REKINDLING
YOUTH PROGRAM

EXPLORE STORIES
CONNECT TO CULTURE

DEVELOP PERFORMANCE SKILLS
CREATE DANCE THEATRE
INTRODUCING REKINDLING

VISION

Rekindling is Bangarra Dance Theatre’s Youth Program, which aims to inspire young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to:

- have pride in the knowledge of their cultural background
- have a strong sense of kinship and connection to their communities and country
- understand their role as the future custodians of their culture
- establish the foundations for positive career choices

BACKGROUND

Bangarra is Australia’s leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts company and fulfills a dual role of creative producer and cultural agent.

For over two decades, Bangarra has worked within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through its’ performance and workshop programs. We know that rekindling traditional knowledge and ownership of culture amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is a vital, positive and effective means to instill a sense of pride and self-worth in ‘who they are’ and ‘where they come from’ as a result of their connection to cultural knowledge and practice passed down from their elders.

The Rekindling program is tailored to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teenagers in regional and urban communities. As we know, for many young people the choices they make and the activities they engage with in their teenage years can have an impact on their entire lives, as well as affecting their families and communities.

Since its inception in 2013 Rekindling has taken place in 16 communities across 4 states with 247 students completing the program. By the end of 2017 Rekindling will have had a presence in every Australian state and territory including the Torres Strait Islands.

“We need to bring up young people with purpose, passionately loyal to their communities, with a sense of belonging to their traditional country, with skills needed to assert themselves in our time while drawing strength from their heritage”.
Michael Anderson, Euahlayi elder, North West NSW & South West QLD

Rekindling: Shantell Toomey, Kadeisha Langman.
Photo by Jhuny Boy Borja

“If you can rekindle some of the stories, knowledge and energy from my community and share it in a positive way that still protects it, that’s very important”.
Aunty Di McNabo, Elder, Wellington NSW

Rekindling: Aaron Brydon and Aunty Di McNabo.
Photo by Sidney Saltner
Bangarra Program Support
In 2013 Bangarra successfully raised funding to develop and deliver Rekindling through the generous support of the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, the George Hicks Foundation, the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and the Australian Government's Office for the Arts. This provided the necessary resources to develop the program and the Rekindling team, engage in community consultations, implement the program and develop an evaluation process. Bangarra continues to secure key partnerships with funders who share the Rekindling vision, so that we can ensure the long-term sustainability for the program. In addition to project funding from our partners, Bangarra also commits its own resources to supporting this important program.

Bangarra and its supporters see this as an exciting opportunity to help shape the evolution of the Rekindling program that can contribute to stronger engagements between young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people their elders and their communities.

What you bring to the Program – Community Support
The Rekindling program requires “buy in” from each community to source support for aspects of the program and to generate community involvement.

The Rekindling Program is conducted in communities around Australia who are able to secure funding to support participants and community staffing, for example, payment of elder’s fees, accommodation, meals and transport for participants and other necessary items.

Previously, the Wellington community approached their local government and their Shire Council to raise $25,000 to fund venue, accommodation and meals for participants, community elders and the Bangarra artists during the program.

THE REKINDLING TEAM
Rekindling has been developed under the direction of Bangarra's Artistic Director, Stephen Page and Sidney Saltner, one of Bangarra’s most acclaimed artists. Sidney leads the Rekindling team as Youth Program Director along with Patrick Thaiday and Chantal Kerr who are workshop leaders. Jhuny-Boy Borja provides digital media and communication support. Each of these artists has had a long association with Bangarra.

THE TEAM

Image L-R: Patrick Thaiday, Sidney Saltner, Chantal Kerr, Jhuny-Boy Borja (photo Greg Barrett)
BIOGRAPHIES

Youth Program Director

Sidney Saltner is from the Wulli Wulli people of central Queensland, and graduated from the National Aboriginal Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College in 1991. Sidney has worked and danced with some of Australia's most notable choreographers, and dance companies during his 26 years of performing, teaching and as a Rehearsal Director and Assistant Director. He joined Bangarra in 1997, and after 15 years stepped down from his full-time performing career in 2011 to assume the position of Youth Program Director.

In his current role Sidney has mentored the 2012 & 2013 NSW Public Schools Aboriginal Dance Company as part of Bangarra's partnership with the NSW Education Department’s Arts Unit. Throughout Sidney's career he has performed and taught extensively throughout Australia and internationally in Asia, Canada North and South America, UK, Europe, South Africa, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

Sidney was nominated for the following prestigious awards: Best Male Dancer in both the Australian Dance Awards and the Deadly Awards in 2003; and in 2004 for a Mo Award for his role in Bangarra’s production of Bush.

Workshop Leaders

Patrick Thaiday is originally from the Central and Eastern Islands in the Torres Strait. He has worked in the field of dance extensively in his own community, throughout Australia and internationally spanning over 21 years. Since graduating from NAISDA Dance College and joining Bangarra in 2002 his wealth of experience has been acknowledged through the prestigious awards he's received: the Australian Dance Award for Outstanding Dancer of the Year 2004; Green Room Awards-Best Male Dancer 2005; and Deadly Award-Best Dancer of the Year 2006.

Chantal Kerr is from the Biripi people of the mid north coast of NSW. Chantal has been a member of the dance community for over 25 years as a dancer and dance teacher and is a graduate of NAISDA Dance College (2002). She first joined Bangarra in 2003 and has worked extensively throughout Australia and Overseas in highly acclaimed performances at the BAM Festival Brooklyn NY, Kennedy Centre Washington DC and The World expo in Aichi Japan. Chantal has returned to Bangarra in 2013 as a team leader for the Rekindling Youth Program.

