



REVIVE Evaluation Report Year Two, 2022

SOMEBODY'S DAUGHTER THEATRE COMPANY

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Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company

REVIVE Evaluation Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

'Revive' is a two-year project supported by RISE funding from the Australian Government.

What is the 'Revive' project? *Grant application short description of project:*

"(The) revival of Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company's (SDTC) offspring program – Nobody's Fool Theatre – an arts led, fulltime education program targeting disengaged, marginalised youth in Geelong. REVIVE will produce new performances/digital media spotlighting teenage mental health and pro-social supports. Work will be performed in Geelong, Melbourne and NE Victoria. Young emerging artists will be employed to perform and facilitate workshops alongside the experienced senior SDTC artists."

This document reports on the **final year** of this funded project – exploring what was done, how it was done and the outcomes from varied perspectives.

1.1 WHO IS NOBODY'S FOOL THEATRE?

Nobody's Fool Theatre (NFT) is a fulltime, creatively led education program for marginalised and disadvantaged young people in the Geelong area. Many have histories of abuse, trauma and multiple suspensions and expulsions from mainstream schools and/or have simply not attended for some time – in some cases, years. NFT is a partnership initiative, launched in 2016 between the Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company (SDTC) and Newcomb Secondary College.

NFT offers participants a safe and inclusive learning environment where they work toward Victorian Curriculum outcomes in the Arts, English, and Mathematics. Individual Learning Plans and personal projects may also generate outcomes in other learning areas. Intensive workshops are conducted by SDTC artists throughout the year in drama, music, dance, multi-media and script development. A Young Persons Advocate, employed by SDTC, attends to the physical and mental health needs of each student.

All NFT students are enrolled with Newcomb Secondary College. They receive one on one/small group support from a teacher at the home base of the NFT program - an arts space in R.S. & S. Old Woollen Mill, Geelong.

Enrolment in NFT requires a commitment by the young person to participate in the arts/theatre program, along with undertaking their education studies. Their stories become the basis for their own original plays, which they perform around the state – in schools, in theatres, in small rooms; to conferences, to educators, to health professionals, to youth workers, to students, to other marginalised teenagers – to the general public.

It is the creative arts led by Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company (SDTC) which is the fulcrum around which all else revolves.

1.2 NOBODY'S FOOL THEATRE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Re-engage mainstream school refusers through an intensive arts-led education program

Increase understanding of reasons for disengagement & motivate more inclusive practice to better meet needs of young people

Painting by Nobody's Fool Theatre student 2022



"I started and painted over and restarted and painted over this piece about three times. My first attempt was a light shining up on a vase with sunflowers, with a quote from my nan which said, "You've got this girl" ... not long before she passed away very recently. The bars eventually became a rainbow which represents light and also reminds me of my lines in our show, 'Walking miles to find the end of the rainbow.'" Olivia Yr 10



2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Key features:

- respectful of the privacy and individual circumstances of each participant (appropriate)
- a process done *with* them not *to* them based on a relationship of mutual trust (participatory)
- the 'voice' of participants is the major feature of content
- an inclusive, non-judgemental process
- informed by the egalitarian principles of empowerment evaluation¹

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection processes are used including:

- semi structured interviews/reviews with artists, project staff, management, and participants
- questionnaires to participants and partner representatives
- focus groups with program participants
- personal writings and drawings of participants
- audience surveys at performances/workshops
- quantitative record-keeping (e.g. attendance records)
- documentary photographs/film taken throughout project

The methodology employed is a combination of Narrative, Empowerment, Program Evaluation and Storytelling².

Storytelling is becoming an increasingly accepted tool for evaluation. It is the basis of the Most Significant Change³ model and many others. As a tool it enables more nuanced insights into the processes which lead to program outcomes.

Personal stories provide information that is not easily classified or categorised yet yield invaluable information which can illuminate why certain interventions have been successful.

Stories have been used to identify issues, support program review and help participants reflect and make sense of their own experiences.

These stories are a valuable way to communicate to readers of research/evaluation reports the complex web of factors that have motivated change that often defy simple graphical representation.

The stories as told by program participants within this report, illustrate how and in what context certain outcomes have been achieved.

NFT is about personal, attitudinal and social change on a range of levels. Such change is complex and multi-dimensional and only fully understood when the story behind the statistics is unveiled.

1 Fetterman, David M., Empowerment Evaluation, (2001) Sage Publications,

2 Krueger, R A Professor. Using Storytelling in Research (2015) University of Minnesota retrieved from <https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/stories>

3 Most Significant Change Technique , Davies R and Dart J (2002)

2.1 REPORT PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- present a clear picture of how the Revive Project was delivered in 2022 and the outcomes achieved within a broader evidence-based context
- motivate action based on the information provided

As articulated by leading internationally recognised Researcher and Evaluator Professor Emeritus Richard Krueger.⁴

"I have spent much of my career listening to people tell their stories in focus groups and individual interviews. People's stories have made me laugh, made me cry, made me angry, and kept me awake.

Quantitative data have never once led me to shed a tear or spend a sleepless night.

Numbers may appeal to my head, but they don't grab my heart. I believe that if you want people to do something with your research findings, you have to snatch their attention, and one way to do that is through stories."

Voices and stories featuring prominently in this report are

- Numerous students past and present, from Nobody's Fool Theatre
- Maud Clark AM – CEO and Co-Artistic Director of Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company
- Emma Boschetti – Teacher at Nobody's Fool Theatre

NFT students performing 2022.



⁴ <https://www.cehd.umn.edu/olpd/people/rkrueger/>

3. REVIVE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

(from submitted Workplan)

ACTIVITY	OUTCOME
<p>1. Education -Marginalised disadvantaged young people (12-18 years) from Greater Geelong re-engage in arts-led full time education at Nobody's Fool Theatre (NFT). Teacher delivers Victorian education curricula at appropriate year levels. All students enrolled at Newcomb Secondary College.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 -14 young people enrolled per annum. • <75% attendance; • <75% successful completion school year. • <90% feel increase in confidence; 100% feel safe,
<p>2. Creative Arts program delivered as core part of education curricula. Young people engage in intensive theatre, script-devising, music, dance, art, film skills workshops.</p> <p>Five sessions p/wk. Five Core-artists employed ongoing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arts provide platform for vulnerable young people from economically/socially underprivileged areas to have their voice heard on issues that impact them • creative skills development • increased self-esteem, ability to work as team • participate in live performances in Geelong and other areas
<p>3. North East Victoria Outreach Program - creative workshop delivery to communities in rural North East Victoria where partnerships already exist. The project will focus on empowering disadvantaged young people with the skills to create quality artistic works in their own towns</p> <p>Facilitated by team of 4 established SDTC artists and 4 emerging artists</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young people have platform for their voice to be heard via theatre/digital media. Positive response to the performance. • <65% NE workshop participants see process through from workshop to completed performance
<p>4. Training and employment opportunities for young emerging artists with SDTC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employment stability, intensive skills development and ongoing mentorship from flagship company enables safe passage for artists in their early careers. This investment also increases the resilience and sustainability of SDTC for the future.
<p>5. Creation of new performance & digital works with focus on youth mental health and other issues of concern as nominated by young people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum 6 performances of new play over 2 years Geelong, Northeast Vic, Melbourne • Motivate improved understanding of issues facing marginalised young people particularly those in regional and rural areas

4. ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Activities One and Two represent the main components of Nobody's Fool Theatre (NFT). This program seeks to reengage some of Geelong's most disadvantaged young people in secondary education, within the context of an intensive creative arts program led by Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company.

NFT 2022 PARTICIPANT PROFILE

65% had been school refusers for more than 12 months upon entry to program.

48% displayed severe behavioural and anger issues at mainstream leading to regular suspensions

20% students identified as Aboriginal.

90% students were from a low socio-economic status household.

25% reported being homeless at some stage in their life

12% have been in out of home or kinship care.

84% of students had dropped out/disengaged with mainstream school in Year 7, the remaining 16% had spasmodic attendance before exiting in Year 9 or 10.

100% have mental health issues. 90% suffer from extreme anxiety and a third of those have diagnosed PTSD. Other conditions include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, oppositional defiance disorder and bipolar. According to Beyond Blue 13.9% of children and young people in the general population (aged 4 to 17 years) met the criteria for a diagnosis of a mental disorder in the last 12 months.⁵ At Nobody's Fool Theatre, these numbers can be multiplied more than **6 times**.

At the beginning of the program, **75%** expressed fear of speaking in public yet 95% developed the skills and confidence to participate in public performances in December.

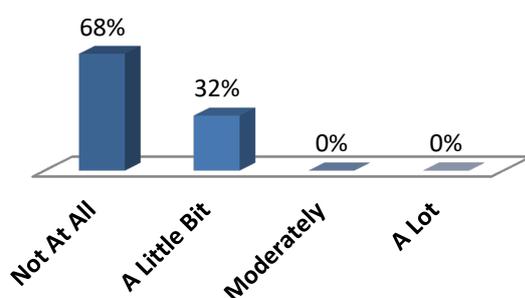
Many of the young people have parents with mental health and/or addiction issues.

In the student survey at the end of 2022:

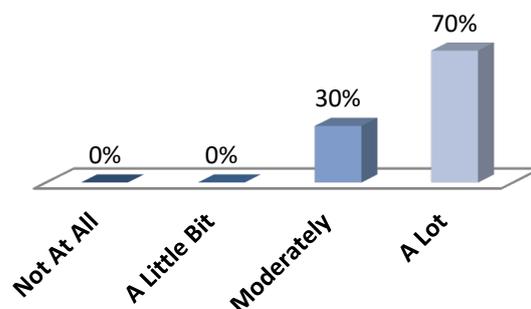
- 100% reported feeling **more confident**, happier and cared about since coming to NFT.
- 90% felt they now worked well as part of a team.
- 92% responded that they felt they now had a better future
- 86% had goals to complete Year 12, and 14% to secure an apprenticeship/traineeship.
- 100% reported feeling **safe**, connected and improvement in wellbeing at NFT

Student attitudes to the importance of education significantly changed after attending NFT, as the graphs below indicate:

Importance of Education Before NFT



Importance of Education NOW



⁵ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/statistics> accessed Dec, 2019 The Mental Health Of Children And Adolescents. Report on The Second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey Of Mental Health And Wellbeing. Canberra: Department of Health.

4.1 ACTIVITY ONE: NFT EDUCATION OUTCOMES

During 2022, 13 students were enrolled in NFT including 7 new enrolments.

There were 8 core students with an average attendance rate of 82%.

100% of these NFT students successfully completed their studies with the program.

It was a much younger cohort than in 2021. 75% of students were in Year 9 or below. There were no students undertaking Year 12.

Of the 5 who left during the year, one relocated to a new area for kinship care, three successfully transitioned back to mainstream school and another to a more appropriate alternative setting in Geelong.

These successful transitions were a highlight of the year.

Prior to enrolment, 65% had been school refusers for more than 12 months and 100% had significant mental health issues.

Given this, the retention and educational outcomes are exceptional.

OVERVIEW

An individualised timetable developed by the teacher, in collaboration with SDTC community artists and the Young Person's Advocate provides a Learning Plan for each young person. This includes a large variety of activities, including theatre, music, dance, art and crafts, multimedia workshops and set education tasks from the Victorian Curriculum.

