

2019 Evaluation Report Nobody's Fool Theatre

Strategic Partnerships Program (SPP)



Report & photos by Jan Osmotherly
Osfield Community Consultants



Contents

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION.....	2
PROGRAM OBJECTIVES	2
PROGRAM OUTCOMES	3
MAIN PROGRAM ACTIVITIES.....	3
Activity One	3
Activity Two	4
EVALUATION METHODOLOGY	4
Factors influencing the methodology:	4
REPORT ON ACTIVITY ONE	5
Delivery of full-time, personalised education curriculum for three participants	5
1. Context.....	5
2. Quantitative Information	5
3. Student Case Studies.....	6
4. Discussion	12
5. Conclusion.....	15
REPORT ON ACTIVITY TWO	17
1. Context.....	17
2. Quantitative Information	17
3. Performances and Workshops	18
3.1 North-east Victoria Tour	19
3.1.4 Highlights - Borinya Community Partnership, Wangaratta.....	21
3.1.8 Highlights Benalla Flexible Learning Centre	22
3.1.12 Summary of Major Tour Outcomes	26
4. Old Courthouse Theatre Geelong Season	27
4.1 Sample Feedback	27
4.2 Conclusion.....	29
APPENDIX ONE.....	30
Quantitative Targets as per SPP Funding Agreement	30
Quantitative Targets for Activity 1	30
Quantitative Targets for Activity 2	30

2019 Evaluation Report from Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company for Nobody's Fool Theatre Program Category 1 – Student Learning Strategic Partnerships Program (SPP)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Nobody's Fool Theatre (NFT) is a fulltime, creatively led education program for marginalised and disadvantaged young people in the Geelong area, who are 'school refusers' or too volatile to be in mainstream school. It is a partnership initiative, launched in 2016 between the Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company (SDTC), Newcomb Secondary College, Barwon Child Youth and Family Services and Platform Arts (formerly known as Courthouse Youth Arts).

The program 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.

Through the Strategic Partnerships Program (SPP) funding, this partnership was further developed to enable NFT to engage three more participants and facilitate delivery of their individualised education and creative development programs. SPP Funding supported the presentation of additional performances.

Program delivery locations:

- The Old Courthouse (formerly known as Courthouse Youth Arts Theatre (primary location)
- Schools
- Conference and professional development venues around Victoria

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

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

Increase understanding of reasons for disengagement and motivating more inclusive practice to better meet needs of at risk young people

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The intended outcomes are:

1. Increased engagement with education and artistic practice for young people aged 12-17 in the Geelong Area who are 'school refusers' or who are too volatile to be in mainstream school.

Annually, 3 at-risk young people are engaged through open workshops and intensive arts led education program leading to:

- Participants completing school year.
- Participants feeling safe, connected.
- Increased self-esteem, emotional coping skills and learning outcomes.

2. Annually, between 15 – 30 educators, workers and managers from health /welfare agencies and arts organisations, 70 – 130 mainstream students and 90 – 160 community members attend performances, workshops and community engagement activities. This participation leads to:

- Increased understanding of the causes of disengagement.
- Reviews of current professional practice/attitudes and increased skills to better meet the complex needs of disengaged youth.
- Increased collaborative initiatives to work with target group.
- A more empathetic and inclusive community.

MAIN PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Activity One

Delivery of Full-time, personalised education curriculum

Nobody's Fool Theatre provides disengaged young people with learning opportunities that are not available in mainstream settings with the aim of improving their achievement, engagement, health and wellbeing:

- Students will receive personalised teacher support to meet measurable Victorian curriculum outcomes.
- Accredited individualised education plans and teaching designed for each participant with an emphasis on literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and social skills, with agreed pathways back into formal education or training.
- Students receive encouragement and support to integrate back into mainstream school if/when they are ready.
- Individual learning plans and personal projects may also integrate outcomes from other learning areas including humanities, science and technology.
- Healthy lifestyle choices, nutrition, diet, physical and mental health education are daily aspects of this program.
- The education program gives significant focus to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures with educational and creative input from KESOs, local indigenous community and elders.
- The primary delivery location for all three participants will be the Old Courthouse Theatre.

