

National Cultural Policy Submission

DRILL Performance Inc

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

Opportunity

DRILL is actively working towards developing a stronger relationship with the palawa/pakana community and have begun by supporting staff and senior company members to attend Cultural Awareness Training. We are building our relationships with individuals in the community and will develop a reconciliation plan in this triennium.

Challenge

DRILL has - like many other youth arts organisations - engaged with First Nations communities in chosen sites or venues for site-specific work. One of the challenges that arises in sourcing sites for mounting works is knowing whether a particular site has cultural significance. We recognise the time constraints of the needs for consultation placed on the relatively small numbers of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community members who are able to work with us on this.

DRILL would like to seek funding to have an ongoing position for Cultural Advisor, but does not feel it is appropriate to compete with Aboriginal run organisations for Aboriginal specific funding. Increased funding in the arts could allow us to employ Indigenous artists in more stable and meaningful ongoing work.

A Place for Every Story

Opportunity

Dance has long been a place of acceptance and expression for young people who do not identify with cultural norms. DRILL holds this space for our company members who represent diverse backgrounds, abilities, gender identity, sexuality, socioeconomic status and views.

Representation is particularly important in remote, regional and disadvantaged communities. We observe that young people with differences can experience isolation, physical and emotional violence when they express themselves in communities that are not accepting of, which adversely affects their mental health and quality of life. Tasmania recorded the second highest suicide rate in Australia – 19.5 per 100,000 compared to 14.8 per 100,000 Australians overall (Australian Institute of Health Welfare 2022).

By normalising the range of stories, bodies, backgrounds and identities we have seen transformational change in the communities and individuals we work with.

Challenge

Inadequate funding to youth-based arts practices diminishes the opportunities for young people to be exposed to the diversity within the community as well as removing opportunities for young people to find safe spaces and to 'have their story heard'. The flow on effect of supporting young artists in this respect gives them the pathways to become leaders later in life, and their learning of supportive, inclusive environments carries communities into their future, which therefore promotes the diversity of communities over long periods of time.

Centrality of the Artist

Opportunity

Youth Arts practice is inherently client focused, placing young people at the centre of all processes. Arts practice is not imposed but grows from their needs and interests. Young people are supported through these processes by professional artists with arts practice outcomes, the direct result and demonstration of their individual and collective 'voice'.

Challenge

There is opportunity in youth dance and youth arts to invite in a range of collaborators and demonstrate creative collaboration to young people and the broader community. DRILL is succeeding at this by having a range of practitioners working across the many different projects that we offer. The artists we employ are professionals and they demonstrate a cross-discipline approach to artistic collaboration, supporting the careers and excellence of these artists. Employing these artists at a level which equates to a living wage is the challenge.

Strong Institutions

Opportunity

Youth arts companies are unique in the arts and cultural ecologies in that as organisations they create a structure which supports and allows for the voice of youth to be heard. The employees are professionals whose focus is not on their own practice but on mentoring, enabling and privileging the needs and voice of young people. Core funding/organisation models are essential in this practice as the focus is on sustained relationships of positive action supported by adult professionals. Creating and maintaining human and resource infrastructure is vital to ensuring accessibility.

Challenge

The arts have long operated in an environment of scarcity where unpaid time, shoestring budgets, and payment through in-kind or 'opportunity' has meant that not only individual artists, but also arts organisations are vulnerable to exploitation.

Stronger institutions will only be possible through financial security that allows for adequate pay, staffing, resources and support services (legal, marketing, administration support etc). It is important that there are development pathways within the arts that align with the opportunities for career progression and growth that are available in other sectors. It should be that the choice to stay in the arts is not a personal sacrifice for those who contribute to this part of our culture and identity as a nation.

Reaching the Audience

Opportunity

Youth dance and arts companies offer the unique opportunity of being able to directly access and prioritise the voice of diverse groups of Australian youth outside the constraints of curriculum requirements. This is a real opportunity to hear the voice of young creative thinkers who are the leaders of tomorrow's communities.

Challenge

Tasmania has the most young people living in disadvantage when compared to any State or Territory across Australia (The Health and Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People Report 2018). We also have the most dispersed population of any State or Territory (ABS 2022).