Physical activities included weekly CrossFit sessions at the local gymnasium and wellness walks along the Barwon River. Healthy lifestyle education included strategies for managing emotional health, healthy nutrition sessions with a dietician and safe sex education.

There were a range of excursions in 2022 - to Lorne, the You Yangs and to Melbourne to visit the Aquarium and see the stage show, *Hamilton*.

A range of appointments were negotiated as needed. The Young Person's Advocate/SDT staff transport students to (and accompany them, if required) to these appointments. The following services were accessed in the past twelve months – General Practitioners, Counsellors; Psychologists; Dentists; Optometrists; Naturopaths; Headspace; Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre; Child Protection; Orange Door; Police and Legal Aid.

Pictured: Students at one of their weekly gym sessions. Students involved in a collaborative team building "Marshmallow Tower activity"



LEARNING AND COVID – THE CONTEXT

The 2021 Revive Evaluation Report contained a significant section on the consequences of Covid and lockdowns, on the program. It was a major success of NFT, to **remain connected** to students during remote learning given the well documented disadvantage of remote learning for young people such as those enrolled at NFT. *“The achievement gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students widened at triple the rate in remote schooling compared to regular class.”* (Julie Sonnemann and Peter Goss, Gratten Institute 2020)

There were no lockdowns during 2022, but the impact of Covid lingered. The majority of students and staff and/or family members contracted the virus – particularly in the first half of the year. Other illnesses such as influenza were rife. This caused serious disruptions to all aspects of the program. Maud Clark– *“For more than six months, I don’t think there was one day when all students and staff were present.”*

The Covid impact on rates of school attendance and school refusal have been an impetus for the Federal Government to launch a Senate inquiry into the national trend of increasing rates of school refusal or “School Can’t” as distinct from truancy. The final report is due at the end of March 2023.⁶

According to experts who have made public submissions to the Inquiry, the numbers of children of compulsory school age not enrolled in any school could be anywhere up to **100,000**. (Professor Watterson, Melb Uni – Crikey Dec 15)

School attendance was not the only repercussion of the Covid ‘hangover’.

A number of studies released during 2022, document a post pandemic decline in the **mental health** of children and young people, including a major report from the Australian Bureau of Statistics: National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing.⁷

In particular, the level of anxiety disorders has significantly increased. Globally they have doubled⁸ The largest mental health school-based research study in Australia, has revealed 75% of Year 8 students reported a worsening of mental health following COVID and in another COVID-specific study, one in three children and adolescents reported very high levels of emotional symptoms and one in five reported clinically significant anxiety and depressive symptoms.⁹

100% of NFT students already suffer from significant mental ill health. NFT staff have all reported an exacerbation of these existing issues in students and increased fatigue themselves, as front line workers.

School disengagement and refusal is higher in those experiencing a range of risk factors including low socio-economic status and geographic location. It is reasonable to surmise that school refusals since the pandemic are disproportionately affecting those already experiencing disadvantage.¹⁰ Anecdotally, many alternative education programs such as NFT, have had increased referrals and waiting lists for enrolment.

Even before COVID-19, Australia’s high rate of disengagement from education was being described as a national crisis.¹¹

6 https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/SchoolRefusal/Terms_of_Reference

7 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release>

8 14. Racine, N., et al., Global prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents during COVID-19: A meta-analysis. JAMA Pediatrics, 2021. 12

9 Sicouri, G., March, S., Pellicano, E., De Young, A. C., Donovan, C. L., Cobham, V. E., ... & Hudson, J. L (2022). Mental health symptoms in children and adolescents during COVID-19 in Australia. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry

10 Hemphill, S. A., Toubourou, J. W., Smith, R., Kendall, G. E., Rowland, B., Freiberg, K., & Williams, J. W. (2010). Are Rates of School Suspension Higher in Socially Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods? An Australian Study. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 21(1), 12–18.

11 Dr J Watterston and Megan O’Connell ,THOSE WHO DISAPPEAR: THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION PROBLEM NOBODY WANTS TO TALK about, Uni of Melbourne, 2019

“The pandemic has shone an unforgiving light on a crucial and long-standing deficiency in Australia’s education system – a systematic undervaluing of the importance of student wellbeing and engagement.”¹²

Several submissions to the current Senate Inquiry - including those from Beyond Blue, the School Refusal Clinic and Prof Jim Watterson – Dean of the Melbourne University Graduate School of Education, have made recommendations for the resourcing of *“alternative education-based programs that cater for the complex presentations of school refusal clients that don’t fit into existing mainstream settings.”¹³*

NFT has again demonstrated the value of such programs.

A FLEXIBLE EDUCATION MODEL

Nobody’s Fool Theatre is a flexible learning space with extensive educational adjustments that supports up to 12 students at one time. Newcomb Secondary College is responsible for the employment of the teacher and overall administration of all education components – including provision of curriculum frameworks, monitoring of learning progress and reporting to parents/carers.

Students who are identified as eligible for the program range from long term school refusers to those at mainstream but with low-attendance, severe behavioural concerns and/or general wellbeing issues. (e.g. anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder.)

NFT aims to connect students back into education through negotiated Individual Learning Plans in a supportive arts-led environment. Hours of participation are negotiated each term with each student and their parents/guardians, establishing goals to increase their confidence and commitment to learning over time. There is an essential literacy and numeracy focus plus an emphasis on building the social and emotional learning skills (SEL) needed to re-engage with mainstream classes.

NFT recognises that relationships and consistency are essential for educational and social engagement. The small team approach ensures that each student’s individual needs are better understood and goals for building personal capacity are targeted directly towards the students’ needs. There is an average of approx. 8 students present in each class and a minimum of two staff members in the room. Both the classroom and drama space have a consistent structure that allows for predictability. These clear expectations support students to develop a repertoire of learning habits needed to have positive interactions in a learning environment.

Both the classroom teacher and SDTC’s Young Person’s Advocate have trained in the Berry Street Educational Model (BSEM)¹⁴ and use this specialist understanding to support the students in the space. The BSEM social and emotional curriculum is explicitly taught at NFT.

All NFT students have highly complex needs derived from a range of factors including severe mental health issues, backgrounds of trauma and poverty, and unstable, sometimes volatile living situations. Some have parent/s with significant mental/physical health disorders, and/or addictions. It is not unusual for NFT students to be carers for young siblings at home.

Parent Perspective

“Coming here to school, to performing - gives her a break away from home and all that’s there. People say that H is an old soul. She’s not an old soul. She has just had to grow up fast.

She cares for me. Mentally, physically, money-wise – she does the shopping for me – gets my medication. She cooks dinner.

¹² Save the Children submission to Senate Inquiry accessed January, 2023

¹³ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/SchoolRefusal/Submissions

¹⁴ <https://www.berrystreet.org.au/learning-and-resources/berry-street-education-model>

I've got bi polar, depression and paranoia if I go out of the house. I'm lucky if I get up to have a shower during the day.

It's the same for other kids here. Maybe it's looking after their younger brothers and sisters or maybe it's looking after their mentally ill mum like H does. Nobody's Fool gives her that break in life. And other kids too. That break away from having to be adults – of being away from issues like drugs and violence.

I've had domestic violence for 22 years. Self-mutilation from husband – alcoholic, schizophrenic. All the kids have got PTSD. I've got PTSD. And to tell you the truth I've never self-cared but tried to look after the children. I had 4 children. The first at 18.

They have nothing at home. They are the adult at home. And when they come here – that mind space is gone. They can be kids. They don't have to worry about their brothers and sisters or their mentally ill mum or their dad stabbing himself. They come here and they are allowed to freely express themselves."

When young people are coming from home situations like this, it is no wonder some cannot make it to the mainstream school gate nevertheless actually go *through* it, enter a classroom with twenty-five other students and just concentrate on their studies.

Student Perspective

OD 16 years. Has been at NFT for three years.

"Mainstream was horrible for me. I got into detention nearly every day. Often got suspended. I was a very angry violent kid. I would scream and yell and knock people about. I did whatever I wanted because I thought I was the Queen of School, and nobody could do anything about it. I thought that was cool – I thought I was 'cool as'. But I look back now, and I am completely embarrassed. I think who was that girl?

If I hadn't come here I would have got expelled or just dropped out. If it wasn't for Emma and the way she was able to teach me there is no way I could do school. I was very very behind when I came but Emma has helped me to catch up and I have just finished some subjects of VCE Year 11. It feels amazing. There is no way I thought I would have got this far.

Doing the drama along with the schoolwork stuff has given me much better coping skills to deal with my anger.

Like it's still there and sometimes I really feel it welling up inside of me but now I have the capabilities to not just let it happen. I tell myself that it's really not worth it. I would never have done that before. And walking away helps. That lets me kind of cool down. And I can go outside and just scream a bit. And that is better than taking it out on a person which is what I used to do all the time."

TL 16 years. Has been at NFT for three years.

"I came to Nobody's Fool because I had really bad anxiety. I couldn't get myself out of my room. I tried a number of times to go to mainstream but I'd get to the school gate and I'd have a really bad anxiety attack so I would just have to go home. It was so bad I was really, really physically sick not just mentally.

I was so behind. But when I came here, Emma the teacher would assign the work to where I was up to and help me with all the things that I had missed or didn't get to learn.

Now I'm so proud, I just finished my Year 11 VCE. And I'm going on to do Year 12 VCAL; next year. No way would I have finished school if I hadn't come to Nobody's Fool and now I've just got one more year to go."

When asked where she thought she would be now if not for NFT, TL replied:

"I don't know. I'd probably still be in my room. I just can't imagine. I know that sounds ridiculous but I can't imagine anything else."

AC 15 years – one year at NFT

"Because I moved around quite a lot when I was young – I missed out on fundamentals, so I was really quite behind. I was told I was useless. So what's the point of trying? My grades were terrible. I was really struggling. And I got picked on because I had different mannerisms to everybody else. I used to get picked on by other kids for how I dressed ... how I styled my hair .. type of music I listened to. Anything they found me different in – they went me.

I felt physically ill when it came time to go to school. I'd be sick and stress myself out. I didn't want to stress out my mum so I'd (pretend to) go but I'd actually wag school. And then some bad things happened when I was out of school .. and I kinda went back a bit and I got introduced to this program and yeh.. life kinda changed.

When I first came to Nobody's Fool I thought I was a failure. I thought I was going to get nowhere, but here I've been told that I'm actually quite smart – I just needed to be bridged with a few of the main things I didn't know were holding me back.

What I love is the drama here. It has really helped with my confidence. People have given me compliments and that's amazing I can start to feel good about myself and think maybe I CAN do something."

Teacher Perspective

"He (AC) clearly felt a failure and identified himself as dumb. It was incredibly difficult to get him motivated about schoolwork even with something he was interested in. He had been totally crushed by the education system and been bullied relentlessly by peers.

The drama is his thing. He has thrived with the creative. He's finally got something that he is proud of and he can do really well."

The positive experiences with drama and performing have been a major factor in giving AC the confidence to move forward in his studies.

The Assistant Principal from Newcomb Secondary College was effusive in his observations of AC's progress since going to NFT.

"He's just a different person. (Its) .. absolutely extraordinary the transformation he's made at NFT, in every aspect of his being – he looks well, his eyes are bright. He's interacting with people confidently. He looks less tired. He looks like he's not staying awake at night with anxiety. It has been a change that has manifested itself in every aspect of his presentation and interaction with others. Since joining NFT he seems to be feeling a kind of connection, of belonging, engagement that he never had with mainstream education."

