

Artback NT
Indigenous Traditional
Dance Program 2015
Artistic Report





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ITDP aims, objectives and rationale

The Indigenous Traditional Dance Program (ITDP) was established to support and facilitate traditional dance practice throughout the NT. The framework developed is based on a three year cycle, which has now been delivered in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Borroloola. Each community has seen a different model developed to respond to the community needs.

Artback NT is now in its third year of engagement with Borroloola and recently delivered DanceSite 2015, a major annual event celebrating traditional dance presented as part of ITDP. The Borroloola model saw for the first time, engagement of a full time and part time employee throughout the duration of the program. This allowed for greater scope and delivery of ongoing projects throughout the year and professional development for local staff. Artback NT has now been successful in securing funding for ITDP to be delivered in Borroloola for an additional year, supporting the sustainability of the model through its transition into a community controlled and funded program.

The aims of ITDP are to:

- Assist in the coordination of DanceSite, an annual event that celebrates the diversity of traditional Indigenous dance in the Northern Territory, providing an exciting cross-cultural platform for audience and performance development
- Deliver remote community support through ITDP that facilitates opportunities for cultural performance skills development within the region through a series of forums, rehearsals, workshops and discreet events leading into the DanceSite event each year
- Provide further Territory and national performance opportunities for the hosting community to establish business and professional development pathways.

The objectives of ITDP are:

- Sustainability of DanceSite in the hosting community and its uptake in the region
- An improved overall understanding in remote Indigenous communities of the integral relationships between cultural maintenance and professional Performing Arts opportunities through participation in local, regional and national showcase events
- An increased awareness of the value of traditional Indigenous Dance as an integral strategy in community wellbeing and a pathway to improved employment and further education and training for individuals, particularly disengaged youth
- The preservation of culture by traditional intergenerational learning methods that strengthens the relationships between Elders and youth and encourages cultural leadership
- To provide an integral strategy in creating pathways for cultural understanding, appreciation and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia
- Undertake independent evaluation through:
 - ◇ Data collection
 - ◇ Qualitative and rich media
 - ◇ Structured feedback and review
 - ◇ Critical reflection
 - ◇ Regular, rich reporting

Wandangula dancers performing

ITDP Coordinator role

Lia Pa'apa'a has been engaged in ITDP in Borroloola for the whole of the program, living and working in the community for the first two years of its delivery. During Lia's time living in Borroloola, she was able to establish working relationships across the community and help to embed ITDP into the arts and cultural landscape of the town. The ITDP office is based at the Waralungku Art Centre, which allowed staff to work closely on a daily basis with key artists and elders, as well as community stakeholders.

Lia now lives in Cairns where she works part time to support the Cultural Events Officer, Marlene Timothy, evaluate the program to date and develop a framework for ITDP's new community of Numbulwar for 2016-2019.

ITDP Cultural Events Officer role

Marlene Timothy is a local Yanyuwa/Garrwa woman who works for Artback NT part time, while also being employed at the Waralungku Art Centre. Marlene has been integral to ITDP's development and delivery in the region. Marlene is an active leader within the Borroloola community and having her on the ground has reinforced the program's local presence and will ensure there is a continued delivery of traditional dance activities and events at a high production level.

Artback NT recognises the importance in nurturing individuals and relationships as part of its engagement in remote communities. The organisation has supported Marlene to participate in several professional developments over the course of ITDP including a Certificate III in Events Management that included placements at the National Indigenous Music Awards in Darwin as part of the crew. Marlene is now seeing out ITDP on the ground as the face of ITDP and DanceSite and will continue in the role until March 2017 with the acquired funding.

