

# Evaluating *The Scared Cool* project:

## Understanding peacemaking through creativity and personal development in Timor-Leste

**KIM DUNPHY**

PHD candidate

School of International and Community Development

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Melbourne, Australia

49 Thomas St, Hampton 3188

Victoria, Australia

kfd@deakin.edu

### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

*This article presents an evaluation of Scared Cool, a physical theatre project for young people in Dili, Timor-Leste. The project was hosted by non-government organisation Ba Futuru as part of their ongoing efforts to promote peace and conflict resolution in that new nation. Qualitative interviews and focus groups were undertaken with a range of stakeholders: participants; staff; the host organisation; audience members and the wider community, to determine their perceptions about project outcomes. The article also describes the 'theories of change' that leaders used to guide their work, and issues arising from the data.*

*The Scared Cool initiative appears to provide significant cultural and social benefits for the young participants. These include development of capacity for artistic expression, creative and analytic thinking, confidence and English language skills. There were also benefits to other stakeholders including audience members. These included the enjoyment of attending a live performance, and the potential for trauma resolution and positive relationship building. This study confirms the potential for participatory arts projects to assist with the positive development of young people in highly disadvantaged communities. In so doing, such projects can contribute to positive social change by assisting the resolution of trauma and violence.*

*I think this show was very important, [...] for human beings to express their feelings.*

- Audience member Juan-Carlos

## THE CONTEXT

Timor-Leste (East Timor) is a small half-island nation that lies to the south-east of Indonesia and the north of Australia. The country faces significant challenges in uniting a people damaged by 400 years of negligent Portuguese colonisation, 25 years of brutal Indonesian occupation and a bloody transition to independence (CAVR 2005). While Timor is a Least Developed Country (United Nations 2011), it is also proud to be one of world's newest democracies. Its people are hopeful for their future now that they experience the freedom that change has brought. Timorese society is being assisted in its rebuilding task by numerous government and non-government organisations who seek to contribute to a positive future. One of these is Ba Futuru, the host organisation of the project discussed in this article.

The arts are often used as a tool for assisting positive social change in the context of international development (Arts for Global Development 2006, Throsby 2008) and in post-conflict societies (Gray 2008, Pruitt, 2011). The use of theatre as a stimulus for change is well-established (Cohen et al 2011), notably in Brazil where Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* originated (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994), Africa (Chamberlain et al 1995), and South East Asia (Ahmed 2007, Van Erven 2000). However, evaluation strategies around these practices are not well established, and consequently outcomes of the work are often poorly understood (Sloman 2011). Some formal evaluations that have been undertaken of arts programs, including theatre, in developing nations, indicate beneficial outcomes. These include recovery from trauma and violence, peace-building and positive youth development (Harris, 20010, Swain 2009).

The use of theatre as a stimulus for change in Timor-Leste has been occurring at least since 2000 and possible longer (Sloman 2011). More recently this practice has begun to spread across the country, supported by NGOs who see potential for personal development of participants and information sharing with communities through the artform. Given the nascence of the activity, evaluation is only an emerging practice (Sloman 2011). A literature search revealed only one published evaluation of a project in Timor (Bryant 2007).

This article discusses *Scared Cool*, a physical theatre project in Timor-Leste, from the perspective of a range of stakeholders.

## THE PROJECT

*Scared Cool* was a physical theatre project that took place in Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, over three months in early 2010. It was hosted by NGO Ba Futuru, an organisation that seeks to promote human rights, peace-building and sustainable human development, primarily through its work with young people. The organisation has a strong focus on work in and through the arts. This focus came about originally because the founders, Sierra James and Leilani Elliott, enjoyed working in visual arts themselves and had found the arts a good medium for connecting with young Timorese (Ba Futuru 2010). Ba Futuru's headquarters are in Comoro, an outer suburb of Dili that has seen high conflict over many years and where most residents experience ongoing poverty.

The *Scared Cool* project was part of Ba Futuru's ongoing efforts to promote peace and conflict resolution in East Timor. It was directed by young Australian actor Kallista Kaval who had come to Timor to volunteer with Ba Futuru, where her sister Lucinda worked as a Child Protection Officer. *Scared Cool* grew out of a weekly 'Drama in English' workshop that Kallista led with ten young men and women aged between 16 and 22. These young people had all previously attended programs at Ba Futuru's centre. After a short period of introduction to the potential of work in the arts through the drama and language workshops, they sought a more intense involvement. Kallista responded favourably, as she was keen to apply her skills as an actor and try a new role as director in the challenging context of East Timor. The group ended up working together three times a week to develop their show. Lucinda and Timorese staff members assisted the project with logistics, interpreting, cultural advice and support for the young participants.

