

The Power of Dance

Murray Bridge, where this school is located, straddles the Murray River in South Australia.

IN the town of Murray Bridge in South Australia, 78 kilometres south-east of Adelaide, Jenna Hann is bringing the power of dance to her adopted community. Her school, The Power of Dance, established in 2018, is not only empowering dancers from age one to 80, it is also increasing the accessibility of dance for people with a disability.

Hann's experience of overcoming a crush injury to her foot as an 11-year-old in regional Victoria, and the frustrations she endured at the lack of resources for rural children with a disability, formed part of her motivation to improve access to dance opportunities for all. Her injury took two years to overcome, and resulted in complex health issues and the need to learn how to walk again. But it had one silver lining. Hann explains: "It gave me a great understanding of body mechanics, which I wouldn't have gained without this challenging experience." She finally returned to dance classes with a teacher Hann describes as incredibly supportive: Sicely Kennedy at Dance X-Tensions in Portland.

After high school, Hann went on to combine dance teaching with Tanya Titterrell as well as complete full-time dance training in Benalla, where she completed a Certificate IV in Dance Teaching and Management; Certificate IV in Theatre Arts; Diploma of Dance Teaching and Management and an Advanced Diploma in Dance Live Performance. Hann then completed a Bachelor of Dance through Adelaide College of Arts in partnership with Flinders University. She danced with Restless Dance Theatre and worked to develop dance movement classes with a dance movement therapist for adults with a disability, as well as another program for mothers and babies experiencing mental health challenges.

With the goal of setting up a regional dance school within 90 minutes of Adelaide where her husband was working at the time, in 2017 an unexpected diversion through Murray Bridge was all it took for Hann to know that this was the community where she wanted to live and work. She says, "I fell in love with the place. We signed the lease in October, 2017, and we were ready to open in January, 2018."

Hann says all the classes at the Power of Dance are levelled by age, rather than ability or talent. This "creates a really supportive environment that encourages students to remain humble and to celebrate the successes of their

peers." Students who have a disability are taught in mainstream classes with teachers adapting their teaching for all the needs in the class, without singling anyone out.

For example, Hann explains, if she has an autistic child in the class, she knows she needs to give very clear and explicit instructions, to cater for this student, a very minor accommodation that in fact benefits everyone.

She says she is often still taken by surprise when, in class, someone achieves something that they couldn't do the week before, and the students erupt into claps and cheers. She is proud of the culture of celebrating individual successes that is fostered within the school.

With two main performances a year, Hann and her team also run movie nights, community workshops, cabarets and disco/games nights. The most recent show was titled Powerful:Community and involved local businesses sponsoring a class. In turn, the students danced to a song related to the sponsor's business. For example, "Our preschool jazz class did a *Bob the Builder*-themed dance which was sponsored by a local building company and the senior contemporary dance class danced

to *Read All About It*, which was sponsored by the local newspaper."

Hann's Magic Movement program designed for younger students (aged one to three) is taught with the assistance of nine children's books that were written by the team at The Power of Dance and illustrated by the brother of one of the students. The program is focused on building confidence, independence and gross motor skills in young students, while exploring themes such as *Our Body*; *Under the Sea*; *Shapes and Colours*. Hann has trademarked the program and hopes to share it with early childhood educators and preschools in the coming years.

"The world is changing," she says. "It is becoming much more inclusive and I am just trying to do my part to extend that inclusivity to anyone who wants to share in the joy of dance." As one parent reflects: "The Power of Dance is no ordinary dance school. It's such a welcoming and inclusive school. It's an absolute blessing to have Hann and the school in our town."

Editor's note: Sicely Kennedy and Dance X-Tensions were featured in last year's Regional Heroes.



Jenna Hann (centre back) with students at The Power of Dance.