

22 August 2022

National Cultural Policy Submission

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute this policy development process for Australia's next Cultural Plan.

For the past 20 years I have worked exclusively in children's cultural engagement, across institutions, small to medium theatre companies and as an independent producer. I have commissioned and produced productions from major festival presentations to small intimate works across theatre, dance and opera. Memorable productions that considered children equals alongside adults; sophisticated, emotionally resonate works that embraced the full complexity of the world children, and adults inhabit together.

Alongside producing I have founded some of Australia's most prominent creative learning programs, including School Drama, and designed research projects on the impact of the arts on children's well-being, learning and mental health.

The research on the social and societal benefits of children engaging in high quality arts experiences has been building for over 35 years and unequivocally states that children engaging in the arts is undeniably a good thing.

A considerable challenge over successive governments has been to convince powerful decision makers to ensure policies and practices relating to children's cultural engagement are carefully considered and properly supported.

Over my time I have witnessed federal support for youth orchestras, youth theatre companies and youth dance companies continually be eroded, sending a message to children, and the artists that create extraordinary cultural experiences for and with them, that they are dispensable. Many would alternatively suggest they are foundational and vitally important.

The new national cultural plan is a generational opportunity to re-lay our arts sector's foundations, addressing the values, structures and processes that have caused children to become invisible within Australia's cultural landscape and consider how we move forward anew. Childhood is fleeting, so change needs to happen as soon as possible.

I would call for a lens of children's cultural engagement to be applied across the new National Cultural Policy and ensure children are specifically considered within each of the proposed Five Pillars.

Thankfully and appropriately, it is proposed the new national Cultural Policy is placing **First Nations First**. It is my recommendation that we must then place our **Next Generation Next**.

A Place for Every Story

'A place for every story' must include children and young people, who deserve opportunities to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in our culture. More than ever, children need stories that explore the full depth and breadth of the world they are living in, whilst offering hope, and a way forward.

We must urgently strengthen and embolden organisations that place children at the centre of their existence, and adequately support their specialist expertise in engaging children and young people as artists and creators, and consumers of culture. They will be the future champions for the arts, and vanguards of evolving new artforms and contemporary Australian culture in years to come.

The Centrality of the Artist

Call for acknowledgement and increased support for the skills and expertise of artists who dedicate their careers in service of high quality, best-practice children’s cultural engagement. Children should be more than a box ticking exercise, audiences to be practiced on, or sketchy programs for sponsorship income. Children should always be respected and valued participants in cultural engagement along with all people from every walk of life.

Strong Institutions and Ecosystems

It is essential that going forward, there are ways of expanding and strengthening funding to organisations across the *entire* ecology, including addressing the under-representation of Four-Year Funding companies that specialise in children’s cultural engagement.

An increase in funding to the Australia Council is urgently needed. Currently, there are only three federally funded companies making theatre for young audiences in a country of 4.7 million children, and yet the research pointing to the necessity of arts engagement for children continues to increase.

Reaching the Audience

I support Theatre Network Australia’s submission calling for the creation of and investment in a **Young People and Culture Framework**.

I also would recommend a **Children’s Cultural Fund** that is managed by the Australia Council, to support companies and artists whose core business is young people’s engagement, sufficient to allow growth of activity and engagement, and demonstrate impact across portfolios beyond the arts, such as health, education, and future employment.

I also support the establishment of a **young people’s advisory committee** that reflect the diversity of young Australians, as an ongoing standing committee for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts, ensuring young Australians have a direct voice to the decision makers impacting their lives.

Best regards,



Helen Hristofski
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