CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE
Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

Melbourne — Thursday, 16 May 2013

Members
Mr P. Crisp
Mr N. Elasmar
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Mr D. Southwick
Ms G. Tierney

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Executive Officer: Ms K. Riseley
Research Officer: Ms A. Madden

Witnesses
Mr Peter Chellew, Executive Officer, and
Mr Shane Wickens, Artistic Director, FReeZA
The CHAIR — Firstly, welcome Peter and Shane, to the committee this afternoon.

As you are aware, we are looking at music in schools and how the committee and how the Parliament can accelerate, improve, music education in our schools. So we are very, very keen to hear from you and from FReeZA, and obviously through our inquiry so far we’ve had a lot of young people who have mentioned their involvement with the FReeZA program and have spoken very highly of it. So, we’re very happy to have you here this afternoon.

If I could introduce my colleagues. Gayle Tierney, who is the Deputy Chair, and Elizabeth Miller, and Kerryn Riseley and Anita Madden assisting the inquiry.

There are a couple of things I need to point out. Firstly, we are recording the information today by Hansard and you will have the opportunity to view that information and to make any changes in terms of typographical errors that have been made.

And, secondly — it all sounds very formal — but the evidence that’s given today is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to Members of Parliament which means you can speak your mind quite freely. But, that only applies to the hearing itself and not what is said outside of the hearing proper.

So, we have a number of questions for you. If you wouldn’t mind, maybe we will start with that and then if there’s anything that we haven’t covered of that you might wish to talk about we can hopefully have some time for that.

So, I might kick it off and ask you to provide an overview of the FReeZA work and how many young people are involved in the program on an annual basis, and an example of the types of experience young people gain from being involved in FReeZA programs.

Mr CHELLEW — Thanks for having us. I would like to throw to my colleague, Shane Wickens, who’s done a little presentation. He certainly has some data for you on the FReeZA program and has the privilege of working with FReeZA now for 16 years. We’re on the coalface with young people, and we’ve got some really good insights for you as to the benefits of music for those young people and perhaps how it interfaces with the education system as well.

Mr WICKENS — As Peter, mentioned we are in our 25th year of operation, funded by the Victorian Government to supply the FReeZA support service. Through the service we’re working with both youth workers and young people in a live music context offering expert advice and resources to assist with their programs.

A little bit of a snapshot of FReeZA: there’s 80 FReeZA groups at the moment, statewide. The majority of these groups are funded to run five events of all ages; drug, alcohol and smoke free. Most of them are funded through local government youth services departments and some community organisations. The structure of the FReeZA group consists of a FReeZA coordinator, usually a youth worker, and a committee of young people aged 12 to 25.

In 2012, last year, we had 31 FReeZA groups in metro Melbourne and 47 spread across regional Victoria; 257 FReeZA events were staged by metro Melbourne groups and 363 events by regional Victoria groups. So, we had 620 events staged last year, which is a really great number.

Of those 620 events, statistics stated 155 were live music events, and that is the most common type of event that young people on committees choose to stage.

So, broadly speaking, the types of events that FReeZA groups will put on are live bands, DJ, dance party events through to cultural events like art exhibitions or film exhibitions. It might also include skate and BMX events or youth development and training events and stuff like that.
Occasionally, there are also community youth stages at festivals like the St Kilda Festival or Queenscliff Music Festival, as a suggestion.

In terms of the committee membership, metro Melbourne FReeZA groups, statewide we’ve got 537 males; 576 females, so almost a 50-50 split there, so a total of just over 1000 people on FReeZA committees at the moment.

Of that 1000 odd young people on FReeZA committees, 724 are currently in secondary college, so there’s a really great parallel there, I think.

**The CHAIR** — How many committees would that be if there are 1000 on —?

**Mr WICKENS** — There’s currently 80. Last year there were 78.

Artist participation: in terms of musicians and performers and so forth, of those 155 live music events, on average there’s around three bands that would perform at an event, so each band with an average of four members, it works out to 465 individual bands, and just over 1800 individual musicians in those bands, so it’s a really significant number.

We are working with a program being the FReeZA Battle of the Bands or Band Comp as it’s known, so that’s a significant program for FReeZA. There’s 62 what’s called a Heat Event which is the first stage of the Battle of the Bands. Almost 300 bands go through that each year and they’re all under the age of 21. So, the majority of those bands are high school age musicians.

Over 1300 individual musicians are in that competition each year, and overall as a snapshot of FReeZA events, we’ve got just over 1200 performances and 3785 individual musicians across those performances.

Statistically, the numbers are really strong. Young people that have an interest in music and have music education really want to further their experience with their volunteer portfolio, and FReeZA is a perfect fit for that to help supplement their studies. Those that are really serious about a career in the industry and looking towards tertiary education and so forth, they’re looking at extending their FReeZA experience to internships and getting ready to work in the industry as well.

