

SPOTLIGHT ON JAMIE MCGLEAVE

GENERAL MANAGER,
PROPEL YOUTH ARTS WA, PERTH



From his first semester studying journalism and dabbling in a performing arts elective, to a career in acting and directing, to his current role as General Manager at Propel Youth Arts WA, Jamie lives by his mantra of being open to all artforms and opportunities. It's an openness he and his team instil in the young and emerging creative people they meet and support on a daily basis, to give everything and everyone a fair go.

“ We help break down a lot of barriers and create opportunities by listening to each other, trusting each other, forgiving each other when we get things wrong, not expecting perfection and just giving each other a fair go. ”

Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

I run an organisation that helps young people find themselves through art. That could mean helping them find creative ways to express themselves and work through challenges they are facing, or to pursue an artform they are already interested in as a professional career – through high school study, tertiary or higher education or their own independent approach. We provide access to arts opportunities and connect young people to individuals and organisations who are interested in engaging and developing emerging artists.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

The only two subjects I really excelled at in school were English and history, and I was really inspired by international journalists reporting from regions in crisis and war-torn countries. At that time there was a lot of conversation around ethics and how war and crises were reported in the information age, and I wanted to be a part of that. So, I applied for Curtin University's Bachelor of Communication & Cultural Studies, with a major in journalism.

But I quickly realised journalism wasn't for me, and it was one of my electives in Performance that really lit the fire in my belly. It was there I met lots of like-minded people and really discovered myself through acting. I ended up changing my major to Theatre Studies and pursuing a career in acting and directing. I worked on lots of small independent theatre, movies and short films in my early career here in Perth and over in Sydney, while supplementing my income with a job in retail.

So, how did you get into arts management?

My retail job was taking up more of my days, and less of my time was devoted to acting. And it's not like riding a bike, you must keep working at it. I started losing my confidence and capability, and that's when I decided to re-enrol at university and applied to study Arts Management at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA).

I graduated from there in 2011 with a much clearer idea of what I wanted to do. And having worked as an artist previously, I already had plenty of knowledge and contacts and found work quickly in venue management and logistical roles at His Majesty's Theatre, the State Theatre Centre of WA and the Perth International Arts Festival. Then I was offered a part-time role as Communications and Development Manager at STRUT Dance, where I got my teeth into marketing and, eventually, helping to rebrand the organisation. Then a friend recommended that I apply for a six-month contract at Propel Youth Arts WA, which expanded into a full-time marketing and operations management role and a couple of stints

as acting executive director. So, when the General Manager role came up, I was ready to step into it!

How would you describe yourself?

People describe me as having a calming presence and I'd say I'm someone who really appreciates and strives for balance in work and life. I'm always checking in on my team, lending a listening ear and making sure we keep the lines of communication open, which enables us to be an agile and flexible team.

What do you love most about the industry?

What excites me most is the curiosity and openness to explore, learn and try new things, especially in relation to addressing societal issues. There's always a social conscience at play here in the arts community, trying to find new creative ways to tackle systemic racism, inequalities and, most recently, the challenges we've all faced with COVID-19.

What do you love most about your job?

I love the fact that everything we do at Propel is driven by the desire to really care about giving young people a voice and a way forward. We help break down a lot of barriers and create opportunities by listening to each other, trusting each other, forgiving each other when we get things wrong, not expecting perfection and just giving each other a fair go.

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

Just keep an open mind and avoid over-thinking things. In fact, think less and just do. Just try new art forms. Trust in yourself and give it a shot. Be as open as possible to any opportunities to embed yourself in the arts community, going to exhibitions and shows, applying for volunteer or paid roles.

And what's next for you?

My focus is on taking care of what's really important to me. Making sure the organisation is in a state of continuous improvement and making time for my family too. I now have two young children at home, and because we've got a good structure in place at Propel, I've been fortunate enough to be able to implement measures to ensure a healthy work-life balance for myself, while delegating some authority to our emerging team members.

Connect with Jamie on LinkedIn

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