



# Creative touch streets ahead

Complex lives burdened by social problems do not have to be defined in only negative terms

**Sharon Callaghan**



IT was a rare sight on a suburban, shopping-district street. The pity of it is, it shouldn't have been so unusual.

A growing throng of excited teenagers gathered on the path outside the local cinema. The mixed mass of joyfully confident kids was great to see.

The young people, their families and friends were going to see *2506*, a short film about young love, crime and regret.

This tender, sad and inspiring film was the work of young people in and around Berkeley.

The Hip-Hop musical drama gave an authentic and melodic voice to the struggles that some young people face.

Too few opportunities exist for them to share their thoughts, fears and possible solutions to hurdles that hinder them achieving their hopes for the future.

Beyond Empathy, a non-profit group that helps facilitate social change through creative projects assisted the young people to make the short film.

It uses artistic means to work in places, contexts and with young people who live with recurring hardships.

Their award-winning grassroots projects unveil the precious talents of many young people and provide learning opportunities, like film-making, that build confidence and skills.

The Minister for Juvenile Justice, Graham West, who recently resigned, was an advocate for more effective, preventative and socially just responses to youth crime.

Punishment and prisons are costly and less effective options compared to community-based projects that go to the heart of the context and causes of crime. More resources creatively applied to education, employment, mental health and drug and alcohol issues will do more for youth crime prevention than punitive approaches.

Seeing young people as having skills, as having something important to say, being able to work co-operatively with others or lead a group project, is the first step in changing prevalent perceptions that youthful opinions and problems don't matter.

When you see young people - often against the odds - do remarkable things, it is a powerful reminder of how complex lives

burdened by social problems do not have to be defined in only negative terms.

*Postcodes from the Edge* was another sophisticated Beyond Empathy production using a compelling mix of music, film, radio, dance and circus, conceived by a diverse group of youngsters.

The theme was inspired by the adage about walking a mile in someone else's shoes to understand them.

I would like our political leaders to visit the postcodes where some young people are doing it tough and listen to them.

Before they write their next political policy they could visit a flexible, holistic learning centre and a community-based program that shows young people how leadership, sharing, taking responsibility and being connected can make life easier.

Even better, policy makers could attend the next production. If they come early and mill around outside, they will feel the energy of young, confident creators.

*Sharon Callaghan is a community activist.*



**Hope:** Jess Rees in *2506*, a short film by Berkeley teenagers