

GRANTS HELP KIDS IN NEED

CAROLINE MUNRO spoke to two Future2 grant recipients to find out how the financial support of the industry is helping disadvantaged young Australians.

MUSIC PROGRAM GIVES HOPE TO YOUNG OFFENDERS

Most people would not deny charitable giving for children's causes. But if those children committed serious crimes, it may be a more emotive issue.

Last year the Australian Children's Music Foundation (ACMF) was given a Future2 Foundation grant of \$10,000 for its Youth at Risk program, which went towards the ACMENA Juvenile Justice Detention Centre in South Grafton and the Frank Baxter Juvenile Justice Centre on the Central Coast, NSW.

ACMF - founded by children's entertainer and musician Don Spencer - launched Youth at Risk eight years ago. It is now run at 17 of the country's 20 juvenile detention centres, where children as young as 10 are serving sentences for serious crimes, from break-and-enter to murder.

Fundraising has been difficult over the last few years in light of the global financial crisis, as well as all the natural disasters, said ACMF executive director, Vicki Fitzgibbon. However, she added, it can also be difficult considering the nature of the cause, as not everyone understood what these children had gone through.

"Future2's vision is about giving disadvantaged kids a second chance - but for these kids it's often their first chance," she explained. "Yes, they deserve to be punished for what they've done wrong. But these are kids, and how did they end up there?"

Many of the children came from extremely disadvantaged, dysfunctional and often abusive family lives, said Fitzgibbon. The Youth at Risk program helped them learn how to express themselves and to



Children at the ACMENA Juvenile Justice Detention Centre in South Grafton learn the guitar as part of the Australian Children's Music Foundation Youth at Risk program. Their faces have been covered to protect their identities.

just have fun, simple things that Fitzgibbon said made all the difference.

"Often they've missed out on what we would consider to be the normal range of social and recreational activities," she said. "Many of them have severe educational deficiencies - a lot haven't even gone to school. So participating in this program has helped them improve their literacy, and all the skills that they are learning, they are applying to other subjects. They see the benefits of getting an education."

One of the students who participated in the program

at ACMENA was the first in his family to pass Year 10.

"It's huge because if kids get an education it gets them out of where they've been," said Fitzgibbon.

The Future2 grant went towards paying salaries to permanently-employed musicians at Frank Baxter and ACMENA, whose importance could not be underestimated.

"These kids have been let down so many times, they need to know they can rely on that person being there," said Fitzgibbon. "Because the teachers are there every week, the kids learn to trust them and they



Well-known children's entertainer and musician Don Spencer launched the Youth at Risk program eight years ago.

open up more freely when writing the songs and so on. As a result, the teacher often becomes a mentor to them.”

The program has been so successful at ACMENA and Frank Baxter that there is a waiting list, resulting in an incentive for positive behaviour. Fitzgibbon said the centres reported back that the program helped increase self-esteem, confidence and positive expression, reducing the rate of children recommitting crimes.

In the first half of this year, three students continued their interest in music on leaving Frank Baxter. The ACMENA student who achieved his Year 10 has continued his studies and was given a guitar on leaving the centre after showing promise, not only with that instrument, but also with the piano and drums. He is among a number of former students from various centres who, having shown a commitment to their music, have been given new instruments by ACMF to carry on that passion.

Future2 became aware of Youth at Risk through FPA practitioner John Tutt CFP®, who has been an active fundraiser and proponent of ACMF's work. Fitzgibbon thanked him and Future2, hoping for further support in the future.

To learn more, visit www.acmf.com.au or check out the Future2 website at www.future2foundation.org.au.

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Helping one person may seem like a drop in the ocean – but its ripple effect can last for generations.

Charcoal Lane in Melbourne is a restaurant that provides what discerning diners have come to expect in that city – authentic, quality Australian cuisine. However, it is not just the infusion of native flavours and the favourite kangaroo dish that have enabled this social upliftment project to become a commercially viable business.

Charcoal Lane is a Mission Australia project that combines work experience, hospitality training and a supportive environment to enable Aboriginal and disadvantaged young people to transition to mainstream employment. It has just celebrated its second anniversary, and Mission Australia state director for Victoria, Paul Bird was proud of the fact that it has just completed its first 18 month-cycle of trainees, eight of whom will go on to start a career as chefs.

This could not be achieved without charitable support like that provided by the Future2 Foundation, which last year awarded Charcoal Lane a \$15,000 grant following an endorsement by FPA Melbourne Chapter Chair, Julian Place CFP®.

Bird said the money from the grant covered the unfunded costs of putting one trainee through the 18-month course.

“Future2 has transformed the life of an Aboriginal person who will now have a career as a chef,” he said. “Eighteen months ago that person had consigned themselves to a life of unemployment and a situation where they had massive personal issues – now they have a sustainable life and livelihood.”

Support like that offered by Future2 has also enabled the program to carry out the type of evaluation research that influenced Government and attracted funding, Bird added. Charcoal Lane and Mission Australia gained the attention of Victoria's Youth Minister and the restaurant is set to host a social enterprise forum.

Not only has the restaurant come a long way but so too have its trainees, many of whom have come from

a family environment dependent on social security and where they may have experienced abuse. Bird said the cost of putting someone through the program was small considering it enabled them to transition from that situation to one where they could have a career.

While some trainees from the first group have gone on to pursue other employment or have had to leave due to family commitments or other personal issues, Bird was pleased to note that the program had a 70 per cent success rate of trainees transitioning to mainstream employment. Some trainees enjoyed the training program so much they have found employment through TAFE to teach other young people, he added.

Mission Australia worked closely with the aboriginal community and the Victoria Aboriginal Health Service to bring Charcoal Lane and its trainees together. However, the program included youth from other disadvantaged backgrounds and two Zimbabweans participated in the first group of trainees, adding yet more cultural flavour, said Bird.

He described the project as “reconciliation through dining”.

“It's trying to get people to experience an exciting dining experience, where they can get a flavour of Aboriginal culture at the same time,” he said. “If we are to achieve reconciliation, we need things like Charcoal Lane to enable people to meet Aboriginal people and experience the culture.”

Charcoal Lane's chefs use flavours native to Australia, such as lemon thyme. And while kangaroo remains the favourite dish, Bird said it was by no means bush tucker.

“It's contemporary Australian cuisine infused with native flavours,” he said, adding that Charcoal Lane offered quality dining to complement Melbourne's culinary culture.

For more information, visit www.charcoallane.com.au or visit www.future2foundation.org.au.