

Thursday January 27, 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

I write on behalf of the Arts for Young People sector in response to the announcement on December 6th calling for views regarding priorities for the 2022-23 Federal Budget. We welcome this consultation and recognise that the nation is facing significant social issues that will require careful strategic investment.

I am Artistic Director and Co CEO of Polyglot Theatre, a world renowned company making theatre for and with young audiences. In COVID times across the past two years our company, along with most others in our sector, has suffered an extraordinary loss of income and reach due to travel restrictions and the isolation of our communities in need. Artists and companies making work for, with and by children and young people in Australia are core to the broader Arts ecology in our nation, developing the audiences of the future as well as creating for and with young people as they develop from babyhood through to young adult age. Significantly, this sector also works across education, social services and welfare, justice, health, community building and resilience.

I am also the President of ASSITEJ International, the global association of theatre and performance for with and by children and young people. As President I have witnessed the impact of neglect of artists and creators in this time, and seen first-hand the commitment and dedication of our sector world wide - providing children and young people everywhere their right to arts and culture and to freedom of expression, as stated in articles 31 and 13 of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory.

Companies in Theatre for young audiences and youth arts 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 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.

The mental health of young people is one of the chief concerns of governments in many nations including Australia and the response in education and through the health system is long overdue. Our role as artists who work with and for this vulnerable population is embedded in all aspects of young people's lives, and we engage deeply with families and communities, addressing the need for increased socialisation, the nurturing of confidence, the possibilities that hope affords, and the power and importance of imagination as we face a disturbing future.



Mental health of young Australians

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.

This is a crucial moment to address the nation's deteriorating mental health by an investment in Australia's arts industry for young people.

The evidence for the beneficial impacts of participation in arts for young people 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

An investment in Australia’s arts for young people doesn’t only benefit young Australians. Companies who provide opportunities for children and young people to engage in the arts 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.

This is an important conversation and requires consideration across all levels of government.

The Arts for Young People sector is ready and willing to work with government to enable the greatest resilience and connection among this population. We stand together in all our variety; across theatres and cultural centres, across schools and communities, across health and justice sectors, across family welfare and wellbeing; to work for the betterment of our country and the growth and resilience of Australia’s young people.

We wholeheartedly support the submission presented by Theatre Network Australia for an investment into this unique and vital sector in the next budget.

Yours Sincerely



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