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## Kids and Philanthropy: Part 2

by Blanche Clark | September 20, 2017

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The future of philanthropy is looking bright with two nonprofits celebrating recent milestones. Kids Thrive uses arts practices and processes to ignite kids' engagement with their local communities.



This year Kids Thrive is piloting Kids as Catalyst Arts (KiCArts) in partnership with St Pius X Primary School in West Heidelberg.

"Don't think because you're little that what you do is little." That was the "take-home message" one boy had after completing a Kids Thrive program.

Kids Thrive co-founders Andrea Rieniets and Dr Andrea Lemon are constantly amazed how the arts can empower children to change the lives of the adults around them.

"We're a cultural organisation, and so the way we work is we use arts practices and arts processes to ignite kids' engagement with their local communities and the possibility of impacting their local communities," Rieniets says.

The Melbourne-based organisation's main program is Kids as Catalyst, a six-month creative leadership and resilience program, which supports upper primary school students to become local philanthropists.

Rieniets says in the first workshop the students come to grips with many questions, including: What is a philanthropist? What is a catalyst? How do you be a catalyst for good? How do you ignite change? How are you already doing that? How does some of what you are doing already sit within that framework?

"The kids discover that donating clothes is an act of philanthropy and then they start to understand the connection," Rieniets says.

She says the program is "old school" and there are no computers or technology involved.

"That's where the arts comes in. They have to engage face-to-face with people, and they have to develop the art of interaction and the art of exploratory and curiosity-led conversations with people."

She says the students examine how their communities extend beyond their family and school to sports clubs, religious organisations and other groups.

"To know that you have multiple communities wraps a whole lot of connecting fibre around you to keep you engaged and safe and connected," Rieniets says.

The ultimate aim is for students to find a community partner aligned with their values and implement a "community-change action".

"Then they come together and do a showcase in which they show what they have done and share the challenges they faced, what they have learned and give their parting message to the world."



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Wheelton Philanthropy to Good to Give	\$50,000
Wheelton Philanthropy to Big Brother Big Sister	\$50,000
Tata Consultancy Services to 12 not-for-profits	\$1 million

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*Students participating in a Kids Thrive program at Our Lady of the Southern Cross, Wyndham Vale, Victoria.*

She says a recent showcase at Wyndham Park Primary School included a group called “Genderosity”, who had organised care packages for women and children fleeing family violence.

“Werribee Housing workers told them that women in those situations often flee a house without a phone charger, or they need a new SIM card so that they are not tracked. The children made care packages with some essential items, and included a note of support, so that the women know that they are not alone.”

Rieniets says the Genderosity group was interviewed on *Life Matters* on ABC Radio National and as a consequence a company has offered to provide free phones for the care packages.

“That’s what’s amazing and that’s what the kids keep finding out; they start with a feeling, they organise, they act and then they tell the story; that is where the showcase and the arts comes in,” she says.

“It’s not enough just to do it, you’ve got to tell the story about it to show what is possible and in a compelling way that inspires people to find their own way.”

Rieniets says Kids Thrive is a registered cultural organisation, with a committee of management and four full-time staff and eight part-time staff.

Funding is 44 per cent government, 47 per cent philanthropic, 5 per cent partner contribution, 2 per cent donations and 2 per cent other income. “The bulk of our funding is philanthropic and this year some donors have really stepped up, so next year our donations will be up around 10 per cent,” she says.

The organisation has been working in the Victorian towns of Benalla and Maldon, and the Melbourne suburb of Altona.

This year it is piloting Kids as Catalyst Arts in partnership with St Pius X Primary School in West Heidelberg, which will result in public works of art to address local issues.



*Kids Thrive co-founder Andrea Rieniets.*

“The next biggest thing for us is being invited into Geelong. That’s what we are needing big support,” says Rieniets.

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“They've asked us to do 14 classes, and that could be a full-time job for our organisation for six months. What it will mean, though, is that anything up to 100 community organisations will be helped by that program.”

She says evaluation by Melbourne University shows the program works.

“Now we are ready to package it and translate that into remote and regional areas. There are also possibilities for getting this online and into a usable format that's translated across the globe.”

For more information about Kids Thrive visit the [website](#).

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