

AWESOME ARTS - Creative Challenge

Proudly Sponsored by BHP Billiton Nickel West

For many of us the idea of an art class brings to mind images of paint pots and easels, but for some lucky kids in regional WA, art time could involve anything from modelling kinetic structures out of bike parts to sculpting local landmarks from marshmallows and jelly babies.

It's all part of the AWESOME ARTS Creative Challenge, which BHP Billiton Nickel West has proudly sponsored for the past three years as part of its commitment towards youth and education in remote communities throughout the North-East Goldfields.

Healthway supports the entire state-wide program as part of its "*Smarter than Smoking*" campaign, with BHP Nickel West sponsoring the Goldfields communities of Wiluna, Leinster, Leonora, Laverton and Kalgoorlie-Boulder - and this year for the first time, Medina Primary School in Kwinana.

The program provides a unique and fun way for kids to discover their sense of creativity and community spirit through a range of contemporary arts programs delivered by some of the State's most talented artists.

Each Creative Challenge is designed to foster an appreciation of individual and collective identity by encouraging children to explore the social and environmental features of their community. The art projects are aimed at instilling in each participant a sense of pride in their community and using creativity to promote independent thinking and a feeling of inclusion.

In 2006, the Creative Challenge involved *Bike Lab*, a project that used recycled bicycles and other mechanical components to build giant kinetic sculptures. Children in the four Goldfields communities participated in the two-week program which encouraged imaginative engineering through use of bicycle parts reinvented as enormous meccano-like components. It provided a new forum for creative expression among students and valuable exposure to the exciting world of contemporary art.

In 2007 AWESOME sent 20 artists into 10 remote communities to explore creative expression with young people in the *Make Your Move* Creative Challenge. Through workshops in dance, sound and performance the children explored a common theme within their community culminating in the creation of a work which was performed in front of family and friends as part of a community celebration.

The 2008 Creative Challenge – *FEAST* - encourages participants to describe themselves and their community through food. The children will create a 3D mural constructed from food and related materials to represent and promote their community.

In all of the Creative Challenges, the broader community is encouraged to come together to celebrate the students' artistic expressions which helps create a generational link and a sense of accomplishment and belonging among student participants.

AWESOME is the only organisation of its kind to conduct residential art projects throughout regional WA, and according to Community Development Manager, Amanda Premici, the benefits are many.

“The program adds value and depth to the school curriculum. The projects are all process-driven which allows the kids to develop the artistic concepts as they work. They’re given guidance from professional artists, but the program encourages autonomy and empowers kids to find their own sense of creativity.

“We often receive feedback from teachers that they’ve noticed a marked increase in the kids’ self esteem and confidence after participating in a Creative Challenge, particularly among indigenous students. Many of the children comment on how much they enjoy getting to work with students they wouldn’t normally interact with, which helps reinforce the value of teamwork and community.”

Nickel West works in conjunction with the AWESOME team to select which schools will participate, with a focus on those within close proximity to its own operations. Amanda says: “Nickel West’s support – both cash and in-kind which includes administrative assistance, accommodation and transport - has allowed AWESOME to maintain a consistent, yearly presence in each of the communities which allows us to build on outcomes year after year and cater projects to specific community needs and interests.”

Following on from the success of the Creative Challenge sponsorship program, Nickel West was keen to support other AWESOME initiatives and recently accepted as principal partner to the *AWESOME International Arts Festival for Bright Young Things* for the next three years.

The annual Festival is held each November and presents an extraordinary array of unusual, thought-provoking and engaging contemporary arts experiences for young people and their families.