

In conversation with Louise Walsh, Director of Artsupport Australia and mentor.

Louise Walsh is Director of Artsupport Australia, an initiative of the Australia Council for the Arts to grow cultural philanthropy. Artsupport Australia works closely with government, cultural, corporate, financial and philanthropic sectors to develop effective strategies for giving. It was established in 2003 by Co-Chairmen David Gonski AO and James Strong AO and since then has facilitated more than \$12 million in philanthropic funding for the arts in Australia.

Louise began her professional life as a corporate lawyer with Allens Arthur Robinson. She got a taste for a world outside the law when she was seconded to work with Rod McGeoch AM on the Sydney 2000 Olympic bid. The successful outcome led to her accepting a position with the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG). She became the first member of SOCOG's successful sponsorship/marketing team in 1994 and brokered a number of significant corporate partnerships for the 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games including Westpac and Ansett.

In late 1997, Louise left SOCOG to work for the City of Sydney as Director, Look of the City, where she managed a number of special projects to improve the look of the city in the lead up to the 2000 Games.

Louise's career took on an arts focus in late 1999 when she became the Director of Development for the Sydney Symphony. Over the next three and a half years, Louise was responsible for managing the fundraising team at the Sydney Symphony and raising over \$4 million a year (combination of corporate partnerships and individual giving or philanthropy).

Louise, Artsupport Australia is quite a unique idea, how did it come about and why did you accept the role of Director?

David Gonski became Chair of the Australia Council about 8 years ago. His passion is growing philanthropy and when he took on the role of Chairman he decided he wanted to do something specifically for the arts. He felt that it was going to be difficult for government funding at all levels to increase for the non-profit sector. He felt if you're a large non-profit like the Salvation Army or Sydney Symphony Orchestra then you have a strong chance of attracting corporate partnerships and sponsorship, but if you're a small to medium company or individual artist then it's typically very difficult. And thirdly, he felt strongly that philanthropy and private giving was untapped in Australia compared to the US and UK. So he wanted to do something about it.

Artsupport Australia is effectively a division of the Australia Council, a distinct unit reporting to the CEO. We are funded by the Australia Council. We are trying to help the cultural arts sector raise more money from philanthropic sources.

When I spoke to Gonski about this job I had been at the Sydney Symphony Orchestra for about four years and I enjoyed it but I knew I didn't want to run an orchestra.....I was thinking about the next thing I wanted to do and I went to him to have a chat. I could see the potential with philanthropy. I could see it was so untapped. The opportunity here was to work with him because he's so passionate about philanthropy as well as the arts and that it was a start-up. So a great opportunity to grow the business and that he was going to be quite hands on - which he was.

From your experience, are Australians and Australian businesses becoming more philanthropic?

I think individuals are. We've got a long way to go until we catch up to the US. But there's been significant tax changes in Australia in the last 6-7 years with Prescribed Private Funds - PPFs - being introduced as well as payroll deductions for workplace giving. They are making a significant difference to philanthropic giving.

There's still a lot more that can be done. On the corporate side, we (Artsupport Australia) don't focus so much on corporate philanthropy we focus on individual or private philanthropy because most corporates are interested in a partnership or straight sponsorship which mean they're getting marketing benefits and all sorts of other benefits, so it's quite distinct from corporate philanthropy. I think there's a move away from that because public companies are concerned about shareholders and their views and rightly so. Where I think corporate philanthropy is growing and does have a role is with workplace giving, where the employees donate and the employers match it dollar-for-dollar. So I think that's a very legitimate source of corporate philanthropy.

What are the hardest things about your job?

Well at the moment we're going through an expansion phase, which is very exciting. For the first three years it was two of us. We now have some more staff in Sydney and in Darwin, our NT Mgr. Now we're recruiting for WA and QLD and one of the challenges is finding the right staff for those positions. They've got to be a proven fundraiser, not necessarily in the arts, and networked into high net worth people in their cities because we want them to broker funding options, so the arts gets more of its share.

The other interesting challenge is the website that we have just launched. There is such a demand for our services and we need to keep up with that demand. It could be a community arts group in Footscray or an Indigenous arts centre in Katherine. We'll see anyone once and we make an assessment about whether they have a good enough case and potential for us to mentor them on an ongoing basis. We can't mentor everyone on an ongoing basis.

First we look at the product. For example we have just started mentoring *Milk Crate Theatre*. It is part of the Darlinghurst Theatre and they run all sorts of theatre based programs and workshops for homeless people in the inner city. One meeting with them and we went 'Definitely!' It has got to be a good product. They are kicking all sorts of goals for a tiny organisation, fantastic outfit. That's the fun thing about the job; sometimes the smallest organisations can be so receptive to mentoring. We also look at the Board and the General Manager.

What is the best part about your job?

Being autonomous, I can kind of run my own show. It is incredibly rewarding because half of the business is really a mentoring business. When we can help an organisation get some seriously good results, such as they get their first philanthropic grant from the Myer Foundation, or we helped *Milk Crate Theatre* get their first individual donor. In *Milk Crate's* case it was \$50K pa for three years and their turn over for the year is \$75K. Some one stepped up to help them. When that sort of stuff happens that's really rewarding.

