

**Submission
No 18**

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Moorambilla Voices

Date Received: 24 July 2024

Parliamentary Enquiry into Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW

1. Moorambilla Voices welcomes the enquiry and the committee's commitment to recognising the central importance of music and arts education in Australian society where music and the arts have been central to culture and human experience for over 60,000 years.
2. Moorambilla Voices is a regionally based, multi-artform, youth education and capacity building program that commissions and creates choral, dance, visual arts and Taiko drumming works reflecting the worldview of participants and their communities. We work to embody the spirit of walking together with Australia's First Nations People inclusion and respect (Yindyamarra). Since 2006 we have worked with over 47,000 children and young people through workshops, residency camps, recordings, tours and performances. Moorambilla Voices has direct on-the-ground experience to inform our recommendations, building on an evidence-based approach that is adaptive, sustainable and continually reflective.
3. Moorambilla Voices recognises that sustained interventions at scale are required to affect change and is aware of detailed suggestions provided in other submissions. This submission focuses on a small set of practical, highly impactful interventions able to be readily implemented in a cost-effective manner. These recommendations are informed by 20 years of experience working in regional and remote NSW and current arts education research. They provide an immediate and meaningful impact on students, teachers, schools and their broader communities.

Recommendations

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| <p>1. Implement MV SING, five (5) minutes of singing every morning in every primary school classroom in the Moorambilla Voices footprint – 22 regional and remote NSW Local Government Areas (LGAs)</p> |
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Rationale: Effective learning requires consistent, typically daily practice.

MV SING is 40 songs regionally inspired, for daily use. The resource is based on the former Australian Broadcasting Commission ABC Songbook, and 'Sing' program on ABC Radio National and will provide:

- Equitable and universal access to music making using the human voice – something that every teacher, student and parent has for no cost.
- Repertoire inspired by the 22 LGAs in the MV footprint, encompassing regional and remote communities spanning one-third of NSW.
- Is a sequential and resource supported kit of 40 cards – delivered in person into each school through MV's 2025 annual skills development workshops, delivered by Michelle Leonard OAM.
- Consists of 40 MV Australian songs with a strong regional focus and embedded Indigenous Language and worldview for daily-weekly use.
- The 40 simple songs are presented in western staff/guitar tab notation and lyrics, with a regional artists' artwork on the front.

- A QR code on the back linking to online recordings of children in the MV program and backing tracks.
- A second QR code linking the cards to the outcomes and objectives of primary school cross curricula & music stages 2-4.
- The resource includes an annual two (2) day professional development residency in Baradine to support teachers in implementing MV SING and other MV resources into their classrooms, and to build the capacity of existing educators in the region.

2. Implement MV magic online modules in every primary school classroom in the Moorambilla Voices footprint

Rationale: Regional teachers require additional training support in the short, medium and long term to confidently lead music programs and address sector skill gaps.

MV magic modules consists of 165 award winning 30-minute modules developed by Moorambilla Voices available for **immediate** implementation. These online education modules are mapped to NSW Curriculum Stages 2-4 across music, dance, visual art and PDHPE, with 37% First Nations led. These resources can be used weekly / daily with high quality sequential content where the educator can participate with children.

- The MV magic modules could be immediately made available to all 3,500 children and young people seen annually in MV's skills development workshops if paid for by the Department of Education at \$10 per child. The funds will be used to partially subsidise the two (2) day professional development residency for educators at Baradine (see point 1).
- Educator capacity development from MV's annual professional development residency can be reinforced with the Company's annual skills development workshops, and the Taiko Trailer Tour delivered into schools and community. This is part of a three-year plan to embed live access to the artforms of Japanese drumming (Taiko), choral and dance into eight (8) participating schools four (4) times a year for secondary students aged 12-18. The MV Taiko Tour is designed to improve the health and well-being of adolescents, contributing to school retention, community connection and transition into high school and work programs.

3. Support the Moorambilla Voices skills development program

Rationale: Each year Moorambilla Voices delivers an intensive and artistically rich program of 95 skill development workshops into schools for upwards of 3,500 students, two 4-day residency camps in Baradine for up to 350 students aged 8 - 18, tours, recordings and performances. For 20 years the annual Skills Development Tour focusing on music literacy development **has been delivered free into schools** to ensure equitable access to music education in regional and remote NSW. Students who participate in the annual residency camps and gala, contribute 25% of their costs. Moorambilla Voices **subsidises the remaining 75%** to deliver this part of its program, relying heavily on private philanthropy, sector support and limited government funding through state and federal arts programs. Those students without means to contribute the 25% are further supported through their schools, community and philanthropic sources.

