

Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation

22 May 2026

Submitted by [REDACTED] **Imaginary Theatre**

Introduction

Imaginary Theatre is a 22-year-old very small arts organisation based in Magandjin/Brisbane, Queensland. The company operates independently of core operational arts funding and relies on project grants and project related income. The work of Imaginary Theatre centres on arts experiences by for and with children aged 0-12 and their communities. It is a volunteer run organisation. Imaginary Theatre's work has toured to over 30 metropolitan, regional and remote Australian centres, and internationally and has been experienced by children and families in schools, shopping centres, performing arts centres, beaches, parks, alleyways and city scapes.

This document is submitted to reflect the experience of various artists and employees of Imaginary Theatre and to provide a voice to a cohort of artists who have exceptional talent, recognized nationally and internationally but whose work is often overlooked and undervalued. It is submitted in the hope that the second National Cultural Policy can provide real change and return hope to the many disheartened but skilled, talented and hard-working artists who work with by and for children and young people in Queensland, and indeed nationally.

This document was co-created with a small group of artists and artswokers from Queensland to ensure consistency of voice and message, with the content then personalised to each participants company/perspective.

Queensland's children and young people (CYP) are being failed in their right to equal access and participation in arts and culture. Research gathered via Creative Australia's Arts Participation report shows Queensland's children and young people do not have equal access to arts and culture, as per the UN convention on the rights of the child Article 31. The specialised artists that make this work are being failed in their efforts to have a sustainable career within this sector and deliver the arts programs and projects needed across this state. The supports that historically allowed Queenslanders to create quality arts experiences for children and young people have been eroded. Organisations and independent practitioners across the state can and want to rebuild the Queensland and National CYP sector, and the next National Cultural Policy can play a role in ensuring Queensland children, families, and artists benefit from sustained and suitable engagement with arts and culture.

Context

The Children and Young People in the arts sector in Queensland is made up of independent makers, independent and funded companies that are dedicated to work for/by/with children and young people, as well as artists and artworkers that make work for/by/with children and young people from within non-dedicated companies including venues, theatre, dance, circus, opera companies. The artists and artworkers work in different artforms, work with a broad range of age-ranges (audiences and participants range from 0 - 25 years), cover a range of geographical locations and are informed by artists and communities from diverse cultural backgrounds, with disabilities and various caring and cultural responsibilities.

The sector is mostly made up of experienced and mid-career practitioners, with few emerging and early years artists due to a lack of visibility on this portion of the sector and viability to maintain stable careers in the sector, despite some interest. Within this cohort, there is limited leadership capacity due to chronic structural under investment, despite leadership capability and expertise within the sector.

Of the investment made to children and young people's arts in Queensland, very little subsidy is provided to dedicated companies (ie companies that focus solely on the making of work with/by/for children and young people.) The QLD State and very minimal federal operational subsidy is largely spread to companies that include programs, productions and activity for children and young people within their organisations broader scope of work, including NPAPF funded organisations. These non-dedicated organisations are doing excellent work, however the nature of the organisations being non-specific to CYP means there is fluctuating quality and commitment to the ongoing work required to service the approx. 1.6 million children and young people across Queensland.

In addition to this specific group, Queensland also has significant numbers of private dance, drama, music theatre schools and other types of user-pays schools or training programs that engage young people, and a breadth of community-theatre companies that also engage young people in theatre and the performing arts. These companies all contribute to the participation of children and young people in the arts, however they are different to the artists who gathered in May who are primarily working to create professional theatre for/by or with children and young people.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- Limited funding both federally and state-based to dedicated youth arts and children's focused companies
- Lack of funding availability specific to youth arts, work for children and emerging artists
- Lack of peak body or organised representation for work for and with children and young people locally and nationally to unify voices and actions.

- Expertise in the sector has moved interstate, or now working in other sectors because careers in the CYP sector in Queensland are not viable
- Many CYP arts organisations no longer exist, there is very limited infrastructure for CYP organisations in QLD.
- Limited opportunities for Children and Young People to access performing arts, especially in regional and remote QLD.
- Distrust and undervaluing of Queensland-based artists and arts leadership in the Children and Young People space: artistically and in leadership.
- Regional and remote communities are underserviced in terms of artistic support, infrastructure and resources and access for children and young people to arts and culture.
- The cost of making high-quality work for and with children and young people is the same, or often higher than work for/with adults. Australian families cannot afford adult ticket prices so subsidy is required to offset lower box office/ school purchase prices. When funding/subsidy is not available, works are made on lower budgets minimising professional artistic experiences and offering a poorer quality product than the artists envisage.
- Insurance costs and cost of living are negatively impacting companies making physical work (Circus, dance, theatre) with young people and pushing costs on to families. Current cost of living is impacting family budgets and slowing enrolments.
- Engagement with Children and young people has a higher duty of care than working with adults, there are additional child-safe measures as well as real on the ground additional load of pastoral care, yet funding amounts do not consider these additional and higher adult to child ratios or additional specialisation in skills.
- Chronic underestimating of the benefits of the arts within the Education sector including learning and wellbeing impacts, creating gate-kept access to young people for artists, creative companies and venues.
- Arts funders using economic measures such as reach, attendance and budgets to evaluate arts projects. Work for children and families and work with young people has qualitative/intrinsic benefit and is challenging to measure.
- Limited visibility of CYP career pathways and bespoke training for emerging artists to experience and join the sector.
- All of these challenges create a compounding challenge that there is very little supported leadership in the CYP sector (artistic and operational) for First National people, people of colour, people with disabilities, d/Deaf people and culturally and linguistically diverse people.
- Limited pathways for CYP practitioners to access:
 - Artistic skills development
 - Professional development
 - Opportunities to make new work
 - Opportunities to share/present work
 - Resources to support ongoing practice, and full lifecycle of projects

