



Flipside Circus Residencies in Normanton, Queensland, 2021 - Case Study

The Young Circus Stars of Normanton



19 workshops



432 participants



6 days | 93 attendees

Over the last three years, Flipside Circus has collaborated with Normanton Arts Council Inc to deliver community circus programs in Normanton, located in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Flipside Circus is Queensland's largest youth arts organisation. In 2021, Flipside worked with 29,934 children and young people across the state delivering programs in 22 regional and remote communities.

With a mission to empower communities through circus, Flipside Circus residencies engage young people in arts programs that involve teamwork, physical training, and creativity.

The Normanton Arts Council Inc's mission is to share arts and cultural experiences. They liaise with arts organisations around Queensland and bring art back to the local community, creating opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be available. "The community has limited opportunities to engage in cultural/arts activities, especially for children and young people." (Jeanette – Normanton Arts Council Inc).

Flipside toured to Normanton in 2019, 2020, and 2021 as part of Flipside's regional and remote residency programs, supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland and in 2021,

by the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and the Queensland Community Foundation.

The Normanton residencies have been a great success, allowing Flipside to work closely with both local schools, and to engage children and young people at the Normanton Sports Centre – facilitated by The Normanton Arts Council Inc.

"I made (Flipside trainer) Chris stand up on the crash mat and tell the young people he would be back. He had built such an amazingly positive relationship with so many young people they didn't want him to leave. We had never seen young people help pack the gear into the truck the way they did, they were holding onto the strong feelings they had experienced for as long as they could....So it's really good to have you back."

Jeanette – Normanton Arts Council Inc

Normanton's population is 1,257. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people make up 59.6% of the population and children aged 0-14 years make up 25.6% of the population (321 children) – source Australian Bureau of Statistics,

2016 census. This means in 2021, around 80% of Normanton children aged 6-14 years old attended Flipside workshops.

POSITIVE IMPACT

Specific outcomes identified by both Normanton Arts Council and Flipside trainers during the program include:

- Increased demand/numbers of participants; from 9 workshops and 152 participants in 2020 to 18 workshops and 432 participants in 2021.
- Many participants retained skills from previous programs, especially in mini-trampoline, and manipulation and were keen to build on these skills/try more advanced skills/try new skills;
- Peer support was well demonstrated with participants stepping in to spot and help each other and keen to share skills;
- Contributions from participants developing over return visits with young people becoming increasingly confident to offer suggestions/ideas from the start of the project and actively contributing ideas to the creative development/performance building;
- Demonstrated support, and self-direction/ownership of the program from the young participants;
- Positive behaviour outcomes observed along with peer-to-peer mentoring and respectful relationships between participants and participants and trainers;
- Normanton Arts Council personnel observed – “lots of excitement and energy from participants! Jumps and flips were very popular. There was no shame about standing up in front of people to perform. Big smiles and lots of fun.”

The 2021 programs greatly exceeded targets with number of audiences, participants, engagements, and performances all above projections.

The program included an additional day of workshops in Karumba (an hour north of Normanton) - an important addition with feedback from this community identifying this community often felt overlooked by touring programs.

Flipside’s residencies also helped further cement Normanton’s relationship with Flipside Circus.

Many participants have attended programs across three separate Flipside tours and therefore did not require time to ‘warm’ to the program or the Flipside trainers. Community members reported ‘kids knew the Flipside truck had arrived, even though it doesn’t have any the name on it, and were eager to engage with the programs.’ The

“Our kids have enjoyed the way that trainers have catered to their interests and encouraged growth and involvement of everyone, particularly those who would be otherwise marginalised and at risk of disengagement in the community. The continuity of the experience that Flipside provides builds trust and recognition within the community and for the students they train”

Kirsty Taney – Normanton Arts Council Inc

benefits of return visits were clear not just in levels of engagement but in the skills and confidence of local participants.

Community and participant feedback was very positive. Normanton Arts Council – and the community’s – long-term relationship with Flipside Circus ensured the programs were well supported.

Flipside’s residency tours have become an ongoing engagement program that provides access to quality arts experiences, performance, performance building, and circus skills delivered by professional circus trainers.

The project also helped build Flipside's touring network with nearby communities such as Karumba and Doomadgee joining the program – making Normanton a jumping off point for further touring.

“I was scared, but I gave it a go and did it – my heart is still beating hard but it was fun”

Alyssia, participant – Normanton

“The kids did really well. Really nice to see something like this in the community – we don’t get much out here for the kids and nothing like this”

Participant’s parent – Karumba