

Submission to the New National Cultural Policy Consultation Youth Circus Sector, Australia

Youth circus in Australia represents a vibrant, growing and underrecognised part of the national cultural landscape. Delivered through dedicated training organisations, community programs and regional touring companies, youth circus uses the discipline and spectacle of circus arts to build confidence, resilience, physical literacy and creative expression in young people. It reaches children and young people who often have no other meaningful point of entry into arts participation.

This submission speaks to the experience of organisations and practitioners working across the youth circus sector, and calls on the next National Cultural Policy to see, name and support this work.

A Place for Every Story

Youth circus is one of Australia's most genuinely inclusive art forms. It requires no prior experience, no particular body type, no literacy in cultural traditions. It meets young people where they are. Across the country, youth circus organisations are working in regional and remote communities, with First Nations young people, with young people experiencing disadvantage, and with those who have never set foot in a theatre or gallery.

Young People as Makers and Future Audiences

The consultation paper rightly identifies young people's evolving role as both creators and audience members as a critical consideration for the next policy. Youth circus speaks directly to this. Young people in circus programs are not passive consumers of culture -- they are active makers from an early age and developing a lifelong relationship with live performance as both participants and audience members.

This matters for the whole cultural ecology. Australia's future audiences are being shaped now, and the organisations that engage young people as creative participants are doing essential work in building the habits of attendance, curiosity and cultural investment that sustain the broader sector for decades to come.

Vital to the Circus Ecology

Australia's cultural future is being shaped right now in training halls, community centres and regional venues by young people discovering what they are capable of. The youth

circus sector asks that the next National Cultural Policy sees and supports that work -- through inclusive language, sustainable infrastructure funding, and a genuine commitment to access for all young Australians.

The next policy should recognise youth arts organisations not as peripheral to the cultural ecosystem but as central to its long-term health.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Youth circus requires space: high ceilings, sprung floors, rigging points, safety matting. These are not amenities that can be improvised. Purpose-built facilities are essential and rare. Across the country, some organisations are operating in ageing or precarious spaces, limiting their capacity to grow and serve their communities. The next policy should recognise specialist creative infrastructure as a national asset requiring sustained investment, particularly in regional centres where youth circus is often doing its most important community work.

Cost remains the most significant barrier to participation. The next policy should include mechanisms to directly address affordability through dedicated funding for youth arts.

Conclusion

Young Australians are finding their voices and their communities through circus. They are also becoming the artists, audiences and cultural advocates Australia will rely on. The next National Cultural Policy has an opportunity to recognise that and to invest in it.

