



Artback NT
Malandarri Festival
Artistic Report
2017



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Cover image:
Festival entrance sign created
and installed by Borroloola
School's woodwork students

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2017 Malandarri Festival Artistic Report

Formerly known as DanceSite, **Malandarri Festival** is a special community-based event that celebrates both traditional and contemporary arts and cultural practices from the four clan groups living in Borrooloola: the Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Gurdanji and Mara people. The festival began as part of Artback NT's Indigenous Traditional Dance Program (ITDP). ITDP was established to support and facilitate traditional dance practice throughout the NT. Through traditional and contemporary song and dance, ITDP has assisted in the preservation of culture through inter-generational learning methods; strengthening relationships between elders and young people, and encouraging cultural leadership.

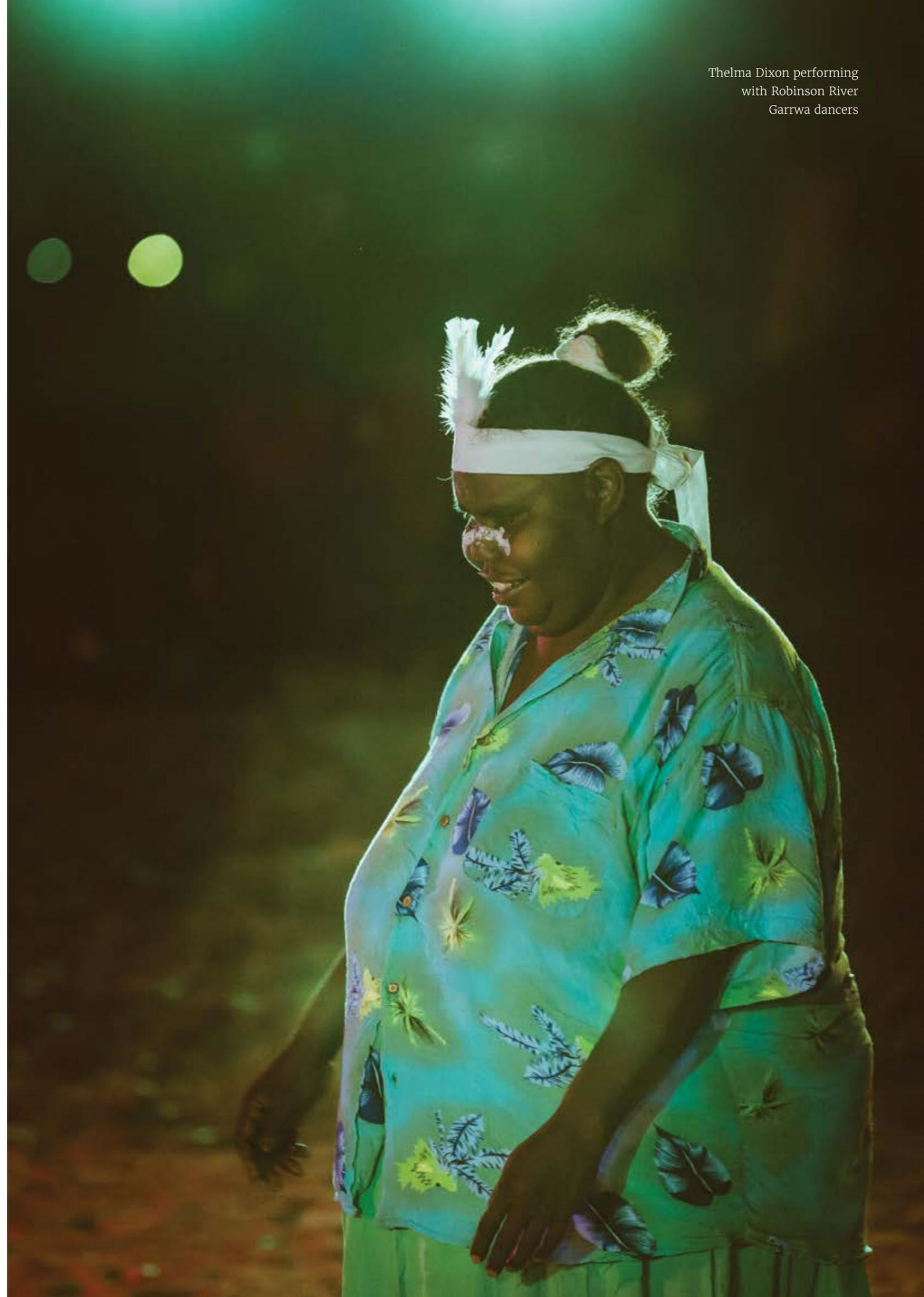
The framework developed for this program is based on a three-year community engagement cycle, which has now been delivered in Alice Springs (2009), Tennant Creek (2010–2012) and Borrooloola (2013 – present). The community of Numbulwar in Far East Arnhem Land was a new addition to ITDP in 2016. Each community has seen a different model developed in response to their specific needs.