**The CHAIR** — Just on those committees too, how often would they meet?

**Mr WICKENS** — Mostly they meet weekly and out in regional Victoria if distance is an issue in terms of getting young people to the meeting facility they might meet fortnightly or more infrequently. But, as a general rule of thumb, it’s weekly.

**The CHAIR** — It’s a big commitment?

**Mr WICKENS** — It is, it is. Most FReeZA groups have got anything from, say, 6 to 15 young people.

**The CHAIR** — And the age group?

**Mr WICKENS** — Because it’s at local government the general charter is 12 to 25, but typically it’s 14 to 17. That’s the target market it attracts.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Do they have training on how to work on a committee and those sorts of things, as opposed to just rolling up and going through all the notes from the last meeting?

**Mr WICKENS** — I think just working in a committee structure is a challenge and a new
experience with Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary. Even that structure is a real challenge, and that’s a new experience for many young people.

At The Push we run a lot of training and development programs, one being The Push FReeZA summits. It’s a once a year training program in the July school holidays, and all the FReeZA committees attended the summits. There’s two in regional Victoria, one in metro Melbourne, and the format is industry guest speakers and professional development around key areas of the industry, being performance, event management, publicity marketing and so forth.

Ms TIERNEY — So are the performers paid or is it just voluntary?

Mr WICKENS — Yes, mostly they are paid. When it comes to the Battle of the Bands that’s a competition, so that’s a free performance, but any other FReeZA even they are generally paid and sometimes that’s a reimbursement of their expenses, their travel and food and so forth. So, it might amount to somewhere between $150 and $300 per performance.

Ms TIERNEY — What are the key benefits of being involved in FReeZA?

Mr WICKENS — I think the key benefits, it fits into three categories. The first one, being a committee member, I think as I said before; being part of a committee structure is a new skill and experience for them. I think just a sense of contributing to their community and being a valued community member and working with the local music industry as well is really important. The training and development opportunities that come with that through The Push and through local government is also really great, a great benefit.

The other category I think is being a local musician, so to have a performance opportunity in your town or suburb and a stage to play at, that’s a great development opportunity for your CV. And, the third thing I think is being an audience member, so being a participant that attends the shows. So, you’ve got an opportunity to support your peers who are putting on the show or perhaps your peers that are playing at the show. I think a lot of young people tend to know a lot of other young people who are involved with the shows. And, then there’s a great value in just having a safe and affordable event to go and attend as an entertainment option.

Ms TIERNEY — And so is there a particular focus also to try and engage the local disengaged youth?

Mr CHELLEW — That’s a case by case in certain communities. I would suggest that FReeZA actually attracts a particular cohort of young people within the schools. So, it’s like the kids who are in the library, it’s not the kids who are playing sport. It’s often, you could say, disengaged young people that are attracted to a music culture. So, in that way it’s a really strengthening thing and it gives a focus not just to young people within their school setting but also in terms of their pathway on. There is obviously an industry there and jobs that a lot of young people are attracted to.

Mr WICKENS — I think one of the things we really push at the training days is diversity. And, so with that the committee of young people, they’re making a decision based on their peers. The whole community, they’ve got to be represented. So, we really push obviously a male/female balance, a regional Victoria and also metro Melbourne balance, and also just looking at young people perhaps newly arrived refugees or from a marginalised community as well, and just ensuring everyone has an equal voice at the committee.

Ms MILLER — I’ve had the fortunate pleasure of attending one of these events, and they’re great. These kids are rocking. It’s fantastic, it really is, and it’s a great initiative to provide the opportunity for these young people to get involved in expressing their creativity in a variety of things, and it’s a cultural thing as well.
So, my question is, following on from the Battle of the Bands, can you provide any examples where that sort of program has actually helped launch, say, professional careers for some of these young people?

Mr WICKENS — Sure. I think there’s probably two sides: there’s the behind the scenes and then there’s the performance, the front of the stage.

With the Battle of the Bands we’ve had certain winners go on to a national level, sign a record deal, put out a record, have a radio single and reach national level, which is what they were aspiring to do, so that’s ticked the box for them.

With the behind the scenes section there are many stories, we’ve had young people go on to work at music festivals like the Big Day Out for example, through to working at record companies or perhaps working in the tech area, so they’re doing stage sound and lighting, pushing black boxes and plugging things in, so they’re working for a sound production company, something like that. So, we see a lot of success in the behind the scene stuff.

Mr CHELLEW — Yes, I think FReeZA was set up by the government to achieve the event outcomes to get young people off the street into positive drug and alcohol free entertainment, but they soon realised that there were great benefits in terms of leadership and development for the young people who are organising that. And, in recent years, we’ve have the introduction of FReeZA mentoring which provides a pathway often for young people who have gone through to be organisers in FReeZA to then be mentored as a young person perhaps going to university level to be mentored by a professional in their field of interest. So, that might be a rock star, or someone who owns their own record company or owns their own festival. There has been a great uptake by the music industry in volunteering in that program. I think, say, over seven years we’ve probably had over 400 different industry professionals volunteering in that program.