Opportunities

- There are strong artists and companies in Queensland who are connected to their community, make exceptional work and are ready to rebuild the sector in order to support children and young people's access to arts and culture in their home state.
- Queensland has a rich history of quality arts with/by/for CYP
- Wisdom and expertise exist in Queensland, including First Nations work, national and international touring, community-engaged practice, arts in education.

- Approximately 23% of Australia's children live in Queensland
- There is an appetite for arts participation and an opportunity to grow audiences and expand appreciation for arts with/by/for CYP
- Artists are capable, committed and tenacious and have experience working with limited resources, and are primed ready to be supported with infrastructure and resources.
- Connection to allied industries to support and enhance multi sector success with Health and Education
- Intergenerational wellbeing improvement for babies, toddlers, children, teens, parents and grandparents through communally shared experiences - live performance is a communal event, it takes away screen time and improves social, emotional and cognitive connection as well as provides embodied physical connection. Participatory activity such as youth theatre/ dance/ circus show additional communication, and physical benefits.
- Research opportunities to create a varied evaluation framework for CYP work that responds to statistical data on wellbeing, social cohesion, and other 'soft skills'; long term impacts of early arts engagement and depth of impact of arts projects in the lives of children and young people.
- Representation by diverse artists is achievable with consistent visibility and resourcing:
 - 1 in 4 people live with a disability in Australia: ongoing, consistent, inclusion by ways of participation by children and young people with disabilities and artists and parents/carers with disabilities is achievable.
 - d/Deaf artists and families can be supported to create performance works in their first language and grow awareness of the strength, resilience and beauty of the d/Deaf community.
 - The sharing of First Nations stories and culture is a cross-curriculum priority area for K-12 in the Australian Education Curriculum. There is demand for funded First Nations Self-determined performing arts organisations dedicated to work for/by/with children and young people.
 - According to the 2021 ABS data, Australia reports 32% of the population are born overseas and approx 22% speak a language other than English, representation by Culturally and Linguistically diverse people in the CYP sector is achievable.
- Research across Neuroscience, health and wellbeing and arts participation supports the fact that participation in the arts at a young age enriches the lives of children, young people and their community and:
 - Assists with healthy development and improves wellbeing
 - Fosters an appreciation of the arts and cultural diversity
 - Deepens children's sense of belonging and connection to family, friends, and their community
 - Develops 21st century skills – a key driver of the Australian Curriculum
 - Sparks creativity, ideas, new knowledge, care for others and the environment, and offers a platform for them to express themselves and have agency in their lives.

The Five Pillars

Children and Young People are artists *and* audiences. Children and young people are important in each of the five pillars in *Revive*.

First Nations First: First Nations children and young people have a right to arts and culture. First Nations practitioners making work with and for children have a right to a sustained career. All Australian children are enriched through engagement with First Nations perspectives embedded in the arts and culture they engage with. Visibility of Self-Determined First Nations practice creates pathways for young people and supports social cohesion.

A Place for Every Story: Every child and young person has a story. Arts with/by/for CYP makes a space for these stories to be expressed and appreciated. The lives of children are enriched through stories. Places that welcome children and families into storytelling are essential, bringing people together through arts and culture.

Centrality of the Artist: Children and young people are artists who have a right to express themselves. Practitioners who work in arts for/with/by CYP support, advocate for, and empower children to participate in and benefit from arts and culture. Practitioners should be able to enjoy a career working with CYP in the arts, and be able to access artistic and professional development opportunities and beneficial networks and resources to enable their work and support the creative pathways of children and young people.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure: Infrastructure that has considered and welcomes children and young people is essential to enable meaningful participation in arts and culture. Family friendly physical spaces are required for the development and sharing of work for CYP. Services, programs, networks, festivals, tours, plans, and funding that support the development and sharing of arts with/by/for CYP ensures CYP and artists across the nation can benefit from arts and culture.

Engaging the Audience: Children, young people and their families are audiences. Engaging CYP in transformational arts experiences at an early age builds an appreciation of the arts and develops life-long audiences. Barriers to participation in the arts need to be reduced to enable CYP to access relevant, timely, and enriching arts experiences as valued audience members.

