

**Submission
No 41**

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

Organisation: The Balnaves Foundation

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The Balnaves Foundation submission to the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales

The Balnaves Foundation (Foundation) is a private ancillary fund that was established in 2006 by Neil Balnaves AO for the purpose of creating a better Australia through philanthropy. Since then, the Foundation has donated over \$40 million to Australian charities.

The Foundation supports many charitable organisations across Australia, including a diverse range of arts organisations such as: Art Gallery of South Australia, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Belvoir St Theatre, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Sydney Dance Company and West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

Since inception, supporting equitable access to the arts has been a key pillar of The Balnaves Foundation's grant making. Neil Balnaves AO, a prominent figure in the Australian media industry and a passionate philanthropist, was a staunch advocate for the arts for much of his life and believed that access to the arts from an early age was a fundamental right for all Australians. Recognising that economic, geographic, cultural and social barriers prevent many people from engaging with the arts, The Balnaves Foundation has elected to support programs which address these barriers. The Foundation works with diverse arts organisations, enabling them to foster engagement through free or heavily subsidised programs for young people, free exhibitions, and initiatives which support early career or underrepresented arts practitioners.

The Balnaves Foundation supported the *Open House* program at the Sydney Opera House from 2014 – 2017, providing subsidised \$5 tickets to live performances for families facing social and financial hardship. The Adelaide Festival's *Open House* program operates with a similar model, the Foundation has been supporting this program since 2019, during this time over 10,000 subsidised tickets have been redeemed. These access programs, provide disadvantaged individuals and groups the opportunity to experience world-class arts programs they may otherwise miss out on.

One of the Foundation's longest partnerships is with the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA). AGSA's *Neo* program is a free after-hours event held at the Gallery for young people aged 13 – 17. Held 6 times throughout the year, the program creates a safe and exciting space for young people to experience art, participate in a range of creative activities, and express themselves with their peers. *Neo* is programmed by a committee of young people, who gain invaluable experience in planning and administering events, and *Neo* evenings are reflective of their input and voices as a result.

The Foundation is the Strategic Partner of Western-Sydney based creative writing organisation Story Factory, which offers in-school and extra-curricular creative writing programs, helping young people develop the skills and confidence to share their stories. Since 2017, The Balnaves Foundation has supported Story Factory to deliver a series of literacy and creative writing workshops. Story Factory's workshops have been designed by creative writing experts to build writing skills, confidence, and creativity: essential for young people to shape a better future. They are led by professional Storytellers whose passion and expertise provides young people from under-resourced schools and communities a pathway to expressing their voice through creative writing. Story Factory offers a bridge into writing practice that young people from disadvantaged communities may not be able to access.

Through our partners the Foundation regularly witnesses the profound impact that the arts can have on young people, both as audiences and participants. We also recognise the importance of the arts to the Australian national and cultural identity and economy. The arts reflect who we are as a nation, projecting a confident image around the world as well as strengthening our capacities and resilience nationally. 98% of Australians participate in the arts according to independent research commissioned by the Australia Council.

In NSW, the creative sectors represent 10% of the state's economy. The arts inspire and invigorate us, stimulating social connections, good health and wellbeing. Per A New Approach's 2020 *Transformative Impacts of Culture and Society Insight Report*, the arts 'reconnect communities, reduce feelings of isolation, strengthen people's connection to place, provide opportunities for reflection and commemoration, and foster a shared sense of hope and optimism' (p2).

We commend the NSW State Government and the Federal Government for recognising and investing in the importance of the arts in Australia through the *Creative Communities* policy and the National Cultural Policy, *Revive*. These policies acknowledge the contribution of the arts to improving the wellbeing and development of young people and centre the arts industry as a priority for contemporary Australia.

Whilst investing in the Creative Industries in NSW is vital, in order for the arts to flourish it is essential that we not only support the current infrastructure and working artists, but nurture the pipeline of future creatives, arts practitioners and audiences by strengthening arts education in schools and providing equitable access to arts experiences for all young people.

"Right now, there is insufficient exposure to the arts in primary and secondary school teaching. This contributes to a lack of awareness in the numerous career opportunities that are available not just for performers, writers and producers, but also technical, staging, front of house, ticketing, food and beverage, marketing and all the support roles that contribute to a well-rounded cultural experience."
(West Australian Symphony Orchestra)

Young people living in regional and remote areas and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged are less likely to be able to access arts experiences due to cost and location. Schools are the most effective and equitable delivery mechanism to ensure that every student has access to a quality, ongoing and sequential arts education.

Extensive research has been undertaken into the benefit of music education in recent years, thanks primarily to Alberts | The Tony Foundation and their *Music Education: Right from the Start* initiative. In addition to this, further research also shows that arts education, including music, dance, theatre, creative writing and visual arts:

- Increases aptitude in other subjects, including mathematics and languages. 'Music learning is a tool to train the logic and sensory structures and functions of the brain to develop in a highly effective way. It is for this reason that there are strong correlations between academic attainment and music learning'. by Dr Anita Collins, Rachael Dwyer and Aden Date and published by Alberts | The Tony Foundation *Music Education: A Sound Investment*, p17 (2020)
- Helps young people develop and improve social skills, emotional expression, and wellbeing. 'Creative arts programs – including those for music, visual art, dance, photography and writing – have significant potential to ... improve the wellbeing of marginalised youth. These programs facilitate creativity and personal development; increase self-esteem, confidence and social networks; foster a sense of independence and autonomy; and promote resilience by increasing social support and coping skills' Story Factory, *Creative Writing and Wellbeing Literature Review 2023*, p3 – 4 (2023).

