

What? National Youth Arts Summit: *Future Proofing Arts + Culture*
Where? CARCLEW HOUSE, 11 Jeffcott Street, Karna Country, North Adelaide SOUTH AUSTRALIA
When? Friday 6th October, 2017

Background:

January 2015: National Youth Theatre Forum Retreat, Bundanon (NSW)

In January 2015, the youth theatre sector initiated a National Youth Theatre Forum Retreat (funded by the Australia Council for the Arts). It was held to support the sector as it prepared for the abolition of the Youth Program Fund later that year and the need to compete with wider professional performing arts companies.

July 2016: Youth Arts Summit, Hawkesbury River (NSW)

Subsequently, in 2016, the Australia Council for the Arts hosted a Youth Arts Summit on the Hawkesbury River. The 2016 summit brought people from across all forms of youth arts practice; people making work with children and young people; and/or work for child and youth audiences; and/or identifying as independent arts makers under 30 years of age; in all genres of artistic practice and cultural expression.

2016 saw nationwide funding cuts across the mainstream middle-tier sector of funded arts companies. It is widely recognized that 'youth arts' is the breeding ground for the next leaders within the national arts and cultural industries. The youth arts sector was bearing the brunt of funding cuts at State and Federal level. There was nation-wide concern that the youth performing arts sector may go the same way as the youth dance sector and disappear from the cultural conversation.

October 2017: National Youth Arts Summit (SA)

Carclew convened the 2017 National Youth Arts Summit to ensure that the momentum of the previous years was not lost. The program for the day was built from the discussions and reflections of previous gatherings and a nationwide sector survey about possible thematic directions.

The consultations and survey results indicated that the national sector was ready for conversations about the strategies and actions required to claim its vital importance within the national framework of the arts; education; health; and social enterprise. The key questions, fundamental to Carclew's program planning were:

- How do we articulate the social and health benefits of youth arts engagement?
- What's 'our role' in seeding the creativity and lifelong curiosity necessary to thrive?
- Partnerships as alternative sources of income and holistic collaboration – what works when and why?
- How can Australian youth arts respectfully support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural processes and artistic philosophies?
- What are young artists pioneering?
- What is happening at the nexus of social enterprise and artistic practice?

Exactly 100 delegates from across Australia attended the 2017 gathering at Carclew.

Karna Elder, Uncle Yerloburka Lewis O'Brien, gave Welcome to Country. 'Uncle Lewis' spoke about Karna education principles; one of them being pertinent to the idea of 'conference'. It was the importance of thinking twice. The brain has two parts; if the brain thinks twice, let it. One side is the thought. The other side is action.

In her Opening Address: *The Voice of the Child*, Inaugural SA Commissioner for Children & Young People, Helen Connolly spoke about the importance of sincerely listening to children. She gave a summary of the extensive 'listening tour' she has undertaken, the early findings that have surfaced as a result, and the ongoing work she will undertake to ensure SA's children and young people know she has heard them and will respond accordingly.

Future Proofing: Artistic Director, Australian Theatre for Young People, Fraser Corfield.

Fraser gave a statistical snapshot of the horror funding-cull across the last 10 years and the resulting “evolve or die” shift that has taken place as companies attempt to rise for the ashes. ATYP recruited Pattern Makers, a research group who specialise in statistical arts data, seeking to know: What impact, if any, does youth arts have on young people’s mental health? He presented the findings and encouraged delegates to consider ways to capture the broader social health and mental wellbeing benefits of their work as they continue to advocate the benefits of youth arts engagement.

Trailblazers: Working Group Leader, Arts Front *Under 30s* 2018 National Summit, Sara Strachan & General Manager, The Young Company, Leigh Boswell.

Leigh picked up on Fraser’s mental health thread and highlighted the alarming Mission Australia statistics of the last 6 years. She said, “when the defunding of our sector happened, so did the social infrastructure for our creative pathways with the nation’s young people.” Leigh went on to question what links our work to mental health and social wellbeing, and asked us to consider our civic responsibility to children and young people and their ongoing social development. Leigh was followed by Sara, who delivered a bold and brave assessment of what it’s like to be a young leader in the contemporary ‘national youth arts scene’ and pushed the sector to dig deeper and work harder at improving youth participation at leadership levels.

Collaborations: Deputy Chair of the Australia Council for the Arts, Lee-Ann Tjunipa Buckskin.