By working with young people, we have the opportunity to ensure the practice of meeting face to face, engaging in artistic conversation and process and supporting real life interactions is thriving in a digital world. Our participants are off technology for the duration of rehearsals and performances.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

DRILL works with Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people to create contemporary and new works that are relevant to their lives. It is important to our work that our young company recognises that they are part of a long history of dance as a storytelling medium. Our Senior Company has participated with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Council and has since developed volunteering relationships to assist in land management outside of their commitments to DRILL.

DRILL has worked collaboratively with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community to date, contracting cultural advisors and Indigenous artists for projects.

We are working towards increased funding that will allow DRILL to expand our existing core staff of 1.6 FTEs to incorporate an ongoing Indigenous position within the organisation.

As a site-specific company, it is important to DRILL that we are respectful and recognise the cultural significance of chosen sites and to ensure we are mindful of any potential issues in relation to site choice.

A Place for Every Story

We are process driven, allowing young people to share their story. It is important that DRILL represents a broad range of young people.

For this reason, it is important that we go where young people are in communities and in schools where the arts can provide a non-competitive means to share ideas, offer wider perspectives and enable experiences otherwise unavailable to young people.

Centrality of the Artist

Our artists play a special role in our company as they not only work with the young people to make performances. They support the physical, mental, emotional and developmental experiences of the young people involved in the project – which is much more than just providing a ‘dance experience’ or ‘dance education.’

Many of our collaborators are teachers, or are artists providing workshops in schools, which further enhances DRILL’s understanding of the special role of the artist to promote safe, inclusive and diverse practices within the broader community and education institutions. The collaboration with educators is vital and important in our work, as the artists ‘feed’ the educators and vice versa.

Strong Institutions

Youth Arts companies such as DRILL are crucial to the ecology of participation in the arts in regional areas.

Government support needs to include youth arts companies and not just adult focused companies. Youth Arts companies provide the building blocks of training to artists who then work in the professional companies. Supporting diversity of practice in a range of artistic offerings is fundamental to having experienced practitioners in the adult and major performing arts companies. Giving smaller, more diverse groups funding and opportunities will help grow and support diversity in the choreographic development of larger companies in years to come.

Reaching the Audience

COVID-19 has made us relook at how audiences should be reached. We have had to look strategically at sustainability, to create more space in programming for flexibility, and remain responsive to opportunities that arise in changing circumstances. With classes being delivered by video conference, DRILL was able to engage - through shared sessions - with Stompin (Launceston) and Yellow Wheel (Melbourne), and produce a combined Tasmanian Dance sector session. One advantage is that DRILL is now able to deliver sessions from interstate artists; however, this approach has proved not to be the preferred mode of engagement by the DRILL participants, with most clearly indicating in discussion circles their preference for face-to-face sessions. (During COVID lockdowns some young people disengaged and have since lost connection with the company.)

Even when able to meet now, social distancing has, for now, altered the way dance and choreography are delivered and created, reducing body to body contact work and the possibility of moving in proximity. DRILL has identified all studio spaces we are working within fit current safety guidelines and looks at the physical limitations as an artistic challenge to work within and around.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

We present the following three areas for discussion and ten recommendations for consideration for inclusion in a National Cultural Policy.

Youth Arts as an Integrated Holistic Approach to Practice, Policy & Funding:

DRILL Performance Company offers dance opportunities to young people, 9 to 25 years, and welcomes those who are vulnerable and/or from socially disadvantaged families who may not have access to arts and health. DRILL's Dance Nexus project is an example of Youth Dance practice. Montrose High School Principal generously opened their auditorium to host the DRILL NEXUS program again for another season of 10-week workshops and final performance day. On performance day, talking to a community of supporters proudly attending to see their children, grandchildren, cousins, siblings, school mates and neighbours, he praised the program for its team building. Each five-feeder school team works on a piece. The teams come together for a rehearsal, building a bigger team. Finally, the audience is involved, and an even bigger team celebrates together. DRILL and the principals and teachers at the schools involved recognise the benefits of an arts/health-based program for their school community. Five feeder primary schools participate. Some students become school leaders.

