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Dear Parents,

First of all welcome to Centrestage Performing Arts School. If you have not been involved in a school of this kind before let me take a little of your time to explain how costuming for the end of year concert works.

Most schools of this kind work towards an end of year production, and the costuming is generally managed one of two ways. Either costumes are hired to the students and kept at the school or the costumes are made for the students and purchased by them. In the beginning Centrestage tried the former option; of hiring costumes to the students, but this was deemed unworkable for a number of reasons. The sheer number and variety of costumes needing to be produced, as well as maintaining and storing them simply did not work. In my research I have found that the only schools capable of working this way, are the straight 'ballet schools' whose range of costumes is less varied than a school offering all styles of dance, or otherwise small schools with groups of an average of 6 in each class.

We also tried purchasing the fabric and asking parents to sew their own costumes, but found this again unworkable on a large scale. We also found this option very unpopular with the parent community!

The reason I explain the historical situation at Centrestage is because, as a newcomer to the school you may wonder why we don't do things a different way – but trust me! We have tried and found that for a school of this size; this is the most successful way. I suppose it then comes as no surprise that most other schools have come to this conclusion too.

Now let me explain further.

Apart from the fact that I am Leanne White's sister, Dancestitch and I have no connection to the business of Centrestage. Dancestitch also works for a number of other schools in Melbourne.

#### A little of the history of Dancestitch.

Being Leanne's sister I have been involved in dance for as long as she has. I did have a school in the 1980's and as I had no one to sew for me back then, I did it myself. Once I stopped teaching to raise my family I started a business making costumes for others. I did this for many years and then made a career change.

In 2005 I heard Tony Kirwan speak, from a mission called Destiny Rescue. They work with 'at risk' girls in Asia. Girls, who are either lured, sold or tricked into working in the 'bars' in Bangkok and the like. I choose my words carefully not knowing the age of my reader.

Tony and his team establish relationships with the families of these "girls at risk" and offer them alternative employment and training. Tony spoke of their success in getting to the girls first before the 'pimps' in Bangkok do, but he spoke of needing small businesses for the girls.

I suppose you can say, the light globe went on upstairs and after approximately a year of preparation, a friend and I travelled to Chiang Rai in Thailand and helped Destiny Rescue set up their business on the grounds of their children's home there. That was in 2007, when we started with 3 young girls (aged 17, 18 and 20). Since then there have been approximately 30 girls who have received training and found jobs elsewhere in Thailand or who have remained with the Production House in Chiang Rai. At present there are about 15 girls in the "Production House" – There is also now a 'jewellery' arm to their business (thanks to two ladies in Brisbane), which employs another 15 girls or so. Currently there are a number of girls working in the "Production House" who have been rescued out of brothels, and they are given a choice of occupations and training, sewing and jewellery-making being just two of their options. If you want to know more about Destiny Rescue you could visit their website at [destinyrescue.org](http://destinyrescue.org)

#### How does it work?

We do the designing, measuring and pattern making here in Australia, send the fabric to Thailand with our instructions and then the Production House send the garments back to us. Once back in Oz, any alterations (e.g hems, skirt lengths and other modifications) are then done here by us. We have found that although Thailand have wonderful silks and woven fabrics their supplies of theatrical dance fabrics are very limited and so we purchase most of the fabric here and send it over. This is the reason we ask for a deposit.

Although we are often able to purchase fabric wholesale – we do not have an overdraft and have limited funds to purchase huge amounts of fabric. It may seem that part paying for costumes in June, that are to be worn in October is quite a stretch, but this is unavoidable – as there are many hundreds of garments to be made for Centrestage’s concert and we need to commence this early. To put your mind at rest – most of the other schools in Melbourne who use a local dressmaker have commenced also – these things take time on a large scale.

### Pricing.

Once the garment is designed, I can gauge an approximate price. When I am liaising with the teachers I can generally advise on fabric choices, trimming options and work out the cheapest option. Once the garment is completed and ready to deliver to you, I can then confirm the price and invoice you. As a benchmark. The cheapest costume last year was \$60 and the most expensive was \$115 (which was a Senior school costume – a velvet suit including a hat). These prices are very reasonable and compare favourably with anything available ‘on line’ or locally.

At this stage, the business does not incur a gst component, but I would like to think that it soon should, because this would mean that there is more work being done which in turn means there will be more girls able to be offered a job in Thailand. This will be a necessary component of doing business in Australia. Anything bought from an ‘on line’ store incurs gst also.

### Timeline

Over the last week I have been measuring each child and many of the costumes are already designed. I am continually pattern making and sending work to the Production House between May and July.

From approximately July, garments start to arrive back and I then take this time to fit the costumes (generally before or after class) and make any modifications before delivery.

For some garments, generally the ‘troupe’ groups (those groups who do competition work), their garments are needed by September and often require additional hand sequinining. This is something that is done her, usually by the parents or friends, as it needs to be done once the actual garment is completed. For concert costumes we try to keep the additional sequinining to a minimum, often just a strip of sequin or pre sequinned fabrics.

There are at times some routines, – generally the Musical Theatre groups, where (depending on the choice of music) there may be a simple costume required, which can be sourced at an ‘op shop’. If this is the case, your teacher will advise you, and of course then you do not need to pay a deposit to Dancestitch, but rather, source the items for yourself from the various local op shops.

If you have any questions about costuming please don’t hesitate to call me on the mobile number.

As I have a full time day job, perhaps you may need to leave a message on the mobile, but I am always available after hours to discuss costuming.

*Janine Power*