theatre company and a board structure. All of us are members of the board. Some board members are not here today, of course. We have a youth committee which identifies the directions of the youth theatre company and then they inform the board. The board seeks funding in collaboration with the young people.

The CHAIRMAN: What funding do you have now? How are you funded?

Mrs Oxenburgh: We have had Country Arts WA funding and Department of Indigenous Affairs funding. In the past we have had Save the Children funding. We have not had that this year, though.

Mr J.N. HYDE: What Country Arts program?

Mrs Oxenburgh: The regional arts fund.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Is that recurrent? Are you on a three-year project?

Mrs Oxenburgh: No. We have just been granted annual funding in the category B round.

Mr J.N. HYDE: What is that worth to you?

Mrs Oxenburgh: \$10 000.

Mr J.N. HYDE: What about Department of Indigenous Affairs?

Mrs Oxenburgh: That is \$5 000. That really is to help go towards the Reconciliation Week projects. A big focus of Freefall, I guess, has been reconciliation projects, working from Aboriginal contemporary theatre as a focused way of working. One of the really important things there is the mentorship from the Yirra Yaakin theatre company in Perth. That has been important because some larger theatre companies wanted to use their model - so-called - whereas the young people here have their own way of working. Yirra Yaakin was empathetic and able to work with young people in the way that the young people wanted to work and to help them with the development of skills.

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned at the beginning that the Freefall Theatre was really born of young people. Can you give us a bit of an indication of how that happened?

Mrs Oxenburgh: There were about eight or nine mainly boys who would have been eight through to 12. The Blue Box youth theatre was running here but was for 13 year olds, so they were not able to access it. That is where they went first. They were told that they were too young.

The CHAIRMAN: Was that a commercial enterprise?

Mrs Oxenburgh: No. It was not for profit.

Mrs Boase: Yes, it was not for profit but it is no longer functioning.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Yes, they could not access that. Because I was working as an arts teacher and I was the teacher of one of those kids, they said, "Can you help us?" One of those was Mrs Gunthur's son.

Mrs Gunthur: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Were they indigenous?

Mrs Oxenburgh: They were a mixture.

The CHAIRMAN: The young people were saying, "We want to do something in theatre. We do not know how, but we want to do something." They got some support together, and that is how it formed.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: With regard to the funding from Country Arts, you mentioned the regional arts fund. You have been granted an annual grant of \$10 000 because you have moved into category B. What did you have to do to get that funding?

Mrs Oxenburgh: We had to write a funding application.

The CHAIRMAN: How did you find that process?

Mrs Oxenburgh: All of these processes are like writing a university assignment. There is always an expectation that young people have to do that. For two people with masters study under way, and for Christine and Gerry who are professional people, we find that a challenge. The expectation that young people can do it is, I think, unrealistic. The kids have the ideas, but the bar for the kids to jump to achieve what they want to achieve is very high.

Mr J.N. HYDE: That devolved state funding is supposed to go through Country Arts to make it accessible for regional people, but there is also a youth arts funding round out of the department. Have you had any contact with them; in other words, have they come to you and asked how they can help you?

Mrs Oxenburgh: Through whom - Country Arts?

Mr J.N. HYDE: It does not matter. We vote for a budget in state Parliament and we expect that somebody will get it to you people. What we want to find out is why it is not getting to you; why you do not know what it is.

Mrs Gunthur: It is a very big challenge to get the money. It is very time consuming.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Tell us why.

Mrs Boase: One of the biggest problems is that this whole theatre group, like many other organisations around here, is basically run by volunteers. We have no recurrent funding whatsoever. There are umpteen grants out there which all come at different times. We all have other projects on at work. We have other things happening with our kids. We are up late e-mailing each other, trying to get these funding applications done. Then we have to ring people to get letters of support. Of course, we have to ring them three or four times to get the letters. Usually we have to send a copy of our draft application first, so that means we are trying to get it happening while we are still trying to get our program together, to get these letters of support. As Sandy said, a lot of the questions are really quite unrealistic and quite difficult to answer. You are not quite sure sometimes how to respond. The fact that you cannot send them by fax or e-mail is archaic. For regional people, it is quite difficult. Sometimes the mail might take two or three days longer, even express post, than theoretically it should, or you are paying big dollars, which you do not have, for couriers to get it there.

