

1 May 2020

The Hon. Paul Fletcher, MP
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts
Suite 1, Level 2, 280 Pacific Highway
Lindfield, NSW, 2070

Dear Minister,

RE: Impact of Four-Year Funding on Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) and Youth Arts.

We write to request an urgent meeting to discuss Australia's youth arts industry.

In this latest round of Australia Council operational funding, the youth theatre sector once again bore the brunt of cuts to federal government investment. Five of Australia's largest, most successful companies will be defunded as of 2022. The rationale that has been offered to these companies does not reference a failure in vision, delivery, achievement or compliance with selection criteria. The reason given by the Australia Council is: "There is not enough money to go around".

In a nation of over 4.7 million children there are now only three federally funded companies touring work for young audiences and four creating work with young people.

Over the past ten years the Australia Council has withdrawn funding from:

Australian Theatre for Young People; Arena Theatre Company; Backbone Youth Arts; Barking Gecko Theatre; Canberra Youth Theatre; Cirkidz; Jigsaw Theatre Company; Lowdown; Monkey Baa Theatre Company; Outback Theatre for Young People; PACT; Platform Youth Arts; Polyglot Theatre; Platform Youth Theatre; Riverland Youth Theatre, Shopfront Theatre; Slingsby; St Martins Theatre; Urban Myth Theatre of Youth; Southern Edge Youth Theatre; and the peak body, Young People and the Arts Australia.

This latest round of cuts has a significant and urgent impact on the Australian artists and audiences. In 2019, between them, the five theatre companies that have just been defunded:

- Employed **630** staff
- Performed to an audience of **78,890** adults and children
- Involved **45,929** young people in workshops and creative learning

The decline in investment in Australia's youth theatre industry reflects a dire decline in Australia's cultural life. There isn't a sporting code in the world that would say: "There isn't enough money for our sport, we need to cut our youth programs." That is what is happening in our theatre industry.

The evidence for investing in the youth theatre sector is unequivocal:

- The sector offers a career development pipeline that fuels our theatre and film industries
- Youth theatre directly addresses 'community building' and 'mental health' – two of Australia's most pressing whole-of-government priorities.
- The youth sector is amongst our most successful cultural exports - nine theatre companies regularly tour North America, Europe and Asia
- Youth theatre is integral to the development of future audiences - in a study released by the USA 78% of regular theatre goers attended theatre as children.

In 2017 an independent report by Arts data specialists Patternmakers questioned whether there were any measurable benefits from young people participating in drama activities. The report surveyed 1,200 past and present youth theatre participants. It found:

- 94% identified a positive impact on their overall wellbeing
- 88% identified improved ability to work in a team

- 71% identified increased resilience in coping with challenges
- 52% identified improved anxiety levels

The systematic cuts to Australia Council have made the role of this federal funding body impossible. The latest round of cuts reflect an organisation that with all the will in the world, is not able to meet its primary purpose: to “enrich the lives of **Australians** and their communities by supporting the creation and enjoyment of the arts.” If young people are our future we are failing them, and by extension, ourselves.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this issue in greater detail.

Yours faithfully,



Fraser Corfield
Artistic Director
Australian Theatre for Young People



Amanda Wright
General Manager
Australian Theatre for Young People



Helen Hristofski
CEO/Executive Producer
Barking Gecko Theatre



Luke Kerridge
Artistic Director
Barking Gecko Theatre



Sue Giles AM
Artistic Director/Co CEO
Polyglot Theatre



Viv Rosman
Executive Director/Co CEO
Polyglot Theatre



Daniel Potter
Executive Director/CEO
Shopfront Arts Co-op



Natalie Rose
Creative Director
Shopfront Arts Co-op



Nadja Kostich
Artistic Director/CoCEO
St Martins Youth Arts Centre



Kerry O'Sullivan
Executive Director/CoCEO
St Martins Youth Arts Centre