A focus of the 2017 Malandarri Festival was to increase community ownership and for Borrooloola-based organisations working with the community's young people to play a more active role within the festival.

Over the last year Artback NT has had conversations with its Cultural Events Officer Marlene Timothy and the Borrooloola community about the role of the organisation in the future. The long term aim is to continue building capacity and working alongside the local community so that each year, the festival would require less external support to ensure its sustainability. The Borrooloola community were keen for Artback NT to continue ongoing administrative support and collegial mentoring to deliver a robust and innovative program for this year's Malandarri Festival.

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
- To deliver remote community support that facilitates opportunities for arts and cultural performance and skills development within the region through a series of projects, rehearsals, workshops and events each year
- To provide further Territory, national and international performance opportunities where appropriate for the hosting community to establish business and professional development pathways.



The festival is known for its role in providing training and opportunities to the Borrooloola community in order for it to grow into an independent and self-determined event

The objectives of ITDP are:

- Sustainability of DanceSite as an annual event 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 strengthen the relationships between Elders and youth and encourages cultural leadership
- The creation of 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

ITDP staffing

Over 80 local recruits were employed to help deliver this year's Malandarri Festival. The festival is known for its role in providing training and opportunities to the Borrooloola community in order for it to grow into an independent and self-determined event in the future. Artback NT will continue to support the festival until the community is confident it can take full carriage of the event in future years.

Festival Director

Artback NT recognises the importance of nurturing individuals and relationships as part of its engagement in remote communities. Artback NT has supported the resident Cultural Events Officer, Marlene Timothy, through the festival's transitional phase by adapting and supplementing the delivery model to include the smart use of technology that connected the Program Coordinator based in Melbourne with Darwin and Borrooloola.

Marlene Timothy is a local Yanyuwa/Garrwa woman from Borrooloola who works for Artback NT and Waralungku Arts Centre. Marlene has been vital to ITDP's development and delivery in the region. She is an active leader within the Borrooloola community and her presence on the ground reinforced the program's local commitment, ensuring a continued delivery of traditional dance activities and events at a high production level.

Marlene is now the Festival Director of Malandarri Festival, and leads all community engagement in Borrooloola to deliver the programs and projects developed by the ITDP team.

Program Coordinator

Fipe Preuss was engaged in 2017 to support Marlene Timothy and the Borrooloola community, focusing on event management activities for the festival. She brought with her, extensive knowledge and understanding of cultural development, community building and event management. From early April, Fipe supported the event/production coordination from Melbourne, spending the consultation week and the two weeks leading up to the festival in community.

New content

There was an increase in the participation of local community performance groups this year with the Fijian community participating for the first time. The Rokovada and Suga families who currently live in Borrooloola were approached by ITDP organisers to gauge interest in performing at the festival. The families agreed to perform on the first night of the festival, and spent the week before creating a new dance called 'Meke' that was based on a traditional Fijian war dance. This sparked the interest of other groups who wish to share their cultural practices.