Digital Media

Jhuny-Boy Borja was born in Manila, The Philippines and was brought up in the outback town of Katherine in the Northern Territory. Prior to dancing with Bangarra, Jhuny studied dance at WAAPA from 1999 to 2002, and has worked as a software engineer and web designer. Jhuny joined Bangarra Dance Theatre in 2003 and danced with the company for ten year. He has been recognised for outstanding performance through Dance Australia’s Critics’ Survey and Green Room Award nomination in 2012In 2013, Jhuny-Boy joined the Rekindling program as Digital Media Coordinator.
THE PROGRAM
Rekindling is delivered in partnership with each local community and starts with the Rekindling team spending time in the community to develop relationships with local Elders. They establish support for the program and invite the Elders to tailor the program to meet the particular needs of their local community. In doing this, the Rekindling team consults with the Elders about stories and language they choose to provide that would be appropriate to be rekindled and shared with the young people and the broader community. The Rekindling team works with the Elders to ensure the practice of appropriate protocols is observed and permissions are adhered to at all times.

The Rekindling team seeks to establish relationships with key stakeholders within the community, to deliver the program during school terms and hours. We find that the encouragement from schools has enhanced the students’ attendance and attitude towards learning, and at the same time supports their cultural awareness within their communities.

The program begins with an audition workshop process, during which the Rekindling team and local Elders work together to select participants for the program. It is important that the group represents a mixture of participants’ backgrounds, levels of cultural awareness and involvement, and personal interests so that the students can learn from each other’s experiences.

THE REKINDLING CYCLE
The Rekindling Gatherings
The Rekindling program is divided into three Gatherings, each with specific aims and objectives.

1. Gathering one, over 3 days – an introduction to culture.

The program begins with a traditional ‘Welcome to Country’. The objective of this first Gathering is breaking down the barriers designed to create a nurturing space for the students to get to know the Rekindling team, each other and the Elders. They are introduced to the process of shared learning and exchange. They begin to explore the cultural knowledge of their Elders – their country, language and family. Traditional and western dance styles will be taught as well as other skills from Bangarra's performance repertoire to discover the process of story telling through movement. The participants are also introduced to the Digital Backyard – a platform for sharing videos, photographs, and stories.

2. Gathering two, over 4 days – exploring creativity and expression.

The participants engage in creative tasks to explore movement, music, design and creative development. While specific dance skills are explored, they are used as a vehicle to opening up the broader discussion of culture, creativity and story telling. Exploring the themes ‘who you are’ and ‘where you come from’, the young people research and gather stories from within their communities and begin discussing themes for their group performance. They are shown different techniques of how to make movement using rhythms, floor patterns, and use of objects to tell their story.

3. Gathering three, over 5 days – preparing for performance.

The participants continue their skills and movement development and prepare for their own creative work. They are introduced to production elements and skills – props, staging, sound and costume. The program culminates in a public community presentation to celebrate the achievements of the students and to share their cultural learning’s with their peers, family, school, Elders and broader community.
2013 – THE PILOT PROGRAM

Rekindling was launched in 2013 with the NSW communities of Wellington (Wiradjuri language group); Moree (Kamilaroi language group); Kempsey (Dunghutti language group) and Blacktown (Darug language group). There has been an overwhelmingly positive response from the Elders, participants, schools and communities.

In Wellington, the students performed stories that told of a Wiradjuri journey, capturing the story of the river system, the animals and the women weaving. They were inspired through their engagement with local elders, including Aunt Di McNabo who shared local stories and showcased precious cultural objects with the students.

“Wellington’s Aboriginal and Torres Islander children have brought tears to some of their parents’ eyes after a stunning performance at the high school inspired by a two week visit from international group Bangarra Dance Theatre”. Wellington Times, April, 2013.

In Moree, the participants worked with local artist Aunty Mandy Haines where the choreography that was developed was inspired from her screen print of snakes, water holes and camps along the water holes provided the inspiration for their final performance.

Moree is a community where very little happens for our kids. It means a lot to us for Moree to be selected for the Rekindling program. The community love to see our kids being involved in something good and they are there right behind them supporting them. The little girls we are working with have their hearts and souls in this project and they want it to work”. Jacqueline French, Moree Secondary College.

In Blacktown the Rekindling participants developed a performance dance piece based on the traditional story of Wargan - and how he became the black crow, a valuable story with a moral about not showing off or bragging.

The Rekindling final performances in all communities have been popular with these groups of young performers receiving invitations to perform at other community events.

Outcomes:

Moree: Through their own initiative, the Moree participants are coordinating weekly meetings to continue their creative development, and they perform regularly to fundraise for future travel to attend performance invitations. They are also waiting eagerly to perform in November at the NSW School Spectacular 2013.

Wellington: Wellington participants have been performing the work they developed for local communities and surrounding districts. They are also taking part in the NSW School Spectacular 2013.

Blacktown: The Blacktown participants have performed their work Wargan - and how he became the black crow, at the Mt Druitt NAIDOC celebrations. They have been invited to perform at the BUUNJI 2013 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference in November - Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour.

Kempsey: When the Rekindling program started in Kempsey, a special connection to two particular elders, Uncle John Kelly & Aunty Thelma Kelly, enabled the process of handing down personal cultural knowledge to the participants. The Rekindling program team was honored to have had the opportunity of being involved with the youth of Kempsey in sharing this unique experience.

In Kempsey, the participants are developing their choreographic skills drawing from the traditional stories, songs and dances that have been shared by Uncle John & Aunty Thelma.
2013: REKINDLING CULTURE WORKSHOPS
2013: REKINDLING DANCE, CRAFTS & DIGITAL MEDIA WORKSHOPS
2013: REKINDLING REHEARSALS AND PERFORMANCE