

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I'm a Creative Producer at PYT Fairfield, as well as a playwright and filmmaker in my own right. In many ways I'm "one of the lucky ones." I have a salary – however meagre – that gives me some semblance of stability, essential as I have two young children. My job is deeply rewarding and creative. But every day I am confronted with systemic failures across the arts and beyond.

My job is to support the aspirations of young people in our multicultural catchment area to become professional artists. I run a free program for young adults in foundational theatre-making, culminating in a new production at the end of every year. Until 2024, we received money from the Crown and Packer Foundation to employ young people as teaching artists in Intensive English Centres in high schools, using drama workshops as a proven method of improving English language confidence.

I always say that everything I do at PYT Fairfield is backwards and in heels. I service a community with multiple, compounding intersectional identities. Most of our young people have never even seen a play, not even a Shakespeare on a school excursion, no thanks to COVID. Accruing debt to study fine arts is something outside their reach. They are insidiously pressured into "safe" professions which drills down into high school subject choice, understandable when you're from a refugee, migrant or working-class background. If they do see a show, it's about white people for white people. When they come to us, often out of frustration at the way their community is misrepresented by legacy media, the majority haven't even done so much as high school drama. They are brilliant and creative, but the access just isn't there. When we do buck the odds and create an amazing show, quality multicultural work, with young people without formal training, which we do year on year, the most we can ever charge for a ticket is \$29. When we try to get it on a larger stage, we are almost always gatekept by the pale, male and stale old guard. Theatre companies with harbour views and a cocktail bar serving affluent communities in the city can charge \$150 a ticket, only to service their existing customer base at the expense of young, diverse Australians. "Philanthropy" has proven itself to be censorship (see harassment of Arab writers) and laundering dirty gambling money, which disproportionately affects our community.

There is not a single social program that cannot be improved by arts access, participation, and a more equitable artistic landscape. When multicultural Australians do not see themselves on Australian screens and stages, they subtly get the message that they're not really a part of our cultural identity. It marginalises them, makes them vulnerable to radicalisation and misinformation. We know that loneliness is one of the biggest health issues facing their generation, and yet my program, which brought together young people in the flesh in a free, fun and safe environment, and upskilled young people with difficulties in finding meaningful employment, had its funding cut, never to be replaced.

We need to remove barriers to watching, enjoying, appreciating, studying and creating art at all levels. A risk-averse arts landscape, terrified of the next funding cut or new Minister, has already done the worst thing possible. It has procrastinated connecting with young, diverse audiences. Theatre in this country will die unless arts cultural policy is embedded as a necessity paralleling health or sports