

Friday January 28, 2022

2022-23 Pre-budget Submissions

C/O The Hon Michael Sukkar MP

Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Housing and Minister for Homelessness,
Social and Community Housing

Dear Minister Sukkar

We write in response to the announcement on December 6th calling for views regarding priorities for the 2022-23 Federal Budget. We welcome this consultation. The nation is facing significant social issues that will require careful strategic investment.

The signatories to this submission are part of the nation's professional Youth Arts industry. This industry sits at the intersection of Government portfolios including Young Australians, Education, Regional and Remote Communities, Mental Health, Youth Justice and the Arts. Youth Arts companies employ professional artists to share their skills and experience with young people to realise community goals. The outcomes of the Youth Arts industry have a demonstrable impact in areas including health, employment, learning and education, community-building and resilience.

This letter comes from a collection of leading national companies delivering programs on the ground around Australia. We support the statements of our peers who have put forward individual submissions along with the peak body for the broader theatre industry, Theatre Network Australia.

Many of Australia's most recognised professional artists have been employed to work with Australian communities through the Youth Arts industry. People such as Cate Blanchett, Rebel Wilson, Toni Collette, Jay Laga'aia, Hunter Page, Mitchell Butel, John Bell, Wayne Blair and Jackie Weaver are amongst the tens of thousands of leading professionals who have been employed to work in partnership with young Australians. This industry brings everyday Australians together with inspiring creative leaders to be entertained, to share stories and to find their own voice within their community.

The Youth Arts industry uses a rights-based approach to interacting with young people. These companies specialise in giving young Australians a personal voice in a world that is increasingly international and online. Their work brokers relationships within communities and starts conversations that connect them with each other, with service organisations and with adults in their lives. Research conducted in Australia and across the world demonstrates the significant beneficial impact this has on educational outcomes, on community-building, and the improvement in mental health and resilience.

Prior to the arrival of COVID 19 in 2020 Australia was facing a mental health crisis amongst young people. The past two years have exacerbated this issue. The 2021 Annual Mission Australia Youth Survey which gathers responses from over 20,000 young Australians again saw Mental Health at the

top of concerns for young people aged between 15 and 19. The top three personal issues identified by young people were:

1. Coping with stress
2. Mental health
3. School and study problems

This was also one of the findings of the *Australia Talks* survey that received feedback from over 60,000 Australians. According to data from the Australia Talks National Survey, 1 in 5 young people say they're struggling with their mental health. Across almost every mental-health-related question in the 2021 survey, young people came off worse.

This decline reflects a range of factors including isolation and increase in time spent on screens, a loss of employment opportunities due to COVID in a casualised workforce, increasing costs of education and pressures associated with achievement at school and university. The Mission Australia survey found 77% of young people spend more than 5 hours on screens per day and 67.4% engaged in less than 7 hours of exercise per week.

There is a need to invest in initiatives that get young people interacting with each other and the wider community. Young people need to be recognised within Australian society, with opportunities to share their own stories, listen to others, and build relationships across generations.

An investment in Australia's youth arts industry should be included amongst the initiatives to address the nation's deteriorating mental health and for the community-building that has to take place as part of the COVID recovery.

The evidence for the beneficial impacts of participation in Youth Arts is unequivocal. There is an extensive body of research both within Australia and internationally that demonstrates that engaging in the performing arts delivers:

- An increase in wellbeing including resilience and the ability to overcome challenges;
- An improvement in self-esteem and sense of self-worth;
- A greater connection to community and enhanced sense of belonging;
- An improvement across all areas of curriculum learning;
- The development in creative thinking, problem solving and working collaboratively; and
- An increased willingness to participate in community activities such as volunteering and voting.

There is a clear opportunity to leverage the arts, and in particular young people and the community's engagement in the arts, as a component of Australia's post COVID-19 recovery.

"It is now widely documented in the United States of America, Canada and Europe, including the United Kingdom, that those young people whose learning is embedded in the Arts achieve better grades and overall test scores, are less likely to leave school early, rarely report boredom and have a more positive self-concept than those that are deprived of arts experiences. In addition, interestingly, they are more likely to become involved in community service."

Professor Robyn Ewing – Australian Education Review

Data research specialists Patternmakers conducted a [study](#) of over 1,200 people in 2017 to investigate whether or not participating in the performing arts had any impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians, and if so, was it positive or negative? The results found:

- 91% said it had a positive impact on their wellbeing
- 89% identified a positive impact on their self-confidence
- 85% were more likely to empathise with another person's perspective
- 78% identified a positive impact on their self-awareness
- 75% felt more connected to other people in their life
- 73% saw an improvement on the ability to "tell their story"
- 52% said it helped reduce their general level of anxiety

"Confidence is the starting point for a lot of things. It builds resilience; the ability to get back up after something hasn't gone right at home."

Evaluation participant – Patternmakers impact evaluation

An investment in Australia's Youth Arts industry doesn't only benefit young Australians. These companies employ professional artists who have borne the brunt of COVID restrictions. Engaging professional artists to create work with and for young people doesn't just improve the lives of young Australians, it helps support professional artists who are struggling to recover from the most difficult financial period in their industry's history.

We would request the 2022-23 Budget look to make an investment specifically toward two priority areas:

1. Companies and artists that specialise in engaging young Australians in performing arts experiences as audiences and participants; and
2. Incentives for the Health, Education, Youth Justice and not-for-profit sectors to partner with Arts companies to deliver programs that benefit young Australians.

In terms of national funding, the Youth Arts industry can make a small amount of money go a long way. These are fiscally lean organisations with minimal overheads whose principal expenses are wages paid to contracted and permanent staff.

An investment of \$15 million per year for five years would make a significant impact on the lives of over 4 million school-age Australians and those in the first years of work. We would suggest the money could be offered in two distinct initiatives:

Youth Arts Resilience Builder

- \$ 6 million per annum to be allocated to youth-focused organisations that specialize in engaging young people in professional performing arts experiences;

Community Capacity Builder

- \$ 8 million per annum to seed partnership projects connecting the performing arts with Health, Education, Youth Justice and the not-for-profit sector addressing areas of concern such as employment, mental health, learning and life skills; and
- \$ 1 million per annum for the evaluation of the community impact of the funding distributed through this initiative.

The money could be distributed on behalf of the Government through an independent industry body such as the Australia Council for the Arts within clearly defined parameters focused on the issues raised in this submission.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the Youth Arts industry and its community impact further.

Sincerely

Christian Leavesley
Artistic Director
Arena Theatre Company
(Bendigo & National)

Fraser Corfield
Artistic Director & CEO
Australian Theatre for Young People
(Sydney & National)

Tricia Walton
Chief Executive
Carclew
(Adelaide & South Australia)

Zoe Scrogings
Executive Producer
Corrugated Iron Youth Arts
(Darwin & NT)

Luke Rogers
Canberra Youth Theatre
Artistic Director & CEO
(ACT)

Robert Kronk
CEO & Creative Director
Flipside Circus
(Brisbane & Queensland)

Dr David Williams
Executive Producer
Tantrum Youth Arts
(Newcastle)

Danielle O'Keefe
Artistic Director & CEO
The House That Dan Built
(Sydney & Regional)

James Berlyn
Western Australian Youth Theatre Company
Artistic Director
(Perth & WA)