Given the glaring disparity in opportunities for regional and remote communities relative to urban peers, it is time that this Moorambilla investment over a 20-year period is better supported through the Department of Education and/or Health. To

illustrate, if the 95 skills development workshops were **paid for in full** for each school as occurs with Musica Viva interactive workshops (at a cost of \$1,500 per participating school), this would cover all skills development workshop costs, and free up vital financial support to enable more candidates to participate in residency camps.

4. Establish a research framework and fund research to consistently capture and quantify the social, physical and mental health impacts of arts programs

Rationale: There is a need to consistently capture and quantify the value and impact of arts education programs on developing confidence, skills and capabilities for other life domains including: schooling, community engagement and work.

Internationally, the benefits of performing arts education on all aspects of health and well-being are acknowledged worldwide (McCrary, Redding & Altenmuller, 2021). Recognised also is that a robust vocal program underpins excellent music education, complementing instrumental programs.

The following highlight the benefits of music education in particular domains. Appendix one provides the Enquiry with a more detailed bibliography.

- Communication, confidence and self-esteem, including emotional engagement with learning, school attendance and leadership (Judd & Pooley, 2014; Rickard & Appelman et al, 2013; Schellenberg, Corrigan, Dys & Malti, 2015)
- Connection to place and community engagement (Brook & Cui, 2021; Brook, 2013 & 2016; Mason & Chuang, 2001)
- Resilience or 'grit' and executive functioning or 'planning ability' including improved school attendance, and increased further education outcomes beyond school (Holochworst, Propper, Wolf, Willoughby et al, 2017; Guhn, Emerson, Gouzouas, 2020; Jaschke, Eggermont, Honing, Scherder, 2013)
- Physical and mental health long- and short- term improved outcomes (Portowitz, Lichtenstein, Egorova, & Brand, 2009; Clift, Nicol, Raisbeck et al, 2010;)

Notwithstanding this research, there is a need to capture, quantify and make publicly available the models of delivery used in and relevant to an Australian context.

Moorambilla Voices is developing a five-year research program for this purpose and is actively seeking appropriate research partners to deliver robust and granular insights. Of particular interest is:

- Describing and demonstrating the model of engagement needed to capture the benefits of a music/cross artform education program and directly reflective of place and connection.
- Capturing physical and mental health benefits, reflected in measures such as confidence, resilience, leadership and engagement. Others relevant to school participation and outcomes include improved auditory and executive functioning, increased working memory and improvements in gross and fine motor skills.

Moorambilla Voices intends to publish and share its findings but recognises that a common framework is needed to understand better the costs and benefits of various models and approaches across the sector. To be effective, the framework should align with major national data collections and instruments used by NSW Government Departments including Education, Health and Communities and Justice. The framework should also be capable of elucidating the interface between programs in other domains such as individual and group sports.

Challenges the four recommendations address

Music and arts programs face a range of challenges. As noted, other submissions address these in greater detail. Moorambilla Voices would like to briefly draw the Enquiry's attention to the following in everyday terms, reflecting two decades of direct observation and experience.

Well-recognised concerns about and for our children and young people range from growing mental health challenges (manifested in anxiety, depression, withdrawal and negative classroom behaviours) to affected literacy and numeracy outcomes and increasing rates of attrition in school attendance and completion.

At the same time, there is a lack of understanding about the social, physical and mental health benefits of music education and engagement. We then face an unhealthy cycle where schools face an over-crowded curriculum exacerbated by high staff turn-over especially in rural areas, low literacy and attendance issues. Poor understanding of the value and impact of music education means that it is not prioritised or is viewed as an 'optional extra' rather than a core capability that enhances positive health outcomes, complementing and supporting results in other curriculum domains. Similarly, scarce resources result in an unhelpful competition between organised sports and the arts rather than a recognition about the strengths and complementarity of skills and capabilities they both provide to our children and young people.

Families across the state experience substantial and growing financial challenges. However, those in rural and remote communities experience additional and significant barriers to opportunities and participation in terms of distance, higher costs and fewer resources that must be 'stretched' further. These challenges are reflected in the school community.

