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**Submission to the New National Cultural Policy Consultation –**  
CIRCUSWA - training and Development centre for youth  
Fremantle, Western Australia

CircusWA strongly supports the five pillars laid out in *Revive*. We specifically advocate for investment in youth arts practice to recognise the sector's vital role in building the artists and audiences of the future and driving experimentation and innovation.

CircusWA is a Perth-based nonprofit youth circus organisation operating from the Circus Substation on Whadjuk Noongar Country. Since 2001, we have been building pathways for children, young people and early-career artists – delivering performances, community programs, and contributing to Western Australia's broader cultural and creative ecosystem.

We work across performance, industry support, training and community engagement, reaching young people from a wide range of backgrounds via three priority youth programs: Aboriginal, Disabilities, and Youth arts.

Sitting at the intersection of multiple arts practices, circus tells unique Australian stories through a form that is physically demanding and technically rigorous, deeply communal, and yet frequently invisible in mainstream cultural funding frameworks.

The evolution of *Revive* is an extraordinary opportunity for the sector with exciting potential to recognise non-traditional and embodied art forms as legitimate pathways into cultural life.

Inclusion of circus and youth in policy language matters: it shapes funding eligibility, partnership opportunities, and the signal sent to communities about whose stories and practices count.

At CircusWA we support attention on the following:

### **1. Transforming Australia's understanding of Social Capital**

Via CircusWA's priority programs for Disabled, Aboriginal, and financially at risk young people, we are improving social emotional wellbeing, physical strength and resilience via our training platforms. Our performances ensure young people can fully engage in an artistic practice and be seen and acknowledged as vibrant participants in civic life.

By investing into youth arts, the results lie in the future where a healthier society awaits. One that is happier and more connected. One that spends less money on medical services and prison systems, and more on maintaining and richly engaged society.

### **2. First Nations leadership - bringing culture and country together with respect**

In Australia there is ongoing diminished respect of first nations cultural practices. This coupled with a lack of acknowledgement of the intergenerational trauma of dispossession of country and culture has led to major mental and physical health implications of these communities. These conditions continue to drain the spirits of all Australians, damages this country's environment and maintains gross inequities of access to resources across our society.



CircusWA's first Nations training program in Armadale is having profound impact by offering young people activities that bring the joy and challenges of circus into conversation with local stories, music and movement. The performance outcomes ensure these young people are seen and develops a sense of rich positive role modelling for their future.

### **3. Infrastructure – social and civic**

CircusWA has recently undertaken a major debt to finance the purchase of a new circus training facility. This risky undertaking is reflective of a lack of state or federal investment into infrastructure to house youth arts. While this building is imperative for the growth and sustainability of our programs, infrastructure funding remains one of the most difficult areas for small-to-medium nonprofits to access.

A building alone cannot manage its own demands and needs, nor can the bricks and mortar build thriving programs. Long term investment into operational staff and programs is imperative to keeping these cultural spaces alive, vibrant and accessible to all people.

We urge the next policy to continue to focus on addressing the gap between major cultural institutions and the grassroots organisations that do the daily work of building participation. Sustainable multi-year operational funding, support for venue maintenance, and recognition of regional and state-based hubs as national cultural assets would make a material difference.

### **4. Arts Access and Education central to national growth**

Through our Creative Learning programs in schools, our teaching artists can guide enquiry across curriculums to bring about unique performance outcomes for the participating students. By participating in these circus and physical theatre programs the participants are learning critical creative thinking, growing confidence in self-expression and for some engaging with curriculum material more fully through the embodied processes of performing arts.

Early access to arts embedded into everyday practice at schools will ensure that arts, like sport, is normalised either as an acceptable profession, or something to continue to engage with or consume throughout their life.

### **CONCLUSION**

We strongly advocate for the establishment of dedicated funding streams that recognise the vital role of youth arts practice in supporting the wider cultural ecology.

Youth circus organisations are not simply a training ground; they are the foundation of Australia's professional circus industry. A driver of innovation, experimentation and creative risk-taking vital to a thriving industry. The pipeline from community training to professional performance runs directly through these organisations. Without a healthy youth circus sector, that pipeline narrows, and the professional industry loses the diversity, depth and renewal it depends on.