[2.20 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Quite often you are working up to the deadline, are you not?

Mrs Boase: Yes. We have one due at 5.00 pm, and we just e-mail it through to a group in Perth to print it off and to deliver it for us.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you repeat what you just said?

Mrs Boase: We finished about one hour ago a funding application that is due at five.

Mr J.N. HYDE: To whom?

Mrs Boase: It was WARIS funding. The only way we can do it and get it down there in time with all the information together is to e-mail and fax all the information to a company in Perth. We get them to print it out and collate it and courier it across. We have to cover ourselves to get it there. It is the only way to get it in. It is a decent lump of funding, rather than \$2 000 here or \$3 000 there.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Without stating the bleeding obvious, no little office exists in Hannan Street to which you can go to deal with these matters. Does it involve dealing with Perth all the time?

Mrs Boase: Yes.

Mr Moody: You request the form to fill out the applications, and when it arrives, you have five days or something like that to get it done. You have a 20-page application to fill out.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Without stating the bleeding obvious again, what if there were an office in Hannan Street the job of which was to let you know there was a funding round, a new fund or a change of name that might be of interest to your group? The person in that office in Hannan Street would be local and know your needs, as well as being from government and being aware of Country Arts, Lotterywest, WARIS, Healthway, the Departments of Education and Indigenous Affairs etc. Would that make it easier?

Mrs Boase: No, I do not think so. I work with the development commission, and we have an officer with one of her main projects being to follow all the grants. She shoots through to me any grants that are relevant to any of my projects. This is one of them. We cannot keep up with them because they are coming through every two or three weeks or every month.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Yes, but the development commission person is not filling them in for you.

Mrs Boase: No. We do not expect them to fill in the application forms.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Under the New South Wales model of a regional arts officer, that person would know that you are volunteers and have busy lives. That person would fill in the applications and do the spade work to make it easier for regional groups.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Is that not what the old country arts officer did when here? That was when Desert Drama went from being the club to the outreach project. Carolyn Gillies-Gray spent many hours with us. That position was poorly resourced and employed part time. She spent a lot of extra time she was not paid for working with the committee of 12 people. We had to prove there was a need. We did a district-wide needs analysis that went from Kambalda to Southern Cross and Marvel Loch and through the lands up to Wiluna and the local city as well. We did questionnaires and interviews. All that gave us, I think, was \$15 000 when we got the funding.

Mr Moody: The lands are the Ngaanyatjarra traditional Aboriginal lands.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you saying that an attempt was made previously for what was, or could be called, a regional arts officer, but they were poorly resourced; that is, employed part time for two days a week and not resourced to travel or anything of that nature? Therefore, it was set up not to succeed from the start.

Mrs Boase: Yes, but what that person achieved, given the little -

The CHAIRMAN: If that person were resourced in a similar manner to the sports and recreation area with an officer -

Mrs Boase: Then we could share the lot, could we not, in regional areas?

The CHAIRMAN: I suppose that is what we are asking. If that person were properly resourced, would that assist groups like yours and others that seek to be funded in not going

back and forth to Perth by fax, phone, carrier pigeon or whatever? Would a person who is locally placed, well resourced and knows the network and is part of the network be a better model?

Mr Moody: I agree with it.

Mrs Boase: I think it would be.

The CHAIRMAN: It seems you had something like that and it was not resourced properly so it did not succeed to the level it should have done -

Mrs Oxenburgh: I think in the end they could not attract somebody to the position because it was not full time.

Mrs Boase: Carolyn could not keep going; she was becoming ill trying to do it. It was for the entire region as well. She resigned, and they advertised the position again and it was not filled. That money, because of the funding set up, could not be used for anything else.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Was that through the development commission?

