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State-wide music program hits a high note for young participants

Research from the University of Tasmania has revealed a state-wide music program is having noteworthy benefits for young performers.

The College of Arts, Law and Education partnered with the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra (TYO) to undertake a 12-month investigation of the musical program.

Researchers examined the experience and characteristics of high school and college students who practised and performed in various TYO ensembles.

Emotional music-making, friendship and musical development were the key, positive themes that emerged from the study.

Project lead Dr William Baker, a researcher from the University's School of Education, said the findings were both significant and surprising.

"It was astonishing to find the value that these young people placed on highly rewarding, shared and emotional music-making experiences in their TYO groups," Dr Baker said.

"They were not the sole focus of the activity; but, rather an important part of something bigger than just themselves.

"Participants highly valued the friendships made through weekly rehearsals, and the musical and other life skills that being part of the TYO gave them.

"The findings suggest out-of-school music programs provide opportunities for young people to engage with each other in ways they don't get in other settings."

Researchers surveyed 31 of the program's young musicians who were also asked to collect and share images that reflected their TYO experiences.

Eighty-nine per cent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that participating in the program helped them work with other people.

Meanwhile, 76 per cent agreed or somewhat agreed that being involved in the TYO helped them feel better about themselves.

In describing their experience, one 13-year-old performer said: "I've learnt about how music can sweep you up and take you to places I never knew existed".

A 16-year-old participant said: "When I'm playing, I feel excited and as though I am a part of the whole, working to create a wonderful sound".

Another, aged 13, said the TYO gave them a 'sense of belonging'.

The study was supported by the Australian Society for Music Education, with the TYO receiving multiyear funding from the Department of Education.

Michelle Forbes, General Manager of the TYO, said the research highlighted the significance of the program for young people.

"Organisations like TYO can provide outlets that are not only creative but that support young people doing what they love in a safe and friendly setting," Ms Forbes said,

"With State Government support, TYO is working to make it easier for young Tasmanian musicians to get involved by offering financial assistance, a new Northern program, choir opportunities and year-round applications."

University researchers will shortly apply for a grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund to undertake an extension of the research project.

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