



Initiatives

CYBI Inc.

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The second edition of *Initiatives* has a lot of ground to cover – but then it has been an active quarter for CYBI. We introduce two new committee members, Jansyl Lagos and Tony Robinson. Jansyl is a CYBI past participant who has reached the peak of her industry in Canberra. Tony has a very varied experience of small and large business, and has been asked by the committee to focus specifically on improving CYBI’s liaison with candidates and the organisations we work with.

There is an interview with Mark Johnson, whose high tech performing arts business, The Fool Factory, was initially established with CYBI support. There’s also a report on the continued progress of the regional expansion project, and the story behind

CYBI’s new leaflet stand, which is the result of an Industrial Design project at the University of Canberra last year.

The last issue of *Initiatives* focussed on how small steps can still lead to valuable outcomes. CYBI’s unique community based model of support has shown remarkable results, both in terms of the success rate of participating projects and in terms of negligible default on loans made. This reflects the strength of ‘micro-finance’, which places resources in the hands of those to whom they are most significant. The continued development of CYBI, mapped out in this issue, demonstrates both the effectiveness of the model, and the vitality of the organisation. ◊

From CYBI to Habana

On any Friday or Saturday night in Manuka, you can see the people queuing to get into the Globe nightclub. It has twice been voted best nightclub in Canberra, and hosts a dance studio, Club Habana. Not only is its owner, Jansyl Lagos, a former CYBI participant, but she has recently joined the CYBI committee.

Eight years ago, CYBI agreed to support Jansyl’s project to start a South American dance studio. For Jansyl this was part of her culture, having learnt South American dance as a child in Chile. It was also, at the time, the first such studio in Canberra. On hearing that the project would become reality, Jansyl says simply ‘I was terrified!’

However, her terror soon disappeared, when she realized how successful the business was. ‘I started in a room at the Canberra Business Centre in Downer. I fixed it up and put in a dance floor, decorated it and gave it a more South



Jansyl Lagos and her partner Javier at Salsambada

American look. I held a big opening party and from then on, I didn’t stop.’

After four or five years, Jansyl decided that she needed to expand. ‘I was running out of room and doing classes non-stop every night of the week, so I decided I wanted a bigger area in which I could do fewer, but larger classes.’ Jansyl approached a nightclub in Manuka, and was able to make an arrangement. When the owner decided to sell some four

months later, faced with the alternative of moving again, Jansyl decided to buy the nightclub. 'We thought it was a good idea, because we could complement the dance studio with the social night and the bands and the dance shows and everything on the weekend,' she says.

It was hard work, and the two businesses are very different, but Jansyl has prospered. She has seldom had to do much promotion, relying instead on word of mouth and loyal customers. However, Jansyl considers herself lucky to be able to do what she wanted to do, something which not many can. 'It's my passion as well as a business, so it did balance, even though it was

such hard work,' she says. To succeed, Jansyl believes 'You need to like what you do, and be ambitious. The chances of getting anywhere if you're just there for something to do are very small. You just have to work so hard and be so careful of what you do.'

Jansyl left university to start her busi-

'No course in life can teach you what I've learnt doing this.'

Jansyl Lagos

ness, but believes her experience more than compensates for anything she missed there. 'No course in life can teach you what I've learnt doing this. This is the best university I've ever stepped in, even better than traveling.'

It's this experience that Jansyl wants to contribute to the CYBI committee. She is keen to see the organisation stay in touch with past participants. 'It's good to have people who've had the same experience, of starting business without capital, without backup. That experience we can pass on to the next participants... so they don't make the same mistakes. If I can help those who are disadvantaged with my experience I'll do that.'◊

Expansion in the Capital Region

At their meeting in early March, the CYBI Committee received Bob Jones' report into CYBI's Regional Expansion project.

It noted a very encouraging overall response from regional community representatives, with keen interest in several centres.

CYBI is now developing specific implementation arrangements for those centres, where local people can become directly involved in operating the CYBI scheme. This should take place progressively over the next few months.

The project is supported by the Capital Region Employment Council (CREC), and by funding from the Commonwealth Government under the Regional Assistance Programme, administered by the Department of Transport and Regional Services.◊

Benefit by design

A central aspect of the CYBI model is its close integration with the local community. CYBI relies on the involvement of local business people, and may also draw on local experts to complete specific projects.

So it was that, when CYBI decided to produce a leaflet stand to display CYBI documentation around Canberra, it sought the assistance of one of Australia's leading Industrial Design schools, here at the University of Canberra.

Gowrie Waterhouse, Interdisciplinary Convenor at the University's School of Design & Architecture says it was an ideal project for first year students. 'It wasn't particularly complicated, but there was a choice of materials, and a choice about the ways in which these



things could be manufactured, to make sure that the materials were properly held, it didn't fall over, and if it was dropped it didn't break,' he says. 'It covers the sorts of concerns that you might typically find in the production of something of about this size and scale. Moreover, just sourcing expertise is a real issue for first years. Who in town can help you build this thing?'