Mrs Boase: No, it was through Country Arts.

Mr J.N. HYDE: While on the subject, New South Wales has two equivalent country arts people in the Sydney CBD and 13 in regional NSW. If we were looking at a similar model with a regional team in Western Australia, would you attach that person to the development commission or the local government structure? New South Wales has four or six regional councils. You have nine local councils in the goldfields regions. As parliamentarians, we are looking for a suitable structure. This is opposed to someone stating, "Here's your \$70 000 salary and \$200 000 expenses; go find a tin shed in Kalgoorlie." That position could be attached to a development commission or a regional council. Any thoughts on a model that would make it easier?

Mrs Boase: Can I suggest a flexible model, because I think the position must be attached to somewhere that has a commitment to supporting the arts. If, for example, you say that the position will always be attached to local government, it would work in some places and not others - some councils are not interested in the arts. The development commissions and other organisations are in a similar position. People with an interest must be involved, and must be attached to some body that cares.

Mr J.N. HYDE: That is great. We have found that in some places the development commission has got an idea and the councils are not interested. Elsewhere, the councils are very supportive and the development commission did not see the arts as its area of responsibility. That flexibility should certainly be considered in terms of a recommendation.

The CHAIRMAN: You have young people aged five to 22 years. How many are we talking about, approximately?

Mrs Oxenburgh: Over a year?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mrs Oxenburgh: We have had fewer this year than in other years. We have worked with about 800 kids.

The CHAIRMAN: Goodness.

Mrs Oxenburgh: We have the numbers here.

The CHAIRMAN: I am trying to get a sense -

Mrs Oxenburgh: We are talking about a concerted program. We would probably hit more kids because we do circus days and one-off workshops. However, we are talking about kids

we work with in a program with which we get outcomes with the kids. We run nine-week programs that will have self-development or personal development outcomes. This is combined with arts skills and it depends on the art form involved; that is, whether it is circus and acrobalance, theatre, dance or mixed multi-medias.

Mrs Boase: Since 1998 we have worked with approximately 2 300 kids.

The CHAIRMAN: That is excellent

Mrs Boase: That is boys and girls ranging in ages and working, as Sandy said, with people like Gary Cooper from Bega Garberringu, who is a professional dancer; and people like Jerry Williamson, and Darren Mason, who is a musician - a very good didge player. Many other people are involved working and using traditional language, traditional dance and theatre, and contemporary dance and theatre.

Mr J.N. HYDE: We are also happy at the end of the hearing to take a written submission if you have brought something to table.

Mr Moody: They also involve the traditional Aboriginal elders to come in and talk about Aboriginal culture and how they do things and dance and rhythm, if you like.

Mr J.N. HYDE: One of the reasons for considering the issue of regional arts is that David and I passionately believe that arts make a difference in a community. That is certainly the case in terms of reconciliation, diversity and tolerance. We would like evidence that the money the Government chucks into the arts - certainly into youth arts - has been effective in terms of building family, community development, cutting antisocial behaviour and all those matters that make the economic rationalists think that arts money is well spent.

Mrs Oxenburgh: We have stats on that aspect. We were asked to run a program last year in a local primary school. They were having issues with kids with attendance, in aggressive acting out behaviours, and difficulties in dealing with feelings of anger and anger management. We set up a program in that school of four workshops a week. Retention of participation was involved. The kids had to attend school and participate. We worked with the schools in the arts workshop programs. There were individual education plans developed with those kids and their teachers. It was a holistic program. It was not that we would come in and give a feel good bit of fun for an hour. It was part of a whole program in which we worked with the school, looked at the outcomes the schools were working with and worked with the teachers. We up-skilled the teachers as well as the kids. Therefore, the outcomes were better for the kids because it was integrated into the fabric of what the school was already doing. This approach was opposed to saying, "Hey, we've got this great idea and we'll come in and do a show!" That would not give the outcomes to the kids.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have some of that evidence?

