

Tjanpi Weavers

5 December 2018

This submission reflects a phone conversation between Tjanpi Weavers and the Department of Communications and the Arts. The conversation was part of the National Arts and Disability Strategy consultation (24 September – 3 December 2018).

About Tjanpi Weavers

Tjanpi doesn't have an art centre, we have a remote office in Warakurna, WA. We cover 26 communities and we come in and out. We do work in the available spaces in communities.

Our service is buying art up front from artists. One of our core duties is to facilitate harvesting the grass used for weaving. This is often on rough terrain.

We improve artists' skills by running workshops, which can be in community or on country.

We also have Tjanpi corner in Alice Springs. This provides casual employment opportunities for people based in Alice for health reasons, and for their families.

Disability at Tjanpi Weavers

Disability is something we live with every day at Tjanpi Weavers. Our staff are not trained in disability support, but we try to find a way to work within the constraints that we have.

Tjanpi brings women together in community and on country for fibre arts practice. We have a diverse artist base, and it is an elderly cohort. Fibre art is often seen as 'nana work'. Supporting people with disability and older people to participate can be challenging in our environment.

We are a community hub, and there's an expectation that we deliver services, but we are not practitioners within a disability framework. Some of our work is about community participation, but there are barriers to this. For examples the vehicles that we need to use to get people around on rough terrain, are not accessible.

We don't necessarily ask the question about what people need because of their disability. We've just starting having to report on disability, so we are finding this out now. There are requirements that people have for specialised support to participate in art making.

Research Project with National Ageing Research Institute

To try to determine how much of our cohort is ageing and is living with dementia, we have embarked on a research project with the National Ageing Research Institute. We are thinking about how we can access aged care services in the future. Part of the research is intended to look at what the impact would be for Tjanpi to access aged care funding. For example, how would access improve if we could access this? Disability is something that needs to be examined more fully.

The interview process for the research project has just been completed across the region. The other partners are Mangkaja Arts and Ikuntji Artists. Now the research is being compiled and will be published next year. The idea is we will be able to use it as an advocacy tool.

Workshops and disability

By the nature of our cohort, many artists have disability, and they are able to improve their skills and increase their income base through our workshops. Recently we had an exhibition at the National Museum of fourteen women from Camp Hill. All have a disability of some kind that limits their participation to different extents.

Adjustments are tricky because of our limited resources. We engage senior weavers to facilitate workshops, and we might need to spend more time with people who have an acquired brain injury for example. Sometimes we have to consider our duty of care, and acknowledge that if we can't support someone's needs we can't take them out.

Not everyone comes to workshops to progress skills. It's often about wanting to be included in a community event.

The Women's Council has some resources that they can harness to engage someone who requires more support than we can offer with one field officer. If someone wanted to participate but couldn't because of their access needs, they can contact the Tjungu team and may get additional support through that avenue.

Our field officer often works with an arts and cultural assistant. Our current assistant has an aged care background and so can offer some more nuanced support.

Often people can't come because they can't get support. We know of one senior artist who has dementia and is very isolated. We make visits to her to drop off materials and do the best we can to engage her.

The high costs of service delivery mean that we can't always cover basic operational costs. We never include a line item for access in our budget when applying for funding, because we are trying to cover basic costs like salaries and vehicle maintenance.

Social inclusion and wellbeing

There are massive wellbeing impacts from the program. The problem is articulating and measuring that impact. This is a strategic goal for the Women's Council going forward. We want outsiders to appreciate the work that is being done here. Anecdotally, people want to participate in our workshops and they express joy in participating in them.

Funding

Being able to articulate our impact would mean we could pursue other funding streams. We have to be agile about where we look for funding. We could be considered in aged care funding, for example. We can't just focus on arts funding alone.

If we could access more funding we could improve our services and have greater capacity out on the lands. We don't have the resources we need, so we have to be vocal about the outcomes and impacts of our work. This means articulating the impact in a way that makes sense to people on the east coast.

We are trying to scale up our operations in WA, and then we would be able to scale up in the NT and SA. It's the right time for us to scale up. We have great youth engagement and we have funding from the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program to support our arts and culture assistance. If we had more sites this would mean releasing the field officer from the daily grind of service delivery so

that they could focus on arts practice. We need to separate our service delivery from arts development, and we need to skill up our team to have people who are trained in disability support. Scaling up needs to be a thoughtful way of increasing Indigenous employment within a trauma informed framework.

It's a sad story that Tjanpi doesn't have the funding we need. Last year we generated \$126,000 in income for the Warakurna community because there is a remote field officer there. With more offices, we could make a meaningful economic impact. We are constrained in our service delivery because we operate across such a vast region.

Future National Arts and Disability Strategy

In terms of what we would like to see in a new Strategy, it would be helpful for staff to have more training on disability issues so that people are more aware in their day-to-day work. Accessibility is a huge issue, for example the cars are not accessible as mentioned earlier.

We often use other services' spaces, so ensuring that community spaces in general are accessible would be an improvement.

The key things are access and participation, and improved knowledge for staff.