The performance focused on themes of peace building and anti-violence, as well as issues that Kallista considered normal for teenagers everywhere; the transition from childhood, peer pressure and difficulties with communication. The last topic she considered particularly relevant in Timor where people speak as many as five languages in their everyday lives. A process of emergent inspiration led Kallista to these themes; 'they came up naturally, out of me, out of the cosmos....'. To develop more potent material, she questioned participants about their life experiences, many of them with significant challenges such as hunger and trauma. Some responses like fears about burning, soldiers and guns, were reflective of childhoods in war-torn Timor-Leste. Others were what Kallista, as a young Australian, considered 'more normal' types of fears, of crocodiles, lizards and snakes. The show used no formal spoken language, only movement and gibberish to present the ideas. Kallista intended this as a strategy to reduce language barriers: she didn't speak Tetun, cast members spoke only a little English and she wanted the show to be suitable for Timorese and international audiences.

*Scared Cool* was not intended to be a direct edict about peacemaking, but rather, Kallista hoped, 'a kind of metaphor'. She had intended that the piece be self-devised theatre, a process in which participants would create their own theatrical work that could be shaped by her as director. This would make it different from the more didactic theatre popular in Timor. However, Kallista discovered that her original expectations had been too high, as her cast had no experience of making theatre, or indeed of any kind of collaborative creative process. Nor had they any experience of making suggestions or asking questions in a learning environment. This led to slow progress in the early stages. However, this difficulty was gradually overcome as Kallista modified her expectations and the group immersed themselves in the learning experience. They eventually came to really enjoy exploring ideas in an abstract way for the first time in their lives.

Kallista was new to working in community contexts and the process of directing, so with *Scared Cool*, she had her first experience of the process versus product dilemma that besets artists working with communities. She found it difficult 'to find the balance between [...] teaching and nurturing and creating a performance. She commented: 'I wanted the show to be great, but I also had to be easy going'. In the end, Kallista decided to focus less on the experience of the audience, although she was highly motivated to 'make a great show'. This decision was supported by Lucinda, who believed that the process was such a meaningful experience for young people that presentation to an audience was an additional benefit, but not the highest concern.

The project culminated in two events; an informal outdoor performance at Ba Futuru's headquarters and a more formal showing in a small theatre in central Dili. The first show was watched by hundreds of people, mostly Timorese, who were there attending other programs or to play sport at the centre. The second event was

attended by an audience of about 100, mostly foreigners; including Ba Futuru staff, invited guests and paying customers.

## **COLLECTING INFORMATION**

This article is based on data collected as part of a larger research project in Timor-Leste that investigates the role of arts in social change. This researcher undertook semi-structured interviews and focus groups with stakeholders in *Scared Cool* several months after the end of the project. Interviewees included performers, project leaders, Ba Futuru staff, audience members and families and friends of the young participants. An interpreter assisted with interviews that involved project participants and other Timorese. Participant observation of some of Ba Futuru's activities also contributed insight.

Ba Futuru had not undertaken a formal evaluation of the *Scared Cool* project. The project had had no external funding so there was no specific obligation to do so. They had, however, wanted to understand participants' experience, so they had undertaken several informal interviews soon after the project finished. Data from those interviews augmented this researcher's data collection process.

## **THEORIES OF CHANGE**

### **Theories of change for the organisation**

The organisation, Ba Futuru, has a documented theory of change (Weiss 1995) for its work in peace-building and human rights education in Timor-Leste (Ba Futuru 2006). They seek to reduce levels of violence by facilitating the recovery of children and youth from the distress caused by civil strife. By assisting Timorese communities to become more peaceful, Ba Futuru believes that they can contribute to a more sustainable development. Based on this idea, Ba Futuru has developed programs in peace-building, conflict resolution and human rights education (James 2008; Ujvari 2005). Their major initiative, the Transformative Arts and Human Rights Education (TAHRE) Programme augments human rights education with skills for conflict mitigation to build peace in the community. Ba Futuru use participatory methods including discussion, role-playing, laughter and team building in their programs because they believe that these will engage participants more effectively and thereby make programs more effective.

An additional theory of change relates to the contribution of the arts within Ba Futuru's programs. The TAHRE and other programs include arts because of the connection the organisation recognises between participatory arts experiences and positive development. Creative techniques are seen as providing therapeutic expression of negative emotions, such as anger, pain and fear. Programs that include self-expression through the arts are believed to offer skills, values and positive models of behaviour to children in difficult circumstances (James 2008). These positive experiences for young people are considered, in turn, likely to contribute to more peaceful communities (Ujvari 2005). In the development of these ideas, Ba Futuru draws on the work of arts therapists and others (Lark 2001; Pirisi 2001; War Child 2005) who use or recommend creative arts experiences as effective interventions for children damaged by war.