Mr J.N. HYDE: Stats, you said.

The CHAIRMAN: That is something we are very keen to get hold of. As John just said, we are trying to make sure that we highlight through tangible evidence how the arts can be used as a medium to address a range of social, economic and other issues in a community. If we have examples, it would help us in our formal reporting. It would be wonderful if we could get hold of that evidence.

Mrs Oxenburgh: We may have to ask the school because it is owned by the school as well.

The CHAIRMAN: Even a summary of the project and how it was implemented would be very useful. You mentioned the involvement of indigenous elders in some of your programs. I am interested in that aspect. Again, this probably relates to using people as a resource to deliver outcomes. Can you provide some more information about how that works?

Mr Moody: There is an old fella here with one leg called Dinni.

The CHAIRMAN: I met him yesterday.

Mr Moody: Yes. He is the type of bloke we get in. He is really an entrepreneur, when you think about it, on the Aboriginal side as well as the white fella's side. He goes back a long way. He is from a traditional background. There are different stories about how he lost his leg, and that sort of thing. He is also a very prominent person in Aboriginal culture and law out in the lands and such matters. People listen to what he says in that regard. When we asked him to come in, he did so. He is paid a fee, like everybody else - it is rare that you get people to come in and do it for free. You have Aboriginal people on a low socioeconomic level, and we try to provide something for them in making a presentation. I am not too sure about Darren.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Darren donated his time.

Mr Moody: Darren is very good with the didgeridoo.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Gary donated his time as well.

Mr Moody: Many Aboriginal people see something in the programs. Kalgoorlie has a bad name in regards to discrimination and that sort of stuff. It is across the board with everybody. We try to break down the barriers with the kids. We have issues in the local schools. The kids play well together through primary school, but other attitudes come into it when they get to high school. We try to break that barrier with the kids and get them involved through youth theatre. Yirra Yaakin is an Aboriginal theatre group that comes up and gets involved. The non-Aboriginal kids see the positive side of Aboriginal people, and not only the negative side as always reported. That is why we get a lot of involvement with the Aboriginal groups.

The CHAIRMAN: Dinni comes in as a respected elder who has a variety of skills. Is the program built around him to deliver some of those outcomes to the young?

Mr Moody: It is not actually built around him, but he is involved in setting the directions.

The CHAIRMAN: But he is part of the program.

Mrs Oxenburgh: He has identified how it should operate because, as an elder, he has the knowledge about, and a control of, how and what is appropriate.

Mr J.N. HYDE: It is interesting that you mentioned Gary Cooper, because I worked as an artistic director in Broome and employed both Gary and Trevor Jamieson. Many indigenous kids in Broome see a career in the arts as possible because they see Baamba Albert or Ningali Lawford there. I guess there is not the same mindset here. Maybe you are starting to build the view that an arts career is possible for indigenous kids. Certainly, having Gary back living here and Trevor around the traps as a role model will help in that regard. How important are role models for the arts?

[2.35 pm]

Mr Moody: It is good, because when we do role modelling, we invite sports people from syndicates that operate all over Australia. When a sports person's career has finished, what do they have? They have nothing. However, people who have learnt the arts have a skill that they will have for the rest of their lives. It is positive for children to see Aboriginal role models.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Through one of our programs, young people can obtain a certificate 2 in live production theatre and entertainment.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Is that done through technical and further education?

Mrs Oxenburgh: It is run through the New England Institute of TAFE. An opportunity arose to run the program with that TAFE. When Desert Drama went to an outreach project, initially we tried to find a TAFE in Western Australia to deliver a course, but that did not happen. An opportunity arose with the New England Institute by accident and good luck. We have been able to get kids involved in that course because the TAFE recognises the prior learning that the kids have already done. Through CrocFest, the kids had another opportunity of being offered traineeships. Some 15 young indigenous and non-indigenous people will complete the certificate 2 by the end of this year. Curtin University has given an undertaking that a certificate 3 course will be available next year. That course leads to employment in the arts and is also a pathway to university education. For example, the students could become art teachers and could provide positive role models to the schools, or they could become involved in marketing and public relations. The people who complete the course will not only become arts performers but can also use the wealth of skills that they have developed, which are so valuable, in other professions to help kids.