Ms MILLER — Just moving on from that, what strategies can you suggest for improving the overall quality and provision of music education in Victorian schools?

Mr CHELLEW — This is not our area. We’ve come with some really good facts and figures for you on FReeZA. So, we primarily work outside of the school setting, over the education setting. However, what we are providing at The Push and with FReeZA support is an interface between young people and the music sector if you like, that is the popular or contemporary music sector. We’re not talking of classical musical or the traditional music forms, but the popular culture of music now.

So, within that we can identify some advantages and recommendations we would make, but they are not systemic and I think we’d have to declare it’s not our expertise. However, we are represented by organisations like the Music Council of Australia that you would be aware of that has a great research arm, with whom you can talk about benefits and potential improvements.

Mr WICKENS — Just to reiterate what Peter was saying about popular music forms. I think that the success of the FReeZA program has been really around on that peer-to-peer level of contemporary popular music. I think it’s important to recognise that contemporary music form has been really
Mr CHELLEW — And often there is a focus on excellence. And, that’s around the traditional forms.

You know, there was a report that came out, the Deloitte report about music, the music industry report. It said that more Victorians go and see live music than go to the football. That was an enormous statistic that made us realise what a massive cultural activity music is for all of us. And so, it is just to recognise the healing power of music in those ways and the ways it brings communities together.

Ms TIERNEY — So to get it on the record — because it’s a no-brainer — can you give us your view as to the importance of FReeZA events in rural and regional Victoria and then from there, if you could you give us some insight into the most active areas in regional Victoria.

Mr WICKENS — Sure. I think the importance of the regional Victorian FReeZA groups is really significant in the way that it’s often the only or one of the only live music outlets in a regional town and specifically one that is all ages and drug, alcohol, smoke free, fully supervised so no pass outs, so something that’s safe for young people and that parents and teachers can have confidence in. Quite often, it’s the only music programme that’s happening in a regional centre.

Groups that are doing really well, there are individual groups in Barwon, south-west, Hume and Loddon that are all currently doing really well, and they’re active. Some of them take a leadership role around organising a networking meeting once a month so that each FReeZA worker, they come together to support each other. I think as with all youth programs sometimes there’s a revolving door where young people come in at maybe 14, 15 and stay for a couple of years and perhaps turn 18 and go on to adult life and other priorities. And, for use of a better word, the FReeZA committee bottoms out and perhaps starts again and a new generation of young people come through.

So, we constantly see FReeZA groups who perhaps are running a really fantastic program, but then have a bit of a quieter period while they recruit and have the changing of the guard.

Mr CHELLEW — And just to add to that, you know, with 80 programs we understand it’s just about all the municipal areas in Victoria. I’m not sure of the number. I think it’s the low 80s. So, almost every local government area is running a program, which is amazing given that some regional areas have a small shire that don’t have a lot of resources.

Ms TIERNEY — So how does the funding work?

Mr WICKENS — It’s on a three-year term at the moment. Each funded — a fully funded group, receives approximately $20,000 — I think it’s $19,450, to deliver a minimum of five FReeZA events and one of those events needs to be a training and development opportunity. So, it is typically in training and event management or committee management, leadership and so forth.

And, there are some groups that are partly funded that might be funded for just two events or three events, but for the most part around 70 of the 80 FReeZA groups are fully funded for five years.

Ms TIERNEY — So, how would it work in a Shire like Yarrambiack, you know —

Mr WICKENS — A small population shire?

Ms TIERNEY — A small rural youth population as well. How would it work?

Mr WICKENS — Certainly. They would typically have their target numbers — they would have lower target numbers and if there’s, say, 100 young people and one secondary college in the town for
example, if they’re getting 90 young people through the door, while that may not seem like a big number, the strike rate, the percentage is amazing. Again, that would be between the Office of Youth and that funded organisation, what their targets would be.

Ms TIERNEY — Okay. So there is a — ?

Mr WICKENS — A scale of —

Ms TIERNEY — A scale and sensitivity to regional concerns?

Mr WICKENS — Yes.

Mr CHELLEW — Do you have any case studies about how FReeZA is working in the school setting?

Mr WICKENS — There’s a couple of groups worth mentioning. There’s Bairnsdale Secondary College. The FReeZA program is run out of the secondary college and so there’s a school teacher there that runs the FReeZA program. That goes really well. So, they run typically lunchtime shows or after school shows.

Another example is Port Phillip in the city that run their FReeZA programs within schools and have it semester-based or term based where they recruit a committee, a temporary committee, with a particular public outcome. They put on an event, and at the end of that, the committee disbands, so it runs to a school term.