This includes local Maori and Polynesian groups who have already asked to be involved in next year's festival! This cross-cultural engagement is welcomed in Borrooloola, and Malandarri Festival continues to be a leading remote community Indigenous festival in the Northern Territory that has strong multicultural representation.

Borrooloola's early childhood groups: FaFT (Family as First Teacher), Borrooloola School, Li-Ardubirri play group (funded by The Smith Family through Mabunji), Wunala Creche (run by Mabunji), Indi Kindi (run by The Nangala Project,) and the preschool and transition classes worked closely with members of the community to create costumes during the week leading up to the festival. They then opened day one's festivities with two songs; *Walamba Walamba* (Twinkle Twinkle), a Garrwa song written by Daphne Mawson, and *Barramundi Song* performed in English.

Pacific Island performer, Fipe Preuss and Indian performer, Jinu Mathew, took the opportunity to extend the reach of Artback NT's engagement by initiating cross-cultural exchange in the form of music and dance workshops at the Borrooloola School. Each workshop was enthusiastically received and resulted in school/class performances at the festival. In addition to this, both artists showcased their skills through solo acts during the festival nights.

Malandarri Festival continues to be a leading remote community Indigenous festival in the Northern Territory that has strong multicultural representation

A group of seven participants worked in the lead up to the event, learning about production and musical equipment, while also restoring the previous year's sculptures

Production training

Last year Artback NT engaged sculpture artist and welder Nina Amberj-Pederson as part of Malandarri Festival to create site-specific works with the community, using them as stage and site props. These works were built from scrap metal and junk found around Borroloola. The community's youth production crew helped restore these sculptures for this year's Festival with support from the Mabunji Boiler Makers.

The focus of this year's production training was on the creation of the event site led by Artback NT's Production Manager, Josh Grant, in collaboration with local festival staff. A group of seven participants worked in the lead up to the event, learning about production and musical equipment, while also restoring the previous year's sculptures. Participants moved on-site to set up the performance space and the dance ground, decorate the site and fulfill general facilities requirements.

The participants gained a general understanding of site construction in a community context where local needs as well as general facility requirements, site décor and fire safety needed to be considered. It is hoped that next year, with a better understanding of the event site's requirements, participants can develop their own production skills by focusing on the lighting and sound elements of the festival. This will enable them to continue supporting Malandarri Festival's production team, and other local events such as NAIDOC in the future.

Professional development

In her fifth year of working with Artback NT, Marlene has continued to grow and develop her craft as a remote community arts worker and event manager. Marlene has continued to engage with external events company Agentur, and in 2016 worked at the National Indigenous Music Awards, which has become a yearly source of employment. Marlene is also heading to Canada with Lia Pa'apa'a to present the ITDP learnings at the 2017 World Indigenous Peoples Conference (WIPCE) in Toronto. This will provide an excellent opportunity for Marlene to learn from other Indigenous cultures from around the world, gaining knowledge of their engagement activities to help enrich future planning of arts and cultural initiatives in Borroloola.

Planning and programming

As the NT Government's Department of Business Alcohol Action, Harm Minimisation Unit were the major sponsor of this year's festival, health and wellbeing were central elements of all programming. Organisers consulted with the community to ensure that these messages were delivered in a culturally appropriate and easily accessible format. This was embedded in the event planning, with the festival continuing to be an alcohol free event, and the partnership with local alcohol vendors to limit the amount of alcohol sales around the festival period.



Malandarri Festival opening with the
Mara clan and Borroloola School

Transwings Dance Studio Director and solo artist, Jinu Mathews, travelled to Borroloola to share the joy of Bollywood, running workshops with Borroloola School students

Dance groups and performers

This year saw five local dance groups perform at Malandarri Festival. Continuing on from last year's practice, each clan group and their Elders supported one another with singing and dancing. The community viewed this as an important opportunity for the Borroloola's young people to be exposed to diverse forms of traditional dance existing within their town.