One of the features of NFT is that all students are picked up from their current place of living and taken to the program site at the Old Woollen Mills in Geelong. They are also taken home each afternoon.

Teacher:

"I think maybe 20% of families if we are lucky would get kids here if we didn't pick them up. Many aren't ready. For example, last week Laura (Young Persons

It's extraordinary the transformation he's made at NFT. He seems to be feeling a kind of connection, .. engagement that he never had with mainstream education.

ASST PRINCIPAL

Advocate) had to go into a student's bedroom (at request of parent) to convince her to come out and get into the car. That's an example of how you have to go over and above what you might do in mainstream with these kids. Here's someone saying 'I don't want to go. I don't want to go'. And Laura had to keep conversing with her and finally convince her to get in the car and come to school. Which she did.

And then there are the text messages. For example, Laura might get a text saying blah blah is not coming to school tomorrow. Laura will never say 'Ah OK that's fine.' You could easily just go with that. It's the path of least resistance and it is easy. But you have to go and have the difficult conversations and keep pushing.

A teacher can tick boxes and say 'I made contact with that family 3 times each week over 6 weeks and they didn't respond.' And you do that to be accountable but to actually go beyond those superficial contacts and have those difficult conversations is what is required. In mainstream when you have so many students – there simply is not the time.

I feel this program is constantly pushing above and beyond in that relentless way. You just have to keep pushing, keep pushing. And that is exhausting but it is that deeper level that's required. It's not just about meeting the requirements of duty of care.

I think the kids want you to keep pushing. It means they matter. You care."

And when they do arrive at NFT, the majority are many years behind in their learning.



Teacher:

"Most of them are aged thirteen or fourteen when they first come in here but they are at Year Four or Five level or lower in literacy and numeracy. For some students that is because of years of physically missing school and for others, they have actually been at school - but haven't been engaged even though they have been attending."

This is NOT a reflection of their abilities. Nor is it a reflection of particular mainstream schools or the endeavours of teachers within them

It is a reflection of the current Australian **meritocratic education system**. This system assumes that all students of roughly the same age begin a school year at the same starting point.

A Year 7 curriculum spells out what every Year 7 student is expected to be taught and learn. The assessment processes are based on common standards students are expected to reach. This system is assumed to be fair and equitable because all students follow the same curriculum and are assessed by the same standards.

This is a fallacy as eloquently explored by Professor Geoff Masters – CEO of the Australian Council for Educational Research in *The Equity Myth*.¹⁵

This myth is based on the false assumption that all students begin a school year on an equal footing. Masters:

“Instead of beginning on the same starting line, students begin each school year widely spread along the running track. Despite this, they are all judged against the same finish line: the year-level curriculum expectations.”

As he explains, students already starting behind the curriculum ‘blocks’ are usually the ones who have other multiple factors of disadvantage. The NFT students are clear examples of this.

Their previous common experience of schooling is to start at the ‘back of the pack’ and get further behind. Is it any wonder they disengage?

Unsurprisingly, ALL NFT students lack confidence. Academic failure is their norm. Motivating them to even attempt tasks is a significant hurdle. It is only when they have experienced some success and can see they are making progress that fear of more failure starts to dissipate.

At NFT, assessment is not a competitive process. Their learning is based on the Essential Assessment Program. (EAP)¹⁶ That means that the curriculum is based on whatever the individual is ready for next – not where they ‘should be at’ for their age.

Teacher:

“They work through modules and when successfully completed they gain access to the next module. It is easy for them to see their progress as it is represented on a table with ‘stars’ for completing a level. There is an intrinsic reward in just seeing they are moving forward.”

This is the kind of teaching practice endorsed by Professor Masters and many other Australian and indeed, global education experts.

And it is not just about where young people are at in terms of skill mastery – it is also about their readiness to learn. Social, emotional health is now recognised as pivotal to learning outcomes. The Victorian Education Department has established SEL (Social Emotional Learning) programs with explicit ‘capabilities’ to be taught.

Again, NFT students are usually well to the ‘back of the pack’ in terms of these capabilities through no fault of their own. It takes an enormous amount of time and skills on behalf of all staff at NFT – teachers, artists, Young Persons Advocate to assist these young people to develop effective coping strategies to manage their own mental health.

Teacher:

“The kids who come here are often so far behind in the social emotional side of life that its incredibly hard to learn.

So before we can get onto academic tasks they need skills like the ability to sit still and focus for more than 5 minutes, the ability to be in a group. We’ve done a lot of work with them on self-regulation strategies and each of them identifying what brings them back to a learning zone. For some, self -regulation and de-escalation means just giving them space – they have to be alone for a while.”

The kids are often so far behind in the social emotional side of life that its incredibly hard to learn.

Before we can get onto academic tasks, they need skills like the ability to sit still and focus for more than 5 minutes.

¹⁵ Prof Geoff Masters, *The Equity Myth* https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/the-equity-myth

¹⁶ <https://www.essentialassessment.com.au/victoriancurriculum/>

It is clear why a high staff to student ratio is so necessary to ensure that each young person is given the best opportunities to progress in their studies.

Professor Jim Watterson's pivotal report, *Those Who Disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about*, discusses the crisis of the ever increasing numbers of Australian young people detached from any sort of schooling. At the time of the report's release in late November 2019, it was conservatively estimated that 50,000 compulsory school age teenagers were not in any form of education. As mentioned earlier, he now believes this number could have doubled in three years!

Despite the growing evidence of an underclass of under-educated young people there are too few alternatives to the mainstream system which are in any way sufficiently resourced and supported to cope with this 'crisis' in our education system.

Professor Watterson talks of the need for well-resourced flexible alternative settings to address this crisis. He concludes in *Those who Disappear* -

"Instead of spending countless dollars over the lifetime of detached students through government services such as juvenile justice, health, welfare, housing, unemployment payments and a host of other allied service costs, we must intervene earlier to focus on the necessary support and educational adjustments that can meet the complex needs of our most marginalised and disadvantaged." ¹⁷

Any kind of alternative education setting that can meet the complex needs of these already disengaged young people and reengage them on learning pathways, makes economic and moral sense. Nobody's Fool Theatre is one such example.

NFT teacher Emma was asked what she has learnt from her involvement in the program:

"I've learned so many things. I've learned that anything is possible, much more than I would have otherwise thought. I've learnt the importance of endless flexibility.

There are consequences to behaviour but there are also second chances.

So for example – you haven't finished your work. You still have to hold a line and those expectations but you might say. "Well I'll give you an extra half an hour" and then it's another half an hour. You are always accommodating, and you need to - for that bad day they might be having – a crisis on the home front – whatever it is.

So if they haven't brought back their permission form for the excursion, you don't say that's it - you are not going!. Its – 'we will drive you home or wherever, to get it.' Going above and beyond .. constantly.

I've learned so much from the way Maud and Kharen work as humans and as artists.*

*They always see kids in a holistic way. As a teacher, you **try** to look at them in that way and you think you do but realistically you look more at their academic, career, pathway. Maud and Kharen are constantly seeing that big picture and constantly seeing their potential and are constantly **trying to plug the gaps to enable that potential to be realised.***

Maud has this uncanny ability to know when to push and to push hard and get results from that. Whereas I would say "oh no, that's too uncomfortable for them – let's not push them through that."

And the drama does that – it pushes them into uncomfortable spaces and then they realise– oh, it's actually OK. Its firm. Its fair. But it's safe.

There are consequences to behaviour but there are also second chances.

And it's the same with the school side - what's possible - we might have given up on organising some excursion – because it's too hard – too many barriers and Maud will come up with a solution to negotiate the bureaucracy. Whereas I would have thought that's perhaps a line we can't cross but she will find a way.

I've learnt that a key to engagement is being RELENTLESS. Be kind but relentless."

*Maud Clark and Kharen Harper are the Co Artistic Directors of Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company

Pictured: Circle before going on stage. All students, SDT artists, teacher, and Young Persons Advocate. A close team.



4.2 ACTIVITY TWO: CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The creative arts is the core of NFT. The young people must commit to the arts program as a condition of enrolment. It is not just an 'adjunct' to their education. It is central to reengaging them in education and in maintaining that engagement.

Structured intensive workshops are conducted by SDTC artists with program participants throughout the year in drama, music, dance and movement, multi-media and script development. Creative workshops explore young people's experiences and reasons for disengagement, culminating in a new Australian work.

It is the arts that assist participants to get over many of their fears and instil in them the confidence needed to succeed in other tasks.

There is an emerging and growing body of research, both in Australia and internationally, that highlights the positive effects that participation in the arts can have on student outcomes.

These positive outcomes include both academic and non-academic success. (<https://naae.org.au/evidence-and-research>; <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/arts-participation>).

Research, particularly in Canada and USA has demonstrated that “socially and economically disadvantaged teenagers who have high levels of arts engagement or arts learning show more positive outcomes in a variety of areas than their low-arts-engaged peers.”¹⁸

So why is that?

Maud Clark explains what it is about the drama process that leads to such outcomes:

“Rigorous drama workshops are critical for participants to discover other parts of themselves that are capable of discipline, of completion, creativity, of visioning a life beyond violence, addiction and abuse.

Theatre is about voice. This is very important especially for those individuals who are totally outside of the polite normative structures. Theatre enables you to have your own voice, not someone speaking for you, about you and defining who you are, be it workers, lawyers, judges, psychologists, policy makers - but speaking your own truth and being heard. It’s not about moving away from who you are but claiming it and finding that there are thousands of others that are not only interested but many who have lived it also.

It is about connection with a positive supportive group – where you are working for something that is bigger than you (a performance) and is for benefit. It has a positive outcome not a negative one.’

Unlike acting for film, performing is immediate. There are no second chances. In film you can do a number of takes – you can edit. In theatre, it is that moment and it is the risk of that moment – it’s now.”

Theatre enables you to have your own voice, not someone speaking for you, about you - but speaking your own truth and being heard.

NFT STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Students were interviewed about ‘doing the drama’ and what it meant for them. The following transcript extracts give some insight into how and why it made a difference.

OD

“Drama has helped me in so many things. For example, I used to speak really quickly. Like so quickly that no one could understand a word of what I was saying. It probably is an anxiety thing. If I’m in a difficult situation I just start to speak really fast. And now I can speak slowly and clearly on stage. And if I can do it on stage, I can do it in normal situations. And I do.

Drama has really helped me with my anxiety. I don’t know how to explain it but if there’s a difficult situation -well - I know that’s just life at the moment. People here at Nobody’s Fool will support me and I know I will get through it.

When I first came here a couple of years ago, I was absolutely petrified of the drama. But now I have realised that it is so amazing just getting up on stage and performing for people who may never have seen live theatre before.

18 Catterall, James S.(2012) The arts and achievement in at-risk youth : findings from four longitudinal studies / James S. Catterall, University of California

They hear our stories and realise that they are not alone in their situations.

It's an amazing thing to be able to do that for others. I feel such a sense of pride.

And most of all, for people to realise that they are not alone in their situations. They hear our stories and realise that there are other people going through things that they are. And that is really important.

It's an amazing thing to be able to do that for others. I feel such a sense of pride.

Drama has also given me patience and a new understanding of things. For example, I used to never give anyone a second chance. I used to be really angry at people in those posh suburbs. And I thought they were brought up with a silver spoon in their mouth and got things I couldn't have and I didn't like them for it. I would really judge them.