Target Audience

Marginalised young people from the Geelong area who have been disengaged from mainstream school.

Activity Two

Creative development program

- 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 devised work.
- Students are given opportunities to present their own stories and ideas to a large audience. NFT provides a supportive platform for them to creatively express key issues that they have chosen to address.
- Each year, students perform at conference and an annual season of public performances, locally and around the State.
- Audiences consist of mainstream students, teachers, agency workers/managers, political representatives, family members and the general community.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Factors influencing the methodology:

i. The organic nature of arts-led projects

Any evaluation mechanism which seeks to 'contain' the organic nature of community arts programs within the confines of a rigid measurement focused methodology, will fail to accurately evaluate the impact of the work.

Whilst projects are conducted according to specific objectives and processes with a focus on agreed outcomes, the evaluation framework needs to be flexible so that it can best reflect the possibility that a project may take an unexpected twist or turn as dictated by local circumstances

ii. Circumstances of participants

In collecting data, the evaluator must be mindful that sensitivity to the individual's circumstances and feelings at any given time is paramount.

Principles

The features of this evaluation are that it is *appropriate and participatory*. This means it is:

- is 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

The Program is evaluated by both quantitative and qualitative processes 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 Department of Education SPP funds contribute to the cost of the overall program, specifically to reengage three more participants and to contribute to more performances.

This evaluation report is of the whole program to ensure the total context of the SPP contribution is understood. It is written with a specific focus on the targets, objectives and outcomes as per the SPP Funding Agreement.

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

REPORT ON ACTIVITY ONE

Delivery of full-time, personalised education curriculum for three participants

1. Context

The NFT arts-led education program is for students who have largely exhausted all other possibilities of accessing an education. Many have histories of multiple suspensions and expulsions from mainstream schools and/or have simply not attended for some time – at least three months, but in most cases it has been a period of years.

All NFT students are enrolled with Newcomb Secondary College and receive one on one/small group support from teachers (two teachers share the role) based at the home of the NFT program - Platform Arts Space (formerly known as Courthouse Youth Arts. A Young Persons Advocate employed by Barwon Child Youth and Family Services (BCYF) attends to the physical and mental health needs of each student. Enrolment in NFT requires a commitment by the young person to participate in the arts/theatre program, along with undertaking their education studies.

The teachers, in collaboration with the Young Person's Advocate and SDTC professional community artists, develop a Learning Plan for each young person which provides an individualised timetable. This includes a variety of activities, including theatre, music, dance and multimedia workshops, set education tasks, physical and sporting activities, healthy lifestyle education including diet, nutrition and strategies for managing emotional health. Counselling, medical and other appointments are factored in. As far as possible, weekly meetings are held to review each individual plan.

The teachers use a variety of reliable, standardised tools to assess each student's education level. These include the Student Engagement Matrix Grid², Autism Spectrum Disorder Resources³, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's (VCAA) On Demand Testing resource⁴, plus ACER Literacy and Numeracy tests. These standardised tools are supplemented with a variety of individualised assessment resources as required.

2. Quantitative Information

Whole Program

Sixteen students were enrolled over the twelve month period. There was a core group of **twelve** students with **eleven** successfully completing the whole school year. The twelfth student completed Unit One VCE, which was considered an excellent achievement given serious personal health and family trauma issues during the year which led to prolonged absences. **Three** students identified as Aboriginal and **eleven** of the twelve core students were from a low socio economic status household.

50% of students reported being homeless at some stage in their life and two are currently living in out of home or kinship care.

On average these young people had moved house/accommodation **eight** times in their short lives with one 16 year old male reporting more than twenty moves, one 13 year old female more than ten and a 17 year old more than thirteen. One fourteen year old Indigenous female has had five different foster care placements, including three in the past twelve months. High levels of residential mobility have been identified by the Australian Institute of Family Studies⁵ as a key factor in early school leaving and student disengagement.

75% of students had dropped out/disengaged with mainstream school in Year 7, the remaining 25% had spasmodic attendance before exiting in Year 9 or 10.