Lee-Ann stated, “collaboration is embedded in indigenous cultural practice – it represents a millennia of trial and error, testing and listening to the bonds of people and landscape”. She highlighted the ATSI journey from ‘self-determination’ in the 70’s to the 2017 Heart of the Nation gathering at Uluru, the lessons learnt from that journey and the deep collaborative efforts and spirit still needed for that evolving story. Lee-Ann outlined how indigenous communities have the lived practice and solutions for putting arts and culture at the centre of society. She discussed the frameworks she has used to determine definitions of collaboration and proposed the challenge: to listen to each other and not muscle for power; to see the authentic collaborative methods of the first nations peoples as a platform to offer the absolute national framework: federal government.

First Nation Voices: Artistic Director, Digi Youth Arts, Alethea Beetson

Alethea wrapped the morning provocations by acknowledging the role that arts has on the lands and continues to have. She wove a strong thread of thought about how we can create a long sighted arts and cultural vision for young people and how important it is for us to “take lots of little steps” as we make the futures of our children’s, children better. Alethea acknowledged the role that indigenous people (“past, present and future elders”) are taking towards “decolonising arts practice, reclaiming our ways, and continuing our ways so that our arts will no longer be a Crown pleaser; anthropological spectacle of ‘the other’, or continue to be appropriated by the mainstream, which often thrives on denial or exclusion of indigenous knowledge”. Her provocation was to get us thinking about how this rich reclamation is a model for empowering children and young people in determining their own stories and expression.

Between morning tea and lunch, delegates moved into Breakout Sessions covering one of the four core focus points (above). These sessions gave delegates an opportunity to dig deeper into the themes and contribute their thinking and perspectives.

After lunch, the entire delegation was wrangled (Kate Gould, champion!) into Speed Strategic Visioning! This was the meaty work. Forward planning. National thinking. Strategies, with actions!

- VISION:
By 2022, Australia is acknowledged as an international leader in youth arts; valued by the community, government and the corporate sector.
- 1. OBJECTIVE 1: 'VALUE':
The community, government, corporate sector, and young people understand, enjoy, and celebrate youth arts in all its evolving diversity.
- 2. OBJECTIVE 2: 'EFFECTIVE & EFFICIENT':
Australia's national Youth Arts sector is regarded as effective and efficient.
- 3. OBJECTIVE 3: 'FIRST NATION VOICE':
Australia's youth arts sector is highly regarded for its First Nations' representation.
- 4. OBJECTIVE 4: 'FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY':
Youth Arts are flourishing and sustainable, with increased government funding and other sources of income.

The 2017 National Youth Arts Summit concluded with a firm commitment to face the challenges, celebrate the collegiate vibe of our sector, and create the future!

Delegates were sent off, giddy and chatty, into sunset drinks by the warm fire-braziers, to enjoy a highlight intimate performance by the nationally award winning, internationally recognized, South Australian youth arts supported, sublime and fierce duo, ELECTRIC FIELDS.

Following the gathering, Sue Giles (Polyglot), Fraser Corfield (ATYP) and Helen Hristofski (Barking Gecko), with hosting support from Australian Theatre Network, created an [e-newsletter](#) that is committed to continuing the collegiate networking and national action planning resulting from the 2017 National Youth Arts Summit.

Moving forward, Carclew is dedicated to working alongside other state representatives to establish a National Working Group (virtual). Anyone interested in contributing in any way to this working group or sub-committee/s is encouraged to say "I'll be a rep for my state/territory/lands/people!" and let Hannah Allert at Carclew know your area/level of interest and all of your contact details. You can email Hannah at hallert@carclew.org.au

But we're not finished yet! - After the full moon sank on another national gathering, the sun rose for 24 fabulous, blurry eyed delegates, who returned to Carclew House on Saturday to participate in a back-to-basics Masterclass. **MASTERCLASS: The Artistry of the Youth Arts Facilitator, Saturday 7th October, Carclew House, 10am-2pm** Led by four leading South Australian youth arts practitioners, this four hour back-on-the-floor workshop was so jammed packed full of energy and vibrancy, it was, as they say, a hit!

The facilitators were:

- Eliza Lovell **Independent CCD practitioner**
- Edwin Atrill **ActNow Theatre**
- Ruby Chew **Independent visual artist**
- Nick O'Connor **Northern Sound System**

To keep the conversation going and the shared toolkit growing, the group have created an online forum/network for each other.