

WA Youth Action Plan

Submission by TNA

Executive Summary

Arts and cultural programs and practices utilise best practice methodologies for deep and genuine engagement of diverse young people, while also offering effective solutions to some of the top issues facing young people today. The WA Youth Arts and Theatre for Young Audiences (YA/TYA) sector is ideally placed to help young people in WA develop their voices, provide a safe platform to celebrate those voices, and can work with both young people and government to connect the two. The sector is open to collaborations that make use of the services it provides to young people that address issues of wellbeing connection and inclusion, and developing skills for the future.

TNA recommends the following proposed outcomes for inclusion in next Youth Action Plan.

1. **Wellbeing** - Increase funding to Healthway to support arts activities for young people.
2. **Arts & Education** – Ongoing investment for the DLGSC’s Creative Learning Program.
3. **Arts for All** - Facilitate stronger implementation and accountability of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts by requiring schools to submit compliance reports.
4. **Future jobs** - Investment for traineeships for young people in critical workforce areas such as production and technical workers.
5. **Job Pathways** - Investment for fellowships for young and emerging professional artists.

Background and Context

[TNA](#) is the leading national industry development organisation for the contemporary performing arts, with a particular focus and priority on supporting independent creative practitioners and small to medium companies. TNA is also the Australian centre for [ASSITEJ International](#), the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People, and provides specific advocacy, services, and support for the youth arts and theatre for young audiences (YA/TYA) sector.

In Western Australia there is a large and diverse sector of organisations and creatives that create artistic work and opportunities specifically with, for, and by young people across genres of theatre, dance, circus, music, and hybrid/multi arts. These organisations are non-profits, and most receive some investment from federal, state, and/or local government funding bodies to provide essential community services. As well as providing arts experiences for and with young people, YA/TYA organisations support and nurture young people holistically, providing spaces for skills development, increased physical and mental wellbeing, and social connection, through creative practice and art making.

TNA has consulted its WA members and other representatives from the YA/TYA sector in WA to contribute to this consultation submission, written by TNA Co-CEO, Joshua Lowe.

Research and Evidence

In order to contextualise the YA/TYA sector as impactful and essential contributors to youth engagement, the following research and summary of evidence was undertaken by [The Power of Youth Arts](#), a report by Patternmakers and ATYP.

Youth arts provides a platform for young people to explore important ideas and boosts civic engagement.

- A [12-year longitudinal study](#) of 12,000 American students found that young people who participated in arts were more likely to be involved in political participation and volunteering.
- Young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who participate in youth arts were also more likely to participate in student government, volunteer, and vote in local and national elections - according to [a correlational analysis](#) of four national longitudinal datasets in the US.

Arts participation provides socio-emotional benefits for young people that can act as protective factors against mental illness.

- [Systematic reviews](#) of the literature show that arts participation builds resilience and contributes to confidence, self-esteem, self-expression, happiness, mindfulness, improved coping mechanisms, and higher life satisfaction.
- Around half of serious mental health issues in adulthood begin [before the age of 14](#), and the socio-emotional benefits of arts participation are known [protective factors](#) against mental illnesses like anxiety and depression.
- A study by [Cirkidz and Uni SA](#) of 54 young people found that participating in circus improved stress levels, self-esteem, confidence, and socialisation – and calculated that for every \$1 invested in youth performing arts, \$7 could be generated in social return.

Arts participation is associated with better educational outcomes for students, including stronger academic performance.

- An [Australian longitudinal study of over 600 students](#) showed that arts engagement significantly predicted class participation, educational resilience (the ability to deal with academic setbacks and adversity), and educational aspirations (e.g., intention to finish school).
- An evaluation of the [Creative Arts Indigenous Parental Engagement](#) program, involving 155 Indigenous students, found that the program ‘closed the gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ NAPLAN scores by more than 20% in reading and 17% in writing.
- Since the 90s, there’s been a [strong international evidence base](#) to suggest that arts participation is associated with higher academic performance – including literacy, numeracy, and higher-order problem-solving skills.

The Top Issues

Young people have numerous challenges to overcome in their lives, many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Maintaining/improving their **mental and physical wellbeing**; this is the [third most important issue identified by young people](#).
- Learning **skills for the future**, including critical thinking, creative problem solving, resilience, and leadership; [41.8% of students](#) said there are barriers to achieving study or work goals.
- Finding opportunities for **social connection**, to be a part of a community, and to feel a **sense of belonging**; [23.5% of young people](#) reported feeling lonely all or most of the time.
- Having a platform for their **voice to be heard** and **agency** over their own lives.

Young people in WA need the state government to acknowledge, support and engage with a breadth of essential services they use that overcome these issues, ensuring they are supported in the spaces they feel a sense of belonging and safety. These spaces include school, sporting clubs, online communities, youth hubs, and arts and cultural programs.

Thousands of young people engage every day in creative arts and cultural programs and activities, many through Youth Arts and Theatre for Young Audiences (YA/TYA) organisations. For many, arts and cultural spaces are the ones that align closest with their identity, and provide the resources, networks, and support to fulfil their needs.

Currently there are several **key challenges** that create barriers to young people accessing these services in WA:

- Arts and cultural organisations are constantly working while overcapacity and under resourced, meaning they cannot provide the number and breadth of services young people need.
- Equitable access to young people from low socio-economic, regional/remote, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is expensive and logistically difficult.
- Awareness and understanding within government of the role and benefits of arts and cultural activities and organisations for young people is low, leading to missed opportunities for mutual benefit and cost savings.
- A complex system of government including numerous departments and funding agencies, and a diverse ecology of arts and cultural organisations, makes communication and collaboration difficult.