The CHAIR — How many of those school partnerships would there be and do you think there are areas of potential for more of that sort of activity to be happening?

Mr WICKENS — I think it’s really informal at this point in time. I think a lot of local government youth services, those that work within schools as a general rule of thumb across all their programs, end up going in there with the FReeZA program and recruiting their young people from school. But, those couple of examples I gave are where it’s a structured environment and they actually run the FReeZA program in a school. There are very few of those. But, broadly speaking, most FReeZA funded organisations would go and recruit from school or set up a table at lunchtime and talk to students about getting involved and use that as a base to go and recruit.

The CHAIR — So, just extending on from Gayle’s question before, our inquiry so far has heard from a number of schools in rural and regional areas. One of the big issues is that kids lack opportunities to perform or places to actually go and see concerts.

Mr WICKENS — Sure.

The CHAIR — Do you see that is a key role that FReeZA could fulfil effectively, number one, the opportunity for those kids to perform, and secondly, for the concerts to be put on so that other kids who aren’t necessarily performing can experience the sort of concerts in rural and regional areas?

Mr WICKENS — Yeah, I think that the FReeZA program in those regional areas, like I was saying before, it can sometimes be the only option that’s there. And, so young people that participate in it, either playing or organising, it becomes really significant. It happens five times a year. In a perfect world, we would like it to happen more often to provide more opportunity, obviously. By all reports, it’s really well received and well attended. The attendance numbers are really strong.

Mr CHELLEW — We have identified there’s only a small percentage of programs that do go into the school settings. Perhaps one could argue that there is some potential growth or way that we could encourage FReeZA to move more into schools, particularly in the regional areas.
The CHAIR — Two other final questions: firstly, we’ve heard again a lot from young people to suggest that their introduction to music in the first place has traditionally come from a parent or somebody that’s had an experience in music that’s then sort of encouraged them to get involved.

Is that the same sort of thing you have experienced in your programs? Would you say that parental involvement or a grandparent or somebody who are actually had an influence has encouraged them? And secondly, what do you think you can do to increase participation of young people to take up music, take up instruments, get more involved?

Mr WICKENS — I think you make a good point with the parental influence. I think the older siblings’ influence as well is really strong. Young people talk to me these days about their vinyl collection, which hasn’t happened in over 10 years. That’s become a new fad, and so young people are going back and discovering music through different ways. A lot of that’s peer influence and obviously in the last 10 years we’ve got access online to music which has opened up a lot more scope. But I think with parents and siblings as well, that’s a really significant influence.

The CHAIR — Do you want to add anything?

Mr CHELLEW — The kind of music that we’re talking about here, it often is easy to pick up an instrument and play, just in your peer group. And, not just guitars and drums but also decks and, you know, DJ equipment as well, which is not just about playing records. These days it’s a lot about making music in its electronic form. And, so what I’m suggesting is within that peer group and within the school cohort there’s an encouragement for people to take up instruments in that way.

And, I think we need to recognise — and this is an amazing thing — that because of FReeZA and for other reasons, there is a youth music culture here in Victoria of the kinds of young local bands and the kinds of artists and different kinds of music older people would never have heard of. It’s a strong culture and because of communication through the Internet and other technologies —

Ms TIERNEY — They’re a very connected one —

Mr CHELLEW — They have an amazing community of music that an older generation would not know about. And, young people are extremely excited about seeing another young person playing and performing. So, it goes way beyond just being an audience member looking at someone on a stage.

The CHAIR — Is that culture stronger now than it was, say, 10 years ago?

Mr CHELLEW — Yes.

The CHAIR — And why?

Mr WICKENS — I think social networking and peer-to-peer online versus in person, and a FReeZA event is basically a peer-to-peer experience, in person. It’s young people organising for young people. Young people are playing on the stage, young people are running the stage, running the front door, selling tickets.

The CHAIR — How would we rate in our youth culture compared to say other states and other countries, for that matter?

Mr WICKENS — Very high compared to other states. I know certainly in New South Wales there are 12 funded all-ages shows a year, as opposed to 400. There’s also less in Queensland and W.A. So, Victoria is certainly very, very lucky in that regard. We’re doing well.

The CHAIR — Fantastic. That finishes it for us. Is there anything else you want to add before we
conclude?

Mr CHELLEW — I think we would be happy to leave the notes with all the statistics.

The CHAIR — Yes, that would be great.

Mr WICKENS — I might actually send them through, if that’s okay.

The CHAIR — Yes. No problems at all.

Thank you to both of you. I am certainly aware of your activities, and I know Peter and I have spoken before about what you do. Well done; congratulations. It’s a great program. We need more of these sorts of things to happen for our young people.

Mr WICKENS — Thanks for the opportunity.