Mrs Gunthur: That has always been one of our objectives, even when we were called Desert Drama. A major project was to make the kids aware of the pathways available in the arts and to provide them with those pathways.

Mr Moody: It also gives them a lot of confidence and self-esteem, which is very good for Aboriginal kids.

Mr J.N. HYDE: One of the committee's terms of reference is to look at the benefits or advantages of holding festivals. We are very interested in CrocFest. The Government has provided a lot of money for that. Has the Government wasted its money by funding CrocFest? Has it brought incredible benefits? Can you give the committee an honest, local view of CrocFest?

Mrs Boase: An awful lot of money has been spent supporting a festival from the eastern States that comes to Western Australia. I will give you a quick summary of how it began. A committee came from the eastern States to Western Australia in November 2001. It held community meetings, and it then went away and we heard nothing from it until late June 2002. We were then told that by August 2002 we had to get volunteers to organise and young people to perform at the festival. We had only six to eight weeks to pool people, to put a career expo and performances together, and to get the schools on board. We had to run around like blue-arsed flies. The equipment for CrocFest was driven in on big trucks. People were flown in from the eastern States, and three days of festivities were held. The kids get a lot out of that. The festival side of it is great. However, the people from CrocFest then all fly home again, and we are all left feeling dead.

The CHAIRMAN: If the government contribution of \$100 000 to make sure that CrocFest appeared in Kalgoorlie had been given to the community organisation, could the festival have been produced in-house?

Mrs Boase: We could have spent the money on projects for the whole year leading up to the festival. The people who performed the traditional welcoming this year were given no funds.

Mr Moody: I was on the welcoming committee, and it had to find its own funds to organise the welcoming.

Mr J.N. HYDE: For CrocFest?

Mrs Boase: Yes. The major local presenter gave two days and two nights of his own time and was not paid for it.

Mr J.N. HYDE: My view of CrocFest is the same as yours. We found when we went to Derby that CrocFest seemed to excuse the fly in, fly out nature of it. The people who rent out stages etc did not gain any employment from the festival because everything came from the eastern States.

Mrs Boase: Exactly.

Mr J.N. HYDE: A lot of employment could be created using that \$100 000. More importantly, local people would gain skills.

Mrs Boase: Yes. There is no follow through.

Mrs Gunthur: Once the festival is finished, that is it until we get in contact with it the next time.

The CHAIRMAN: There is no lasting value. I liked your quote; we might use that. How well is the Freefall Theatre known in the region and in Kalgoorlie-Boulder specifically, and how well is it valued in the community?

Mrs Boase: The Freefall Theatre company is still developing a name for itself. Originally it was called Desert Drama. Because it was getting bigger and more kids were being involved, it had to change its focus and become an incorporated body. Desert Drama is very well known, whereas Freefall is still making itself known. It was incorporated late last year.

The CHAIRMAN: Why is it called the Freefall Theatre?

Mrs Oxenburgh: With the name Desert Drama, a lot of people were very negative about it. They said it was just for Aboriginal kids and that it should go to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission for its funding. Many negative things were being said to the children. The young people wanted to include non-indigenous people as well as Aboriginal people because they wanted to further reconciliation and promote positive things. They felt that the name Desert Drama and the logo, which one of the young girls had designed, was got giving them a competitive edge when chasing funding. That is why the name was changed to Freefall Theatre. The group took about three months to come up with the name. Freefall was the sense that the kids felt they got out of the workshops. They felt it was like they got an adrenaline rush with safety strings attached. They had a sense of something positive, which also had a support system. That is how they decided on the name Freefall.

The CHAIRMAN: As opposed to bungee.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Yes. The group spent a lot of time talking about that. The adults were not very sure; however, it was the kids' decision, and that is the direction they decided to take. We are there to help them. Our attitude would be different if it were a name that was completely dangerous.