### **Theories of change about the *Scared Cool* project**

In concordance with their views about the relationship between positive development and creative expression, Ba Futuru was pleased to host the *Scared Cool* project because they considered it likely that participants would experience positive development through engagement with theatre. Organiser Lucinda Kaval believed that participation would assist the young people to develop creative and analytic thinking; skills that are useful in creative work and also in life more broadly. Co-founder and Program Manager Sierra James also anticipated benefits for the wider community because she believed that participants' parents would be proud of the skills their young people were developing and would consider these a contribution to the development of their nation. These outcomes were considered congruent with Ba Futuru's goals of working towards more peaceful communities in Timor-Leste.

One additional change factor, perceived by artist Kallista and program co-ordinator Lucinda, was the likely positive influence of Kallista as a leader. Both sisters believed that Kallista could provide a positive role model for the young people. They also felt that the focussed attention she would provide as she mentored the creative work would be beneficial, because young Timorese have few opportunities for positive focussed attention from adults.

All the leaders believed that Timorese communities could become more peaceful if young people damaged by war had opportunities for empowering creative expression. Kallista's ideas were more intuitive, based on her professional experience as an actor, while the ideas of Ba Futuru's staff were more evidence and experience-based, developed through years of research and practice. Both drew originally from similar personal experiences of the transformative power of the arts in their own lives. All leaders shared the same goals and were working towards similar outcomes through the *Scared Cool* project. A later section discusses how these theories aligned with the outcomes of the project.

The section to follow describes the evaluation of the *Scared Cool* project. Outcomes are explored for all stakeholders; participants, staff, the organisation, audience members, families and the wider community.

### **OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT**

A framework derived from Hawkes' model of the four pillars of sustainability (Hawkes 2001) is used to consider outcomes of the *Scared Cool* project. That is, all outcomes can be considered in terms of their contribution to a community and society within the four interrelated dimensions of *cultural vitality*, *social equity*, *economic viability* and *environmental sustainability*.

In this framework, the *cultural* dimension will include artistic and aesthetic concerns, as well as broader aspects of culture including attitudes, beliefs, customs and meaning-making. It will also include the dimension of pleasure where that pleasure seems to relate to competence, through feelings of achievement (Deci and Ryan 2000). The *social* dimension will include personal development, such as confidence and recognition by others and the dimension of pleasure where that pleasure is about relatedness, or connection with others (Ryan and Deci 2000). This dimension will also include wider issues of community harmony, including peace-building and trauma resolution. The *economic* dimension will include education and skill development, as respondents recognised a strong relationship between education, skill development and future economic success. *Environmental*

outcomes were not mentioned by any of the stakeholders, so it appeared that there was little perceived relationship between the project and a more sustainable environment. Hence in the sections that follow, the environmental dimension is not discussed.

Project outcomes are summarised in Table 1. These are categorised according to the perspectives of the various stakeholders; project participants, staff, the organisation, audience members and participants' families. Responses indicate that outcomes were overwhelmingly perceived as positive. Cast members identified numerous benefits of their participation, in cultural, social and economic terms. Other stakeholders also perceived positive outcomes, for the young participants, themselves and the wider community.

<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>Cultural</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Economic/educational</b>
<b>Participants</b>	<p>pleasure through competence</p> <p>new artistic experience</p> <p>experience of professional theatre</p> <p>transformation through performance</p> <p>development of new genre of Timorese art</p> <p>self-expression, especially non-verbal</p> <p>skills in analytic thinking, creative problem solving</p> <p>valuing of new experiences</p> <p>understanding the usefulness of constructive criticism</p>	<p>development of self-confidence</p> <p>pleasure through relatedness</p> <p>trauma resolution</p> <p>recognition from valued others</p> <p>skills for a more peaceful life</p>	<p>High quality learning: role model of supportive leader</p> <p>English language learning</p> <p>work-related skills</p> <p>connection with foreigners, perhaps leading to future opportunities</p> <p>cross-cultural learning</p> <p>alternative education option for those not attending school</p> <p>new ideas and opportunities for the future</p>
<b>Staff</b>	<p>enjoyment of providing a cultural experience</p>	<p>new learnings about self</p> <p>enhanced relationships</p> <p>recognition from valued others</p> <p>skills for a more peaceful life</p>	<p>skill enhancement</p> <p>valuable professional experience</p> <p>new ideas and opportunities for the future</p>
<b>The organisation <i>Ba Futuru</i></b>	<p>positive recognition for association with cultural event</p>	<p>positive recognition for work with young people</p> <p>pride in achievement of young Timorese</p>	<p>financial gain</p> <p>enhanced professional reputation</p>
<b>Audience Members</b>	<p>enjoyable cultural experience, live arts event presented in a theatre</p> <p>introduction to a new artform-devised physical theatre</p> <p>new ideas; stimulation of imagination</p>	<p>improved relationships between Timorese and foreigners</p> <p>skills for a more peaceful life</p>	
<b>Families who did not attend</b>	<p>indirect introduction to the unfamiliar artform of devised physical theatre</p>	<p>pride in young persons' achievements and skill development</p> <p>indirectly, skills for a more peaceful life</p> <p>indirectly, trauma resolution opportunity</p>	

*Table 1: Summary Of Outcomes*

## OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

The *Scared Cool* project was primarily intended to benefit the young people involved. This goal was confirmed without doubt, with all participants discussing their gains through the project. The benefits perceived by young people were confirmed by other stakeholders, as detailed in the paragraphs to follow.