The first day was opened by the Mara clan who led a parade with Borroloola school students. This was to pay respects to Elders who had passed away from Gurdanji and Mara clans, and were key participants of the festival in previous years.

Following a community meeting in April, Elders invited a Bollywood Indian dance group to attend, reflecting the community's desire to continue its exploration of different cultures. Transwings Dance Studio Director and solo artist, Jinu Mathews, travelled to Borroloola to share the joy of Bollywood, running workshops with Borroloola School students. Jinu performed several solo performances across the festival, and kept the audience intrigued and engaged with costume changes for each of her routines.

ITDP Program Coordinator Fipe Preuss also shared her cultural dance practice, spending time with Borroloola School running movement workshops that focused on Polynesian storytelling. Fipe performed several forms of Polynesian dance including Hawaiian, Tahitian and Pasifika Fire dancing during the festival.

This year saw three bands perform as part of the programming. Malandarri Band, The Sandridge Band and High Tide Band created a celebration in dance for everyone at the end of the festival, ensuring the focus of the festival: traditional dance, was not compromised.





Borrooloola early childhood groups, FaFT (Family as First Teacher) - Borrooloola School, Li-Ardubirri play group funded by The Smith Family, Wunala Creche supported by Mabunji, and Indy Kindy (Nangala project), preschool and transition. These groups performed a song called Walamba Walamba (Twinkle Twinkle) in Garrwa, written by Daphne Mawson - a teacher assistant of over thirty years.



Dance groups and performers (including children)

Language Group	Dance Group/ Band	Community	Performers
Garrwa/Yanyuwa	Wandangula	Sandridge Outstation	22
Garrwa	Blind Mermaid Dancers	Robinson River/ Borroloola	11
Yanyuwa	Ngardiji Dancers	Borroloola	18
Mara	Mara Dancers	Borroloola	37
Gudanji	Mermaid Dancers	Borroloola	23
All	Early Childhood Performers	Borroloola	20
Yanyuwa	Malandarri Band	Borroloola	5
Garrwa	The Sandridge Band	Sandridge Outstation	3
Mara	High Tide Band	Borroloola	4
Indian	Jinu Matthews	Darwin	1
Samoan	Fipe Preuss	Melbourne	1
Fijian	Rokovada and Suga families	Fijian Islands	8

Participants	2015			2016			2017		
	Total	Indigenous	Other	Total	Indigenous	Other	Total	Indigenous	Other
Performers	127	100%	0%	120	100%	0%	153	92.2%	7.8%
Production	20	90%	10%	36	100%	0%	18	89%	11%
Committee	15	100%	0%	12	100%	0%	10	100%	0%
Contractors	5	100%	0%	15	80%	20%	4	75%	25%
Volunteers	7	90%	10%	12	100%	0%	5	100%	0%
Audience	1000	95%	5%	1000	95%	5%	1500+	80%	20%

Free food was available for all audience members and resulted in greater community involvement and ownership of the event and its outcomes

Partnerships

Organisation	Type of Support
Waralungku Arts Centre	Office space, marquees, artist support and logistical support,
Roper Gulf Shire	Venue support, staging, firewood, rubbish collection and drinking water
Mawurli Wirriwangkuma Aboriginal Corporation (MAWA)	Bus, lights and additional funds
Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association	Accommodation, vehicles, office space, clean out of hired toilets and additional funds

Catering

This year the festival adopted a similar community catering approach to that taken in 2016. The hunting and gathering role was taken on by the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers who caught dugong. A local family was then brought in to cook the meat and vegetables, and Elders were employed to make large quantities of damper for the meal. This approach meant free food was available for all audience members and resulted in greater community involvement and ownership of the event and its outcomes. In previous years the festival was only able to cater for dancers due to the large costs involved, however this year the overall cost was almost half of 2016's expenditure.

Funding

ITDP is possible because of the valued support of our key partners. This year the NT Government's Department of Business was the significant sponsor of the event through their Alcohol Action, Harm Minimisation Unit. Artback NT has also successfully secured triennial funding from the McArthur River Mine Community Benefit Trust to support the Community Event Officer's role.