² https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/student_engagement_matrix_guidelines.pdf

³ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/learningneeds/Pages/teachlearnstrats.aspx#link83>

⁴ <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/prep10/ondemand/index.aspx>

⁵ <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/family-factors-early-school-leaving/risk-factors-early-school-leaving>

88% of the core student group have required ongoing mental health support with conditions ranging from depression, severe anxiety to Bipolar disorder. 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.⁶ At Nobody's Fool, these numbers can be multiplied more than 4 times

At time of writing, one student had been admitted to the Banksia Mental Health Unit at the Royal Children's Hospital. According to the Young Person's Advocate, four students (one in three of core group) this year had a history of self-harming. Not one of these students has cut themselves since attending Nobody's Fool Theatre.

Sixteen different support organisations have been consulted for support during the year including Jigsaw, Headspace, individual psychologists, Barwon Child and Youth Family Services, two different housing services, Geelong SOCiT- Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team, Geelong Sexual Assault & Family Violence Centre and various Youth Drug and Alcohol Services.

Many of the young people have parents with mental health and/or addiction issues. It is not surprising that **33%** reported being carers for younger siblings. This is a major, ongoing issue.

3. Student Case Studies

The SPP program supported three marginalised young people to complete their school year with Nobody's Fool Theatre.

All of these teenagers had been school refusers, some for many years. Two had dropped out of mainstream school during Year 7 and one during Year 10.

STUDENT ONE: KA 16 years Attendance 92%

KA had not been to mainstream school for two years when she dropped out, aged 13 years in Year 7. She was constantly bullied at school and experienced major anxiety episodes about even entering the school gate. She came to NFT when she was 15 and has just completed her second year with the program. KA has successfully completed her Year 10 studies and has also 'fast tracked' her VCE Year 11 Drama.

Asked whether she would recognise the KA before coming to this program and the KA now – she empathically replied:

"No. No way. I was lost, sad. My parents weren't really present. I would just sit in my bedroom with my cat for company, because I had no one. For two years I just did that as well as looking after my younger brothers. I would send them off to primary school. I didn't want them to be like me so I made them go. They would fight – and say, you don't go to school so I'm not going – but I forced them to go. I had to put on my 'mum' pants and get them to go – they had to go .. they were too young to not go. Then when they did go to school, I'd sit in my room with my cat for a year and a half. Then my cat passed away. So I sat in my room by myself. "

KA was eventually introduced to Nobody's Fool Theatre through the local Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) and even though the thought of doing drama initially filled her with anxiety-

"I had never done drama before and I was freaking out. I was really, really shy and quiet at the beginning" – she still felt Nobody's Fool was a program she wanted to come to. When asked why, she explained:

"Because everyone there had troubles – everyone had gone through stuff like what I had gone through so everyone understood. So I knew they wouldn't bully me because they knew what it felt like to be bullied. And they wouldn't judge. It felt like a safe place to be. Mainstream wasn't."

When KA reengaged with education at NFT her literacy and numeracy skills were years behind the norm for her age, but she has caught up fast. From barely being able to 'string a paragraph together,' her teacher reports that she can now write a cohesive essay.

⁶ <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.



KA emphasises *"I ALWAYS wanted an education but I just couldn't get it at mainstream. Here when you need help with something, you actually get the help you need, unlike mainstream school – they show the whole class at once. And if you aren't at the same point as the whole class you don't get it. And you just get further and further behind."*

KAs growth in the creative program has been quite exceptional this year. From being almost too afraid to speak, she now has well and truly, in the words of SDT Director, Maud Clark, *"found her voice. Not just in performance but for speaking up for herself AND others."*

One of her teachers reflected on this personal growth and new found social skills. *"When she arrived she was more like a wallflower. Quiet and shy. Now she has transformed into a leader."*

This newly discovered confidence has flowed into her academic work and assisted her to deal with extraordinarily difficult personal circumstances. On the 'home front' she and her brothers were formally removed by DHHS from their parents 'care' and placed into foster/kinship care.

Despite all the upheaval in her personal life, KA still maintained over 90% attendance and was an active participant in all aspects of the program. She proved herself to be quite a leader on NFT's tour to north-east Victoria - not only in performance and workshops but in supporting younger members of the group.

So what are the ingredients that make this program work when mainstream couldn't?