But now I have met some of these people who have come to our shows and workshops and I know those people too, might have things going on in their life that aren't good. I guess you could say I am more accepting of people in general.

Where do you think you would be now without Nobody's Fool?

I think I'd be a complete druggie to be honest. I'd be in someone's basement doing bad things I shouldn't be doing. I reckon.

But that's not the person I am now.

OD in pensive scene from play

So who are you now?

The me of now has things to be proud of. I never had that before. Not good things to be proud of. I guess I feel worthwhile because of that.

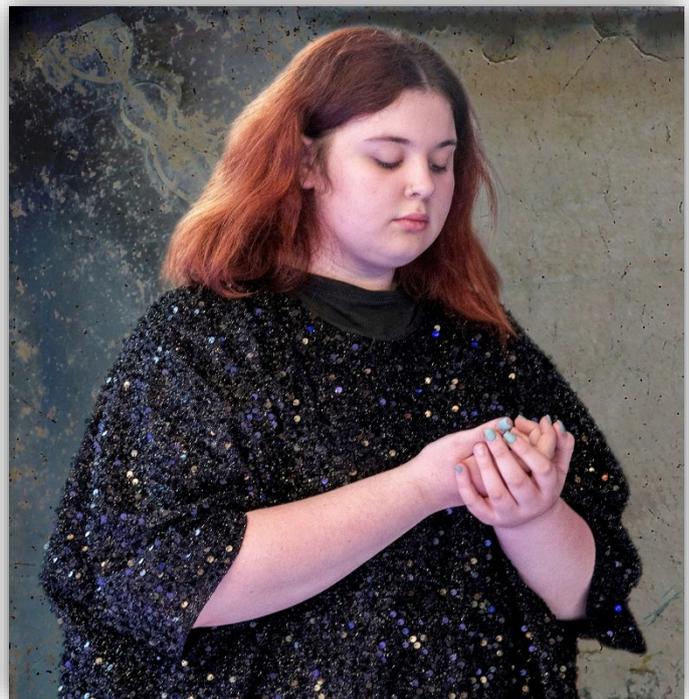
I've got things to look forward to. I am starting at the Gordon TAFE next year and doing a course in social work and mental health and stuff like that. I want to be a mental health worker.

Feeling worthwhile helps me with the other parts of my life.

I think I can achieve something. I lost my nan earlier in the year and that was really hard. The drama has really helped somehow. Its helped me to talk about it without always just bawling my eyes out. I don't know how to explain it really. Here I feel I have people around who really care and I feel safe to express myself.

Nobody's Fool has helped many kids become good people - who have gone on to do really good things. I know so many kids who would be completely ruined without this program. They would not have gone to school. They would have done bad shit.

Yet kids have come here and now they are doing their work and are doing things out of their comfort zone and getting rewards for that. Like you trust people here. Like it is a big family. Yes there are bickerings here and there but at the end of the day we are all so close. It is family. We all mean so much to each other. "



TL

"It's the drama that has helped me be confident enough to express how I feel. I found it easier when I came a few years ago, to express my feelings through body movement than in voice. Doing the improvisations really helped a lot. Now that I've been here quite a while, I'm much more able to speak up. It's this school - the drama - the support I have from the group.

And how does that work?

They push me to do things I don't really want to do or am too scared to do but they know that I can do them. They push me but it is a safe push. They don't let me get off easy. But if I do get upset or really anxious they will support me.

That actually happened recently. It happened on the second day of the Geelong performances to schools. I had a huge anxiety attack and just wanted to go home and they were going to cancel the performance. But I ended up just doing it.

I'm not really sure why it happened. It was just kind of a random thing but it was a bad attack. Like I was really sick.

But I just didn't want to let the group down and that became the strongest thing.

I knew I really had their support on stage so that if I messed something up or dropped a line that they would cover for me. I knew that and I trusted that and it worked.

I did feel quite proud of myself at the end that I got through it. So now I know that - I think I learned that - even if I'm worried or anxious about something that I can actually still do it. I can get through.

And what about talking to people? People that you don't know.

No way would I have done that before!!!! No way!!!

I can do it now and I was doing it on this tour - answering questions from the audience after the show for example and talking to people that I'd never met before.

TL leading discussion after play



It helps me a lot to know that on stage, in telling people how I feel about a situation, it's actually helping other people. That means a lot. Like I thought I was the only one who had such bad anxiety that I couldn't push through. I thought that was just me. But now I know it's not.

I had one girl come up to me after one of the night shows in Wangaratta and tell me that she had felt like me. And that meant heaps!!

Through Nobody's Fool shows, I feel like we are doing something useful, and I am doing something good.

If you hadn't come to Nobody's Fool where do you think you would be?

I just can't imagine to be honest. I really have no idea at all. I might still be in my room! Nobody's Fool gives kids like me who really struggle - an opportunity to succeed in life."

TL's Mother

"I look at her with such pride and just can't believe that this young person who couldn't leave her room let alone the house, is now up on stage in front of all these people performing and smiling and happy.

If there wasn't a program like this, I can't begin to imagine where she or other kids like her would be. I mean, where would kids like this end up without this? The cost of managing severe mental ill health, homelessness, addiction - is much greater than the cost of this program. Programs like this are about being proactive rather than being reactive."

TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

The program's teacher, who has seen many other alternative education programs, made this observation.

"The drama is the critical part of it. That's the real carrot for these kids. I had a teacher at Newcomb who works in another flexible learning space on Newcomb campus say, 'We just don't have a carrot. Kids come here for half a day and then they go home at lunchtime - that's the only carrot. They can go home early. They don't have anything else external to the schoolwork as a motivator.

That's what makes NFT so unique.

They have the drama. They have something that is bigger than themselves. That is real. They are belonging to something bigger. And that something bigger is very disciplined and the expectations are very high especially around performance time.

It's the zest, that SDT brings to the space – the energy, the fun, the humour.

*All the staff at SDT are so kind and caring and the kids respond to that. It's really hard to quantify that and explain to others what that means .. **but it's their creative energy which holds this space. I'm sure of that.**"*

The drama is the critical part of it. That's the real carrot for these kids. They have something that is bigger than themselves. That is real. And that something bigger is very disciplined and the expectations are very high.

ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE

What holds it all together?

Maud Clark:

"Just perseverance. Just keep walking forward. Just take another breath. You have to let so much go. Because it's very hard.

The thing is - everyone who works in this area is invested in it. If they are not they don't last. We know that change can happen. We know the magic is here, that's why we are all in it."

How do you know when to push and when not to push to enable the young people or any people in your drama workshops to reach their potential?

"It is almost like you read where someone is. There are some kids that I know that we are not going to have the time before a show to get them to a certain level. So we have to make sure that what they are going to be working on is not going to be pushing them too far.

It is hard to pin down. But that's the skill. When you've got that way of understanding what a person is capable of and you can get them there – they are the magic moments. They are the high points of working in this area.

You can only push as long as you have got another zone to push them to. You've got to have a safe zone. You can't go pushing them into an abyss.

You are not asking someone to come out of their comfort zone for the thrill of it - you are asking them to actually discover more of themselves. I love it when that young person said 'learning is like flying'. It's like that.

You discover,
'I'm more than
this one facet,
one dimension,
I'm all of this. I
can be twenty
colours and not
just one.'

That's the exciting thing of performance. We keep ourselves caged. We keep ourselves imprisoned. And the whole thing in workshops is you open that cage. You open it and you find its safe!

You discover "I'm more than this one facet, one dimension, I'm all of this. I can be twenty colours and not just one."

Creative Highlight: The Tour

After two years of being 'grounded with Covid' a highlight of the year was the tour of the full stage production of *When the Light Went Walking*. As Maud Clark expresses it, "*When there is the focus of a performance tour of the full show – the improvements they are able to make in weeks would otherwise take months if not years with no such focus.*"

Travelling away from the students' hometown of Geelong to Wangaratta for a series of performances had many benefits. For some, it was their first time out of Geelong. Travelling away from home was like an adventure and exciting while for others it was a source of great anxiety. However, even those who were anxious came to feel that they were secure and 'held.'

Maud Clark:

"What they all learn is that they can go through the experience and find they are safe. The other thing is they are totally looked after when they are away with us.

There is a firm structure that holds them – with meals, set bedtimes, collecting their mobile phones at strategic times. There is a whole structure which gives them a form of security.

All the kids loved the tour. They loved that the play was well received. They loved that people like them connected and didn't feel alone. They loved the food. They loved the music on the way up in the car.

To achieve what they did - ten live performances (including many to their own peer group which is incredibly hard for them) – is amazing. The rousing applause, all that positive feedback- gives them such a sense of self- it says that 'you are worthy, that you have a place – that you belong' – all of those things are huge.

These kids who feel they have never achieved anything positive, never achieved success are out there performing on a stage to hundreds of people. There is a huge sense of pride. Of achievement."

When NFT students were asked what their highlight was for 2022, 90% answered – going to Wangaratta for the tour. Comments included:

"It meant a lot to me to see that what we said in our performances impacted other people's lives."

"It's really life changing to give to someone else and then to see you have made an impact. That is enough of a reward. You realise it's not just about you. "

"I love how I can express my feelings and my story through playing another person."

"I love the messages we are able to give in our shows. I love standing up for what I believe in."

"It made me realise that what you do on stage can really send a message. When you are performing you think people only think about it at the moment, but it can make a lasting impact. Kids realised that our story was theirs too and it gave them hope. That was amazing."

"I think the tour made me realise that we are doing something that matters. That has given me such purpose. It's much better than mainstream school where what you do doesn't matter to anyone except your grades. In school you SHOULD be doing stuff that matters."

*"The tour and performing really helped me deal with my anxiety. Like it actually helps me the person and my depression. Like you go away from your home – your comfort zone, no matter how shitty it is, and you get up there on stage and there's people in front of you. You just have to do it and then it just shows you that you **can** do it. That's huge. If I can do that - I can do other things as well."*

Maud Clark:

"It's the same thing that happens with any group of people when you are on an endeavour together - it's like you're on a quest. And even though it's really hard work you are part of something that is bigger than you. I love it when you get to those stages when the whole group senses that something is working – it's a group energy.

People have gone beyond just holding onto themselves tightly in the world.

We had that energy on the tour. "

Performing in small country hall at Moyhu on tour



4.3 ACTIVITY THREE: NORTH EAST OUTREACH PROGRAM

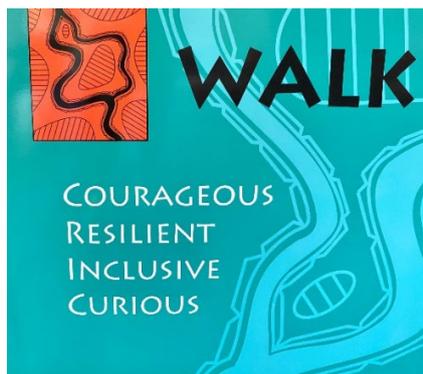
SDTC and NFT travelled to rural Northeast Victoria to deliver this program where partnerships had already been established. The focus was on empowering disadvantaged young people with the skills to create quality artistic works in their own towns.

Covid restrictions implemented mid-way through 2021 had a significant impact on this activity. Face to face visits to the schools ceased mid-year. While zoom sessions occurred intermittently thereafter – this was predominantly to retain connection rather than to further the work being done which required physical presence.