### Cultural benefits

Participants were unanimous about their enjoyment of the process, especially the 'high' from the performance. Director Kallista's project journal documents her observation that the young people 'are LOVING the work'.

The project had two artistic elements, creative development and public presentation. Both of these offered participants valuable experiences, particularly because they were utterly new. Program assistant Marta, for example, 'loved' all her new learnings, especially the techniques of acting and using body language to share ideas and feelings. Presenting the show in two formats, informally outdoors and formally in the theatre, doubled the learning experience. Project co-ordinator Lucinda commented on the impact of the professional setting on the cast; 'it created a real sense of theatre, with lights and people sitting in rows, something they had never experienced'.

Several stakeholders discussed the valuable opportunity for stimulation of analytic thinking. Kallista confirmed that during the artistic process, the young people had had, 'mind blowing discussions - the first time they had made those connections'. Timorese staff members of Ba Futuru commented on the important opportunity for analytic thinking that the show provided, both for participants and audience members. They perceived this as valuable particularly because it is not an every day experience. While Ba Futuru's programs, like *Scared Cool*, do provide such opportunities, they believed it is otherwise uncommon for many Timorese.

One audience member felt that the development of analytic thinking was valuable because it would help participants perceive constructive criticism as a positive learning experience. He believed that this understanding would be beneficial in Timor, where criticism can be perceived as a personal affront and something to be resisted. He felt that his contribution as a lecturer who had come from overseas to teach in a Timorese university would be enhanced if his students had a greater understanding of the value of analytic thinking and critical engagement.

There was evidence that *Scared Cool* offered participants opportunities for working through problems, especially those related to past trauma. Program assistant Marta, for example, commented that participants, including herself, learned new and creative ways to work through previous difficulties; 'we can [...] change our bad thinking [...] and experience from the past'. Marta felt that this was particularly important because almost all young Timorese have lived through significant experiences of conflict.



## Social benefits

Staff members considered one of the major outcomes to be participants' increased self-confidence. The young people, like participant Gabriel, confirmed this; 'First I got nervous but now I feel confident everywhere'. Marta enjoyed learning new coaching techniques from Kallista that emphasised positive affirmations of the young people's competence. These included Kallista's focus on progress and achievement, and exhortations to do 'even better', when she was wanting to help students be more confident and creative-thinking.

The recognition that the young people received from audience members was perceived to be an important factor in this development of self-confidence. Lucinda reported that the local audience provided positive recognition to the young people. While they attended in the casual style of Timorese audiences, moving around and talking throughout the performance, they gave the performers a 'phenomenal response'. This included the unusual acknowledgement of a large clap at the end.

Organizers invited mostly foreigners to the second show. They wanted the cast have the experience of an attentive audience; one that sat quietly, focussed intently and responded with applause. They anticipated a heightened sense of achievement for the young people from the recognition of such an audience. This view turned out to be correct. Lucinda was moved to tears as she witnessed the young people's pleasure from the audience's response;

*At the start, they were so nervous, [...] when they took their bow, there was a standing ovation, [...] and they didn't want to leave the stage. They were so elated, they ran out, and said to me, 'Mana (sister), they loved it, the malae (foreigners) are crying'. To have somebody really appreciate what they had done was extraordinary.*

An additional type of recognition came unexpectedly. As Lucinda was putting together the program for the show, she discovered that the young people did not know what a program was. None of them had had ever been acknowledged in such a document before and they were amazed and delighted that the audience would want to know their names.

Participants also confirmed being helped to resolve trauma. In an interview, one young man described how he used skills developed in the project to address a longstanding grievance with his father. He felt empowered to discuss with his father the hurt he carried about violence experienced at his father's hand. In response, the father began to cry and apologized for his actions, and the son experienced a feeling of catharsis for the first time.

## Economic and educational benefits

Young people reported a range of valued learning experiences through the *Scared Cool* process. Many of them were pleased to develop their English language skills, which they considered important for their future. Participant Gabriel planned to use the dramatic skills he had developed, in his job as a trainer at *Ba Futuru*; 'If participants feel bored when I talk, I will use drama and refresh them so they can concentrate'.

Participant Domingus valued the high standard of the learning experiences provided by Kallista. 'She was not abusive [...] she was serious, so we could get more out of the experience. Foreigners are always like this'.