Image opposite: Alan Griffiths and the Bali Bali Balga dancers from Kununurra

An increased awareness of the value of traditional Indigenous dance as an integral strategy in community wellbeing...
- ITDP OBJECTIVE



ITDP community based activities

To develop the activities that culminate in DanceSite events, ITDP facilitates projects throughout the year with the community and dance groups, ensuring there is ongoing community capacity building as well as cultural maintenance. 2015 has seen the continuation of existing programs including the monthly Borroloola Community Arts Markets and workshop delivery with schools and tourist groups as required. In addition, several exciting new initiatives have been delivered:

- The **Li-mijimbangu (all together)** traditional dance master class was developed to create a new work, bringing together the five dance groups of Borroloola. Key elders and community members from each group worked together to create a new dance based on contemporary issues and events effecting the community. This approach allowed a shared ownership of the dances, enabling all of Borroloola's community to perform them. Traditionally songs are owned by individuals with custodianship of the songs by certain family members, with dances only taking place if the owners or custodians are present. This performing arts process and opportunity was hugely successful at engaging the community to strengthen and maintain traditional song and dance practices. The project allowed the participants to give themselves permission as leaders within the community to both write and choreograph songs and dances that were relevant to their own life experiences. As this process was done with nominated participants from all of the five local dance groups, there was a sense of community and togetherness that ITDP had not achieved through clan-specific programming delivered in the past. As traditional dance in Borroloola is predominantly managed through the elder women (bardi bardi) of the community, there has been little space for men to engage in the

past. However, for the Mara clan, whose leaders are men, this renewed approach allowed for there to be a recognised place for them within this process. Several young men participated heavily in the project, leading the male choreography, singing and playing the accompanying didgeridoo. This local project now has a full four part song and performance that has been performed locally with great potential and interest in being performed and toured both regionally and nationally. Furthermore, there are several song themes that were developed as part of the process that Marlene and the community will continue working on post the project funding.

- As 2015 was the final anticipated year of ITDP in Borroloola, Artback NT engaged researcher Marnie Badham from the Centre for Cultural Partnerships (CCP) at the University of Melbourne to evaluate the program. Marnie attended DanceSite 2015 and collected data through formal interviews, informal conversations and observations. This data will now be incorporated into a major evaluation that is due to be delivered to Artback NT in December 2015. The interviews and conversations have all been recorded for Artback NT staff, Borroloola community members and the Waralungku Art Centre to utilise for their programming and development processes as well as a community archive.



Wandangula dancers getting ready

- Lia and Marlene will be delivering a draft of the evaluation to the community in late October 2015 for any final feedback and discussions to take place before it is finalised. This will allow the community to have multiple inputs into the review process of ITDP and will help Artback NT shape what the continued engagement of ITDP in Borroloola will be in 2016. Furthermore, it will also contribute to Artback NT's development and consultations with the next identified ITDP community of Numbulwar.
- In 2015 Artback NT engaged with the Borroloola community across its other programming for the first time. The Performing Arts Program toured *Sticks Stones Broken Bones*, a children's puppet show that was performed to approximately 40 people at the Borroloola Community Arts Markets, providing an exciting opportunity for locals to experience an art form that many had not seen before. The Music Program successfully presented and toured The Sandridge Band, a local Borroloola band, across the top end of the NT and WA.

DanceSite 2015

DanceSite is the annual showcase event of the Indigenous Traditional Dance Program, which has two primary key objectives:

- 1) To provide a platform for local Indigenous knowledge keepers to meet, exchange and maintain their cultural practices, as well as gain professional development experience as paid performers.
- 2) To showcase traditional Indigenous dance to a mainstream audience in order to foster broader understanding of Indigenous cultural values and spirituality.

The strategies for the delivery of DanceSite Borroloola in the broader context of ITDP are to:

- Develop and deliver a model of ownership of key community/regional events and activities through initiating, facilitating and building the capacity of a local stakeholder committee to oversee the event in the area of engagement;
- Deliver in an area of engagement that changes every two to three years to give more sustainable outcomes: **the first year** to engage and inspire the local community and region through familiarisation of community cultural event and performance management processes; **the second year** to consolidate community organisational participation through working partnerships, informal training and mentoring that will transfer the event to the community and provide sustainable event and performance development practices; and **the third year** to continue mentoring the community in the delivery of its own traditional dance event;
- Support the establishment of regular future dance and related cultural maintenance activities at local venues through developing local, regional and national organisational support networks specific to the area of engagement;
- Build the capacity of the engaged Cultural Events Officer so they are able to take a leadership role in the development and implementation of the program.

