CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 9 April 2013

Members

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Ms J. Lloyd, Chief Executive Officer and Artistic Director, Songlines.
The CHAIR — I will begin by thanking you for coming along this afternoon and appearing before the committee. We have a reference to look at the music in schools and what we can do to support better programs, better offerings within our school systems at both primary and secondary level. We are assisted today by Hansard, which will be recording the hearing. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript and if there are any typographical errors they can be fixed.

The other thing I need to point out is that the evidence you give us is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege. It is the same parliamentary privilege afforded to members of Parliament, so you can feel free to speak your mind in whatever way, shape or form. However, that privilege does not apply outside the Parliament itself, just in the committee proper.

We will begin by you making some brief opening remarks about the organisation and what you do and then we will ask you some questions.

Ms LLOYD — Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation is the peak Indigenous music body for Victoria; it is a statewide body. I have been at Songlines for the past three years and we work in three areas. One of our areas is youth, the second area is artist support and development and the third area is festivals and events. Those three areas work as a pathway to generating emerging artists and stimulating the Indigenous music scene in Victoria. One of the main areas out of those three is youth; it is probably our best-funded area and it is one that we get a lot of government support for.

In the youth area we also have subcategories. We have in-school programs, out-of-school and school holiday programs, one-on-one mentoring for individual youth and a youth festival which is happening on Saturday in Darebin, if you are interested in coming along. Over those four areas we try to engage with as many Indigenous young people as possible, and a lot of our funding with Department of Justice focuses on northern metro, as well as us getting a lot of support from the City of Darebin, which has the highest Indigenous population in Melbourne, and that is where Songlines is based, as well.

Also, another one of our major partners is the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency — VACCA. We source a lot of our young people through them, and we have had a relationship with them for probably about the last four years. There are some short-term and some long-term projects. One of the successes out of that is a choir I have called the Koorie Tiddas Choir. It is an all-girls youth choir and it ranges between 4 to 7 or 8 members. I think the eldest is about 19 and the youngest might be about 11. They are all girls in care and they have been with me for about three years. That is probably one of our success stories, where young people are in crisis or at risk, and music, performing and the Arts is a way of engaging them and giving them social skills and personal development outside of whatever else they are involved in.

The one-on-one tutoring is a personal, one-on-one mentoring thing that we have with young people. It has been hard for us to maintain young people on one-on-one sessions for a long period of time, but usually we try to do it over terms, matching them up with their schooling. One thing we are starting to incorporate in that is slowly trying to incorporate a bit of numeracy and literacy in the mentoring, and just getting them to develop personal relationships with our established artists as role models and engaging with the Indigenous community, because a lot of the kids in foster care are not with Indigenous families. In doing the Songlines programs it really gets them involved in community, especially when they are performing at our events, they are meeting with family and cousins or whatever, with whom they do not engage throughout the year.

That is a bit of an overview of our youth program.

The CHAIR — Are a lot of your programs done outside the school program?

Ms LLOYD — Yes.

The CHAIR — Do you do anything within the school or is it predominantly outside the school?

Ms LLOYD — We have been trying to get into the schools. The main schools that we were working on were Northland Secondary, Reservoir and Ballertr Mooroo College, which I do not think is running any more. That was probably one of the hardest areas for us to get into.
I think schools with high numbers of Indigenous kids enrolled — I felt we were becoming quite competitive with the other incursions the schools were being offered. It was just another thing that was taking them out of the class doing their maths and English. It was not really a quality program for us that we were offering within the schools. It was a bit of us having circus guys coming in, and then a theatre thing coming in, and it was just another thing that the kids had to do.

Engaging in schools is probably the most inefficient way for us, and I think over the next 12 to 24 months we are probably going to phase that out of our youth program. We will still engage with the schools indirectly, I suppose, with connecting to the Indigenous kids in the schools, but in terms of offering programs during school hours, it is not really as beneficial as our holiday program or our afternoon programs.

The CHAIR — So the program that you run, the youth program, is mainly a referral program, is it? Is it done after hours?