(Continued on page 4)

The Fool Factory

At the Fool Factory, Mark Johnson has created a fantastic world where performing arts meet engineering. Here hi-tech stilts magnify the skill of a clown, bouncing juggling balls trigger sound and light effects, and the actor can control the facial expressions of his costume using switches at his fingertips inside his gloves.

Mark has been involved in the performing arts since he was a child, working as a clown and doing tricks in children's circuses. When he completed his engineering degree at the ANU, he had the inspiration to apply his technical knowledge to this much-loved 'extra curricular' activity. Since then, his extensive performing career has taken him to the Sydney Olympics, and seen him appear as Skip the Bioelectrical -mechanical Kangaroo at Olympic events in Canberra. Last year he staged a major production at the National Museum of Australia during Science week. An experimental piece called 'Extendor,' it was a multi-media theatrical presentation using stilts, which explored the relationship between the human body and the machine. A number of his projects have received funding from ArtsACT and the Australia Council.

Perhaps because innovation is at the heart of Mark's business, he is con-

stantly searching for ways to extend his knowledge. 'When I launched into this venture, I dived in head first. I realised that my skills weren't, and still aren't in some areas, quite where I want them to be, but I'm building towards a business which is quite unique in Australia,' he says. For this reason, at the same time as building up the Fool Factory, Mark has worked in science education at Qwestacon, and as a tutor in computer assisted design at ANU. He describes this as 'on-the-job training that can flow back into the business.'

In terms of business skills, Mark feels that his NEIS training equipped him well, particularly in the financial area. CYBI support allowed him to buy his computer, which he describes as a cornerstone of his business. The network of other participants also provided support and ideas that helped him orient himself at the beginning. It is no surprise that he sees commitment as one of the keys to success. 'It really helps if you have something which you're really interested in, and passionate about, something you're willing to do 80 hours a week and get paid a minimal wage for a number of years,' he says. 'You also have to be an optimist, and have the tenacity not to let the cash flow worry you too much!'

**'You have to
be an optimist'**

Mark Johnson



Mark Johnson as Solar Flare

The future is full of projects. Mark is working on a new character called Fruit Bat Man, which involves some highly sophisticated animatronics, and which he hopes to market interstate and internationally. Mark has already performed in Japan during the Nara-Canberra sister city celebrations there, but he hopes to be involved in more overseas festivals. He is also preparing a pre-school show on nutrition, for Healthpact. Longer term he may build up the engineering side of the business, which could lead to manufacturing or providing custom made apparatus to performers.

Mark has some positive advice for intending entrepreneurs. 'Have the germ of an idea that really inspires you, then you'll make it happen. But it's a pretty tough road, and you need a lot of discipline as well. Just remember - you never know what's going to happen tomorrow.'◊

Ponderings

"Entrepreneurs are risk takers, willing to roll the dice with their money or reputation on the line in support of an idea or enterprise.

They willingly assume responsibility for the success or failure of a venture and are answerable for all its facets.

The buck not only stops at their desk, it starts there too !"

Victor Kiam.

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Tony Robinson

Tony Robinson, who has just joined the CYBI committee, has a background almost as varied as our participants' projects. At various stages of his career he has studied psychology, been an IT hardware engineer, an artist, the owner of a business providing special framing and display products to artists and galleries, (including the National Gallery), a business advisor, and now a consultant.

Nevertheless, he has a simple approach to his work with CYBI. 'I'm just finding out about CYBI and where I can contribute. I'll listen to what's going on, and if I have something to offer that's needed, I'll do it,' he says.

In fact, Tony has been given a specific function on the committee, that of liaison between CYBI, the organizations who are the main sources of CYBI participants, and the candidates themselves. The role is really '(making) sure that if someone should be working with CYBI that that's facilitated, and that people get to know what CYBI's about



and has to offer,' he says.

This will involve working closely with the NEIS providers, and also the Job Provider networks. The relationship with CANBAS is also crucial, since they actively promote CYBI and are usually the key first point of contact for prospective participants.

Tony is convinced of the value of what CYBI is doing. 'There are people out there who have genuine potential. All they need is a little break, and you can really change (their) life'. Through CYBI, Tony sees a way to give some of these people the chance they need.◊

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The project was conducted in three stages; a market survey, where students established what good ideas were already in existence; designs sketched on paper; then finally, the building of prototypes. 'Often what's been drawn on paper isn't what emerges in three dimensions,' remarks Gowrie. 'It's very easy to draw non-viable or non-feasible solutions.'

Students and staff then selected the better outcomes, and the shortlist was put to the CYBI committee for decision.

'As a learning exercise it was excellent,' comments Gowrie. 'Students appreciate real exercises. As well, it can find its way into their portfolio and make them more employable. Which is what has happened, in this case.'

Cooperative projects like this not only help support the CYBI programme, by making available high standard materials at reasonable cost – they also provide opportunities to those who are helping. Another example of the benefits of being close to the local community.

If you would like a stand and a supply of leaflets please contact John Parke (johnp@marketing4success.org)◊

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