DanceSite 2015 was presented by Artback NT on September 18th & 19th at the Borroloola Showgrounds. This year saw a maturity of programming and an increased level of participation and ownership by the community. DanceSite 2015, for the first time, hosted two full nights of traditional dance programming, while in previous years the event has included films and music on the first evening. All local dance groups performed over both nights, as well as visiting dance groups from Kununurra, WA and Ngukurr, NT - both performing at DanceSite for the first time. In addition, Artback NT presented The Kailani Dancers as the headline act, hailing from the small Pacific nation of Kiribati who have also seen their traditional dance and cultural practices become critically endangered. Their performance wowed and invigorated the crowd, many of whom had never seen Pacific traditional dance performed live.

...DanceSite, an annual event that celebrates the diversity of traditional Indigenous dance in the Northern Territory...



Planning and programming

In 2015 the ITDP coordinator, Lia Pa'apa'a, relocated from Borrooloola to live externally, engaging ITDP via Skype/email/phone, as well as block placements back in the community. This provided an opportunity for local ITDP staff member Marlene Timothy to have room to 'step up' as the locally based leader of the program to continue to deliver programming and develop DanceSite as required. This was done within Marlene's part time capacity with Artback NT, as she also works at the Waralungku Art Centre.

DanceSite 2015 programming was developed in direct consultation with key elders from each of the five dance groups, all contributing ideas and support of the program. It was identified through these meetings that the community

were keen to have a global Indigenous group perform, something different that would allow their community to get a better understanding of different cultures whilst also being able to share their own. The Kailani Dancers were identified as a Darwin based group by Tracks Dance Company and were engaged as the headline act.

This year was the first time DanceSite hosted two full nights of traditional dance. Organisers were excited to see the community's level of interest and engagement who were happy to dance on both nights for the same performance fee. This allowed groups to perform different sets and songs that had not been performed at DanceSite before, along with the inclusion of new dancers and singers.

Another element of the programming was the final performance outcome of a two week workshops that took place in the weeks leading up to the festival. The **Li-mijimbangu (all together)** traditional dance master class outcome was performed and warmly met by an enthusiastic audience of locals.

- DanceSite 2015 also saw the development of a new relationship with **The Smith Family** who deliver early childhood and children's activities in Borrooloola. The Smith Family came on board to program a three hour section of the event on Saturday 19th from 2-5pm. By working together we were able to share costs and provide a stronger focus on children's engagement at the festival, including dance workshops by Ghenoa Gela and The Kailani Dancers, sports activities and a much needed water slide!
- ITDP utilised interviews and conversations recorded for Artback NT as part of the evaluation process, developing them into short audio clips that were played as part of DanceSite. This provided an empowering platform for community leaders to have their voices heard as part of the event.



Performance of new song and dance, 'Magu Gula' - written and performed by the five groups of Borrooloola

Dance groups and performers

Mara man, Barnabas Timothy, getting ready

DanceSite performers for 2015 (including children)			
Language group/ location	Group name	Community	Performers
Mara	Mara Dancers	Borroloola	40
Gurdanji	Gurdanji Dancers	Borroloola	30
Yanyuwa	Ngardiji Dancers	Borroloola	14
Garrwa	Blind Mermaid Dancers	Borroloola	20
Wandangula	Wandangula Dancers	Borroloola	50
Kununurra	Alan Griffiths and the Bali Bali Balga dancers	Kununurra	12
Wagilak	Wagilak Group	Ngukurr	25
Kiribati	Kailani Dancers	Kiribati/ Pacific Islander	8
TOTAL PERFORMERS			199

Employment table

Participants	Total 2013	Indig.*	Other	Total 2014	Indig.*	Other	Total 2015	Indig.*	Other
Performers	106	100%	0%	181	100%	0%	127	100%	0%
Production	10	30%	70%	7	14.9%	85.1%	20	90%	10%
Committee	15	80%	20%	17	100%	0%	15	100%	0%
Contractors	2	50%	50%	18	55.5%	45.5%	5	100%	0%
Volunteers	25	70%	30%	10	50%	50%	7	5	
Audience	500+	75%	25%	1000+	80%	20%	1000	95%	5%

* Indig. = Indigenous



Highlights

For the organisers, the highlight of DanceSite 2015 was the level of active participation and engagement from the community. The festival has matured into itself and found the right balance of workshops, markets and performance for the event. Having global Indigenous content through the inclusion of The Kailani Dancers was a major highlight for the audience, as many had never seen other cultural dances before. This was evident by the audience's participation and enthusiasm towards the dancers.