"It's been a crazy year and to be honest it has at times, been very difficult to focus on school work. No way would I have done anything at mainstream. Well I wouldn't have gone. But here... I wanted to come. No matter how I was. If I come in here and I'm upset, you get to sit down and chill and talk to people about what's happening. You get the support that you need. I feel so much cared about. I feel love here. It's not just a program – it's a family.

That makes me feel so good. Especially with everything going on at home.

I really feel I'm wanted somewhere and I fit in somewhere. And at home, I didn't feel wanted at all ... then coming to this program, I just felt wanted. And I felt so much love.

That helps me deal with everything."

"With this program, I really feel I'm wanted and I fit in somewhere.

I feel love here. That helps me deal with everything. "

NFT student

KA is clear about her goals.

"Next year, I am doing Animal Studies at the Gordon (TAFE) and I'm doing Year 11 Psych at Newcomb and then I'm doing English, Maths and Drama here.

I'm older and more mature now so going back to mainstream for a subject doesn't scare me so much. I know now, it doesn't matter what others think. I'm a LOT more confident. A lot more confident. Doing Year 11 Psych is a bit scary. It's going to be a lot of work but I'm doing it because I want to. This is a very big change.

I'm happy with myself that I am challenging myself more. I am more comfortable and confident to do that kind of thing, because I would never have been able to do that in years gone by. Never if I hadn't come here.

I want to challenge myself to get VCE and I will get VCE because I earned it. I don't want to take an easy way out."

From hibernating in her room with her cat, feeling she will never get an education, experiencing anxiety attacks at even the thought of speaking with others to now performing confidently on stage and approaching Year 11 VCE with confidence is quite a journey.

STUDENT TWO: AC 15 years Attendance 92%

AC was in Year 10 at mainstream Newcomb Secondary College before coming to Nobody's Fool Theatre. This young person has moved house over twenty times and has been to six different schools. He lives with a single parent who suffers severe mental health issues. He is a significant carer for his younger sibling.

Prior to NFT there had been substantial periods of prolonged absence from school. His attendance was described as 'sporadic' at best and he was seen as a student with very low esteem and a poor attitude to learning.

AC in his own words relates his mainstream schooling experience in negative terms...

"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 AC arrived at NFT, *"he 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."* (NFT Teacher)

What AC absolutely loved was the creative program – he thrived on the drama workshops. In his own words: *"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."*

This eventually translated to his studies. Initially, he would only do simple activities and it took constant one to one encouragement by the teachers and 'prodding' to get him to progress to new learning tasks.

NFT teacher: *"There was initially massive resistance to any challenges ... it's like he is so terrified of failing – because of all those negative school experiences. So it's like 'I don't mind doing something easy, but I don't want to be pushed into that challenging space. However, he really wants to do the right thing, so I can get him to do quite a lot if I am with him. Again – its having that relationship and having the time to keep prodding to keep him going ... which, simply, you can't do in a classroom of 28 kids."*

“I felt physically ill when it came time to go to ‘mainstream’ school. I’d be sick and stress myself out. Now, here, I’m starting to get better. I might be doing VCE next year when that wasn’t even in the remotest realm of my possibilities.”
NFT student

The positive experiences with drama and performing have been a major factor in giving him the confidence to move forward in his studies. NFT teacher *“The drama is his thing. He’s finally got something that he is proud of and he can do really well.”*

AC: *“When I first came here I thought I was a failure. I thought I was going to get nowhere, but at this program 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. Now I’m starting to get better. I might be doing VCE next year when that wasn’t even in the remotest realm of my possibilities, if you rewind to six months ago. My aim is to finish Year 12 VCE and if possible, maybe make a career out of acting. That would be amazing”*

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 - 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.

He has immersed himself in all aspects of this Program; has been involved with multiple performances and is seeming happier (and healthier) than he ever has. Almost every time I see this student now, he thanks me for giving him the opportunity to be involved with NFT. I am quick to remind him that he is the one who has made the most of it all, and should only feel proud of himself for being brave enough to embrace the new challenge.”

And the final word from AC:

“I just think since I’ve come here I am so much a better person. I just feel inspired about everything..”

Says it all really.