Timorese teachers rated poorly in comparison; 'They don't care about us. They are just playing, [...]. If one person speaks and another person speaks, they are like, abuse'. Several young people mentioned how they valued making a connection with foreigners through the project. This was seen as likely to bring future opportunities.

Organiser Lucinda believed that the young people's positive experience of learning through *Scared Cool* would be generalisable beyond the project. As a result of their enjoyment of theatre-making, she felt that they would value new experiences more highly. This might have an exponential effect on their learning. It might also influence others who had not been involved in *Scared Cool* to try new things. Lucinda saw this as particularly important because young Timorese have had so few opportunities, that they are unaccustomed to trying things with which they are unfamiliar. Participants affirmed this view, with one saying, 'after I had finished, I wanted to teach more about my experience to other people who do not know'. This young man's colleague provided further support for Lucinda's idea. He commented that he had been reticent to join the program because he had never seen anything like it before. However, he was encouraged by his peers' great enthusiasm to enrol in the next one.

Kallista hoped that the participation in the project might lead to future opportunities for her cast, such as involvement in drama workshops or even professional acting jobs. She perceived that there is some call for these in Timor and few skilled actors to meet it. Participant Anna confirmed this possibility, by reporting that she wished to develop her dramatic skills and eventually become an actor.

## **OUTCOMES FOR STAFF AND THE ORGANISATION**

There were benefits to staff members of being involved, in all three dimensions, cultural, social and economic. Artistic director Kallista described the project as 'by far the most extraordinary experience of my life', through which she had learned a lot about her artform of theatre. Both Kallista and Project Co-ordinator Lucinda had pleasurable experiences of recognition through the project. Lucinda observed participants' deep regard for Kallista, believing that they would 'always remember her as a special mentor'. The young people and other staff members also acknowledged Lucinda's competence and contribution, which Marta described as a being a 'very, very good job'. Kallista felt that she had grown professionally, developing skills useful for her future. These included new employment options, which were especially valuable, given her choice of the unreliable profession of acting. Lucinda also reported benefitted professionally through the project and her wider involvement with Ba Futuru. The organisation's small size allowed her to gain experience at a range of tasks at a high level very quickly.

There were also positive outcomes of the project to Ba Futuru as an organisation. Lucinda thought that the event was 'a brilliant PR tool', providing a valuable showcase of the organisation's work and the talent of young people nurtured in their programs. When *Scared Cool* was instigated, this hadn't been a focus, but once they realized the quality of the show being produced, they wanted people to see it. Staff were pleased with the recognition received from audience members, especially from those outside their immediate community, including potential funders and collaborators.

A different kind of recognition for the value of the organisation's work came from the young people. Their desire to continue the work even after Kallista had gone, indicated to Lucinda how much the project had meant; 'The

fact that they keep asking every day when Kallista is coming back [...] is one of the most successful and most annoying parts!'. Another measure of success was economic; the performance was presented successfully and well-attended, resulting in a positive financial outcome. Proceeds from ticket sales then contributed to the organisation's operating funds.

## OUTCOMES FOR THE AUDIENCE

### Cultural benefits

Audience members reported benefits from the *Scared Cool* project that can be described as *cultural*. Most significantly, the shows provided a rare opportunity for people in Timor to attend a live arts event outside the genre of traditional cultural performance. Audience members, both Timorese and foreigners, commented on their enjoyment of the experience. One person described it as 'a very cool performance (that) I won't forget ... for my life'.

Participant Nardo welcomed the show because it may have been the beginning of a genre of art currently absent in his country; 'We don't have our own TV or drama shows, but maybe in the future we can do something the same or as good as others'. *Scared Cool* may have been a particularly valuable cultural opportunity, because it had so many elements unusual in Timor. It involved the unfamiliar artform of devised theatre, the cast was entirely Timorese and it was presented in a professional theatre setting.

### Social benefits

Lucinda was confident of benefits for the wider Ba Futuru community that can be considered within the social dimension. The project 'definitely created a sense of pride for Ba Futuru, the community,..... to show that Timorese youth can do something as amazing as this'. This was particularly significant, she believed, because 'international audience members.... would never have thought that Timorese youth would do something like that'.

One audience member, a development worker from overseas, appreciated the opportunity the show provided him to offer recognition to Timorese people. He was pleased to be able to 'support (them) and show that you respect them and are interested in them'. He believed that positive connections like those generated between young people and foreigners through the project might help to reduce resistance from young Timorese. He felt that young people in Timor 'often feel a little bit outside of everything and [...] watch the malae (foreigners), as if they were taking their country'. This man's experience as a development worker in Timor led him to the view that these connections could benefit foreign workers. Their contributions might be more effective if they were received more favourably by locals. The wider Timorese community could also benefit, in turn, by obtaining greater advantage from foreigners' efforts to assist.