Regular contact between the Principals and SDTC was maintained, however, further Covid disruptions continued in 2022. Borinya Wangaratta Community Partnership – (alternative setting for Wangaratta young people struggling within mainstream school) – became the major focus of the Outreach program for 2022. Unfortunately, some of Borinya’s students who were intensively involved earlier had left the school when workshops eventually resumed in Term Two, 2022. This effectively meant a project ‘restart’.

BORINYA COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

A predominantly new group of students was engaged in 2022. With continual disruptions beyond anyone’s’ control, the public outcome for the project was renegotiated. It was agreed that instead of a performance work – a short film would be produced.



The theme of WALK (moving forward) within a strong local indigenous context is a core component of Borinya’s Mission Statement.

Courageous – dare to learn, learn to change

Resilient- being ready to try again when we are challenged

Inclusive – we work together to embrace and celebrate our differences

Curious – curiosity is asking questions and being a part of the answer

SDTC artists continued to use this theme as a focal point for workshops in 2022.

Some selected scenes from Nobody’s Fool Theatre’s new play were performed (pictured) outdoors to students and staff in May, as a prelude to the project ‘reset.’ This was followed up by workshops which ignited a sense of camaraderie, fun and trust with the new participants.



Subsequent visits to Borinya involved workshops with a core group of students who generated stories which formed the basis of the short film.

The physical environment of Borinya has a major impact on the school culture and much of the filming was done in the magnificent surrounds of the Mullimar Billabong. The students' stories were further enhanced with the support and input from local Indigenous Elder, Dozer Atkins.

Even then, as CEO Maud described: *"it was stop start with illness – with both Borinya and us*

That group of young people had given us their energy – their time - their trust. There has to be something that comes out of that to reflect their investment and make them proud.

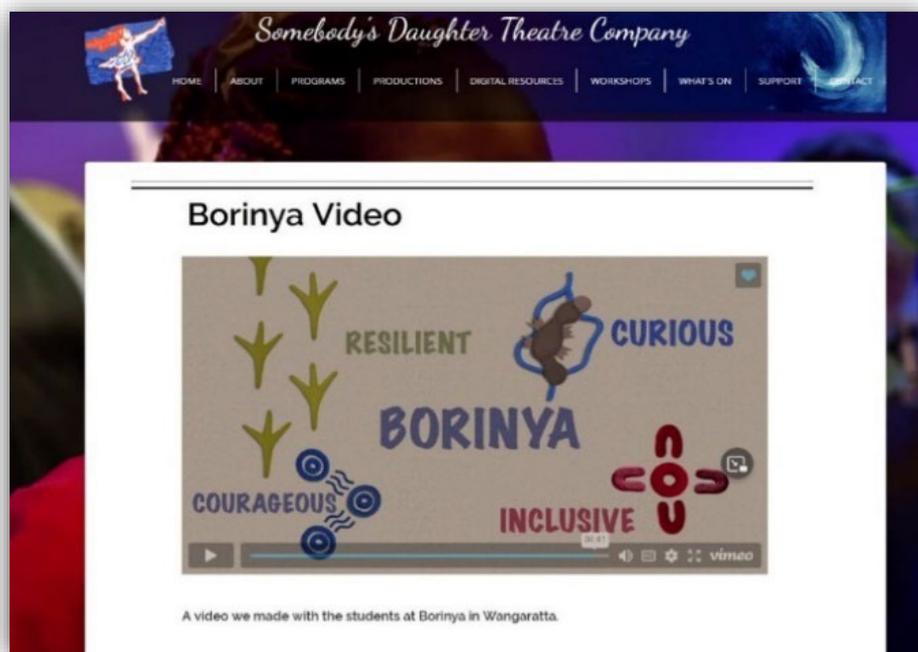
We were worried the whole time that we wouldn't come up with an outcome. That group of young people had given us their energy – their time - their trust. There has to be something that comes out of that to reflect their investment and make them proud."

And that they did.

Maud: "The product that we came up with was centred on the community of young people - a real reflection of their voice."

The finished short film premiered in November before a full stage production of *When the Light Went Walking*. An audience of nearly 100 people watched the film on a large screen and gave it a standing ovation. Maud: *"It was beautiful that we could show the video at the first public performance in Wangaratta when the Borinya kids and staff were present. It was a real honouring of those kids."*

This short film can be viewed on Somebody's Daughter Theatre website by clicking this link.
<https://www.somebodysdaughtertheatre.com/borinya>



Sam brought the highest of levels of expertise to the project. His vast experience working with young people enabled him to engage the participants and establish a trusting and respectful learning environment."

Merriwa Participant Comments:

"I thought this was a fantastic learning opportunity for myself and my peers. It's not easy to learn skills like this in Wangaratta. I am most proud that we worked together as a team and let everyone have their moment to shine through the project. That makes me very proud of everyone involved."

"I really liked collaborating with Sam about my ideas. Most of my ideas got put in and he understood my sense of humour - he seemed to really connect with it and we had fun writing."

"I am most proud that the videos will give people a good laugh at the chaos that can happen if they don't think about safety at work. Lots of the things like the explosion were my ideas and we got them in there and they are funny. It was really good to get to learn from such an expert."



Mat & Scott - front stage at launch.



Scot, Sam Reed from SDTC and Mat

The videos are now used as part of Merriwa's staff safety induction program.

WORKSHOP FOR WORKERS

Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company artists along with emerging and trainee artists from NFT conducted a workshop for workers in Wangaratta in November as part of the outreach program.

After a special viewing of a performance of *When the Light Went Walking*, participants took part in practical creative sessions which modelled the techniques employed by SDT in working with young people and women impacted by histories of trauma and abuse.

Participants included people from North East Victoria who work with and/or manage/teach people impacted by family violence /trauma, mental ill health, substance abuse, sexual abuse, eg. youth workers, social workers, teachers, disability workers and carers, sexual abuse and family violence practitioners, survivor advocates.

It was a very successful day, with **100% participants saying they would recommend these workshops to others**. This is despite many expressing that the workshops certainly took them 'out of their comfort zones.' Voice exercises, singing and dramatic improvisations with a good degree of humour were a feature of the workshop.



The drama improvisations centred on issues the participants raised as most relevant to their current work.

A very pertinent comment from the Feedback was: "While I was initially uncomfortable – I realised that it was really good for us to get out of our comfort zone and this is a position we often put kids we work with in."

Other comments:

- It was awesome. I think everyone needs this! (Family Violence Counsellor)
- It definitely made me want to try to put into place measures to make young people feel more heard when I return to work. (56 Resi Care)
- You have absolutely inspired me to do better! (18 Peer Support Worker)
- I'll going to try and use this creative model to facilitate young people to explore and express – to be heard. (Counsellor)
- Great to get out of our comfort zone. (Youth Worker)
- Thank you for sharing your passion and process. (Aboriginal Liaison Worker)



4.4 ACTIVITY FOUR: TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

This Activity involved the 'training and employment opportunities for young emerging artists with SDTC.' The intention is to provide intensive skills development and holistic support for young people to become effective community artists.

In 2022, two former NFT students who graduated Year 12 in 2021 were employed as trainees. Given the considerable amount of work SDTC does with young people, it is important the older experienced professional artists of the Company nurture younger artists.

Maud Clark, CEO:

"It would be very easy to go and employ a couple of young artists straight out of drama school and they'd have a whole lot of skills and they'd be self-sufficient. By taking on young people who have worked with us for some time as NFT students, we are furthering what Somebody's Daughter Theatre is all about. Through the arts we are providing opportunities where there were few to be had.

This is about kids with great talent, who don't have 'contacts' or the family support or the financial support to help them go further. They don't have any stepping stones that many others already have in place and take for granted which will assist them to access a positive future.

Taking on these roles within our Company can be a stepping stone. We are a group of artists who can give these young people the support they need. They will be 'shepherded' and cared for, so they are not open to the risks that is in this work.

With really careful holding, they can become very strong and they can become strong in their boundaries. They are young so they are going to reach people in a way that we can't. They have lived experience - which is both a strength and a downfall - because one has to be very careful so that they are safe with all that. We can help with that.

We can help them grow as community artists with the skills to know their own boundaries and work within that. Yes - they are going to bring a young voice and their lived experience - and of course SDT is going to benefit from that but it is also taking what we are committed to, to another level. KS has shown a great amount of self understanding, so has HW and if they are going to bring that degree of awareness to work with other young people - that is powerful stuff. They have developed to the point where they have earned this. It's not tokenistic - it's just the most obvious thing to do with these two young people. "

The two young trainees assisted with the leadership of workshops in North East Victoria, took on roles in Somebody's Daughter Theatre Post Release (women who have left prison) new theatre production at Chapel off Chapel Theatre Melbourne and undertook tasks of responsibility during the rehearsal and touring of NFT's *When the Light Went Walking* in November and December. Part of their contract with SDTC was that, as well as their employment as Trainee Community Artists, they would undertake further education.

Both are now undertaking their Certificate 3 in Community Services.

Maud Clark:

"Both HW and KS have purchased their own computers which is a huge thing from their wages as trainee artists. K also bought a car with her own money. So in terms of them now becoming self-sufficient, they both now have agency in the world. And that is crucial.

KS has taken on a real leadership role, especially in discussion after performances. I can see her becoming a great leader in the indigenous community. The skills she has developed throughout the year are assisting in a big way with that.

This is about kids with great talent, who don't have 'contacts' or the family or financial support to help them go further.

The KS that first came to NFT couldn't talk. She wouldn't talk. And now she is leading discussion with people she has never met before with confidence and clarity. It is KS who spoke in front of 600 people at a Grace Tame luncheon in Geelong (pictured) and after each of the eight performances on the tour.



And the other thing is for the first time, both HW and KS have learnt what it is to be employed. It's not just about having an income, there are responsibilities to your employer that come with that – there are expectations, there is a real discipline that is required.

Both of them have a much deeper understanding of the importance of voice – their own voice and the power of when they are the voice for a wider community.

In terms of arts, HW and KS have been brilliant. They have really grown as artists. Their work has had a profound impact in workshops and in performances on tour. Their skill level has grown immeasurably.

Both can hold the performance energy on stage – so if either of them are there – the other less experienced kids can play off them. Before their presence as trainee artists – we always had to have a Somebody's Daughter Theatre senior artist on the stage to hold the energy. But now as trainee artists, both HW and KS can hold that energy and that's why they are in so many scenes. They are providing the platform for others. That's what this work is all about. Neither KS nor HW, when they are out there on stage, are concerned about ego.

They are there enabling others to step up - to have the confidence, the inspiration, to perform the best they can.

*They have different expectations now and **know** more is possible in life. Whether they totally grasp it or not is up to them."*

A WORD FROM THE TRAINEE ARTISTS

HW: "I just love helping others. It makes you feel good that you can do it. The comparison to when I was on ice, like I wouldn't help other people! I was doing bad with people.

*But now I'VE grown so much and I'm helping other people do **good** things. I've helped myself realise that it's possible to make a big change. I can now see what's possible and hopefully I can help others see what's possible for them too."*

KS: "When I came to NFT, I couldn't speak in front of people. Even a few people. Now I can speak in front of hundreds of people and answer their questions. As a trainee I can help other kids find their voice. It's changed my life really and I hope I can help change others."

4.5 ACTIVITY FIVE: CREATION & PRESENTATION OF NEW WORKS

Activity 5 involved the creation and presentation of new performance works.

