

5 May 2010

To the Major Performing Arts and Theatre Boards Board
Australia Council
Company B Belvoir
Via email: forum@belvoir.com.au

YWCA of Adelaide submission in response to Women Theatre Directors: Action Planning Forum

YWCA of Adelaide is the leading voice for young women in South Australia, a non profit organisation delivering advocacy, support, empowerment and leadership opportunities for young women under 30 through services, programs and campaigns.

Vitalstatistix Theatre Company has informed YWCA of Adelaide about the Women Theatre Directors Forum and we extend our congratulations to all parties involved that time, energy, funding and momentum is being directed to addressing the lack of leadership of women in the theatre sector.

We know from our consultations, campaigns, program work and service delivery that women's leadership – across all sectors - is a key concern for young women.

At our 2010 International Women's Day stall in the city Mall, when we asked people what their vision for women is in 2020, equal pay and paid parental leave featured highly, as did comments such as these:

- That we have not just equal opportunities, but equal outcomes; and that women who demand equality are not mocked or belittled but supported by a more progressive society
- All women have equal access and all social barriers removed
- Equality for women in the workforce

YWCA of Adelaide's three policy priorities, as determined by young women, are violence against women and girls, self image, and gender role stereotypes. Gender stereotypes begin before birth if the sex of a baby is known, and gender roles are learned and reinforced by families, friends, schools, media, literature, art, laws, institutions and workplaces.

We know that when women are in decision-making roles in creative pursuits that this influences the representation of women in the final performance or product. Martha Lauzen, a Professor at San Diego State University who annually reports on the representation of women working on and behind the scenes in Hollywood has said: "When women have more powerful roles in the making of a movie or TV show, we know that we also get more powerful female characters on-screen, women who are more real and more multi-dimensional."

At the Cannes Film Festival in France in 2007, New Zealand Director Jane Campion was honoured on stage alongside 30 other major directors. She was the only woman on stage. *"I think it's just the way the world is,"* says Campion. *"That men control the money, and they decide who they're going to give it to."*

Then Chief Executive of Women in Film and Television UK, Jane Cussons, said: *“I don’t think it’s because women are discriminated against deliberately, but it’s always been assumed that when you get out there on the set, the director’s the boss. And people still find it a little difficult to accept women as being the boss.”*

While the above examples relate to cinema, when we consider the incredibly transformative power of theatre, and the director as boss, the above comments could reasonably be interpreted to also apply to the stage.

Achieving and increasing women’s leadership requires several strategies and could include:

- Challenging gender role stereotypes
- Setting quotas
- Establishing a mentoring program

Challenging gender role stereotypes

The starting point of challenging gender role stereotypes is often a shift in attitude. It also requires a change in language that people use (how often do you hear a group of women being addressed “hi guys”.) It demands a level of critical media literacy, and making personal choices. It is about the clothes that people buy for their children and the media they choose to consume. In the case of the theatre, it can be the script that is chosen for development, or the play that is chosen to be performed, the colours used in marketing material, and the gender of those chosen to play roles behind and on stage.

Setting quotas

The South Australian Government’s State Strategic Plan, launched in 2004, set a target of 50% of women on government Boards and Committees. They hoped to achieve this by 2008, and while the percentage of women on government Boards and Committees in April 2009 was 44.78%, this is a significant increase from the January 2004 figure of 33.62%. Progress has been made through initiatives such as awareness-raising; promotion; collaboration with government and non government agencies; and creating the Premier’s Women’s Directory which is an online resource of skilled women available for board and committee appointments.

Mentoring program

One example of our work is the Two Degrees of Separation (2DS) mentoring program. This was developed following a Forum with young Adelaide woman who identified three things they felt were essential to becoming better leaders: **confidence**, **experience**, and **mentoring**.

The 2DS program consists of regular Café Sessions where successful women share their experiences with young women; and one to one mentor matches where mentors and mentees meet weekly for a year. Feedback from 2DS participants include:

“I have developed networks that I will definitely connect with in the future. My self-confidence has increased through being a part of the cafe sessions. I have learnt new skills and been inspired by many of the women I have met.”

“During the first session, I realised that other women were facing the same problems I am - having formal education but not knowing exactly what is expected of me in the workforce, not knowing how to prepare a career progression plan, a lack of female role models and difficulty discerning how assertive to be in the workplace.”

“Through 2DS, I have vastly expanded my professional network and met a group of motivated, talented women who face the same difficulties in their careers that I do. Through my mentoring relationship, I have learned to better handle difficult situations in the workplace and my confidence in what I can achieve has improved.”

YWCA of Adelaide wishes everyone involved in this Forum the very best. We hope that productive and practical outcomes are discovered and implemented.

Anne Bunning
Chief Executive