Ba Futuru was uncertain about how strongly *Scared Cool* addressed the organisation's peace-building and anti-violence goals. Co-founder Sierra was concerned to ensure that the project would not replicate the type of social action theatre that is common in Timor. These performances have an ostensible social change agenda, often intended to provide an anti-family violence message. However, Sierra believes that it is difficult to know whether they have any positive impact, because the issues are explored using humour and slapstick. It is possible that they may even inadvertently valorise violence.

Staff were therefore concerned about possible undesirable responses to two scenes in *Scared Cool* that contained violence. In one scene, all the performers hit each other in an aggressive cycle and in another, violence was resolved in a humorous sequence of balloon popping. Kallista felt that the cast and Ba Futuru staff would 'get' the message in these episodes, because they were sophisticated in their understandings through their involvement with the organisation's conflict resolution work. Timorese staff members, like Juancarlos, did perceive an anti-violence message:

*It was [...] amazing, because the soul of it was describing what happened in 2006 (a significant social crisis), [...] things that [...] was awful for communities and people of Timor-Leste. [...] It's a good lesson to us, to say to our friends and the kids [...] that's it's not good to use [...] violence.*

Both Sierra and Kallista were confident that foreigners in the audience would have been cued to reflect on the negative cycle of violence. One foreign audience member shared his view that young people's participation in arts activities like *Scared Cool* could result in reduced involvement in violence. However, he felt that this change would be attributable more to young people's deep engagement in a positive activity with engaged mentors, than any particular message in the play.

Staff member Juancarlos also had a positive view of the show's impact on Timorese audiences. He observed a variety of responses in audience members. He felt that people who most needed the anti-violence message, those who had been involved in criminal activity, seemed to receive it most strongly. He observed, 'some youth [...] were very sad, almost crying. For others [...], if they have done criminal things, it stopped funny, maybe they were afraid'. Juancarlos also saw a broader value of the performance that made it meaningful for participants and audiences. 'The show was very important, [...] for human beings to express their feelings'.

Co-Founder Sierra had anticipated some indirect benefits for the wider community through the project. She felt that parents would be happy that their young people were developing skills. They might also feel a sense of pride in their children and country because of this achievement. Although few family members attended, young people were able to report about family members' responses when they visited or contacted home and shared news of their participation. Some did confirm that their parents were pleased for them. Domingus' older sister, with whom he boarded, expressed her gratitude to Ba Futuru for assistance with his skill development, especially learning English. This response corresponded with Dominus' valuing of his participation. English language learning and development of his skills through working with foreigners were the best outcomes for him. Participant Nardo's family supported his involvement because of the opportunity to work with a foreign teacher. Nardo believed that they would not been enthusiastic about his participation in a drama project with a local teacher.

### **Divergent views**

However, despite these largely positive responses, there were also some dissenting views about the likely value of the project and the performance to local communities. Domingus believed that Timorese people would not think it good for young people to learn drama; 'They'd say, it's crazy, it's bad'. He was certain that this would be a community-wide response; 'Not my family only, everyone!'. Domingus did not feel like this himself, but only, he believed, because he had had such a positive experience in the process of making theatre. Otherwise, he too, would have thought making drama was 'crazy'!

Some respondents considered that ordinary Timorese may have found the abstraction of the show confusing. People who had not had previous exposure to theatre, or critical thinking about issues related to violence, might not have gained much meaning from it. One community respondent provided evidence for this perspective. He questioned the purpose of the performance, which he did not understand. However, his query indicated that the event had at least stimulated his thinking. In the end, he had decided to become involved in the next project! Performer Gabriel perceived that Timorese audiences were not analyzing and learning from the performance in the way that foreigners seemed to be. He was sorry about this difference in responses and what he saw as a lost opportunity for Timorese people to learn.

Cast members Nardo and Domingus were convinced that their family members and other Timorese would not have appreciated *Scared Cool*. Factors they considered contributing to this lack of enthusiasm included the abstract content of the show, the absence of 'action' and the low prestige cast of local people. As Domingus said;

*Timorese think it would be boring to watch this show, even if it was in Tetun. If we made a CD of this show, and gave them, they'd just break it (laughs). They like to watch things from foreigners only.*

In looking overall at the outcomes, the project and final performances of *Scared Cool* appeared to be overwhelmingly beneficial for participants, leaders and audience members. These benefits can be categorised as cultural, social and economic. Some questions arose when the value and benefits for wider communities were considered. These will be explored in the section to follow.