Ms LLOYD — The ones after hours are more beneficial for us. We get more results and we get more access to kids and more long-term access to kids than in the schools.

The CHAIR — How many kids would you have in the program? Over what period of time would those kids be in one of your programs?

Ms LLOYD — One that we are currently running this week is the Easter school holidays program. We have a limit of 30 kids and it is over the five days, just because we have limited resources, but that is a good enough number for facilitators to work with; about the size of a class, I would say. Those 30 kids, every holidays, will change. It is not all holidays, it is just April and September because then we have got NAIDOC week in July and there is too much going on.

Connecting with VACCA gives us the same sort of access to the same kids. The after-school program, like we have here, we have got the Koorie Tiddas youth choir, we have got a boys traditional dance group, and so having direct access to their parents or their carers is better than going through the schools, for us — just developing the relationship with the kids ourselves, really, rather than other things.

The CHAIR — Do you find with those kids that you have developed those relationships with and they are on your program that it assists with their retention within school because they have another area of focus, particularly with the kids in need?

Ms LLOYD — I could not say exactly for sure, but I would assume so. I would not know exact figures. I think that would be something that we would have to spend a bit of time researching to find out what that is.

I think our angle is not necessarily to retain kids in school, but to provide them with the same numeracy and literacy skills through music, rather than just relying on the schools to provide those skills. A lot of the young kids that we are working with are really disengaged at school and neither here nor there about it, but the music or the hip-hop or whatever is engaging for them. That is a bit of a hot one so we are attracted to working that way with them rather than keeping them active and engaged so that they stay in school; it is more about that.

The CHAIR — Once you have found a passion for that young person, that you have engaged them, what do you think that does longer term for them when they have been in a program and previously have been completely disengaged from a whole range of different things? Have you seen career progression or life progression?

Ms LLOYD — Yes, for sure. I will give you one of our success stories, about a young girl who has been with us for a while. She was in VACCA care but she is over 18 now so she is no longer directly under them. Her background is extremely traumatic: on the streets very young, involved in drugs, and there would be a couple of pregnancies, and this is all at 11 or 12 years of age. She came to us a couple of
years after that. She would come and go because she was still going on the streets, and a lot of these kids are.

Definitely through the Songlines program, the youth program, she is now a professional performer. She is committed, she is dedicated, she has got her own place and her life skills and her own self view is completely extreme to what it used to be. This kind of example is what keeps us going, and knowing that something is working here.

There are lots of kids that are in the halfway mark there who might be around about 13 or 14 who are not with us at the moment because they are going through stuff, but they are always welcome and it is always open for kids to come back. With all the other situations they have got going on with court cases or whatever else is going on, we try to work around that — so definitely, without a doubt.

Ms TIERNEY — I just wanted to know a little bit more detail about the mentoring program you have. How do you identify the kids that would fit in the program? How do you get local artists to agree to be mentors? What training do they go through?

Ms LLOYD — The mentors?

Ms TIERNEY — The mentors. What have you learnt from the program? When the kids have all sorts of other stuff that is overtaking their lives, how do you keep the channel of communication going even though they are not necessarily with you at that point in time?

Ms LLOYD — I think, to answer that last question, VACCA has always got access to kids and even the kids that are not in VACCA, it is just community. Everybody has a fair idea of who is who, and whose auntie is who, and that kind of stuff. But in terms of selecting the kids it is open for everybody: Indigenous kids 25 and under, really. Usually young people who attend our festivals or our events or come to the holiday program want to stay on and do more regular stuff. From 10 to 25 is quite a broad range so we have different ways of working with each of the young people. The Koorie Tiddas choir was a great example of working with under 18s because they are all in school and they are used to that kind of thing, whereas those aged 18 and over, up to 25, are young adults and that is more where the mentor program comes in. They are not in schools so they are not really interested in doing class-style things. They just want to go on the computer or learn how to play guitar individually for their own solo work, I suppose.

