



No performance anxiety from the Fairfield Public School kids! Photo: Sarit Vandegraaff

Now in its third year, IGNITE continues to live up to its name. When you get a huge handmade thankyou card from a whole classfull of kids which has the message “You brought music into our lives” on the front, it tells us we’re hitting our mark. I lead one of the groups that goes into schools, called “Switch” and bassist, Zoe Hauptman, leads the other, “the Good Guys”.

My biggest challenge as coordinator is to match the musicians’ availability with the schools’ schedules as every single one of the ten or so musicians involved in IGNITE is a talented and in-demand professional player juggling touring, recording and other playing commitments. I think it’s an important element of IGNITE that our musicians are first and foremost professional performers, not music educators. The kids really seem to pick up on that and we get greeted like rock stars every time we go into the schools. Zoe’s group has been with the program from the beginning and they all love it. They interact with the kids much more confidently than when they began. The same goes for me and my players. This year we all made more of an effort to identify opportunities to work with instruments in the classroom. The percussion bag came out wherever the school had one; if there were kids in the class who had any instrumental experience, we encouraged them to have a go and Zoe’s group even worked with a whole class to incorporate glocks in their song. As always, there have been some amazing impacts from the program on individual kids. In one of our classes we had a boy with a bad stutter who hardly ever spoke but who managed to get up and sing with such confidence and without a hitch at the final concert. Then there was the little girl whose teacher said was usually so shy and retiring but who became very animated during the IGNITE sessions and was always first with her hand up to answer our questions or throw in lyrical ideas or dance to the songs. It just goes to show the power of music to engage kids who might not otherwise be big participants in the classroom.

Another development was the IGNITE “festival”. With Fairfield High School - the feeder school for many of our participating primary schools - agreeing to open its doors and provide the performance venue, we invited our 2007 schools to come together to perform their songs for each other. Traditionally, each

IGNITE KIDS

come together to perform

While Sirocco and Imbosima were inspiring kids in in regional Victoria, Play for Life’s own music in schools program, IGNITE, was lighting up classrooms in South Western Sydney primary schools. Here’s program coordinator, saxophonist, Stuart Vandegraaff.

IGNITE class has performed its song for friends and families within its own school. The development of an excursion opportunity, having the excitement of buses picking them up, arriving for rehearsals and then performing for their peers from other schools: this gave the kids an insight into how other classes had approached the IGNITE task and introduced a kind of informal element of healthy rivalry among the schools which added an extra spark to the culminating performances.

One of the most rewarding parts of my job as coordinator is to read the kids' remarks on the evaluation surveys after they've been part of IGNITE:

"I like the singing most, how we performed

live, writing the songs, organising the performance, doing the actions, playing the instruments, dancing and the band. The most was to have a real, live band teaching us."

"I really liked the song and performing on a stage with a band. I also like that we're the only class performing (in our school). I like when we learn every lesson a week and I like all the instruments the band and we played. I wish I could do it again."

"I liked the opportunity to play instruments. I liked the way we were the ones that came up with the song."

"I liked how we were the lucky class and only we got to play with the band. I always wanted to work with a real band and now I have."

IGNITE is run with the generous assistance of the Freedman Foundation. In 2007, the program also secured funding from Fairfield City Council, enabling expansion into more schools and the filming of a documentary on IGNITE's impact in the classroom. The doco is in the final stages of production now. Plans for 2008 include a partnership with Fairfield High School around a "musical mentors" program.