Sometimes they are start ups to, they just come in with an idea and two years later they are putting on their first production, so that's quite exciting, but there's frustrating things as well because some of them don't follow up as much as we would like, they just don't get it. Working with the Boards is also good. Part of the mentoring is we will talk to the Board of an arts organisation and sometimes the Boards don't quite get fundraising as we would like them to. They either think that fundraising is purely corporate sponsorship or they think that philanthropy is about just really, really wealthy people and we don't have any of those so it's not for us or we've got paid staff so they can look after the fundraising. But we get in there and do a lot of hands on work with them and often we get Board members donating as a result and driving a fundraising campaign, so that's very satisfying. Sometimes we also assist with recruiting for Board Members.

How do you respond to the inevitable question regarding investing or participating in Arts or Sport

To be honest having worked on both, I can see the merit in doing both. With sport I can totally understand the reach and the power of the media, especially television. But one of the great things about the arts is that it is usually a much cheaper investment and often you can get a better return on the investment, because it can be quite niche. Often arts audiences have high disposable incomes, they are tertiary educated, and are quite discerning. I think there's a place for both. One of the things that frustrates me is the amount of money most of these top sporting stars are getting paid and the atrocious behaviour of some of them. There is a diminishing number of sporting role models, especially in football codes. I do think some of the smarter corporates, like NAB are putting a lot of money into the arts and I'm sure it's paying dividends for them. I'm a bit biased because I am as passionate about sport as I am about the arts, I worked on the Olympics, I'm probably a bit unusual.

Let's talk about the two mentoring programs for arts companies that you have set up with Wendy. What did you want it to achieve and three years on has it met those objectives?

I think it's one of the best things we've done.

How it came about wasThe Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council approached me about three years ago...they have 29 big performing arts companies ...about doing some philanthropy training for their companies.

At the time I thought that the solution has to be ongoing not just a workshop! I'd been thinking about it and was looking at Wendy's business and what she was doing with businesses like Allens and UBS. And I thought wouldn't it be good if we could lift that model and do it purely for philanthropic fundraising. We have annual KPI's around things like – increases in donations. We did get some serious dollar increases for those companies (for four out of the six) in the first six month pilot program in 2005 and on the back of that, we added four more and then we started to get some real results. Sydney Theatre Company of South Australia has doubled its income in donations each year since mid 2005.

We now have 12 companies in the *Major Performing Arts Philanthropy Mentoring Program*: Australian Brandenburg Orchestra; Bangarra Dance Theatre; Melbourne Theatre Company; Opera Australia; Queensland Ballet, Queensland Orchestra, Queensland Theatre Company; Sydney Dance Company; Sydney Theatre Company; Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra; West Australian Symphony Orchestra; and The West Australian Opera. And now we have ten Indigenous arts organisations in a second program. They are from mainly regional and remote areas across Australia.

For this Indigenous Program we needed a different type of mentor who understood fundraising and the non-profit sector, had an empathy with Indigenous communities, also someone who could add more value to their Indigenous organisation than just help with fundraising. The solution is not necessarily cash.

In the first 12 months one organisation, Kurruru, Australia's only Indigenous youth performing arts company based in Port Adelaide, secured over \$1 million dollars in philanthropic funding - it has just been a fantastic success.

In many cases the mentors are helping with basic business practices where the companies just haven't had that support. Kurruru's mentor Mick Reid is helping with strategy and business planning amongst other things. He's helping to open doors...very hands on. They're not all going to be successful but if we can get 85% across the line then we're doing a good job.

Wendy has this amazing network and particularly with the Indigenous Program that has been invaluable. I could not place those mentors without her. With the *Major Performing Arts Program* it's a different person,

the mentors there are professional fundraisers. That job has been more a combination of Wendy and I using our collective networks to find the right mentors....for us success is dollars in the bank for the mentee companies!

You are a mentor with McCarthy Mentoring for corporate clients, what kind of issues do you and your mentee discuss?

I've been placed with mentees who are very motivated, driven, and very smart. One of the objectives we're working on is more balance between work and life, career development and options. Ultimately the mentee is interested in my career path and the fact that there are other things that one can do beyond their chosen profession to date. Last night, as a value add, I took my mentee to the theatre – we had a fabulous time and I know she hasn't had that experience too often at all! They'll be more of that!

Do you think you've made a difference?

My first mentee wasn't happy and needed an exit strategy. She's gone on sabbatical, gone back to the UK. Being a mentor is really challenging. You have to consider how structured the mentoring should be.

How is mentoring for philanthropy different from mentoring with a corporate client?

In some ways it's very similar, but with the arts programs the mentor is mentoring the company not just one individual. Our mentors also work with the boards and senior staff of the organisations. Success in our arts programs is very easy to measure – how much has donations and/or grants from philanthropic trusts and foundations increased in any one financial year?

What have you learnt from the experience?

What I have learnt as a mentor is being a better listener. I'm a big talker. I do a lot of arts mentoring myself but when you're really doing that one on one personal mentoring yourself it's about working with the mentee so you do get some structure and some outcomes. In many ways our arts mentoring programs are easier and certainly easier to measure success.

What are the benefits from this program for both the mentee and the organisation?

With my Artsupport Australia hat on, the mentee organisation should become stronger and better at fundraising – in the short and long term. Boards should become more involved with fundraising. The organisation should be investing more staff resources in this area to truly reap the benefits. The results won't come overnight though, it takes a lot of hard work and focus, but the rewards are extremely satisfying.