DRILL programs are successful and impactful because they are co-designed by youth for youth. Youth voices are enabled and heard. The dancers recognise DRILL as a respectful space and bring their lived experiences. Their stories of transgenerational trauma, family violence, poverty, and dealing with family health issues are safely shared within the containment of the group. The attuned and caring culturally trained leadership of DRILL staff cannot be underestimated. There is no competition. No labels. First Nations People are acknowledged and respected. Diversity is welcome. Disengaged isolated young people become connected with the community. This care that DRILL takes allows for positive experiences, empowers leadership and makes change.

DRILL is an exemplar in programs that impact as they break away from silo thinking and practice. Projects flow across health, education, justice and the arts. Arts practitioners are employed on projects for their lighting, design composing and choreography skills. Frustratingly, DRILL is stifled by short-term government grant funding models preventing sustainability and long-term planning and employment.

A different way of thinking is needed. Another approach needs to become policy. The National Arts and Health Framework, already ratified and launched by all national government heads, needs to be implemented. Now. Cross-cultural holistic curriculum that flows, like life, across health, education, justice and the arts need to be policy.

Youth devised performing arts with, by and for youth has a powerful impact. There is plenty of well-documented research supporting this. Early proactive non-pharmacological, non-recidivist arts interventions such as dancing, movement and singing have long-term economic benefits.

Brighton has the highest number of Aboriginal identified children in lutruwita/Tasmania. Brighton and Clarence are two communities that would embrace NEXUS in their schools. Principals recognise the importance of life-changing programs like those offered by DRILL, but they face continual and mounting pressure to address daily living rights for their students and families.

One community member, with significant health issues who pulled out all stops to attend the performance, sidled up to DRILL staff post performance to relay, “ My son still fondly wears his DRILL t-shirt and he’s left high school now!”

Another host secondary student initiated packing up all the seats post performance with a DRILL board member. Over a conversation they said they wished there had been a dance project like that when they were younger. They are in the school dance group and excited to be attending DRILL’s city public performance at MAC 2. The school is bussing them in. This is a young person who with support outside of family would be enabled to connect and rehearse with DRILL. It was observed their demeanour had completely changed as a result of the performance. They were alone, regulated, calm, cooperative, communicable and showed initiative. Earlier they had mingled amongst a group of non-conforming students outside the auditorium doors causing trouble there and later in the toilets necessitating staff security to manage the entrance. There is hope for this young person and others like them when performing arts and small creative youth companies like DRILL are sustainably resourced.

Recommendations 1 and 2

Include “Young People's Engagement with the Arts” as a priority of the National Cultural Plan.

Establish Advisory Boards that represent the diversity of young Australians, managed independently, as ongoing standing committees for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts

Philanthropic Brokerage

Philanthropic Support has always been important for the arts; however, many arts organisations are operating in an environment of scarcity and cannot prioritise fundraising positions within their organisation. This means that philanthropic and partnership opportunities not necessarily realised for individual practitioners, or for small and medium organisations.

The organisation currently charged with promoting philanthropy and corporate donors is Creative Partnerships Australia. Creative Partnerships Australia does not have a presence in Tasmania, instead providing services from Melbourne. This is also the case for the Australian Capital Territory with it being managed out of the Sydney office.

Creative Partnerships Australia provides only one program for incorporated arts organisations: Plus1. It provides small to medium arts organisations with up to \$25,000 or \$50,000 in matched funding, depending on the size of the organisation (annual turnover less than, or greater than \$500,000).

The program requires an arts organisation to apply, and if successful, the organisation can use the Australian Cultural Fund platform to offer donors tax deductibility for the fundraising campaign, and once completed Creative Partnerships Australia will match what is raised dollar for dollar.

This model is fine for arts organisations with the skills and resources to find and manage philanthropists and corporate donors. However, it provides nothing for those arts organisations without the existing resource base to actively seek out these potential donors.

Recommendations 3 and 4:

The creation of a philanthropic brokerage for artists and cultural organisations

Relationship management should be based in each state and tertiary.

The role would be to help build relationships with local philanthropists and corporate organisations providing seed funding, community-based projects and industry development. Funding a small team of philanthropic professionals who universally support the arts in their region, while sharing resources and collaborating with their counterparts across the country (e.g., legal templates, MoU, brand and marketing) could provide a high return on investment in arts and culture, alongside the existing direct funding model.