Students are given opportunities to present their own stories and ideas to audiences consisting of mainstream students, teachers, health workers, political representatives, family members and the general community.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

- **198** creative workshops with NFT students in drama, music, movement, digital media and visual arts
- **28** workshops with other secondary students outreach program (Wangaratta)
- **12** live performances **6 Wangaratta** – (includes Borinya; 1 Wang Library 1; 4 Wang November; **6 Geelong** (includes 1 Grace Tame event; 1 Newcomb teachers; 4 Cricket Studio)
- **12 Q & A** sessions with audience
- **1** art exhibition
- **2** videos
- **276** page views/digital downloads

Audience members completed Feedback Sheets after each performance



Audience for Live Performances

- 1360 community members
- 380 students
- 76 teachers, health workers

WHEN THE LIGHT WENT WALKING

'When The Light Went Walking' mirrors our world's time of change and the political landscape surrounding the theme of 'consent.'

Voices and experiences of young people are brought to the stage and provide a window of connection for others whilst highlighting the importance of finding ways to be strong, to grow and to move forward. It touches upon truth telling and the importance of connection to land, culture and elders.

'When The Light Went Walking' is funny, sad, confronting, and empowering, but ultimately shows how everyone can find their own light, even when the world feels dark.

DESCRIPTION

After a very disrupted 2020/21, intensive arts workshops began in 2022 for NFT students with a view to two major public outcomes:

- revising and touring full stage production of the new performance work *"When the Light Went Walking"* (Activity Five)
- resuming creative outreach program in North -East Victoria (Activity Three)

The first half of the year continued to be disrupted by Covid and other illness. Nevertheless, the Company returned to Wangaratta in May to present two short 'workshop performances' – one at Borinya and one at the Wangaratta Library. *(poster in library foyer pictured)*

Even though the workshop performance was just a few scenes, the reception by those 35 people attending the Library show was overwhelming.

94% of the audience indicated on their Feedback Forms that seeing the show had motivated them to take action such as:

- *Get this Company back to Wang!*
- *Work more as a change agent and advocate for people*
- *Be more considerate and open minded*
- *Talk and better still, listen to my children more*

A member of the audience from the Centre Against Violence Board of Management, did 'get this Company back to Wang' by conducting a successful fund-raising campaign to bring the full production of *When the Light Went Walking* to a much wider audience later in the year.

KS of NFT speaks of the origins of the play.

"I was just on my phone one night and I saw a Grace Tame speech. And that had a massive impact on me, so I ended up just coming here the next day and talking to Maud and everyone about it. We spoke about the speech and consent with the other kids during their rehearsals that day.

I had been in a very toxic relationship that was abusive in any way possible and didn't realise that my own personal experience was shared by other kids here. That was a big thing for me, to tell everyone about that and then get everyone else's stories."

There's a lot of young people out there that are scared to say 'no' in certain situations. I know, I was petrified of saying the word 'no'."

Given this context, NFT was delighted to receive an invitation from the Give Where you Live Foundation, Geelong (GWYL) to perform at a special event the Foundation was hosting, featuring Australian of the Year 2021, Grace Tame. The performance by NFT of a short scene and the theme song **No Means No** from their new play was received with a loud ovation from the 600 people attending and hugs from Grace Tame with every Nobody's Fool Theatre young person.

Maud Clark:

"To be invited to perform at that lunch in front of Grace and 600 people was magic. And for KS that was worth its weight in gold. That was something we could have never planned. And for everyone in that room, the performance was amazing. We have received incredible feedback."

A music video featuring the **No Means No** song, is currently in the final stages of production.

This link below, features a discussion with KS and other Somebody's Daughter Theatre members about the video and the theme of consent.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQjrf5E4Yu4>



The impact for the young people who create and perform this original and unique live theatre is almost immeasurable.

The added bonus, is that this theatre had such a powerful impact on very diverse audiences.

The following section features a selection of responses from people who attended performances during the tour in November, December.

AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO PERFORMANCE

Audience members completed feedback sheets and all responses were recorded and collated. Sample responses:

What did you think of the performance? ... How did it make you feel?

- Heartbreaking, heart-warming. Good messages, fabulous performances, made me smile, laugh and cry. (51 Sexual Health Nurse)
- It was incredibly thought provoking and emotional. Such a brilliant performance that brought up many topics. (28 Psychologist)
- Extraordinarily powerful in delivering a story that needs to be told in every school. I laughed and cried. THANKYOU!! (56 Art Teacher)
- It was truly remarkable. Such potent content. Very moving. I felt many things but mostly awe and inspiration. (32 Hospitality/Single Mother)
- Real truths that are sad and touch the heart. Performed beautifully with strength. (41 Teacher)
- I loved the performance. I could relate to some of it. I struggle with confidence and this play makes me feel less alone. (15)
- I loved it. It was so comforting to know others are going through similar things to me. I honestly wish I could be your friends. (15)
- Inspirational. I feel seen and grateful. (21 Outdoor Educator)
- Made me realise all the important stuff we ignore. (15)

I loved the performance. I could relate to some of it. I struggle with confidence and this play makes me feel less alone. (15)



- The performance opened my eyes to the thought that not everyone has a good home life. (15)
- Confrontingly beautiful. (41 Multiple Roles)
- It was amazing. The layout of the stage was amazing and really added an awesome element to the performance. (19 Student)
- It was amazing. It made me feel proud to be a woman and hopeful for the next generation. (50 Partnership Manager)
- Just wow! This was so well written. Performance was top notch. (36 Mental Health/Family Violence Practitioner)
- I loved it. It made me emotional towards the end. (20 Subway Worker)
- I feel in it! The authentic stories provided strong emotions to connect to my own story. (45 Youth Alcohol and Other Drug Clinician)
- Excellent. So strong in expressing and communicating life experiences. I felt sad, inspired, despondent in the system. (47 Child Psychiatrist)
- I absolutely loved the performance. It made me sad because so many people suffer yet the sense of hope at the end – the fact that we have the power to change our lives. I also thoroughly enjoyed/appreciated the inclusion of Indigenous tradition. Wow! Just brilliant. (43 Primary School Teacher)
- Great. Made me feel much more aware. (66 Bricklayer)
- Gave the insight from today's teens into the world they navigate that older adults have little understanding of. I feel old and antiquated but hopeful. (46 Teacher Secondary)
- My daughter is 21 and she has an intellectual disability. She spends time in care, and I realise she at times struggles to communicate with me. I am very grateful for you sharing your experience. Your will play was very *very* helpful for me. (Pensioner)

Which parts of the performance had the most impact on you? Why?

- I loved the No Means No song. I like it because it will empower women to stand up for what they think is right. (11 Child)
- Consent. Had similar experience where I struggled to speak up. (19 Receptionist)
- The consent issue. I've lived this. The real issue of foster care, Resi Care – relationship between carer and teen. (40 Ed Support Newcomb SC)
- The boys talking about feelings. (63 Deputy Mayor)
- No Means No gave me goosebumps and yes, we are all equal!! (40 Fresh out of Rehab)
- The kids not having a place to call home. Resi Care being such a sad place for kids. (61 Housing Services Officer)
- Songs. They were inspirational. (49 Educator)
- Discussions around consent, sexual assault had a big impact due to being a survivor. (22 Case Manager VACCA)

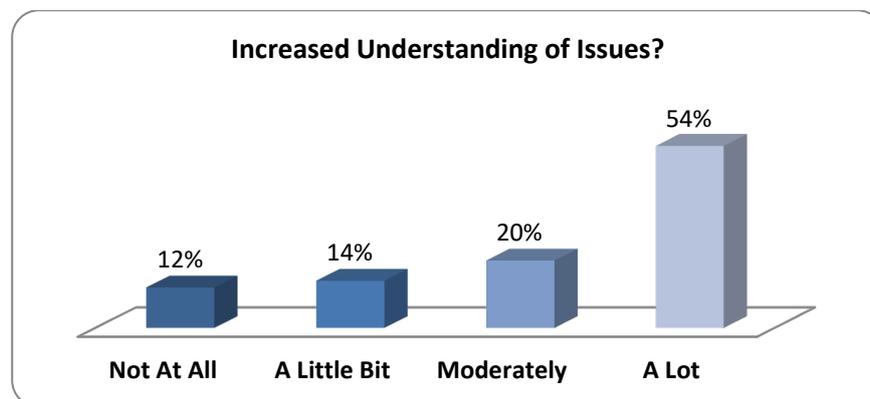


- The impact of lack of justice. (Mother)
- The connection to country and Aboriginal culture as well as the out of home care stories/impacts. (28 Psychologist)
- I was spellbound. I have to say the finale – I was holding back tears. They came from DEEP inside. POWERFUL performing. (56 Art Teacher)
- The sense of hope and connection to land of ancestors. (43 Primary School Teacher)
- I loved the group songs where everyone sang as I like music and expressing how I feel through songs. (15 Student)

*NB. 80% respondents mentioned the **No Means No** song as a highlight.*

To what extent did the performance increase your understanding of any issues?

12% Not at all 14% A little bit 20% Moderately 54% A lot



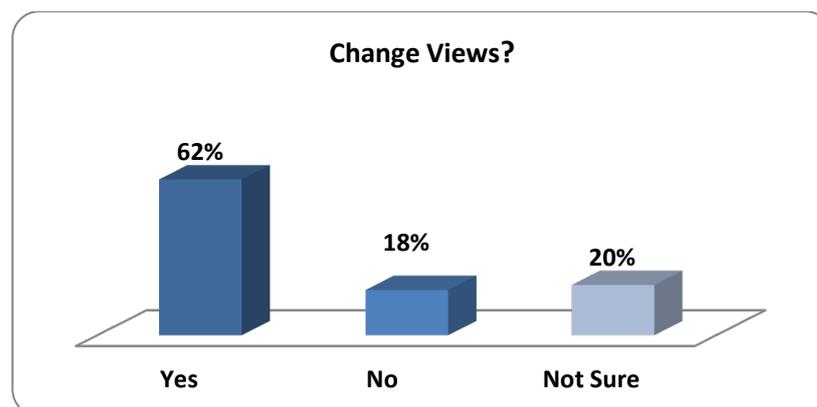
Please explain your response:

- A lot. Real kids sharing real pain, their own experiences or people close to them. It was so enlightening to hear it from their mouths. (English Teacher)
- It explained issues in a way that would make sense to people going through that. Like me. (15)
- A lot. How they explained it in the play made me think different. (16)
- I'm a psychologist working in this area with young people so have lots of experience, but this puts a whole new lens on it. (38 Psychologist)
- I have much better understanding of consent. (15)
- It offered me a different perspective on things, particularly consent. (19 Student)
- A lot more understanding because it was done in such a unique way. (65 Aged Care Worker)
- As a recovering addict and a person who has been on the street, in jail and risked my life – I related to almost all of the issues – but seeing them performed brought even more perspective. (47 Recovery)
- A lot. It gave me an insight into how kids in certain situations can feel. The fight they have in their heads. (37 Teacher Aide)

I'm a psychologist working in this area with young people so have lots of experience, but this puts a whole new lens on it.

Will it change the way you view some people in the future?