The facilitators we have are all Indigenous musicians based in Melbourne and the crew that we use we have been using for ages. They know what Songline’s program is; they know what the outcomes are. Each young person is different and we try to match up the right facilitator with the right young person. We do not really have a formal training process for the facilitators; a lot of the musos have been doing it for 10 or 20 years anyway. We might just team up facilitators as a training kind of thing for somebody who does not have much experience.

We send a lot of the young people who have been mentored out with the facilitators to do another group. There is that kind of more informal on-the-job kind of training. It works when you have Indigenous performers facilitating, especially if they are well known in the community. Somebody like Kutcha Edwards is just unbelievable. There is no formal training process for Kutcha Edwards; we know that he knows what he is doing.

Mr ELASMAR — Could you tell us about the importance of music within the Koorie community and what role music plays in helping all students to learn about Indigenous culture?

Ms LLOYD — In answer to your first question, I think music in the Indigenous community is highly important. It is broader than that. I think the Arts is extremely important in the Indigenous community because it is cultural. It is something that is easily understood and acknowledged at a grassroots level. Young people and adults are constantly growing up with it and it is something that can be easily understood as opposed to something not really taken on easily in the community. Music is definitely up
there with dance and art. It is something that is culturally related that the community picks up like that. It is a great medium for us to use for engaging and addressing a lot of different things that we may want to do. Music and dance just work.

Your second question was about Indigenous music for all students.

Mr ELASMAR — Yes, and culture — that music helps Indigenous culture.

Ms LLOYD — We have found this is a bit of a hot topic at the moment. Something which everyone feels very passionate about is cultural identity and the definition of Aboriginality in urban areas. I notice that a lot of the young Indigenous people are getting right into hip-hop. It has been a complete success because it is engaging and it is also a way for them to represent themselves and the modern culture that Aboriginal people have. The music and the dance, whether traditional or contemporary, is what sustains the culture and it is very important that blackfellas are involved in the Arts because it is way that we can continue the culture, express it, develop it, evolve it or whatever it may be.

The CHAIR — What about extending on from that in teaching non-Indigenous kids about Aboriginal culture?

Ms LLOYD — Yes, totally. That has been an important thing for us as well. Mind you, when we hit the schools that is always a bit of a hard spot when we send facilitators in. Are they only for the Indigenous students or for all students? How the schools differentiate that we are not sure. Other than that we run programs in the general community, whether it is the AFL, Westpac or in schools or whatever. It is called Koorie Stories and Song and basically it is a cultural awareness program through music. It is meant for a non-Indigenous audience. We will have three performers up there singing a song or two each but in between they will talk about what influenced that song, that background. It is an option to open the door into the background of Aboriginality and people explaining about where they come from, where they were born, why they are the way they are, what inspired this — through family or culture.

Programs like that are the way that we do cultural awareness through music, and it is always more easily absorbed, we find, by non-Indigenous audiences. They can understand Aboriginal culture, both traditional and modern, through the singer/songwriters.

Ms MILLER — Just touching on that, Jessie, you raised a couple of interesting points about educating non-Indigenous children. I am not sure what your experience has been but in my electorate in Bentleigh a lot of the primary schools are now playing an Indigenous version of the Australian anthem and they have the Australian flag flying. That is quite interesting. A lot of the younger ones are getting into understanding more about the culture.

You also raised a really interesting point that music and dance, irrespective of your culture or your faith, breaks down a lot of barriers. Leading into my question, do you believe that the musical needs of Koorie students are being met in Victorian schools, and if not, what do you think should be done to address this?

Ms LLOYD — I do not work directly in the schools so I probably could not answer that. I can say that it is hard for us to deliver Indigenous music programs in schools, not because the schools are not interested but because it is competing with other incursions that are being offered. In saying that, my ideal wish list in order to offer Indigenous music in schools would be for us to develop a partnership with the Department of Education and offer our programs, maybe as part of the curriculum, without having to cold sell to schools and compete. It would be more of an internal way of going in.