The Robinson River School also attended for the first time, allowing community members and children to participate. Robinson River is a small Garrwa community 150 kilometres east of Borroloola and after experiencing the event, teachers are now keen to engage with ITDP on a regular basis so the community can be more heavily involved in the future.

Wagilak group from Ngukurr getting ready

Challenges

Many of the elders had difficulty organising their dance groups internally, with several living in other communities or not being available for a variety of reasons. In the future ITDP would like to investigate how organisers can better support the elders in this, as many elders have health issues that prevent them from acting at a full capacity. This could be done by engaging with dancers' Centerlink work placements and have them allocated to the festival in the weeks leading up to the event. This would allow for focused time spent on costume making, rehearsals and providing festival support.

2015 saw the highest level of participation by males to date, however this was predominantly with one clan group. ITDP organisers recognise there is a need to have clan-specific targeted workshops and engagement strategies in order to engage the remaining groups. The Men's Health team approached ITDP staff after this year's festival to express interest in being part of next year's DanceSite event. This partnership will be further explored in late October to start implementing for 2016.

ITDP would like to work on strategies around the engagement of young people through the Borroloola School. There have been several engagements over the three years, however with due to a high turnover of staff it has been difficult to fully embed the ITDP program into the school curriculum. In 2016, ITDP will place a major focus on young people and this engagement, with Lia Pa'apa'a to develop educational resources to support the workshops that are delivered by elders and the wider community.

Media and marketing

ITDP worked with Artback NT Communications Manager Jess Ong to develop a marketing strategy for the event, which included a social media campaign, media releases, printed collateral and a partnership with Larrakia TV.

ITDP built on an existing relationship with Larrakia TV to promote DanceSite 2015 through its radio and TV networks. This provided DanceSite 2015 with the most accessibility and visibility it has had to date. Although hard to establish how this marketing campaign contributed to ticket sales for the festival, it has greatly increased the wider public's understanding of what Artback NT does. Building this awareness is a key strategic goal of the organisation and it is anticipated an ongoing partnership with Larrakia TV and Artback NT will be established. Larrakia TV will be producing a documentary on DanceSite, which will air to tens of thousands of people across the Top End. This will continually reinforce the concept of DanceSite within communities and engage them in an event long after the actual production has been completed. The Larrakia TV advertisement can be viewed on this link - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1Duemcu__8&feature=youtu.be

Activity in the lead up to DanceSite and the actual event itself was documented and shared across

Artback NT's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms. These updates provided insight into the process and work involved in putting on a community festival to audiences well beyond the NT, helping to cement Artback NT's role in the delivery of art and cultural experiences in remote Australia. Real-time posts across Instagram and Twitter were ongoing across both nights of the event and were enthusiastically received, evident by the number of 'likes', 'retweets' and cross-posting that eventuated. Artback NT's social media audiences are engaged and appreciate being included; employing platforms like Twitter and Instagram provided an opportunity to create a buzz around DanceSite and for the event to be celebrated and acknowledged, transcending geographical boundaries.

A reflective blog about DanceSite was written for Artback NT's website and shared across the organisation's social media platforms, again received and shared enthusiastically. This integrated approach across such channels before, during and after the event, supported by the activity of Larrakia TV, has assisted in building awareness of Artback NT, as well as Borrooloola and the capacity of its community to deliver such a festival.



Partnerships

- ITDP has continued to develop both existing and new relationships in order to continue delivering effective programming in Borrooloola. Notably, there is the media partnership with Larrakia TV (read more in media and marketing) and programming partner The Smith Family (read more in planning and programming). In 2015 there has also been a great development in the relationship with the local council, Roper Gulf Shire (RGS), who played a large part in the development of the site for the festival. This is due to a change in staff and meant we had support for the first time through free venue, rubbish, staging and logistical support.

