

Carclew is South Australia's home of youth arts and creativity. As Australia's largest multi-artform cultural institution dedicated to children and young people, Carclew plays a central role in supporting creative participation, developing artistic capability and strengthening pathways into further education, industry and leadership.

As the policy enters its next phase, we see a critical opportunity to more clearly recognise and resource youth arts as essential national cultural infrastructure.

Challenges and opportunities

Australia is experiencing a generational shift in cultural participation. While many children and young people continue to engage creatively, research shows a decline in arts participation compared to previous generations, with the greatest barriers experienced by young people from low-income households, regional communities and marginalised backgrounds. At the same time, young people are navigating increased digital saturation, social isolation and mental health pressures. These conditions heighten the importance of accessible, high-quality creative experiences that support connection, expression and wellbeing.

Youth arts organisations operate at the intersection of culture, education, wellbeing and community development. At Carclew, our work extends beyond one-off participation to sustained creative development. We support young people to build creative identity and capability over time, connect with artists and peers, and navigate pathways into further learning and creative practice. This work also supports Australia's creative workforce, providing employment and development opportunities for artists as educators, facilitators and mentors.

Despite this impact, youth arts is not consistently recognised or resourced within national cultural policy settings. It is too often positioned as supplementary to "professional" practice, rather than as the foundation that grows future artists, audiences, cultural workers and creative citizens.

What matters to us

Carclew is committed to placing children and young people at the centre of cultural life. This includes recognising young people as creative agents in their own right; supporting ethical, safe and sustainable practice for artists working with young people; and designing programs that respond to place, community and lived experience. We also prioritise equity of access, particularly for young people who face structural barriers to participation.

Our experience shows that investment in youth arts delivers strong public value. With relatively modest funding, youth arts organisations generate significant social, cultural and economic return, including broad reach, strong leverage of public investment, workforce development and long-term cultural impact.

What we would like to see in the next National Cultural Policy

Carclew encourages the Australian Government to ensure that the next National Cultural Policy includes:

1. **Clear recognition of youth arts as core cultural infrastructure**, embedded across the five pillars of the policy.
2. **Sustained and dedicated investment in youth arts organisations**, recognising their role in access, participation, workforce development and future audiences.
3. **Stronger alignment between cultural and education policy**, supporting partnerships between professional youth arts organisations and schools.
4. **Recognition of children and young people as cultural citizens**, with creative rights, agency and voice.
5. **Support for pathways**, enabling continuity from early participation through to professional practice and lifelong engagement.

Investing in youth arts is investing in Australia's creative future.