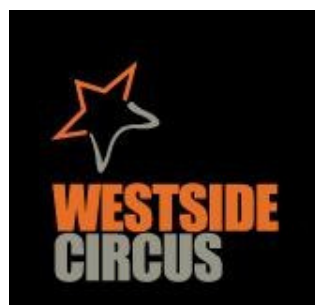


Westside Circus: Verve Casestudy

By [Max McLean](#) ArtsHub | Thursday, December 24, 2009

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Changes to the Victorian training system are making it easier for not-for-profit organisations to provide their staff with subsidised training and higher qualifications, as Debbie Maziarz of Westside Circus is discovering.

It was 17 years ago, while working as a youthworker in Melbourne's western suburbs with some of Victoria's most disadvantaged young people, that Maziarz first discovered that mastering circus skills was a great way to build self-esteem and confidence.

That realisation has resulted in Westside Circus, a flourishing not-for profit organisation that teaches circus skills to some 400 children a year in classes and another 8,000 in community outreach programs. And for the ten or so children who have graduated from participating in Westside classes to become trainers themselves, their self esteem and confidence has no doubt grown even more. "They are now in high demand as trainers and are the greatest strength of our organisation," says Maziarz, now Westside Circus's CEO.

Maziarz had to learn the necessary skills to manage the organisation as she went along. She is also keen to help her trainers to upgrade their skills and qualifications as well. "We have an ongoing commitment to mentorship and skills pathways for our staff," she says.

The Victorian Government's major package of reforms to the Victorian training system means that staff training is more likely to be subsidised. The Victorian Training Guarantee will make government subsidised training places available to all eligible Victorians, at all levels of skills development, at any stage of their lives, subject to eligibility requirements that encourage enrolments at higher skill levels.

For people aged up to 20, government subsidised places will be available for any qualification level. For people aged 20 and over, government subsidised training will be available for all training at the foundation skills level, including literacy and numeracy courses, and for any qualification higher than those already held.

The Brumby Government has established the *Victorian Training Guarantee*, which came into effect on July 1, 2009, and is now available for Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses, all those up to 24 years of age, and retrenched workers and job seekers. The guarantee will be extended to everyone seeking to use the training system by January 2011.

Westside Circus was also eligible for assistance from *Skills for Growth: the Workforce Development Program*, as Maziarz discovered when a representative from Apprenticeships Australia visited them to talk about the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Skills for Growth provides eligible businesses with independent specialists to work with them – free of charge -

to identify their strategic business aims and objectives, assess staff skills, and place staff into accredited training. Skills for Growth is open to all Victorian-based small and medium sized businesses. To be eligible, your business must employ between 1 to 200 staff, have been in operation for at least 12 months and be financially viable.

“We were interested in taking on traineeships in Arts Management and Arts Administration for some younger people who have grown up through the organisation and he suggested we call VERVE (the Industry Training Advisory Board for the arts, culture, sport and recreation sectors in Victoria), Maziarz explains.

Maziarz did, and VERVE sent their specialists to the circus. “They conducted a skills audit of the entire organisation and developed a training plan for our staff team based on where the organisation wants to go,” Maziarz says. The whole process took about three months.

Maziarz was especially impressed that the consultants recognised that for Westside Circus, people are the organisation. “They interviewed everyone,” she says. “It’s great to look right across the organisation and at each of the individuals in it – as people with names and futures rather than just as roles within an organisational structure.” She hasn’t seen the completed plan yet – “it’s almost ready” - but has been told the overall recommendations and says they make good sense.

Westside Circus recently took the *Victorian Skills Pledge* as an acknowledgement of this commitment to staff training. The *Victorian Skills Pledge* is a public declaration by businesses of their commitment to skills development. Taking the Victorian Skills Pledge gives businesses a range of marketing opportunities to show potential customers they are dedicated to up-skilling their staff to best-practice standards. “It’s a way of formalising our commitment to something we believe and support,” Maziarz says.

“It has been an optimistic process because it has been about making people better and part of the future,” Maziarz says of Westside Circus’s new training program: “It’s great to be able to support people’s dreams in this way.”

For more information about changes to the TAFE and training system, including *Skills for Growth*, the *Victorian Training Guarantee* and the *Victorian Skills Pledge*, visit www.skills.vic.gov.au or contact the relevant Industry Training Advisory Board.

About Verve

Verve – Knowledge and Skills, is the Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB) for the cultural and recreation industries in Victoria, Australia. It serves industries include the performing arts, sport, museums and libraries, outdoor recreation, fitness, multimedia, design, and music.



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