Recommendations for the next National Cultural Policy:

1. **All Pillars: Children identified as a separate group of people and included in each Pillar of the Policy** with committed actions that value children and young people as makers now, and audiences now, as well as audiences and makers of the future.
2. **Pillar 1, 2, 4 & 5: Annual funding quarantined to fund projects for, by and/or with children and young people.** This includes development, presentation and touring of performances and programs. This funding can span artform areas including CACD, disability arts and into Education, but must be for the benefit of people aged 0-18 and their carers/ communities to engage with the performing arts. Models might include

- a. Co-investment from health, education and the arts in a per-child subsidy for theatre tickets, to ensure children can engage in live performing arts annually. Ticket price is worked out on cost to make the work and cover costs
 - b. Early years performances linked to early years learning framework, National Early Years Strategy in Education and subsidised via education or the arts.
 - c. Arts engagement for children and young people included and prioritised in Social Prescriptions through Health.
3. **Pillar 4: 10 - year investment in infrastructure for Queensland Children and Young People's dedicated companies and artists to rebuild.** This is to align with the call for a National 10-year rebuilding plan, this support is specifically for a Queensland-lead action plan to rebuild the Children and Young Peoples sector and subsequent support for the plan to be delivered in QLD. Funding provided to existing companies and artists across QLD to re-vision, restructure and regrow the Queensland CYP sector from within. Priorities include
 - a. Capacity building - upskilling of artists, producers, managers and leaders
 - b. Career pathways - building pathways back into CYP in QLD for QLD young people
 - c. Artistic investment - support new work, creative risk taking, professional development and exchange of existing and emerging artists.
 - d. Audience development - growth of audiences of work for, by and with young people. Subsidy to venues (particularly regional venues) to offset free and low cost programming by QLD based artists.
 - e. Infrastructure - operational funding for a peak body/core company an/dor support for existing companies to provided sustainability and guide the revisioning and regrowth of the sector.
4. **Pillar 1, 4 & 5: Increased, long-term investment and strategy in international market development** and international touring to support the export of world-class arts and culture made by/ for/with children and young people.
5. **Pillar 1, 4 & 5: Support and leadership for national CYP workers and companies to engage in cross-portfolio collaboration particularly with Education, Health, Disability and Social services.** Including
 - a. Matched funding to support cross-portfolio collaboration
 - b. Support for research partnerships to identify data gaps that are specific to barriers to participation in the arts, attendance at arts and cultural events, and career success, leadership pathways, wellbeing for young people who have engaged in youth arts. eg there is data from people who attend performances, there is data on how children and young people learn, we need the direct data on how to engage young people, and how the engagement in performing arts or participation supports learning and engagement.
 - c. Education: co-fund the support for an artist in every primary school in Australia every 2 years.
 - d. Sector lead, research driven Governmental advocacy across departments to lead and support cross-portfolio partnerships.
6. **Pillar 3 & 4: Tax reform for sole traders working in the arts and cultural sector.** Grant income tax reconsidered to prevent artists paying tax on grant expenditure, and the introduction of a tax exception for first 60k made on creative practice/artworks sold.
7. **Pillar 3 & 4: Insurance review** - provide incentives for riggers insurance, and participatory insurances for small and medium sized arts organisations and individuals working with children and young people in order to maintain ticket prices and fees at achievable rates for families.

8. **Pillar 1, 2 & 3: Regional artists and companies endorsed to lead from the regions and promote regional stories for/by/with children and young people.** Regional Arts Australia, DARTS and other peak bodies representing regionally based artists and companies are supported with dedicated funding to support regional practitioners to lead from the regions by offering capacity building funds, promotional support and visibility within and across regions to promote pathways and advocate for the quality of regionally lead work for by and with regional young people.
9. **Pillar 3: Tertiary pathway reform to prevent barriers into creative careers for young people.** Technical, design, behind the scenes and performance degrees for young people based across Queensland and Nationally need to be addressed and reinstated as per the recommendations of the National Advocates for Arts Education submission. In addition
 - a. Subsidy to be provided for arts organisations to support trade pathways and certified training programs in Queensland to ensure a viable pipeline of creatives exists immediately and provides opportunities for QLD-based emerging artists without the need to leave the state.
 - b. Incentives provided for organisations to engage with middle-school aged young people to make visible the pathways into creative careers.
10. **All Pillars: Specific investment in inclusive and diverse arts leadership.** Dedicated support for First Nations specialised practice and d/Deaf and disabled artists, culturally and linguistically diverse artists, people of colour to work in artistic leadership, with particular focus on CYP.
11. **All pillars:** Introduction of a Basic Income for Artists. An unconditional 4-year commitment for practicing artists, creative workers to a living basic income to subsidize creative practice. The spread of the income must have a base-level spread across states and territories.

In addition to the above recommendations, I sincerely support and endorse the submissions and recommendations made by the following groups:

- [National Advocate for Arts Education](#)
- National Children's Theatre Initiative
- Children and Young People in the Arts Advisory Group
- Theatre Network Australia
- Alliance of CACD organisations and individuals www.revivecommunityarts.com
- Creative Climate
- Youth Circus
- National Youth Arts Companies
- Say no to censorship, political interference and racism in the arts
- [Arts and Disability Network Australia](#)