State-wide (indeed nationally) there is a lack of time allocated to music education in tertiary education degree courses – a long-term and systemic problem. Consequently, there is a skills and confidence deficit in our current teacher population with primary or secondary school music specialists, many now with no lived experience of any arts/ music in there, primary secondary or tertiary education; many are early career.

In the 22 LGAs serviced by Moorambilla Voices, there are no regional choirs, bands or orchestras. Notwithstanding the efforts and commitment of schools and educators, there are few ensembles of any nature, only sporadic or ephemeral classroom music education or primary school ensembles, and few opportunities for engagement with qualified educators. In the 20 years of delivering Moorambilla Voices skills development workshop program, these opportunities have decreased.

These issues require considered planning, systemic and long-term change and resourcing beyond the scope of this paper.

The recommendations put forward by Moorambilla Voices represent practical and immediate actions that can be taken to deliver immediate music education to support the children and young people in our regional and remote communities. Moorambilla Voices resources are already being used in other locations and jurisdictions. The strategies put forward in this submission could be adapted to and implemented in other geographic regions.

About Moorambilla Voices

Moorambilla Voices is an award-winning multi-arts organisation that provides music and arts education programs for children and youth ages 8-18 living in regional and remote NSW – its footprint services 22 Local Government Areas, and to date over 47,000 children have received free music literacy workshops in their school. The footprint includes the most remote areas in the state and some of the most disadvantaged communities in NSW in standard social, health and economic measures.

Founded in 2006, Moorambilla Voices inspires and empowers young people to explore their creativity and express themselves through music, dance, drums and visual arts in the spirit of Yindymarra as we walk together with inclusion and respect. Annually the program subsidises over seventy-five (75%) for each candidate to ensure the core pillars of access and equity are upheld. Thirty percent (30%) of participants identify as Indigenous.

Moorambilla makes a public and ongoing commitment to excellence, equity and opportunity, and recognises the capacity of children and young people from regional and remote NSW to excel when given opportunities more readily available to their urban counterparts.

Annually, up to 350 children co-create during residencies held in Baradine with a team of over 50 world-class composers, choreographers, visual artists, taiko artists, vocalists and musicians. The children are positioned as co-creators and learn the vital skills of technical production, performance, collaboration, resilience and hard work as they deliver performances to standing ovations.

The annual program is informed by Moorambilla Voices' annual Artistic & Cultural Immersions, where artists are taken on-Country to work with Australian Indigenous Elders, Linguists, Cultural Knowledge Holders and community members. Moorambilla co-creates, performs and records original works that gather their core artistic inspiration from the people and the region of New South Wales they call home. This is a proven innovative, long term and hugely successful program that is unique nationally.

Moorambilla Voices is committed to complementing other music and arts programs and engagement in broader capacity building initiatives. This includes supporting school retention and connecting young people to on-going education and job opportunities.

Moorambilla Voices Highlights

- 2024: Performance with Grammy-nominated ensemble [VOCES8](#) at the Sydney Opera House (SOH) and [ABC classic drive recording](#)
- 2024: Farewell concert for Moorambilla Voices' Patrons Their Excellencies Mrs Linda and Mr David Hurley (retd)
- 2023: ['Goodhigoo Yanmay' Album](#) recording Sydney Opera House
- 2023: APRA AMCOS – Luminary Award for Organisational Excellence
- 2016-2023 annual [Gala showcase](#)
- 2023: Michelle Leonard, Founder and Artistic Director awarded National Runner Up for AgriFutures Rural Women's Award
- 2023: ['The Shape of Water'](#) short-film featuring the MAXed OUT (senior) company
- 2022: Performed as part of 'From the Steps: Voices at Dusk' celebrating Sydney Opera House 50th anniversary
- 2019 Recording of [Lepidoptera](#)
- 2018 Recording of [Yarragaa](#)
- 2017: Recording of [Yindymarra: A Prospect of Peace](#) at the ABC studios including songs in the Wiradjuri language
- Michelle Leonard awarded Order of Australia (OAM) for services to the arts and community.
- 2015: Wide Open Sky documentary, winner of the Sydney Film Festival Audience Award, featured on SBS and Netflix

Appendix one: Bibliography

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