- Grows skills crucial to the workplace that can be scarce in other subjects, including critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and leadership, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written communication, accessing and analysing information. 'The evidence shows when students engage with arts and cultural activities in school, they are more likely to develop the adaptability necessary to operate successfully within our evolving labour market. Investment in arts and cultural education will contribute greatly to a future where coming generations of Australians hold their own on the international stage.' A New Approach, *Transformative Impacts of Culture and Society*, p2 (2020)
- Builds curiosity and imagination and empowers students to express themselves and their identity. 'The arts promote understanding of diversity by engaging students with different cultural experiences which are often integrated through the storytelling worlds of Drama and Media Arts, the physical imagination of Dance, the visual escape from the body and self-enablement through Visual Arts, or the aural sanctuary that is created when making or listening to Music.' Kerby, M., Lorenza, L., Dyson, J. et al. *Challenges, implications and the future of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts*. Aust. Educ. Res. 48, p903–904 (2021).

One case study that demonstrates the efficacy of quality, sequential and ongoing music and arts education is the West Australian Symphony Orchestra's (WASO) *Crescendo* program, for which The Balnaves Foundation is the Lead Partner. *Crescendo* offers free weekly music lessons for all students from two disadvantaged primary schools in Kwinana, south of Perth. The program is delivered by music teaching specialists who are qualified musicians, and has shown remarkable results for its participants.

The program has provided significant benefits to the schools and their students, contributing to improved academic performance and social outcomes for the school and broader community, as detailed in the *Crescendo: Music Education Program Case Study*. The report confirms:

- that the socio-economic disadvantage of the participating schools demonstrates a strong social need for programs like *Crescendo* that provide access to unique opportunities early in life that can meaningfully improve people's lives in the long term;
- that the program is able to generate a sense of inclusion and belonging to the community-at-large, beyond those directly participating in the program, including family members, friends and residents of the City of Kwinana who attend *Crescendo* performances;
- the program gives individual students confidence to speak up, define goals and take an active role in decision-making (personal agency), and this was likely to lead to greater academic performance.

Data shows that NAPLAN results rose significantly between 2015 and 2020 for students in the *Crescendo* program, with both schools improving between 10% - 12%. Schools with similar demographics improved by 7% during the same time frame, which indicates that *Crescendo* schools are demonstrating above average improvement in academic results when compared with schools that have similar socio-economic advantage. *Crescendo* is an exemplar of how music education can be integrated in a primary school setting to improve music, development and education outcomes. A copy of the *Crescendo: Music Education Program Case Study* is included alongside this submission.

Story Factory's *Creative Writing and Wellbeing Literature Review 2023* also demonstrates the importance of arts education in improving wellbeing, resilience and a sense of self and cultural identity in young people. Per the review, 'creative writing programs (co)designed for and with marginalised youth can play an important role in improving the wellbeing of participants and

enlivening and diversifying the voices that shape our society's discourse.' (p18). A copy of *Creative Writing and Wellbeing Literature Review 2023* is included alongside this submission.

These two case studies demonstrate that differing arts disciplines also provide different skillsets and benefits. In considering the need for increased arts education in NSW, the arts should be considered as multi-faceted and multi-beneficial, and the curriculum and associated programs should recognise each arts discipline as separate rather than seeing the arts as a homogenous subject.

According to the 2020 *Music Education, A Sound Investment Report* 'often in public primary schools, in order to fit music education alongside the many other Australian Curriculum requirements, children will experience one art form every term.' (Alberts | The Tony Foundation, p21). 'It is arguable that the grouping of music with four other arts disciplines has inevitably reduced the amount of time, value and expertise put towards quality music education for most children in Australia' (p13).

In addition to improving cognitive and social skills, exposure to the arts at a young age also offers the opportunity for all young Australians to see a pathway to lifelong engagement in the creative industries. Young people who participate in the arts at an early age are more likely to continue their involvement in adulthood, attending arts events and supporting this vital part of our economy.

Furthermore, young people who have exposure to the creative industries gain the insight that the arts are a viable career pathway. Seeing professional artists at work, especially those who come from underrepresented and marginalised communities, is game-changing for many young people. Without seeing themselves represented in the arts, these young people struggle to visualise themselves participating in or undertaking careers in the arts.

