



# Directing the hero within

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It started back in 2004 when my partner Jennifer Lyons-Reid and I had success with a couple of documentaries. We had never made a

film before and we were going like, 'Okay, if we can do this and it's so much fun and we can tell important stories, then how about we share this skill?' My background is in theatre and multimedia and I also happen to be a human rights activist. For years I worked with camera crews, mainly as security in demonstration rallies and I came to see cameras as a very powerful tool. A magic pass.

We wanted to help kids in remote communities make films about their lives and share them. What we *didn't* want to do was to go into a community, wave digital equipment around and disappear again. We wanted something that was sustainable and could grow even without us being there and we realised we needed to start at ground level because making films isn't just about how you hold a camera. It's about coming up with an idea and having the power, the teamwork, and the spirit to actually see it through. The kids need to learn how to visualise the story and then be able to share it, in a powerful way. We thought that ideally, it would grow into a national network.

We work the three-pronged approach with local councils, youth art workers and the local schools. The outcomes depend on finding people with vision in the community, entrepreneurs, who will run with it after we've gone and so that it's not seen as just a bunch of kids doing a holiday program but more as a way of working together with young people at an early stage, to involve them in the decision-making.

We need to have youth workers and health workers on board who understand it's an investment in the future and will say, 'Okay, we'll invest time and also a bit of money.' Then we come on board with local and federal or state funding to add to it and create a plan that has short term outcomes (a film is made in each workshop) and a long term commitment to invest into a youth media centre to carry the skills on. Communities who find the will to do that suddenly have a youth media team that can document their own events. Suddenly they have a bunch of young people who can create a platform for the community to have a voice and share with other communities.

Each group that goes through the workshops learns skills that they can pass on to others. So we very much encourage adults to take part in the workshop. We have normally two to three youth workers who are adults, sometimes parents, depending what the relationship is to the teenagers, to learn the skills so there is more longevity built in. It's a fascinating fast ride. We start off the first day and there's no idea and they've never touched a camera and then at the end of the third day they have a finished film.

We now have seven youth media centres across South Australia working in different regional centres. And we've developed a DVD package to build the skill set. It's a teachers' manual for a term's worth of filmmaking. And there are lots of examples of films made by young people and behind the scenes footage to show that they actually did it themselves. We've found this can be one of the biggest things: that people think often it's not really the young people making films but the adults. We needed to prove to our funders and to the kids and their adult supporters that kids really are able to do it for themselves.

We're now producing updates on the DVD. Pretty much each time we do a workshop, we produce a film or sometimes a couple of films. And they grow into an archive. If we can, we put them on online. And the ABC has commissioned us to produce a miniseries together with a couple of young people in the Riverlands and Pinaroo.

We just recently sold the *Directing the Hero Within* training DVD to a network in America and it has really taken off there. The Americans love it. It's the different voice, the exoticness and also there's a certain Australian humour and Australian integrity that they really love. We were really surprised it happened. Now we have Australian kids from the desert and from the bushland teaching the US students how to make films!

Living in interesting and also rather difficult times, one of my big hopes is that we will find support for identity, belonging and storytelling. If we have a strong sense of belonging and a strong sense of identity then we can be much more tolerant. Telling our stories is an integral part of this.



LEFT:  
The Hero project:  
Julissa at camera  
training for *Surviva  
Nunga Style*  
PHOTO: CARL KUDELLE

RIGHT:  
The Hero project:  
Kade and Danah  
shooting the original  
*Pinnaroo Surfer*  
PHOTO: CARL KUDELLE