A couple of years ago I tried going to the education department but it was kind of a brick wall where the response was, ‘We don’t really have any specific funding for that’ or ‘We don’t really have anything set up at the moment’. I think something that would be ideal for us in terms of having Indigenous music in schools for all students would be not having to do the cold sell directly to the schools but go through the department or have a partnership where we develop a program that will go through internally.
Ms TIERNEY — Are you aware of any Indigenous music education programs in schools at the moment, and if there are any, where are they, and do we have Aboriginal people actually delivering that music education?

Ms LLOYD — No, I could not say too much. I get a lot of phone calls from schools. Around NAIDOC week they will want something. We might just send out a singer/songwriter or something but it is kind of a one-off thing; it is nothing long-term. I think there would be a lot of music teachers in schools who would be doing a lot of Indigenous-themed stuff with kids anyway. I think that is kind of going on but I would not really know of anything specific like the programs we have. We have not come across anybody else who is saying, ‘No, we don’t do it because we’ve already got somebody’. Another group that is doing it but is not in schools is in the juvenile detention centres. I know that they have got some good programs running there which we have partnered with.

The CHAIR — I just wonder, in terms of gifted kids that you may see — gifted in music — if a young person comes to you through a whole lot of different pathways and doors and you discover that they have a gifted ability in music, whether there are appropriate pathways for young Koorie people when it comes to supporting those kids?

Ms LLOYD — By ‘gifted’ you mean talented?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Ms LLOYD — Yes, totally. The Songlines structure that we have is a pathway: to youth programs, artists support and development, and to festivals and events. We get a lot of the 21 to 25 who are still youths, on paper, easily bridging over to our artists support and development, giving them their mentoring sessions, recording their EPs, launching them, developing the beginning of their music career and providing them with training in how to be an artist, basically. There is a nice bridge there that works for both when they are still youths but they also have one foot in the artists support and development. I probably would not be interested in doing that with anyone who is still in school. The workload of what is required to be a successful artist cannot be done while you are in school, so I would not expect that from somebody who is doing Year 11 or 12.

The CHAIR — Have you had examples where a young person has started off within a program and ends up mentoring or becoming a facilitator on one of your programs?

Ms LLOYD — Yes. One of our artists, Meriki Hood, she is a hip-hop artist. She and her partner Johnny Mac were art students from Ballernt Mooroop College. They have been involved with Songline’s youth program, or when they were youths, and now they are one of our main facilitators. We have also worked with them as artists in recording, supporting and producing.

We are developing a nice little handful of crew who are coming up. We just need to maintain that consistency. I have only been there for three years but, yes, we have definitely got potential for the young crew that we have got now, to keep moving them through.

The CHAIR — Is there anything, Jessie, that we have not covered that you would like to finish off with?

Ms LLOYD — No, I think the only thing there that I would like to say is that it has been hard for us to get into schools. I think it is important for us to be in schools, and I think what would work ideally for us is if we went through the education department and started talking there to see how we could develop a partnership that offers to all the schools, rather than us doing the cold sell. It has really been unproductive for us.

The CHAIR — Can I just finish by ensuring that we have something on record here. You get a fair bit of support, you said, through the Department of Justice, so you are dealing in many instances with young
people at risk. Would it be fair to say that exposing those young people to risk through a music program like the one you offer could assist those young people on a journey to a better life, say?

Ms LLOYD — Well, yes, I tell you without a doubt, and this does not only apply to our youth program, this applies to the artists that we work with. It applies to every festival and every event that we put on. I honestly believe that what we are doing is building cultural pride, community pride. Every time a blackfella is walking down the street and sees a poster of an Aboriginal event, that just goes, ‘Yes, I am going to go somewhere, that’s my mob’. They go there, they will see family and they will see their artists, and it is something that is ownership. This might be hitting spots that have not been experienced very often over one person’s whole life. The more events that we do, the more artists that we put out, the more kids that we get involved through the whole community, it totally ripples through, and I deadset believe it.

The CHAIR — Fantastic! That is exactly what I wanted to hear. Thank you, Jessie, for appearing today.

Ms LLOYD — No worries.

The CHAIR — And keep up the great work with your program. Excellent!

Witness withdrew.