

Case Study

Strengthening the value of ASHE Cultural Games for schools and community



Background

The Academy of Sport Health and Education (ASHE) is an initiative that encourages mainly Indigenous youth aged 16-24 years to pursue education and employment opportunities. Based in Shepparton, it provides a needs-based, holistic learning environment focused on cultural values and participation in sport. It offers hope and direction for students challenged in mainstream education, and a sense of cultural pride.

Since 2007, ASHE has hosted an annual cultural festival that invites schools and the community to celebrate Indigenous culture through traditional games, competitions and activities. The first day focuses on activities for primary school-aged children of Indigenous background, connecting them to culture through games, stories, dance, art, and language and increasing their self-worth and sense of pride. The second day focuses on a traditional game, Buroinjin, for secondary school-aged children of all cultures, and invites the whole community to take part in a day celebrating Indigenous culture. ASHE-Fest, as it is now known, promotes greater understanding and a sense of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

ASHE students play the key role in planning the event, supported by staff and local volunteers. With more people attending year on year, the event is a growing success among local schools and in the community. By 2014, it was evident that planning and coordination challenges were becoming more complex, and without stringent financial and event management processes there was a risk the event could run at a loss for ASHE, with knock-on effects for other core programs.

Jawun has supported ASHE since 2011, and in 2014 and 2015 deployed three secondees to strengthen event planning and management as well as marketing and long term financial viability.

Approach

In 2014, Paul Dort from Wesfarmers arrived at ASHE and began to work closely with staff and a team of students to help coordinate the coming ASHE-Fest 2014. In particular, Paul worked with the students to identify priority issues faced by Indigenous youth in the Shepparton area which could be constructively highlighted at the community-wide event. Issues included bullying, racism, and drugs and alcohol, and student ideas to address them included an anti-bullying rap song played at the event, and a banner featuring primary school children's handprints with their names inside, spelling out the message that racism is not something they want any part of. Paul drew up suggestions for future ASHE-Fest events, highlighting planning improvements and the need for more corporate sponsorship and stallholder engagement. According to former staff member, Rebecca Presser, former Careers and Transitions Co-Ordinator at ASHE, "Paul was a huge help with ASHE-Fest 2014, assisting us to manage stallholders, sponsorship and entertainment. This was a major part of the event and without his assistance during this time it would not have been as successful."

The following year, Pierrette Charbel from Wesfarmers was deployed to ASHE to review work health and safety (WHS) protocols for the 2015 event. With a background in insurance, Pierrette identified incident reporting as a key need since there was no policy or process in place to either manage or report incidents. She drew up a comprehensive WHS framework (including an Incident Reporting process) which gave ASHE confidence in managing all future versions of this large-scale public event. Implementing Paul's recommendations, Pierrette further streamlined aspects of the planning and also secured important corporate support for the event – including vouchers and food from Coles, and printing from Officeworks – which continues to this day. Overall, the 2015 event was a great success and the increased planning was noticeable, with one participating school writing to the event team afterwards to say, “Your *hard work sure paid off – it ran like clockwork and everybody LOVED it!*”

Also in 2015, CBA employee Amanda Ridge was seconded to ASHE to create a marketing plan in response to the risk that, while enormously popular with schools and the community, the ASHE-Fest was not financially sustainable. In the past it had needed to draw on ASHE program funds as a last resort, potentially putting those programs at risk. ASHE's idea was that the annual event's activities could be offered year-round as a 'cultural sport and activities' package to schools, sports clubs, NGOs and community groups, and Amanda was briefed with developing a business plan for this.

Amanda began by using a digital survey to collect information from current school partners and developing a detailed cost analysis. She then developed a detailed business plan for selling packages of traditional games and cultural activities. This offered schools or organisations differently priced packages ranging from a one hour session of traditional games such as *pulyugge*, *parndo*, *weme* and *jumpin' pin*; to an all-day session of traditional games and cultural activities such as Yorta Yorta language workshops, traditional painting on canvas, and making boomerangs, didgeridoos or clapsticks. Amanda also created budgeting and invoicing tools for the event – the last being particularly important as her financial background had steered her to a major gap in the invoicing process that meant outstanding funds were not being followed up on. Finally, Amanda supported the student team to develop a suite of marketing materials. This was a process where her previous life as a PE teacher came in handy! As well as being enjoyable, it further added to the rich learning provided during induction week about a regional history of dispossession and injustice.

The students held a competition for a logo that would capture *Daya*, the Yorta Yorta word for play that they agreed shaped their brand. The final marketing package incorporated this into flyers, information packages, a Powerpoint presentation, booking forms and invoices. Feedback forms were created to ensure the events package could improve over time and meet customer needs. Before returning to CBA, Amanda left a proposal for packaging the ASHE-Fest cultural activities for businesses, relating them to professional skills development including teambuilding and communication. ASHE Director Leonie Dwyer was particularly impressed by Amanda's cost analysis that made plain how precarious ASHE-Fest's funding was, and her energy to lay a strong foundation for the event's future. Her comments to Amanda were, “*The work you have done would never have been achieved otherwise, and is instrumental in taking the traditional indigenous games to the next step...*”

Outcomes

With the support of a series of skilled secondees, ASHE-Fest is now better planned, safer, and on a firmer financial foundation. Steps towards future financial viability by commercialisation of the games package are paying off: five schools have purchased a games package as a result of Amanda's work; and the ideas she left for creating similar packages for businesses are ready for follow-up.

Next Steps

ASHE plans to market the package state-wide among schools and businesses, including with a new promotional video. Following the secondees' recommendations, it plans to raise the professionalism of the games. It hopes that the increasingly popular ASHE-Fest will be continued on an annual and year-round basis, as a powerful way of improving awareness and engagement with Indigenous culture in the region, and advancing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.