

TEDxYOUTH@Darwin

Sarah Tam-Perez 2013 Project Transcript

Good afternoon everyone, my name is Sarah Tam-Perez and I am a member of the Round Table cohort this year. I am also a proud TED-ster and the organiser for TEDxYouth@Darwin, which is the project I worked on during my time here on the Round Table.

Now, some of you may wonder what TEDxYouth@Darwin is and it is actually a very common question, but we have to start from the beginning. So, TED started as an annual conference in 1984 when the founder Richard Saul Wurman, an architect and graphic designer, witnessed the convergence of the technology, entertainment and design worlds, hence the name TED.

At these conferences, the best and brightest in the technology, entertainment and design fields were invited to come and “*Give the greatest talk of their lives*” in 18 minutes or less. Really though, he just wanted to throw the world’s best dinner party.

In the early days, the speakers came from these fields. However, that all changed in the early nineties when the range of speakers broadened to include all fields such as; artists, scientists, philanthropists, world and religious leaders amongst many others.

Over the years at these conferences, the speakers at these conferences have included Sir Richard Branson, Bill Clinton and author of Eat Pray Love Elizabeth Gilbert and Bill Gates. In 2007, TED.com was born and the selected few of the talks presented at the conferences were posted online. At this point in time, TED.com is the most popular lecture series online, with more than 800 million views.

TEDx then is an independently organised TED-like event. These events are organised all over the world and in June 2012, it was calculated that on average, five TEDx events were being organised every day in more than 130 countries, which then resulted in more than 16,000 talks given at over 5000 TEDx events in more than 1200 cities.

So, after watching my first TED talk in early 2012, which was Shawn Achor’s “Happy Secret to Better Work” a talk about working with the happiness advantage, I was addicted. I was addicted to how inspired I felt, watching people who were so focused and passionate about an idea. Not to mention how many new perspectives I gained on so many different topics.

When I heard that Darwin had its own event, I decided to volunteer at TEDxDarwin 2012, the second TEDx event to happen in Darwin. The speakers shared amazing ideas, the audience was genuinely interested and the volunteers, including myself, were passionate about this concept of spreading ideas. I knew an event like this would work really well in the youth sector. If I felt this inspired by what I was learning, there must be more than a few young Territorians out there that shared that same feeling.

So, on June the 1st 2013, after a lot of hard work, and many many tears, TEDxYouth@Darwin was launched. This event was the first youth specific TEDx event in Northern Territory, with a total of 42 attendees, five speakers, three performances and 10 volunteers. It was also a youth run even, with all the speakers and performers, and most of the volunteers under the age of 25. Our speakers were; Alpha [Capaque], Amy [Hetherington], Danielle [Andrews], Kevin [Kadirgamar] and Lauren [Moss]. There were also has some very talented young performers; Abbey Rose, Room 105 and Skarlett.

The greatest strength of this event, and what I had hoped to achieve by organising it, was that everyone involved benefitted in some way. We aimed for the speakers to gain more confidence and perhaps use their talk in another venture of their life. We also aimed to have the audience walk away from the event inspired and with some perspectives they hadn't yet considered, and the volunteers to gain experience in areas such as sound and film production, and event management, amongst many others.

Now, the speakers at TEDxYouth@Darwin were encouraged to challenge themselves by getting to know their topic and idea so well that they would present on the day without the assistance of palm cards or prompters – that's 18 minutes without any help. They also put a lot of work into their talks, having done what might have seemed like a million drafts, which were then reviewed by their coaches. The testimonials that were received by a few of the speakers proved that what we had set out to achieve with the speakers had eventuated with most, if not all of them.

In several of the testimonials provided by the audience members, it was once again proven that what we had set out to do had been achieved. The audience members had thoroughly enjoyed the talks and had even managed to relate to a few of them and see a new perspective. For example Amy's talk about How to Create a Happy Culture, in which she talks about having terminal positivity and suggests that you should catch positivity as if it were a disease.

There were also testimonials received from the volunteers, who had stated that they had used the experience to gain further skills in areas such as sound and film production, and event management amongst many others again.

Now, on a personal level, as the organiser of the event, I gained so much more than I thought I would. I knew I would gain many practical skills, like as event, project and budget management, graphic design, promotions and many other skills. What I didn't expect was the amount of confidence I'd gain. It changed my way of thinking about problems and how to solve them, and it also gave me the nudge I needed to begin volunteering for a few other youth organisations.

Running this event was far from smooth sailing, as most annual events are in their first year. There were many hiccups along the way; however the main issues that were faced were the lack of funding and the difficulty in communicating with schools.

Lack of funds is something most youth projects encounter, so it was no surprise when I encountered it when I was running this project. In fact, in our current economic climate, money is very hard to come by. Also, with the major grant rounds occurring during National Youth Week and the two major school breaks, the time that an event could be run were limited in a sense to those grant round seasons.

With my event falling just outside the mid-year grant round, I not only needed to but I wanted to find alternatives. I looked to contact other youth organisations and local businesses for discounted, if not in kind donations, of services and goods that I required for the event. I felt that this process would have gone much more smoothly had I known, first of all, how to approach other organisations or local businesses and secondly, which youth organisations and local businesses to contact first.

There have been a few workshops, this year alone on how to apply for grants, but there had been nothing to assist with writing proposals to potential sponsors. The same goes for providing them with the list of youth organisations and local businesses that would be willing to assist. Doing so would give young Territorians trying to run events more options to fund their events, instead of just applying for grants. It would also mean that because the grants

were less relied upon as a source of funding, events would be able to run more evenly dispersed throughout the year, as opposed to all falling during National Youth Week and the two major school breaks.

Another difficulty that many youth events face is communicating with schools. We were very fortunate this year to have the amazing speakers that we did. However, nearly all of these speakers are already quite well known in the youth sector. Many attempts were made to contact schools, but with little to no response. This however, is very much understandable with schools and teachers being extremely busy.

What I was hoping to achieve by getting into schools, was discovering young Territorians who might not have had a chance to be a part of a youth organisations or events, with an original idea in a topic that could be to do with infrastructure, economics, so on and so forth. For example, a Charles Darwin University student studying economics with an idea to do with breaking the poverty cycle in remote communities.

There seemed to be a disconnect between schools and youth organisations, with students unaware of the events being held or organisations in existence, and youth organisations unable to get the information to them. I believe this process would have been made much easier if there was a single point of contact between youth organisations and schools, to ensure that all information that youth organisations provide would be distributed to all NT schools and hopefully, students.

All in all, the purpose is of this event, and why I am so passionate about it is because it provides young Territorians with a platform to share with an incredibly diverse audience, an idea that is important to them. It also challenges them to not only identify a problem, but to find a solution they believe would work. They are given the chance to be not only young Territorians, they are creative thinkers, innovators, passionate people who think outside the box.

When tying it back to the Framing the Future Framework [draft blueprint], the visions that TEDxYouth@Darwin aligns with most closely are Confident Culture and Strong Society. However, as the subjects of the talks are so varied, the talks themselves can relate to any of the visions or objectives.

So, though my experience organising a youth event, and understanding the many opportunities that they create and the benefits to the community they have, I recommend that the Northern Territory Government support youth run events by;

- Providing a series of resources that include proposal writing workshops and a database that contains the details of organisations or local businesses willing to assist youth projects.

Also

- Creating a position in the Northern Territory Government to act as a central point of contact between youth organisations and schools, so that youth organisations can get their information into schools and students would be able to access information about these organisations more readily.

With these recommendations, TEDxYouth@Darwin, and hopefully many other events, will be able to grow in years to come.

Thank you very much for your time.