The delivery of the 2017 Malandarri Festival ensured that again the community had a strong level of ownership and control of the event

Media and marketing

The marketing campaign for Malandarri Festival utilised social media platforms to engage audiences on both a local and national level. The bulk of social media content was produced and delivered by Fipe Preuss, supported by Eve Pawlik, Artback NT's Project Coordinator, and Jess Ong, Artback NT's Communications Manager. The lead up to the event was heavily documented on Instagram, which generated significant engagement through 'likes' and reposts.

A media release was distributed before the event, focusing on the role the Festival plays in supporting contemporary cultural expression in the community and introducing Jinu Mathew and her dance style. This media release yielded interest from ABC Local Radio who interviewed Marlene Timothy. Marlene shared the excitement of having new cultures taking part in the festival and talked about upcoming performances and the overall engagement of Borroloola's young people. The story of Malandarri Festival's cross-cultural exchange with the addition of Bollywood dancers was featured in the NT News.

Local radio promotion announcements were created by Fipe Preuss for radio and read out several times during the day. This attracted large tourist groups from the King Ash Bay area and McArthur River Caravan Park.

'Live' Facebook alerts were posted during the Festival which increased community support and encouragement.

Malandarri Festival worked with Benjamin Bayliss as the official photographer for the fourth year running. AirRemote Media were engaged to film the Malandarri Festival, however due to unforeseen circumstances filming was cancelled.

Highlights

The delivery of the 2017 Malandarri Festival ensured that again the community had a strong level of ownership and control of the event. There was a strong focus on empowering and supporting Borroloola's young people to come up with their own creative ideas about how they could contribute to the festival. Engaging the Early Childhood Learning Program to open the festival saw participation from different community members who hadn't been involved with the festival in the past. Youth were involved in the performance, participated in workshops and created the festival signage and art installations. This year's Malandarri Festival gave the community's young people the chance to see how welcome their ideas are in this space.



In addition to the traditional dance and music content, the Borrooloola community has welcomed other cultures to represent their traditional dances

Challenges

As the festival was held in June instead of later in the year, there were necessary changes to the performance site due to dry weather conditions and the football season commencing in July. The previous four years of the festival had been held on the south side of the Borrooloola Showgrounds oval. Four years of sand placed on the oval had changed the topography of the site, and as a result the council requested the festival move to another space within the showgrounds. Working with council and community, a new site was agreed upon for 2017, and resulted in an interesting and exciting dialogue about what 2018's festival site could look like. Moving forward, the Borrooloola community will be working closely with council to create the best possible site for future festivals and any new events run by the local community.

The delayed arrival of new toilet facilities for the Borrooloola Showgrounds saw the festival team organising the delivery of eight portable toilets at the last minute. This unexpected obstacle took the festival team away from facilitating other activities scheduled for the community at the Waralungku Art Centre, which was an unfortunate outcome.

Summary

Despite these challenges, Malandarri Festival was a great success. The last minute changes to the festival site and facilities gave the event management team an opportunity to work closely with community and council to grow relationships and create a better understanding of the festival's needs. These changes have also started conversations between Marlene Timothy, the local council and the community about how they envisage Malandarri Festival being presented in 2018. Conversations have also been initiated about how performers, the production team, stall holders and audience members can be better supported in relation to the site layout, new tree configurations and changes to power options. The development of the festival program for 2018-2021 will be the main focus for Artback NT over the next six months.

In addition to the traditional dance and music content, the Borrooloola community has welcomed other cultures to represent their traditional dances, including those from Fiji, India and Polynesia. The attendance of Marlene Timothy and Lia Pa'apa'a at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Canada will provide the opportunity for organisers to develop new ideas that will inform future engagement opportunities to be explored by the Borrooloola community.

Strike a pose! Young people of Borrooloola show Fipe Preuss their muscles