In order to entertain an arts career a student must first develop an interest and passion for the arts. This might be encouraged through; access to engaging creative experiences and/or performance, realisation that creative careers exist and can provide a rewarding career choice and a belief in one's creative contribution. (National Institute of Dramatic Art)

For [First Nations] students they are seeing their culture practiced and honoured in some of the country's landmark cultural venues, and post-performance a heightened sense of pride and joy is present in the foyer as the children meet and share stories with Bangarra dancers. (Bangarra Dance Theatre)

Investing in the arts through education ensures that we can continue to tell our nation's story and strengthen our strong cultural and storytelling heritage, enriching all Australians through creative expression and bolster Australia's cultural export long into the future. Furthermore, the overarching social benefits of the arts cannot be underestimated. At a time when the nation is emerging from the pandemic and a difficult economic landscape, the need for the sense of community, representation, wellbeing, resilience and joy that the arts can bring has never been greater.

Art is the soul of the country. If we can get the arts arguments across and get the correct government funding, we can make a profound difference in creating something within the spirit of what Australia is about and stop importing it from overseas. (Neil Balnaves AO)

The Balnaves Foundation has long established partnerships with the organisations it supports. Through these relationships we have a strong understanding of the role arts organisations and creative professionals play in education. Consistently, these organisations share with us that their programs offer access to arts skills, resources and industry professionals that schools are unable to offer. Professional arts organisations and creative professionals can share unique insights and experiences directly from the industry, giving students a glimpse into a professional career in the

arts, or their first encounter with an art form for which they will become a lifelong aficionado and audience member.

Our programs fulfill a crucial need that schools often can't address. The intimacy and excitement of live theatre allow students to engage deeply with the material, fostering a greater understanding of the playwright's intention. Experiencing plays come to life off the page offers insights that enhance their learning in ways traditional education cannot match. (Ensemble Theatre)

Mosman Art Gallery sees education in the arts as an essential part of our operations. We offer a range of experiences and art making opportunities that extend the offerings of schools and are unique to the Gallery environment, such access to artists; arts materials; skilled arts instructors and to critical artworks. (Mosman Art Gallery)

Orchestras are an incredible industry resource, with musicians, composers, conductors and other technical, managerial and creative professionals enabling students to access real-world experience and expertise. They provide mentorship, masterclasses, and workshops, providing students with insights into the music and broader arts industry and imparting practical skills and knowledge. (West Australian Symphony Orchestra)

For many students, however, these programs represent the only access they have to arts experiences and education. These programs should complement, not replace, a robust school-based arts education program. The arts, culture and creative industries are keen to co-ordinate with schools, educators, government and philanthropy to introduce young people to the arts, help them build on creative skills and fuel the next generation of creatives.

The organisations we work with have expressed that they value their education programs and see the investment in young people as part of their contribution to Australia's cultural richness. However, without government and philanthropic funding to continue these programs, or funding subsidies for schools to buy into these programs, these organisations would not be able to offer them, especially in the face of economic challenges impacting the creative industries.

Mosman Art Gallery is reliant on obtaining both philanthropic and government support to conduct these services. Without these sources of funding the programs would be severely curtailed or not run at all. (Mosman Art Gallery)

Philanthropy and government support play a crucial role in the success and sustainability of our programs. Without this backing, we would struggle to maintain the necessary funding to deliver impactful experiences ...philanthropic and government contributions are essential in bridging this gap and enabling us to make a meaningful difference in arts education. (Ensemble Theatre)

The Balnaves Foundation believes that philanthropy should be used to test new ideas, explore new possibilities and to challenge the status quo. We feel that government should partner with philanthropy in these innovations but also be positioned to take initiatives and projects seeded by philanthropy and grow them at scale in a sustainable and equitable way, where evidence shows successful outcomes. Government should leverage the access and networks of philanthropy to explore and provide alternative opportunities and pathways to deliver outcomes through different methods or structures to the established ones.

A prime example of program that changed the status quo can be found in Chicago, USA. The Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) was established in response to increased government investment into arts education in public schools and to amplify the impact of that funding to garner philanthropic support. CAPE teaching artists and classroom teachers collaborate to integrate music, visual arts, dance, digital media, and drama into their academic lessons in order to improve academic

and social-emotional outcomes such as creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration skills. For over two decades CAPE has been studying what happens when the arts are placed at the centre of public education. This research shows that arts integration optimises teaching and learning. By partnering teachers and teaching artists, data shows that classrooms increase access to academic success for all learners and especially impacts students from economically disadvantaged communities. Research on CAPE's professional development model reveals that teachers increasingly expand their teaching practices and curriculum design abilities as a result of their participation in CAPE's teacher training programs.

It is our recommendation that the NSW Government reestablish a focus on the arts within the curriculum and ensure that teachers and schools are equipped and supported to deliver a varied and robust program for all school children of a quality, sequential and ongoing nature across all arts disciplines. This should be measured and reported on by school principals and valued equally to academic results.

Furthermore; we believe the Government should provide a catalyst service for schools to be able to access programs provided by arts organisations, arts teaching professionals and industry professionals; by providing funding for schools to engage these organisations and individuals and connecting schools seeking programs with program providers.

Access to the arts is imperative for all. The arts provide a plethora of opportunities for learning, expressionism, development, community and creativity. Ensuring that children and young people are exposed to the diversity and inclusivity of the arts from an early age and maintaining it throughout their education and into adulthood is of the utmost importance now and into the future.