Proposed Outcomes/Recommendations

1. Increase funding to Healthway to support arts activities for young people.

Direct financial investment into core and new activities of YA/TYA organisations, which provide essential services that young people need, is the most effective and efficient way to achieve some of the key aims of the Youth Action Plan.

Youth arts organisations are led by professionals that specialise in engaging young people to create artistic work that celebrates and promotes young peoples' views and shares them with communities. As outlined in the evidence above, these organisations and their programs support young people to build meaningful connections with others, engage with the broader community, learn important knowledge and skills for both personal and professional development, and develop protective factors for their mental health and wellbeing.

The last WA Youth Action Plan committed \$8m in 2023 through Healthway to support sport and arts activities for young people, from which a small portion was allocated to YA/TYA organisations. Increased investment earmarked specifically for arts activities (which generally have far higher costs than sports activities) would see the sector be more adequately supported to maintain and grow their services.

2. Ongoing investment for DLGSC's Creative Learning Program.

DLGSC's Creative Learning Program is a four-year election commitment by the WA State Government, running from 2021 – 2024. The Program consists of two funding programs, [Creative Learning Partnerships](#) and [Creativity for Schools](#).

The one round of Creative Learning Partnerships provided funding for arts organisations and schools to deliver two-year creative learning programs. The program enhanced students' (years 2 to 9) and educators' creative learning capabilities in and through the arts and built educators' pedagogical capacities and increased access to and participation in the arts, cultural and creative activities. Creativity for Schools has a similar focus, but provided smaller, ongoing grants for one-off residencies and collaborations.

Such a program provides affordable and accessible opportunities for young people to engage with arts activities within their school, meaning they receive the benefits outlined above. It can provide a young person with their first arts experience and is how many go on to pursue further training and careers in the creative industries, as well as inspiring a life-long love of arts and culture. For the youth arts sector, it provides valuable, targeted investment that assists them to connect with young people and communities that would not otherwise be possible.

Investment in this program is a smart use of public money, as it increases the capacity of both arts and education institutions and workers and is an effective way of reaching regional/remote communities in WA. The four-year program will be evaluated as it ends in 2024. TNA and the sector strongly recommends that the WA Youth Action plan commit to extending this investment.

3. Facilitate stronger implementation and accountability of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts by requiring schools to submit compliance reports.

The Australian Curriculum has been well designed to deliver the best educational outcomes for Australian young people. The Curriculum acknowledges the real benefits and learning outcomes in the arts for students and includes a direction that all students from Foundation to Year 8 have the opportunity to engage with at least one arts experience per year.

The reality is that there are huge discrepancies and inequity in how this is delivered, and little to no accountability or oversight to ensure it is even delivered at all. Today, many young people still do not have access to the basic entitlements outlined in the Curriculum.

Strategies should be put in place to ensure the Australian Curriculum: The Arts is implemented in full, so that all young people, regardless of where in the state they live, or what kind of school they're at, can benefit from engagement in the arts, driving greater skills development, job readiness, and social connectedness. The best way to begin this process is to require schools to submit reports detailing how many of their schools are achieving basic entitlements for students. Investment in Recommendations 1 and 2 (above) will also assist schools in building capacity to deliver on the Curriculum.

4. New investment for traineeships for young people in critical workforce areas such as production and technical workers.

[According to Live Performance Australia \(LPA\)](#), prior to COVID-19, consistent industry feedback was that there was a shortage of workers in technical roles (e.g. sound and lighting technicians), with the problem more acutely felt in regional areas. Skills shortages in these roles have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and have broadened to encompass crew, production (e.g. company management, stage management, event management, wardrobe and design) and front of house roles. Now, the problem is felt in both metropolitan and regional areas. One of LPA's recommendations to address this issue is investment for industry-led skills development initiatives, and funding traineeships.

Due to the healthy ecology of arts organisations in WA, there are opportunities to create a range of paid placements for young people within these organisations. Such traineeships would be mutually beneficial; they would provide young people with real, hands-on experience

and valuable new networks, and assist the industry by addressing the skills shortage and increasing the staffing capacity of participating organisations. Traineeships would complement any tertiary training courses available, but are also an alternative to young people for which tertiary study is not an option.

5. New investment for fellowships for young and emerging professional artists.

Support for young and emerging professional artists as they move from training to the workforce has dwindled over recent years, affecting the viability and length of careers and mental wellbeing of young people in the arts. Where programs from Federal and state governments have dropped off, an already strained sector has stepped up to fill the gaps, often with much reduced opportunities that place additional strain and workload on young people. With most artists working as gig workers, piecing together project grants and short contracts from organisations, young people are especially vulnerable.

Organisations in the sector have collectively voiced a commitment to supporting young and emerging artists within their programs, but need additional investment so that they can provide meaningful and sustainable opportunities. A fellowship program, administered by DLGSC, which provides a one-year salary and a project/professional development budget for a group of young and emerging professional artists each year will make a huge difference in bridging the current gap in the creative workforce pipeline. Undertaken within a WA arts organisation/institution, it will also generate considerable in-kind support, and activate new partnerships and networks for young people.

More Information

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