

## **ROYAL SOUTH STREET SOCIETY**

### **SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES**

#### **Background on Society**

The Royal South Street Society has been running an Eisteddfod or performing arts Competition in Ballarat since 1891.

The Society is a non profit organisation and is managed by a Board of 14 voluntary members. There are two full time and one part time paid staff and two hundred other volunteers, who work as ushers and back stage assistants when the Eisteddfod is running.

The Eisteddfod runs from the end of July to the end of October and involves the following Disciplines: Brass Bands, Calisthenics, Choral, Dancing, Debating, Electronic Keyboards, Highland Dancing, Highland Pipe Bands, Instrumental, One Act Play Festival, Pianoforte, Pipe Organ, Speech & Drama, TV Auditions and Vocal.

The Competitions attract over 7,800 Competitors entries each year, which result in over 40,000 on stage performances. We have a paying audience of 25,000.

#### **Importance of Eisteddfod to Ballarat**

The Eisteddfod is important to Ballarat's economy and we estimate that it is worth \$15 million each year to accommodation providers, food outlets and other shops in the central business area.

Accommodation is at a premium particularly during the months of September and October, when our two biggest Sections in Dancing and Calisthenics are held. Calisthenics Clubs and their followers book accommodation months ahead and during some weeks in October, 95% of Ballarat's accommodation is booked because of South Street.

Accommodation providers and owners of food outlets plan their operations around South Street and a number of motels and caravan parks contact our office to seek information on Competition dates, so that they can have sufficient rooms on hold for South Street Competitors and followers.

#### **Impact of South Street on young people**

The majority of schools in Ballarat participate in South Street in one form or another. We have entries in Instrumental, Bands, Choral, Debating, Speech & Drama and Pianoforte from schools that plan their school calendars around the South Street Season. A number of schools include music, speech and drama and debating subjects relevant to South Street in their Curriculum.

Our Competitors have ended up establishing careers in their chosen performing arts fields which were nurtured during the years that they competed at South Street. For example one of our female Calisthenics

Competitors has recently performed with the Moulin Rouge show in France and Anthony Callea of Australian Idol fame competed in the South Street Competitions Modern Vocal Section.

There are also a number of young people who attend privately run Dancing Schools and Calisthenics Clubs in Ballarat and we believe that many of the students of these Schools and Clubs have chosen to stay in Ballarat because of the friendships and associations they have formed over the years.

There are 10 Dancing Schools in Ballarat which is quite high for a population of 80,000 people. As far as we are aware Bendigo has 2 Dancing Schools and Geelong also has only 2. A number of Dancing teachers who have returned to Ballarat to set up a School, have done so because their participation in South Street as Competitors, has given them recognition in the area which makes setting up a viable business realistic.

2 Dancing Schools have up to 500 members and we estimate that with an average of 300 members per School, 3,000 young people are involved in Dancing Schools whose members compete at South Street.

There are 2 Calisthenics Clubs in Ballarat with around 300 members each. The Club Coaches and parents of quite a number of the Club members have competed at South Street themselves. In fact it is relatively common during Calisthenics to have grandmothers and mothers either in the audience or assisting in the dressing rooms, as their grand daughters or daughters perform with their teams.

Young people, who participate in Eisteddfodau, develop high levels of self esteem, confidence and the ability to work with others that equips them with valuable skills to find meaningful work and to make a worthwhile contribution to society.

The importance of Dance in Ballarat can also be evidenced by the fact that we have two specialist Dance Supplies shops in the town, when other major regional towns have only one or none.

### **Strategies and Recommendations that that might be taken to increase the number of young people who decide to remain in rural towns and communities**

The Royal South Street Society is a member of the Association of Eisteddfod Societies of Australia Inc., whose members meet twice a year to exchange ideas for a better understanding of the place in the community of each individual Eisteddfod.

All Eisteddfod Societies are kept afloat by Volunteers who give of their time to provide opportunities for young people to showcase their talents at their Competitions. It has been estimated that the Royal South Street Society Competitions involve over 10 thousand volunteer hours to plan and run the event each year.

A number of the Association members face similar problems to the Royal South Street Society with regard to rising costs involved in running their Competitions each year. Eisteddfod Societies depend on ticket sales and sponsorship as their main source of income and all of them are currently facing similar problems with declining audiences, despite the fact that Competitor entry levels remain strong.

In the 2005 Competition year the Royal South Street Society incurred a loss and a number of the expenses such as Adjudicators' fees, Theatre Technicians and Front of House staff wages, cleaning, electricity & gas, insurances and commission on Theatre ticket sales were beyond the Society's control.

We believe that financial support for the Eisteddfod movement from the State Government would greatly contribute towards the retention of young people in Rural Towns and Communities. If Eisteddfod Board members were able to spend less time on the continuing battle to meet rising expenses, greater effort could be put into ensuring that the Eisteddfod experience would be even more rewarding and enjoyable for Competitors, which in turn would assist in retention of young people in local areas.