62% Yes 18% No 20% Not sure



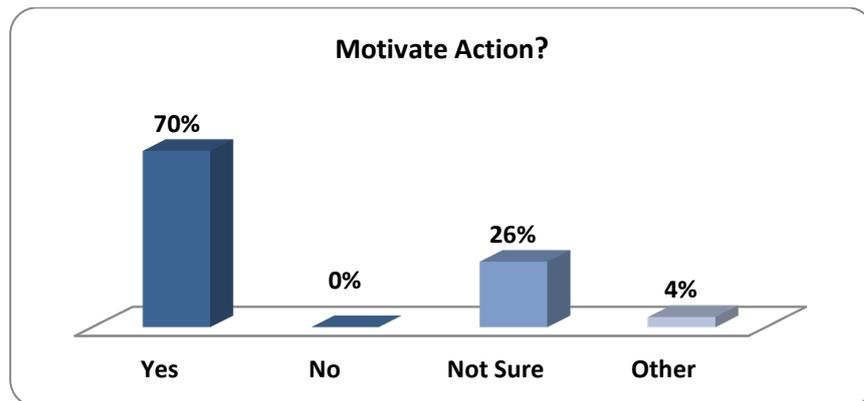
- It made me realise there a lot of things I don't know about. I will see some people differently. (65 Retired)
- I will be more understanding and open-minded. (36 Mother)
- Contributed hugely to not 'pathologising' seeing as negative/hopeless the issues, situations. Believing more in the capacity of people. (46 Family Counsellor)
- Be more compassionate and understanding of peoples' backgrounds. I am mostly unaware of how peoples' lives are going, and I have to learn not to judge others when I am so uninformed. (16 Student)
- Yes, as I will see how they truly feel not the front. (15 Student)
- Yes. Everyone has a story and not all of us have a choice regarding how we start our journey. (28 Psychologist)
- Yes. I'll listen more deeply instead of judging. (56 Art Teacher)
- I will try to be more understanding and compassionate. Everyone has a 'back story.' (48 Landscape Architect)
- I will try to understand my nephews and nieces more. (68 Retired)
- Makes me think more about what might have happened to these kids without this program and also kids like them. Such potential they have. (55 Doctor – Paediatrician)
- I think everyone who saw this performance will think twice. (65 Aged Care Worker)
- Yes. It is helpful to be reminded of all aspects of what people have to offer if given the opportunity. (47 Child Psychiatrist)
- Yes. I will have more empathy for these kids I see on the street, in my classroom. Rather than judgment and frustration – I just want to hug them! (English Teacher)
- Yes. Working WITH kids and not judging them. Just try to give a safe place for a while even in my working environment. (57 Admin)
- Yes, about women's lives and rights. (16)
- Yes. Try to be proactive in support/calling out acts of social discrimination and disadvantage. Advocating for equality and fairness. (60 Artist)

I'll listen
more deeply
instead of
judging.
TEACHER



Does it motivate you to take action (big or small)?

70% Yes 0% No 26% Not sure 4% Other (I already am).



If yes, how?

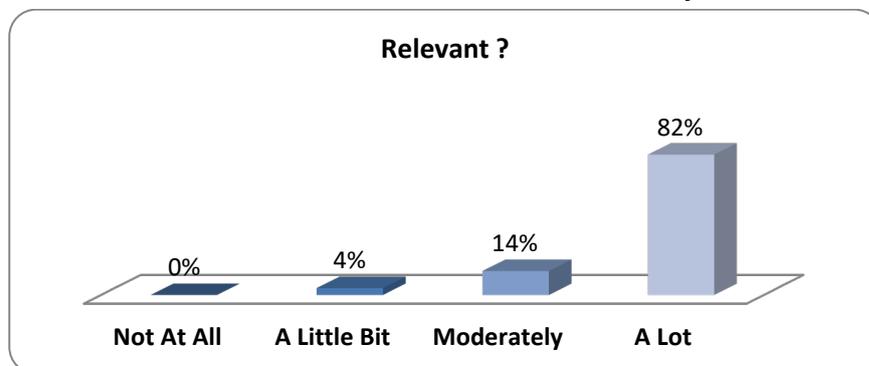
- Yes. You have motivated me to change my attitude and behaviour and to seek more ways small or big that I can help rather than judge. You have motivated me to be more involved-give more time. (English Teacher)
- Yes. Conversations with my kids. (50 Planner)
- Yes. Have more conversations about consent. (49 Psychologist)
- Speak up more. (15)
- I just hope in my day-to-day iterations that I can make a person feel better about themselves. (70 Retired Nurse)
- You have motivated me privately to take action to understand people's situations more. (19 Student)
- Yes. Consider offering to provide respite and support to young people. (48 Landscape Architect)
- Big call out to hold people accountable. (36 Mother)
- I would like to explore my own anxieties through theatre somehow. (64 Ex-teacher)

- To have courage, be brave and speak up about my own experience. (47 Retail)
- I will stick up for those who don't have a voice. (15)
- It makes me wanna help more people going through it. (14)
- Yes. As a young person now I am more empowered than ever to speak out about issues regarding consent and the rights of girls. (16 Student)
- Yes. Consider how this can be incorporated into Respectful Relationships education. (44 Social Worker)
- Yes. To take into consideration the impacts on youth across multiple situations and settings in my work. (28 Psychologist)
- Yes. Conversations with my son (3) and nephew (6) – of course, age appropriate – about emotions and expression. (35 Mother)
- Yes! I will explore volunteering possibilities. (43 Primary School Teacher)
- I'll try to grow my experiences and openness. (19 Receptionist)
- Be more aware. Take opportunities to support/care. (53 Kindergarten Teacher)
- Speak more often about consent. Educate myself more on Indigenous culture. (28 Occupational Therapist)
- Will continue to inspire me to work with young people in this space. (38 Psychologist)
- Yes. Will call out the issues presented if I encounter them. (24 Carpenter)
- Yes. More open conversations with my own children. (45 Life Insurance Employee)
- Yes. Check my own bias. Be patient and listen. You never know someone else's story. (38 Mental Health Team Leader)
- Be more understanding of those I meet who have issues. I will look into the issues to learn more. (68 Artist)
- Yes! Bloody hell – if kids can put on such a beautiful moving performance/message – we can all do more!!!! (36 Mental Health/Family Violence Practitioner)

You have motivated me to have courage, be brave and speak up about my own experience.

How relevant did you find the content to *your* local community/school/organisation?

0% Not at all 4% A little bit 14% Moderately 82% A lot



- All these issues affect my friends and family. (14)
- I found it really relevant cos I'm going through the same thing. (15)
- That stuff happens here. (15)

- I know people in these situations. (15)
- I have friends and classmates who go through this. (15)
- They are common issues that happen here. (16)
- It needed to be said. (15)
- The culture at my school can sometimes be quite toxic in regard to consent and often boys are quick to say sexist things. Many of my friends have experienced sexual assault in some sense so it's extremely relevant! (16 Student)
- A lot. Very relevant to my work as a psychologist in schools. (28 Psychologist)
- All issues are so relevant and important to the students I work with. (40 Ed Support Newcomb SC)
- I'd love to see this in every secondary school with workshops to include others' stories. (56 Art Teacher)
- Totally relevant to my work at Centre Against Violence. (40 CEO)
- Many people in my school would benefit from seeing this. Would help them understand. (14 School)
- I work in an upper-class primary school and our students wouldn't have any idea about what some people go through. (37 Teacher Aide)
- We need to get more of this content out to our community. (45 Youth Alcohol and Other Drug Clinician)
- Totally. A lot of people my age go through anxiety and depression. (14 High School)

Other comments?

- It was such a profound performance. I would see it again in a second. You should be so proud! (40 Secondary Teacher)
- I get bullied because I'm different and people think they can do things to me. Thankyou for being so awesome. (15)
- You've changed this old man's way of seeing. (80 Retired)
- It would be brilliant if this performance and discussions could feature as part of police cadet training. (65 Recently Retired Senior Police Sergeant)
- Keep shining bright because one day your light will inspire someone else like you have done to me today. (18 Recovery Peer Worker)

It would be brilliant if this performance and discussions could feature as part of police cadet training.



OTHER RESPONSES

FROM FAMILY VIOLENCE SPECIALIST ADVISOR

I'm sure that my students could learn more from your stage production than I could teach in a semester.

"I am writing to you as I really wanted to let you know what an impact your performance of 'When the Light went Walking' had on myself and a professional colleague. We attended a show in Geelong more than 10 days ago and are still talking about it this week!

Wow! It was incredible. Moving, funny, sad, real. The cast was fabulous and the students in particular were phenomenal.

As someone who has worked in family violence, mental health and with children in care, I found the lived experience voices and the way they came through in this production was so powerful.

I also teach on these topics and I'm sure that my students could learn more from your stage production than I could teach in a semester. I would love it if services actually ran this as a training module for staff who work in these areas.

Mental Health Specialist Family Violence Advisor: Mercy Hospitals Victoria Limited"



FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL NEWCOMB - GEELONG

"Over six years, we have developed an immense appreciation for the work the Company does in reengaging disadvantaged and at-risk young people with their NFT program in Geelong.

Furthermore, the program promotes broader wellbeing and engagement through its poignant and professional performances, all of which use humour and sincerity to shed light on matters affecting young people and our community. I know it has had significant impact on staff at our school who regularly attend their performances.

It has brought a greater empathy and understanding of the emotional 'baggage' some of our students bring with them through the school gate, which in turn has a positive impact on their professional practice."

FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL WANGARATTA

"We recently had SDTC and NFT perform at Wangaratta High School to our Year 9 students. I was impressed by the performance let alone the impact and power it had on our students. The discussion held after the performances allowed students to integrate and explore the often-silenced topics of consent, assault, unsatisfactory home life and identity in a safe way led by the wise older students and trainees at SDTC.

We chose to endorse this performance as a part of the curriculum around consent and there are no regrets. The power of the impact is multi-faceted and way beyond what can be achieved in classroom formal discussion.

As an Executive Principal and teacher of many years' experience, I can honestly say that this is powerful teaching and learning that is almost impossible to replicate in a classroom."

I can honestly say that this is powerful teaching and learning that is almost impossible to replicate in a classroom.

PRINCIPAL

FROM RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS PROJECT LIAISON OFFICER

"This play highlighted issues around consent, sexual assault, out of home care, youth mental health - all of which are being experienced by and have such serious consequences for the wellbeing of young people in our community.

I know that because that is my day to day job. I am employed by the Victorian Department of Education and Training in their Respectful Relationships Initiative as a social worker.

The fact that this performance encapsulated the lived experiences of the young people performing made it so much more powerful and real than most resources currently available.

It made me think what an innovative addition this could be to our work in schools."

FROM PARENT

"My 14 yo daughter, 16 yo daughter and 19 yo son all saw this play. They couldn't stop talking about it. They were so inspired by the NFT kids and couldn't believe what they had been through. It opened their eyes, and we had conversations about the power of judgment to close-down conversation, about boys being supported to share feelings, about consent, about how speaking out about hard stuff is empowering and empathy is essential if we are to build a culture of respect and consent.

My kids have a good, safe life and here they were able to see other kids, whom they might have otherwise labelled as 'druggies 'or 'dropouts 'in another setting, as humans, amazing performers and wise youth. This is a win for our community and healing to all.

As a parent, this is such a valuable medium to explore such important issues in a nonthreatening and empowering way. "

FROM TEACHER

"At the whole school level and community level, the live theatre and digital resources that Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company produce contributes to the Respectful Relationships core component of the Victorian Curriculum.