The CHAIRMAN: The wider awareness and value of the group is still evolving in the community?

Mrs Gunthur: We are being contacted regularly to perform at community events in town.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Because it is a volunteer organisation, it cannot keep up with everything. Leanne has been overseeing the circus and acrobalance side of things, and I have been overseeing the theatre, dance and multi-arts. Each of the board members oversees a specific area of interest. However, combined with our work, we cannot keep up with the workload and we have to say no sometimes, which we find hard and we feel guilty about, because we cannot support the kids. We spend about 20 hours a week doing volunteer work for the group. It is not as though we cannot be bothered; it is just that the time needed to devote to

the group is so big. We all have children, families and jobs of our own, and we cannot keep up with the amount of work required.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the Freefall Theatre get involved in festivals and other things? Is it out there in the community?

Mrs Gunthur: We have been approached to perform at the St Barbara's Festival on the day of the parade. We will also be involved in the Rhythms in the Outback Music Festival.

Mrs Boase: And National Reconciliation Week.

Mrs Oxenburgh: The group had a big part to play in National Reconciliation Week. When CrocFest was held, the Freefall kids were part of the welcome to the land event.

Mrs Boase: It was hard though, because they were not acknowledged. The Freefall kids did part of the welcome, but they were not acknowledged.

The CHAIRMAN: That is important. Where does the group practice its circus and dance routines?

Mrs Oxenburgh: Over time people have offered us space free of charge. Those places have included a school hall, a local scout hall and the Palace Theatre Recreation Centre in Boulder.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that the old theatre?

Mrs Oxenburgh: Yes. That is a great space. We have negotiated rent there. We work on access. We aim to provide an accessible place for the kids. We are not trying to make money. We are trying to get as much sponsorship and volunteer time so that kids who would not normally access such a program can access it. For example, the kids can attend dance classes or whatever. That is why we have looked for other supports.

Mrs Boase: The Police and Citizens Youth Centre and the Young Mens Christian Association asked the Freefall group to conduct circus programs during the school holidays and after school during the school terms.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the city council know that the group exists and does it give in-kind support?

Mrs Boase: The council does know it exists. I am not sure how much support it gives.

Mr J.N. HYDE: You can be honest.

The CHAIRMAN: If the group needed to use the hall, would it provide it?

Mrs Oxenburgh: Support has been an issue. A meeting was held between the Freefall Theatre group and the CEO of the council and we were told that the council would prefer to see Black Swan Theatre Company rather than a local initiative run out of Kalgoorlie. As volunteers who had worked very hard for a long time, we found that upsetting.

Mrs Gunthur: We have a history of success in our community.

The CHAIRMAN: And it is a local group that uses local kids.

Mrs Gunthur: We then had the same conversation with the Goldfields Esperance Development Commission. We told the commission what we had been doing, and we showed it the programs etc, and we got a very different and positive response, which restored our faith that there is support from government organisations for community arts. The development commission assigned Christine to the board, which has helped the rest of the volunteer board and us, because we were all starting to feel very tired. We had been working with the kids as volunteers for a long time.

Mr J.N. HYDE: It is worrying that access to arts and youth funding, when there is an indigenous involvement, seems to be more successful using funds from the development commission or the Western Australian Regional Incentive Scheme funding. Technically, WARIS was not used for the arts; it depended on the minister of the day. Because Hon Tom Stephens is pro-indigenous, a lot of indigenous art is being funded through WARIS. It is alarming that the Freefall Theatre has been left to apply for WARIS funding.

[2.55 pm]

Mrs Boase: We cannot get any funding from the Australia Council for the Arts. We are not big enough, we are not slick enough and we are not from the eastern States. We do not drink with the right people.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you expand on the limitations of your Australia Council connections?