STUDENT THREE: ET 15 Years

Attendance 82%

ET is 15 years of age and joined NFT towards the end of 2018. She had been out of mainstream school for some time, after trying two different secondary schools. There is a background of serious mental illness in the family and incidents of trauma.

ET suffers from anxiety and reflected on how the bullying she had experienced at two different mainstream schools had led her to feel fearful about attending at all.

“I came to NFT after being bullied a lot in multiple schools and not really ever fitting in. So I’d been at one school and I couldn’t handle it there so I moved to another school for about 6 months but ... by the second school I was going only once or twice a week at most. If I did go to school I’d be crying on the bus there and back and it was a 45 minute bus ride. But thankfully NFT came up through a social worker.”

School work was never the issue for ET. As NFT teacher relates: *“She works hard. She’s got a positive attitude to learning. Her issues are not around school work. Her issues are around people in a social context. She wasn’t going to school because of constant issues with other people.”*



ET has successfully completed Year 10 as well as fast tracking and passing two Year 11 VCE subjects – Biology and Drama. She gained sufficient confidence to return to mainstream for one of those subjects Biology. Speaking with ET, she is clearly proud of her academic achievements.

“My school work is going so great now that I’m even accelerating a year. I’m going to accelerate Biology and Drama and do Year 12 of both in Year 11 next year.”

When asked, if she could think why there was such a difference between mainstream and NFT she responded:

“What works for me is that there is no massive school room and lots of kids. Everyone’s program is different so you are not stressing what other people are doing and comparing yourself. You just focus on what you are doing. And the others don’t bully because they know what it’s like. We are all different in our own ways and we don’t judge. The program is flexible enough that the teacher can accommodate your own style of learning – what works for you.

I like learning and I’m just glad that this opportunity came up so I could continue my education. Before NFT I was looking at not doing my VCE – not doing anything. Just staying at home. I was in such a ditch – it’s really awesome to see that I’m going somewhere now. I’m not stuck. I’ve got hope! I’m alive I’m actually living!! That’s how I feel!”

Unlike some of the other NFT student ET lives out of town. According to NFT teacher, the biggest win is simply that she is going to school now and achieving what she is a capable of. *“She is motivated and organised. She has to catch a bus from Ocean Grove every day – nobody picks her up. She gets herself to Newcomb to do her Biology and then she’ll get back on the bus and come back here and then back on the bus to go home to Ocean Grove. That’s quite an achievement for someone as anxious as she was.”*

The drama aspect of the program has given ET not only a huge amount of confidence, but an insight into the importance of the performances they do for others.

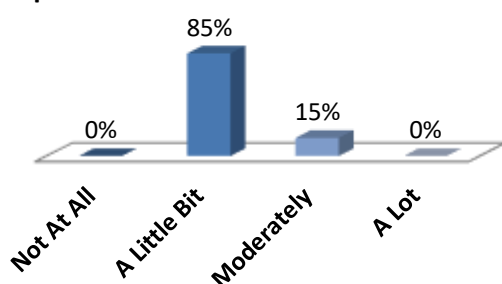
“And it made me realise that what you do on stage can really send a message .. I mean when you are performing you think people only think about it at the moment but it can even make a lasting impact. We saw that on our tour in north east Victoria. Kids realised that our story was theirs too and it gave them hope. That was amazing. “

This led her to reflect quite philosophically on education.

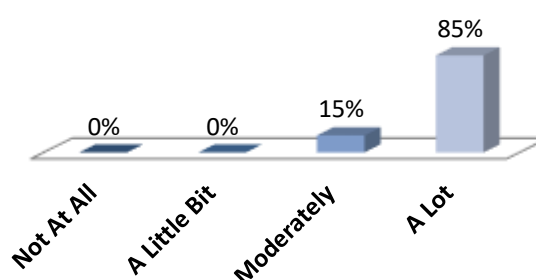
“I think its realising that we are doing something that matter. That has given me such purpose. It’s much better than mainstream school where what you do doesn’t matter to anyone except your grades. In school you SHOULD be doing stuff that matters.”

All three students were asked how important they thought getting an education was before NFT. As the graphs below indicate, there has been significant change.

Importance of Education Before NFT



Importance of Education NOW



“(With performing our stories for others) ..I have realised 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.”

