

Media Statement

AER congratulates ‘Samson & Delilah’ team on Cannes Camera d’Or first film prize win

26th May 2009: The Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AER), Australia’s leading alcohol harm minimisation body, today congratulated local film director Warwick Thornton for taking out the Camera d’Or first film prize at Cannes his film ‘Samson & Delilah’, a love story set in a remote Indigenous community.

AER supported the Australian premiere of the film in Alice Springs in April. This special outdoor setting paid homage to the film; as all scenes were shot in Alice Springs and surrounding communities. Alice Springs is also the home of director Warwick Thornton and the two leads, Rowan McNamara (Samson) and Marissa Gibson (Delilah). More than 3000 people from local communities attended the premiere with the large screen at Telegraph Station set against the stunning backdrop of the Todd River.

AER Chairman and Aboriginal, Scott Wilson said: “It’s great to see a film which tackles such challenging social and cultural topics recognised not only here but on the world stage. AER is proud to be associated with Samson and Delilah and we congratulate Warwick and his very talented team on their win.

“Samson and Delilah is a powerfully confronting film which presents the complexities and realities of everyday life for many young Indigenous people. Amongst its culturally loaded content, the film provides a voice for youth on the issue of substance abuse, which is a significant challenge for too many young Australians. We expect this movie will start a national conversation around the issues facing many young Indigenous people. Topics such as cultural dispossession, substance abuse, boredom, alienation and the struggle and isolation of everyday life for youth living in remote communities.”

Thornton drew on his own experience of growing up on the streets of Alice Springs when writing the screenplay and sourced his actors from local Aboriginal communities. ‘Samson & Delilah’ follows the courtship between Samson – who spends his time sniffing petrol and lost in music and Delilah, who cares for her ailing grandmother.

Cheryl Bart, Deputy Chair of AER said “There’s no doubt ‘Samson & Delilah’ is ground breaking and the waves of resonance around this film will continue for a long time. Film and storytelling is a very powerful medium for raising awareness and understanding amongst the general population. This unique film has the ability to speak to a diverse local and international audience and Samson and Delilah is a story that needs to be told. I agree wholeheartedly with David Stratton in that ‘Samson and Delilah’ is, quite simply, one of the finest films ever made in this country. We hope the success of Samson and Delilah will inspire our next generation of filmmakers to make a similar contribution.”

The film won the 2009 audience prize and received a five minute standing ovation at its festival debut in March.

Wilson adds “Global recognition of this powerful home-grown story is testament to the fearless approach of its actors and directors. Thornton brings home an important, yet often ignored issue into the broader consciousness for many Australians. The film is also an important reminder that organisations such as AER - which support hundreds of evidence based programs around the country to reduce the devastation of substance misuse, 30% of which are Indigenous - do save lives,” he said.

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Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation (AER): AER is a not-for-profit company established in 2001 with a mandate to ‘change the way we drink’. AER was initially established with funding from a federal government grant and is now a perpetual trust. AER has built up a comprehensive understanding of the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector and is a leading grant giving body for community groups and programs within the alcohol sector. Through donations, grants and utilisation of the perpetual trust: AER seeks to prevent alcohol and licit substance abuse especially amongst disadvantaged, indigenous and young people; to support evidence-based treatment, research and prevention programs in the AOD sector; and to highlight the dangers of licit substance abuse and promote the responsible consumption of alcohol within the community. AER has funded more than 950 programs throughout Australia (30% of which are within the Indigenous community) including numerous programs which contribute to shifting community attitudes towards a responsible approach to alcohol consumption. For further information: <http://www.aerf.com.au>