Mrs Boase: It is very hard to interface with the council in any way. We are trying to present and offer down home arts. I cannot put it any other way. We are not super slick, techno or whatever. We are teaching kids how to dance, write scripts, make sets and play with language. They are really simple arts that give them lots of fantastic skills. However, it is not funky and it is not out there. It is not scripted art; rather, it is self-created art.

Mrs Oxenburgh: It is not simple; it is complex in process. The process is very important and what the kids get out of the process is really important.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Yes, but the federal taxes that all of us in this room pay fund the community cultural arm of the Australia Council and it is supposed to be looking to fund what local communities value. However, we keep coming across communities that have never seen members of the council and that are not getting money from it.

Mrs Boase: I do not think we have ever seen them.

Mrs Oxenburgh: Australia Council representatives came over in 2001 and held a meeting at the Maku Stadium. We went there, but the whole process was very difficult. We had to have certain pictures, and supporting evidence had to be put in with the application. We did not have the money to pay for it. At that stage, we had been doing other applications and I think we had been paying for a lot from our own pockets and we just could not stretch it and do that. It was not possible.

Mrs Boase: Just going back, I did not mean in any way to denigrate down home arts. It is complex and involved, but it is not that slick.

Mrs Oxenburgh: It is not something that is polished for touring performances, although the kids here went on an interregional youth arts camp in Geraldton in May. There were 50 kids from regional Western Australia and they worked for only nine days. What you can achieve in nine days is a different level of performance, but they still did that in a different region and they performed at Queens Park amphitheatre to a large audience. They did not perform before their families but before local people in Geraldton who they did not know. They got lots of positives out of that. It was a slick performance process wise. However, it did not have all the gismos and -

The CHAIRMAN: You are not trying to create a Johnny Young "Young Talent Time".

Mrs Oxenburgh: That is right; that is not what we are about. What we are about is processing and improvised original creative stuff that the kids create themselves.

Mrs Boase: And valuing the kids' creations.

Mr Moody: The self-esteem and confidence of a lot of the kids who came back from Geraldton hit the roof. Before that they were all shy and could not integrate with each other. They would say, "I'm not doing this and I'm not doing that." I was not there but my brother was there and he said that given the days the kids were there the performance they put on was spectacular.

The CHAIRMAN: In terms of the future and where you go from here, obviously you have a board structure. The young people are directly involved in that and influence the outcomes because they are helping to shape it constantly. What are the group's aspirations into the future?

Mrs Oxenburgh: One girl has just graduated from year 12 and she wants to work in this area. It is her aspiration to develop works that can tour. Her uncle is doing some stuff overseas and that is where she wants to take things - she does not want it to be just local. I guess we are looking at that with the WARIS application. We were looking at cross-regional linking because the kids - I should not say kids but young people - found that linking in with other people and growing in that sharing lifted the bar. That is what they want to do. They want to continue the good stuff they do locally. However, as those young people get older and leave school they want to develop as young emerging artists and take that to a higher level. They do not want to have to leave home to do that. They want to be able to tour and whatever but still live here.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there anything else you want to address or highlight to the committee before we close this part of the session? Would you like to raise any issues?

Mrs Boase: I would like somebody to recognise the positive values of arts for kids as much as they do for sports, because it makes them think better. It helps them with literacy and with lots and lots of things. That is why most of the Chinese kids who come to Australia also learn a musical instrument and they do the best in their tertiary entrance examination. Those families know that a music or arts discipline is important. We do not recognise that yet.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is a wonderful way to finish the session. Thank you Gerry, Sandy, Leanne and Christine for your contributions this afternoon. To give you a bit of a background, our report will be presented to Parliament in August next year. That is our timetable. We have a number of regional visits coming up. Today's transcript will be available over the next two weeks. If there are things you would like to highlight through your written notes or submissions, we would be happy to receive them also because they will help us formulate our recommendations. Those recommendations will be forwarded to the responsible minister. Part of the requirements of standing committees is that the minister directly responds to the recommendations. Therefore, there is significant weight to what this committee is doing. We wish you and the Freefall Theatre Company the very best for the future and thank you again for your attendance this afternoon.