

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I've been a researcher, teacher and consultant over the past 25 years with regard to the wellbeing and empowerment of performing artists, especially actors. I've done all that I can to bring public attention to the special vulnerability we appreciate from creatives, particularly, as their innate vulnerability and passion for creative expression can draw them into a neglect of selfcare as they attempt to prove their value to society. What concerns me about the second pillar of the current National Cultural Policy – Centrality of the Artist: Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators – is that it can place all the burden of sustainability onto the creatives themselves when it is institutions with which they interact that must also bear part of the responsibility for the overall flourishing of creativity in our culture.

Last year I conducted an international study of those who self-identify as 'open-hearted' professionals. Open-heartedness includes a willingness and capacity to practice empathy and emotional awareness, to treat both one's self and others with respect and compassion, to being approachable towards partnerships and collaborations, and to being adaptive and open-minded. My study revealed the following: Open-hearted artists, educators and arts administrators encounter diverse yet significant issues of value alignment (personal vs. professional), resource constraints and uncertain career sustainability concerns. As a highly skilled, deeply empathic and committed workforce they face systemic challenges that threaten both their individual sustainability and their collective ability to create sustainable positive social change. The very qualities that make these artists, educators and arts administrators effective, namely, deep empathy and openness, threaten their career sustainability without appropriate skills and support systems. Their professional expertise and empathy alone carry apparently insufficient significance in advocating for the systemic changes these professionals require. These professionals consistently work in under-resourced environments that strain their ability to deliver on their values. Even mission-aligned arts organisations often resist the changes these open-hearted professionals seek to implement. The recognition of the need to acquire skills in resilience highlights that current institutional and social pressures exceed artists, educators and arts administrators' coping capabilities. Yet, these professionals are ready and able to invest in solutions for resilience and empowerment, if appropriate programs and resources are made available to them.

I believe that we might better address these challenging interdependent dynamics by involving all stakeholders, especially arts educators, arts administrators and the artists themselves, in regards to influence/empowerment (learning how to affect change rather than just serve within existing systems), self- and other-care/embodiment (protecting and fostering the empathic capacity of all human beings), and resilience/endurance (acquiring skills for sustainable professional endurance, rather than heroic tolerance or martyr-like sacrifice). This triad represents the shift from 'caring/creating at any cost' to 'caring/creating sustainably and strategically.' Above all, open-hearted professionals can learn from the heart's wisdom about how we might create our own "coronary circulation" of self-care, establish sustainable rhythms between givin