

Dear members of the consultation committee,

I am an independent theatre maker with 35 years of experience creating new work, mainly for children aged 0-5 years. I am also an early childhood teacher and academic researcher. I am familiar with the impact of the arts on children and young people, having recently authored [*Next Generation Now. Benefits of the arts for children and young people: A discussion of selected research*](#) for Creative Australia. I am therefore pleased to see that the role of children as creators and audiences is foregrounded in *Revive*.

In recent years there has been a noticeable decline in opportunities for artists to connect with young audiences. Between 2002 and 2016 my company, Pocketfool, performed in early years education and care settings and obtained regular bookings at festivals, libraries and arts centres. Few of these opportunities now exist. Early years centres are too time and cash-poor to engage with artists, and public venues produce less work with fewer artists every year because their budgets have been reduced in real terms. This is detrimental to both artists and children. Young children, in particular, need to have extended live engagement with the arts where they see, touch, hear and move with real objects, space and other people because they learn about themselves and the world primarily through their bodies.

I continue to make theatre with my collaborators at Pocketfool, but it is impossible to make a living from what we do. We literally pay to be artists and can only do this because, as older people, we have some limited means to self-finance our work. Increasingly, grants offer minimal support that is not worth the time to apply for. There are no dedicated national funds for youth arts. The collapse in the number of viable independent theatre companies working with children and young people over recent years attests to this situation.

Pleasingly, the fourth pillar of *Revive* supports a strong cultural infrastructure. While it is important that institutions are 'resilient [and] adaptable', without increased funding many will soon not be 'fit-for purpose' let alone thriving, and this will have a negative flow-on effect for artists, audiences and the breadth of stories that can be expressed in our culture.

For many children, their education settings are the only places that they engage with the arts, either as creators or as audiences. *Revive* can realise their right to access the arts by investing in the organisations that deliver the arts to education settings (e.g. Regional Arts Victoria), by extending the remit of these organisations to early years settings, and by working with education departments to support such programs. *Revive* can support new and existing work by establishing a separate funding stream for youth arts within Creative Australia.

Over the next decade *Revive* will have been successful if every child and young person, from birth, has regular opportunities to engage with the arts and if making strong, informed, child-led art with and for this cohort is a viable career path for artists.