Organisation	Type of support
University of Melbourne	Evaluation
The Smith Family	Children's programming
Larrakia TV	Media
Roper Gulf Shire	Venue, rubbish collection and drinking water
Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association	Accommodation, vehicles, firewood, office space
Waralungku Arts Centre	Office space, marquees, artist support and logistical support, staffing and volunteers
MAWA	Bus, lights



Young people from Borrooloola at DanceSite children's activities run by the Smith Family

The preservation of culture by traditional intergenerational learning methods...

- ITDP OBJECTIVE



Gurdanji dancers performing



ITDP evaluation

- As this is the final year of full time engagement with Borroloola, Artback NT engaged the Centre of Cultural Partnerships (CCP) at the University of Melbourne to undertake an evaluation of the three year program. As stated above, researcher Marnie Badham attended DanceSite and collated data through formal interviews, informal conversations and observations. Another key element of the ITDP evaluation is the critical reflections of the ITDP and Artback NT staff members Lia and Marlene. This has been done through interviews with Marnie and internally through journaling and reporting.
- Additionally, the above mentioned interviews and conversations have all been recorded for Artback NT staff, Borroloola community members and the Waralungku Art Centre to utilise for their programming and development processes as well as a community archive.
- As part of the ITDP evaluation, Lia and Marlene will be delivering a draft of the evaluation to the community in late October 2015 for any final feedback and discussions to take place before Melbourne University delivers its findings. This allows the community to have multiple inputs into the review process of ITDP and will help Artback NT shape what the continued engagement of ITDP in Borroloola will be in 2016. Furthermore, the material will also contribute to Artback NT's development and consultations with the next identified ITDP community of Numbulwar. The collated data will be incorporated into a major evaluation due to be delivered to Artback NT in December 2015.

Summary

Over the past three years, the aims and objectives initially set out for the delivery of ITDP has resulted in the program being greatly successful. The ability for ITDP coordinator Lia Pa'apa'a to live in the community meant there was ongoing everyday engagement and relationships established, which nurtured trust and understanding of the program. The strength in Artback NT's work in Borroloola has been in its relationships with both Marlene Timothy as the Cultural Events Officer and the Waralungku Art Centre who have hosted and worked collaboratively with ITDP since its inception.

Traditional dance is a medium that has existed for tens of thousands of years and will continue

to do so into the future to varying degrees across Australia. It is hoped that with this program, the clans of Borroloola have found a new surge of energy and excitement in their cultural practices, which will help to maintain and create new practices for future generations.

Artback NT is extremely pleased to be able to continue its engagement in Borroloola post March 2016 when the initial funding concludes. Artback NT recognises the value of the ITDP Borroloola framework, one that showcases a collaborative community model of arts and cultural engagement, which the organisation intends to continue growing and developing for new communities in the future.

Future engagement in region

ITDP will continue to be delivered in Borroloola at a full time capacity until March 2016 when the initial funding concludes. At that point Marlene will continue to work part time at Artback NT and Waralungku Art Centre. Lia will continue to support the program one day a week from Cairns as a mentor, event manager and to secure funding where required through support from McArthur River Mines.

Artback NT is now in initial consultations with the community of Numbulwar, which is 550 kilometres north of Borroloola with many family and cultural connections. It is anticipated that with both Numbulwar and Borroloola potentially operating in 2016, there will be synergies and collaborations between the ITDP sites.



The Kailani Dancers performing with the audience

...creating pathways for cultural understanding, appreciation and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia
- ITDP OBJECTIVE

ARTBACK NT PRESENTS

DanceSite Borroloola

COME CELEBRATE DANCE AND CULTURE IN YANYUWA COUNTRY

2015



FRIDAY 18 SEPTEMBER FROM 5PM
SATURDAY 19 SEPTEMBER FROM 2PM
BORROLOOLA SHOWGROUNDS

SPECIAL GUESTS

the Kailani Pacific Dancers and visiting groups from across the Top End
Smith Family children's activities marketplace workshops art food and much more
\$5 per night at the gate- children under 16 free.

This is a drug and alcohol free event.

Photographer: Benjamin Bayles. Yanyuwa dancers performing at DanceSite 2014



This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Artback NT thanks the Smith Family for their support