

## FESTIVAL EMPOWERS KIDS

By Rachel Loveday

The first Illawarra Children's Festival was a smashing success in empowering children and encouraging their creativity over the weekend.

The three day festival, which is an affiliated event with the Sydney Children's Festival, commenced on Friday and concluded on Sunday at the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre (IPAC) and the adjacent Civic Plaza.

The festival consisted of workshops, art displays, concerts and theatre shows catering for pre and primary school children who are just beginning to enjoy their school holidays.

However, the activities weren't only exclusively designed for children-parents were also encouraged to join in with their children in many activities, such as *FenceArt*, allowing children and parents to work together to transform a plain metal fence into a work of art.

Wollongong mother; Shannon Smith was enjoying watching her child having fun during the Trapeze workshop and hopes that there will be many more festivals to come.

"I heard about it (the festival) through my child's school," Mrs Smith said.

"It's opening their (kids) eyes to different things, and everyone wants to be an acrobat."

"I have every confidence in the festival as it is well organised."

The rain on Saturday morning did not damper the children's spirits, with the festival's Trapeze workshop-which was hosted by Circus Monoxide, being relocated from the outdoors to the IPAC's loading dock.

Circus Monoxide rigger, Keyna Imray and trainer; Jane Davis both believe that encouraging children to explore their creativity and talent was invaluable.

"Kids find they can do anything when they are encouraged to, especially things that they enjoy," Ms Imray said.

"It's a lot of fun to teach the kids and it's nice to see how empowered they feel when you teach them something and when they have a go, they realise that they can do it," Ms Davis said.

The festival was organised by Wollongong's Merrigong Theatre and Illawarra Children's Services (ICS), with IPAC staff and ICS volunteers presiding over the festival events.

ICS volunteer, Sandra Kolednik said that Children's Festivals were a great way for children to enjoy fun and productive activities during their school holidays.

“This (the festival) is a brilliant opportunity for kids to participate in fun activities during their school holidays,” she said.

There were also two pre-festival events that catered for trained professionals that work with children-a theatre workshop and a creativity conference.