The devised content stimulates awareness and conversation around key issues including anti-racism, gender identity, bullying, and consent education. It is an excellent opportunity to use student voice to bring these issues into focus in a highly engaging way. Whilst there are teacher resources becoming available for consent and respectful relationship education, the power of live theatre and amplifying the voices of our community's young people, is an opportunity that needs to be harnessed more widely."

Clearly as evidenced in this Chapter, the tour of this play with its central theme around CONSENT could not have been more timely. It came when the seventh federally funded national survey of Australian secondary students and sexual health ¹⁹ revealed that growing numbers of teenagers are reporting unwanted sex.

More than one-third (39.5%) of young people said they had experienced unwanted sex during their life. As stated by La Trobe University's Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, Assoc Prof Jennifer Power: *"Unwanted sex is a national health crisis and we need to be really interrogating the normalised violence that is occurring."*

Power goes on to say that given consent education is now mandatory, there is a long way to go in improving what is delivered. *"Most students weren't very impressed with what they are currently receiving at school."*²⁰

NFT has produced valuable and potent resources for such education in this new work - a unique piece of theatre with the voices of young people front and centre.

The culture at my school can sometimes be quite toxic in regard to consent.

Many of my friends have experienced sexual assault so it's extremely relevant! (16)



19 Power, J., Kauer, S., Fisher, C., Chapman-Bellamy, R., & Bourne, A. (2022). The 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2021 (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 133). Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

20 More Australian teenagers are sexually active and for one-third it's unwanted <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/dec/22/more-australian-teenagers-are-sexually-active-and-for-one-third-its-unwanted?CMP>

5. CONCLUSION

Covid continued to cast a long shadow on the program, particularly in the first half of the year with significant absences of staff and students due to illness. Mandatory isolation for those with the virus and of close contacts was not lifted in Victoria until October 2022. Continuity of specific projects was significantly impacted.

Despite this, the outcomes of NFT were quite extraordinary.

The Revive project, in 2022 clearly met its objectives.

Objective One: Re-engage mainstream school refusers through an intensive arts-led education program

NFT young people have reconnected to learning and life.

NFT young people are no longer a statistic of the growing numbers of teenagers lost to a system that is unable to accommodate their intensive needs.

They are no longer a statistic of the growing numbers of teenagers lost to a system that is **unable** to accommodate their intensive needs.

Reconnecting these young people to education was critical for their futures – for them to have choices - for them to have agency – to have a chance to make positive contributions to society - to be healthier and to raise children who are not trapped in endless cycles of intergenerational poverty.

On purely economic, not just social and moral grounds, programs like NFT are essential.

90% current NFT students are from low socio-economic households. This compares to approximately one in six or 16% of Australian children who live in low-income families where even the basics are hard to come by.²¹

Numerous studies confirm that children from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from school than other students,²² and children who are suspended or expelled from school are more likely to enter the criminal justice system. The Victorian Ombudsman found that the majority of young people in the juvenile justice system had been suspended or expelled.²³

Deloitte Access Economics (2019) estimated that improving academic achievement for low SES students could generate a national economic positive impact of \$148.8 billion.²⁴ That figure doesn't take into account further savings to the economy, if disadvantaged young people remain out of jails and live healthier lifestyles.

Lamb and Huo in their study *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*, used Census and other Household Income Data to estimate the fiscal and social cost of young people leaving school early and not fulfilling their potential. Based on one cohort of 37,692 nineteen year olds who left school early in 2014, they conservatively concluded that there was a lifetime (*adult years 25 – 64*) fiscal cost to the Australian taxpayer of \$12.6 billion and social cost of \$23.2 billion. That is, for **each** student who does not complete Year 12 or equivalent, the fiscal impact is \$334,600 and social impact is \$616,200.²⁵

21 Davidson, P; Bradbury, B; and Wong, M (2022) Poverty in Australia 2022: A snapshot Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and UNSW Sydney.

22 Ibid

23 Victorian Ombudsman (2017) Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions.

24 Deloitte Access Economics (2019). *Unpacking drivers of learning outcomes of students from different backgrounds*, Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education.

25 Lamb, S. and Huo, S. Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Mitchell Institute report No. 02/2017. Melbourne p.47,48

Since that calculation several years ago those costs have significantly increased.

NFT reengaged 12 students with education in 2022, including 4 who returned to mainstream school. Using the above conservative and outdated financial data, this means that if these 12 students remain engaged and complete their schooling (*which the majority of NFT students have over the past six years*) then there could be a lifetime fiscal saving of at least \$4,015,200 and a lifetime social saving of at least \$7,394,400 to the Australian economy.

Resourcing this program for the long term clearly makes economic sense!

12 students
reengaged with
education =
lifetime fiscal
saving of at least
\$4,015,200 and
a lifetime social
saving of at least
\$7,394,400

The latest declaration by all federal and state education ministers –the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration December 2019 ²⁶ states:

“Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.”

It adds that such a system must “... provide equality of opportunity and educational outcomes for all students at risk of educational disadvantage”.

“We need a national commitment to ensuring all children & young people are supported to access a quality education that suits their needs and personal challenges”

Given that the current system is **unable** to provide such equality of opportunity –it is incumbent that Prof Watterson’s Recommendation Number One, in his landmark report *Those Who Disappear* - be seriously considered by those with the responsibility for implementation of government education policy.

“We need a national commitment to ensuring all children and young people are supported to access a quality education that suits their needs and personal challenges, especially those at risk of disengaging or detaching.

This includes funding and long-term support for accessible tailored programs and alternative and/or flexible schools for at-risk children and young people to remain engaged and achieve success.”²⁷

Nobody’s Fool Theatre is one alternative, flexible setting.

Not every disengaged, detached young person will be suited to the Nobody’s Fool Theatre model. The needs, health status, circumstances, cultures, and location of disadvantaged young

people will vary enormously meaning there will be NO one successful model for reengagement.

However, NFT is an example of a ‘tailored, alternative and flexible’ program as described by Watterston, that *is* clearly working very effectively for a proportion of disengaged young people.

In the words of Maud Clark AM, CEO of SDTC

“The thing that stands out is the critical importance of this work. None of those kids would be anywhere near a school if not for Nobody’s Fool. None of them.”

It is the arts which has brought these young people back to education.

²⁶ Department of Education, Skills and Employment – Feb, 2020 <https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration> , page 4

²⁷ Watterston, J and Megan O’Connell ,*Those Who Disappear: The Australian Education Problem Nobody Wants To Talk About* , Uni of Melbourne, 2019

Objective Two: Increase Understanding of Reasons for disengagement and motivate more inclusive practice to better meet needs of at risk young people

This objective was more than met. It was exceeded.

The undoubted highlight of the year was the tour of NFT's new play *'When the Light Went Walking'* with CONSENT as its major theme. The responses from more than a thousand people who saw this play - from all ages and all walks of life – summarised in the previous chapter, clearly demonstrate the extraordinary power of this creative work.

Young people felt they were no longer alone and many felt empowered to speak out about their own abuse. Others felt they needed to reassess their own prejudices and behaviours. Many teenagers expressed relief that 'toxic cultures' in their own environments were finally out in the open.

Teachers and psychologists and health workers felt motivated to reassess their own professional practice and listen more carefully to the actual voices of the young people with whom they worked. Some even admitted that they had been unconsciously judging and reinforcing stereotypes. A Family Counsellor writes: *"I now realise I have been 'pathologising' and seeing as negative/hopeless the situations for some young people. Not seeing hope."*

A 42-year-old teacher states: *"You have motivated me to change my attitude and behaviour and to seek more ways small or big that I can help rather than judge some of the children in my own classroom."*

An 80-year-old retired man expressed that: *"You've changed this old man's way of seeing."*

Many parents wrote that they were motivated to have frank conversations with their children.

Other individuals were moved by the performance to be more empathetic and compassionate.

A Family Violence Specialist Advisor who trains workers in the field states: *"My students could learn more from your stage production than I could teach in a semester."*

Such is the power and impact of the NFT performance.

Many people, view the 'arts' as mainly a form of entertainment.

'When the Light Went Walking' was clearly entertaining.

However, this exemplary example of community arts work is so much more than entertainment.

People have been moved in ways they never expected to be, when they sat down in Geelong Football Club's vast GMHBA Stadium, or in the small Community Hall at Moyhu, or in the Wangaratta High School Hall or in Crickets' Photographic Studio – a dedicated Artspace in the Old Woollen Mills Geelong.

Many experienced their first piece of live theatre, and the experience was profound.

Nobody's Fool Theatre is unique in that it produces some of the most powerful theatre in the country – giving voice to the voiceless

AND

reunites some of the most traumatised and difficult to engage young people, with a meaningful and successful education journey.

Nobody's Fool Theatre:

Changes the lives of those who create and perform.

Changes the lives of those who see it and FEEL it.

The final words of this report are left to a former NFT student of many years, who wrote this letter about the impact of Somebody's Daughter Theatre and Nobody's Fool Theatre on his life.

Nobody's Fool
Theatre:

Changes the lives
of those who
create and
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Changes the lives
of those who see
it and FEEL it.

I've come from a very hard life, a life that wasn't what I expected or accepted.

A dysfunctional family where violence and drugs were normal. Growing up it was really hard for me to find who I was, due to finding out that I was different. What I mean by different is being a person of aboriginality and being gay. Growing up I've always been looking for WHO I am and WHAT I am. A me that wasn't locked away inside my head, a me that was able to express who I am.

Due to drugs and violence I conditioned myself to keep everything inside and when I was asked if I was okay I would lie straight to the person's face. But that's only because I believed it myself. This was my everyday life. Due to the stress from everyday life, I stopped going to school and started smoking weed 24/7. That became normal for me and for a very long time that is all I did.

I started getting into crime and becoming someone that I hated. I wasn't going to school so what else was I going to do.

School was something that I had struggled with a lot, never being able to concentrate or take things in. I think it was due to everything going on in the background. I come from a very poor family, and when I say POOR I mean poor. A different type of poor. Poor as in we had NO food, we were going to the local church for our once a day meal, poor meaning never being able to go on school excursions and not having what I needed for camps. Not being able to have school shoes, a uniform. Poor when you have no food, no clean clothes not even sheets. This was my every day life. So I dropped out as any person in this state would. I thought that I would end up like everybody had always said.... A dropout, a nobody.

Then in 2017 my mum changed our lives by moving to Werribee. After many months of looking for a program that suited the needs of our lifestyle we found ourselves at SDTC Nobody's Fool in Geelong. This was arts led education with a teacher from Newcomb Secondary.

THE ARTS are the only reason I'm still alive, the arts protected me from every bully, every issue, every sharp piece of glass that's thrown at me.

At NFT we are around other people that are going through the same, people that haven't eaten, people that have had hard upbringings, people that want to change their lives. This school was able to provide education and a safe place, a place where there were no worries.

The full focus is on you and your education through the arts. Showing us that you can express yourself NOT through drugs, violence, spite, anger, hate but through movement, speech, song, travel, positive human connection. This isn't a school - this is a home, whether we're workshopping or performing, be it in a park, theatre, hotel, church or school, we're a different kind of family.

I want to do more workshops and performances to bring awareness that people aren't alone and maybe give them HOPE just like I was given. I believe that through the shows and workshops we can show that the path you are on is not the only path and that's it possible that you can take a new pathway instead of just accepting what has been chosen for you.

NFT is about thinking of the future - the future of the kids that aren't thought about.

The kids like me.

The kids like us.

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