This model of funding has been successful in Medical Research, where advisory boards mitigate local bias and a team of fundraising professionals can let the funding recipients do the work, they are best at, while ensuring mutually beneficial and protected relationships between the funder and funding recipients. These are usually administered as an annual grant round, with ongoing brokerage (securing and matching trusts, funds, bequests, major gifts and corporate partnership with artists and cultural organisations).

Skills Shortages / Living Wages / Sustainability

DRILL employs two staff members over 1.6 FTE in the roles of Artistic Director and General Manager to operate our core functions but relies on up to twenty creatives employed on short term contracts each year on projects. As a not-for-profit youth dance company, our Board members serve in a voluntary capacity. DRILL works closely with other arts companies and independents to employ local practitioners as well as to stimulate the local arts community by bringing in interstate artists.

After expression of interest, the youth participants pay a small fee to join the projects. Performances attract audiences with accessible ticket prices. The issue DRILL has is ensuring sustainability. In order to attract contract artists, we need to be able to offer award rates. To be able to attract staff, we need to be able to offer a living wage.

Recommendations 7 and 8

Establish an ongoing, dedicated funding stream for Young People's Engagement with the Arts for companies whose core business is young people's engagement, administered by the Australia Council for the Arts.

Establish targeted, cross-department streams of funding for Young People's Engagement to work with Health and Mental Health, Employment, Youth Justice, Regional Youth and Education – co-managed by the Australia Council.

As previously mentioned, there is a skills shortage in creative artists in many sectors of the Performing Arts in Tasmania. This again is partly due to the lack of paid employment/jobs in the industry. In the August 2022 Snapshot of Contemporary Dance (Graham, L 2022a) activity in Tasmania, despite the relatively healthy ecology of small companies producing excellent, diverse and relevant contemporary practice, there are only 10.05 FTE long term* 'jobs' in dance available across the State. These include the 3 x Artistic Directors, 2x General Managers, 1x Executive Producer, 2 x Administration/Project Officers, 3 x Creative Director, 1x Arts Administration Trainee, 1x Artist Support Coordinator, 1x Producer, 2x Associate Producers, 1x Public Program Coordinator, 1x Finance and Governance Manager. So, very few of these positions are full time, and most as mentioned fall into the low pay category. All other employees are on very short contracts leading one company (Second Echo Ensemble) reporting that 10 performers are employed for the equivalent of only 3.8 FTE in the year and another (Assembly 197 as Tasdance working with Situate) report a total of 60 artists only equates to 10 FTE employees (including the leadership/admin staff included in the list above). The problem appears to be that there are many being employed for very short periods requiring them to seek employment in other industries. There is little incentive for those with skills and those thinking of following a training pathway other than passion. The issue is that without dancers and technicians there will be no performing arts industry. Even volunteer and youth participants need the support of trained, experienced and paid professionals.

*up to one year contract

At the recent FUSE summit of youth arts Lesley Graham (2022b) reported 'Kim Tran, Director of Policy and Governance at Live Performance Australia, presented the results of a LPA member 2022 State of the Industry survey showing the occupations in short supply. While there were no specific statistics for employment in youth arts, anecdotal feedback indicated skills shortages in areas of company, event and stage management, technical staff and crew, largely because many people have recently left the broader performing arts industry for better job security. LPA 's survey results confirmed skills shortages in these areas, plus production and customer services/front of house roles. When compared to the National Skills Commission's Skills Priority List 2021, there appears to be a real disconnect between the industry experience and current government statistics.

Recommendations 9 and 10

That a priority be made in getting the required skills back up to speed by providing reasonably priced and accessible training.

That the National Skills Commission collects and contributes more relevant data and insights into the Skills Priority List process.

References

Theatre Network Australia (2021) *Salary Survey Report 2021 Not-for-Profit Small to Medium Arts Organisations*; Theatre Network Australia. Melbourne.

Graham, L. (2022) *Snapshot of Contemporary Dance in Tasmania August 2022*, Unpublished report (attached)

Graham, L (2022) *Lighting a FUSE in the youth arts sector*, <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/features/lighting-a-fuse-in-the-youth-arts-sector-2567033/>, Arts Hub, online publication, accessed 27/07/2022