## **RESEARCHER'S REFLECTION**

### **Limitations of the research**

The qualitative methodology used for this study, including the semi-structured interviewing approach, provided an advantage in its capacity to capture all possible responses to the *Scared Cool* project. This included both anticipated and unanticipated responses. However, the small sample sizes that this approach necessitates means that findings can only be indicative. Larger samples would provide more conclusive results. This methodology has a further limitation in that it only captures respondents' self-report of their experience, rather than evidence of behaviour change. A further step in effective evaluation would be evidence of actual change. For example, with respect to the project's contribution to peace-building and conflict resolution, more compelling data would measure incidences of violence in participants' communities (in families, schools or neighbourhoods) before and after their involvement or attendance at the event. Ba Futuru are currently exploring possibilities for such ambitious evaluation strategies.

### **Definite benefits**

The data indicated most clearly the positive outcomes for participants in this project. While the performance's themes of peace-building may have added a dimension, the young people's engagement in a collaborative creative learning experience seemed to lead to the greatest possibilities for positive change. Other contributing factors included a highly enjoyable experience, the development of creative problem solving skills, an increased

capacity for critical analysis, inspiring leadership that modelled peaceful ways of relating and greater sense of possibility for the future through new experiences and increased life skills.

It is also clear that the project provided staff members with valued life and learning experiences. Artistic director Kallista, particularly, experienced intense personal and professional growth. Host organization Ba Futuru benefitted through the provision of a valued cultural event for audience members, the effective provision of a growth opportunity for young people and the hosting of a financially successful event that enhanced the organisation's reputation.

Some young people indicated a positive indirect impact on the wider community, with reports that their families were pleased about their participation and skill development. This was confirmed in one interview with a family member. The challenge in accessing families who lived far away in the districts meant that it was not possible for this researcher to verify this more broadly.

There were definite benefits for at least some audience members. Ba Futuru's staff who had been 'socialized' about peace-building and anti-violence through the organisation's programs, received the message positively. One young man perceived the show as so powerful that he would remember it for his whole life. Audience members from overseas enjoyed watching it and witnessing the positive outcomes they perceived for young people and the wider community.

### **Uncertainties**

Less conclusive was the value of Scared Cool for Timorese audiences, particularly regarding the impact of the anti-violence message. Opinions from stakeholders varied on this, from the perspective that it would be a deeply meaningful experience to one that it would prompt Timorese viewers to 'close the TV'. Possibly foreigners valued the experience more highly than Timorese audiences.

The different responses between Timorese and foreign audiences may have been because of both the demographic and cultural differences between them. Foreigners attending would most likely have been highly educated people with an interest in the arts. They may have had some previous experience of abstract theatre. They would also been likely to have had some experience or training in issues around development, and may have placed high value on the cast being Timorese because they understood the positive implications of young people's involvement in such an activity.

Timorese audiences on the other hand, mostly would have had little experience of locally produced arts, especially those outside traditional cultural practice. They have also experienced centuries of socialisation by colonisers that their cultural production is of lesser value than that produced by foreigners. Timorese audiences would also likely have had little formal education or training in principles related to youth development and peace-building, or of the relationship between creative engagement and positive outcomes for young people. Thus they may have been less likely to perceive potential outcomes beyond their own immediate experience.

### **Dangers**

One issue of concern arising for this researcher was what could be perceived as participants' valorisation of foreigners. This was evidenced in the perspective expressed by several respondents that foreign ideas and input

are intrinsically better than the local. *Scared Cool* participants and other Ba Futuru staff reported very positive experiences working with people from overseas in this and other Ba Futuru programs. Domingus for example was adamant; 'Because the foreigners teach us, that's why I wanted to attend. ....If the teacher was Timorese, I would not have done this program'.

In discussing his positive experience working with foreigners, Gabriel was aware of the negative connotations about his own people;

*I am very comfortable when I am with malae (foreigners), because they can understand me. When I ask something, they always answer nicely. When I ask for some help, they will always help me. But Timor-Leste people..... they never try to analyse what is going on, they just stop in the short term.*

Comments like these are marvellous compliments for Ba Futuru, confirming the quality of the organization's staff and their work. They do, however, precipitate a concern. Ba Futuru, like most other small NGOs, is in a precarious position, supported by funding from donors that is not stable. The organisation will not necessarily be able to offer services to local young people indefinitely, particularly services led by foreigners. Volunteers like Kallista often only visit Timor for a short time, so participants are involved in projects that cannot necessarily provide long term participatory opportunities.

Even more significantly, it may not be helpful that, after participation in such a project, young people come to see engagement with foreigners as the most likely means of their learning and progress. The development of negative views about one's own community and culture may perpetuate some of the very issues that Ba Futuru seeks to address, namely, the capacity of Timorese people to manage their own country successfully and independently.

