



art
influence
change

As we settle down to relax and enjoy the festive season, it's good to reflect on the positive things about our lives. For me, a source of perpetual joy is being a director of Beyond Empathy as this makes me a part of a very special family. It is a family that gives me far more than I could ever give in return, that is, an insight into different worlds, most of them definitely not easy worlds but ones where humanity is encouraged to shine and flourish.

Take the *Festival of the Brolga* this July in Moree. After thousands of hours of hard work by Beyond Empathy's Moree leader Jess Duncan and her modest team, 213 new and established artists performed scene after scene of dances, comedy, language, rap, singing and theatre, culminating in a giant Brolga puppet moving grandly through the crowded stage. It is hard to describe the power of this Brolga – this crowd-hushing beast was awe-inspiring, humbling and deeply moving. But the outstanding memory of the night for me was watching a large group of young boys and men, wearing nothing but simple scarlet lap-laps, dancing to a song about pride – about being proud of who they were and not giving up. As the little boys worked hard to keep up, their faces were transfixed on the big boys as they sang and chanted and followed their steps. It was a remarkable lesson in positive leadership, something that Beyond Empathy fosters through the arts every day.

In November in Wollongong, Beyond Empathy Chair Anna Buduls and I shared in the *Blue Rose* experience at the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre. When award-winning filmmaker and BE artistic director Phillip Crawford first flagged this project with the board, I said something along the lines of: 'Phil, that's simply not possible.' What he wanted to do was use film and digital technologies so that people who were unable to speak could 'tell' their stories and create great art. The work would be made by them and told entirely through their eyes. At least 30 of the artists were there to present their work, people who almost always exist in the shadows with no chance to shine. The utter pride and delight on their faces (and those of their carers) at the response to their art from the audience was deeply moving. The project is ongoing so there's a chance for you to see the next stage when it's ready. Again, it is Beyond Empathy stepping over disadvantage to create opportunities, build lives.

This year, our board welcomed three new directors – Este Darin-Cooper, who brings with her a wealth of knowledge from the human rights and philanthropy sectors, and two of our own artists, cross-genre singer David Leha from Radical Son, and our Wollongong leader Phillip Crawford. Under the ever-wise guidance of Chair Anna Buduls and with the unending passion and talent of our CEO Kim McConville, Beyond Empathy will continue in 2017 to work with those living on the margins, tackling disadvantage, empowering communities and creating great art along the way.

Thank you for being part of the Beyond Empathy family and please help us continue this life-changing work.

Vivienne Skinner
Director

we love **art** and we hate **disadvantage** we love **art** and we hate **disadvantage**