Ba Futuru is mindful of this dilemma and seeks at all time to develop local capacity. Sustainability of the organisation's activity through empowerment and skill development of Timorese people is a major focus. While the organisation was started by an American and Australian, the majority of their paid staff now are Timorese. Since 2008, the organisation has been headed by a long-standing Timorese staff member, Joana dos Santos Camoes. Ba Futuru advises others to prioritise Timorese leadership in program delivery to increase effectiveness (James, 2010). However, this challenge is an ongoing one, especially as there are as yet, few Timorese who have skills that would allow them to replace specialist staff such as program manager and co-founder Sierra or theatre director Kallista.

However, in the process of sharing her expertise, Kallista has contributed to the development of young people and thereby to the capacity of future leaders. Ba Futuru is also fortunate in that it continues to attract skilled volunteers from overseas who contribute to a range of programs for participants. While the *Scared Cool* project finished at the end of Kallista's placement and participants were sorry that Kallista had to leave, new opportunities became available to Ba Futuru's clientele. Those who wished, could continue their learning through theatre in a different program.

## Recommendations for future

Despite some reports of change that the performance effected on audience members, it is unlikely that a brief experience such as witnessing a theatre event, on its own, could be life-changing. This is particularly so for *Scared Cool* because the message was presented abstractly and may therefore have been difficult to interpret. While a performance might introduce an issue and new possibilities for behaviour, it would need to be supported by other factors to effect significant behaviour change; including changes in social norms and individual's sense of agency (Ajzen 1991).

The project may have been able to make a greater impact on audience members, families and the wider community, if a stronger emphasis had been placed on this aspect. Such possibilities include the resolution of relationship difficulties, like that reported by the young man who worked his relationship with his father using skills he had developed in the project. Efforts to make a stronger impact on the wider community are likely to prove challenging, given the very significant communication barriers between Ba Futuru staff, participants' families and other community members. These barriers include language, geographic distance, life experience, education and literacy levels. However Ba Futuru have the capacity, at a minimum, to provide additional information and support to audiences and others who are impacted by the event. This could be in the form of a discussion session after the show, follow-up sessions, reference material, referral to appropriate agencies or further programs addressing the issues.

Ba Futuru recognizes this potential and intends to realize it more fully in future arts programs, building on knowledge of community impact gained from their main human rights education program. As well, the organisation plans to focus more strongly on understanding the qualities of the artistic process that might lead to change. This will help ensure replication, if not of the artistic process, at least of desirable outcomes.

## IN CONCLUSION

The *Scared Cool* initiative appeared to provide beneficial outcomes for a range of stakeholders. Positive outcomes for the young participants were particularly salient, but there were also benefits obtained by staff, the host organisation and audience members. There were even reported benefits for participants' families and wider community members who had no direct involvement.

Beneficial outcomes were reported within each of the categories used to group the data: *cultural*, *social* and *economic*. The sheer enjoyment of creating, presenting or attending the performance can be considered a *cultural* benefit, as can the development of creative and analytical ways of thinking and acting and the production and presentation of live theatre. *Social* outcomes includes resolution of trauma, development of self-confidence and new positive ways of relating to others. *Economic* outcomes include the development of work related skills, including English language and cross-cultural learning.

The theories of change held by the three main project leaders were well aligned, which meant that there was a strongly shared vision for the project. Leaders' beliefs about what they were attempting to do and participants' and others' experience of the project were also well aligned, thus indicating that the project did address its goals well and achieve anticipated outcomes. There were also several outcomes that were not part of the leaders'



stated theories of change, in English language learning and potential improvement of relationships between Timorese and foreigners.

This project indicates that arts participation can advance peace and sustainable communities by offering valuable experiences to disadvantaged young people. The NGO Ba Futuru seeks to contribute to a peaceful society in Timor by supporting young people towards a more positive future. Findings of this research support the purported connection between Ba Futuru's programs and a more peaceable society. If disadvantaged young people have creative outlets, see hope for their future, have skills they feel will lead them to opportunities and feel supported by their wider communities, it would seem less likely that they would engage in violent behaviour. The young participants in the *Scared Cool* project unanimously reported these positive experiences. The theoretical idea on which Ba Futuru bases its programs confirms these premises. Peace may be further enhanced and conflict reduced if Timorese and foreigners can work together productively, as occurred very successfully in the *Scared Cool* project.

All of these factors in turn impact the broader community, with parents and family members experiencing positive outcomes as a result of their young people's involvement in the project. These include conflict resolution within families and pleasure in young's people achievements. Therefore, while the *Scared Cool* project only directly impacted a small number of young people, there is a possibility of significant positive reverberations beyond those individuals.

**AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

Kim is a PhD candidate in the School of International and Community Development at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research investigates the role of participatory arts in social change in Timor-Leste. She works as the Program Manager for the Cultural Development Network, an independent organization that promotes the cultural vitality of communities throughout its home state of Victoria, Australia. She is also Director of Many Hands International, a non-government organisation that seeks to contribute to development in Timor

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