NFT Student

The progress of two other students adds to the picture of the NFT Program. JB joined half way through 2019 and AS returned to the program after some absence.

JB 13 Years Attendance 90%

JB is thirteen years old and started Year 7 at Newcomb Secondary College this year. She comes from a background of family trauma. The school referred JB to Nobody's Fool concerned at her inability to settle into mainstream. There were behavioural issues inside and outside of the classroom but of most concern, was her depression and regular episode of self-harming at school.

NFT Teachers, Somebody's Daughter artists and the Young Persons Advocate all report a positive transformation in JB. When she first arrived at NFT she wore black clothing and heavy black makeup and would avoid eye-contact. She would draw very 'dark' images in her notebook and had what was described as a 'solemn' demeanour – head down, hiding behind her hair.

In the six months since she has been at NFT, there has not been a single incidence of self-harm. She no longer wears black clothes or makeup and her moods are far more cheerful. While there haven't been major improvements in her academic skills, teachers report that the main thing is that she is actually doing the work.

NFT Teacher: "JB has very good attendance. I probably spent the first couple of months just engaging her and getting her to speak with the other kids. That was the focus to start with – to help her feel better about herself. So then she started to feel safe here and that she belonged somewhere. She has clearly grown in self-confidence and is in such a better space. When she first arrived, she would do little more than draw dark images in her notebook but now she is actually doing regular classwork and improvements are beginning to show."

The creative components of the program – the drama, the art, the music have given her multiple avenues for self-expression. She now relates well to others, is trusting of the adult NFT artists, teachers and Young Person's Advocate and has successfully completed her Year 7 studies.

Her first ever drama performance with Nobody's Fool Theatre was late November on the main stage at the International Criminal Justice Conference held at the MCG Melbourne.

Again, this is quite an amazing transformation.

AB 17 years Attendance 60%

We reported on AB in last year's evaluation. Brief extract from the 2018 Evaluation below.

"AB was in the NFT program in 2017 but returned to mainstream school at the start of 2018. She remained there a very short time before dropping out and remained disconnected from any form of education for some months. During this time she endured significant personal traumas and withdrew from most sources of support, simultaneously increasing her drug use. NFT artists and the Young Person's Advocate kept in touch with her throughout this time and offered support where possible.

The key to AB's reengagement with the program was the drama. Maud Clark, NFT Program Co-Director:

"The only reason she is at NFT is because of the drama. She would not have come back just to do school work. We maintained contact with AB even just by telephone when she was going through that entire trauma and withdrew from everything. She came in just for singing because she loved the singing. It was through the drama connection, that she was brought back to education."

AB had another difficult year in 2019 and missed a lot of time due to ill health and personal and family traumas. She is no longer with her parents and is living in Out of Home Care. She was aiming to complete her Year 11 VCE Units and 2, however, due to the amount of time missed was only able to complete her Unit 1 subjects.

Given the seriousness of the issues she was enduring outside of NFT, the fact that she returned in the second half of the year to this safe space to complete her work, is a major achievement in itself.

NFT Teacher: "Finishing is important. She was adamant after missing most of Term 1 and half of Term 2, that she still wanted to come here and finish her Year 11 Unit 1. She's disappointed that she didn't complete all of Year 11, but she is still quite proud of herself that she stuck it out and finished Unit 1. And she's just been accepted in Cert 3 or 4 Disability at TAFE next year."

AB reflects: *“When I wasn’t at ‘mainstream,’ school, I would just smoke bongs all day. That has completely stopped. I don’t smoke drugs any more. I don’t do drugs at all any more. I know I’ve dropped in and out of here too, but I’ve always come back. It’s a safe space. They are always understanding. There’s so much more support here than a regular school. If I’d been at normal school there’s no way I would have reached this far – like Year 11. Not at all. Now I’ve got an aim and I want to continue my education and go to TAFE next year.”*



Student with NFT teacher

AB is receiving a lot of support from the Young Persons Advocate. In her own words she has learnt to ‘trust adults again’ and levels of anxiety have dropped.

“Before this program, I couldn’t even go into a shop and get milk. That’s how anxious I was. Now with Matt’s (Young Person’s Advocate) help I was able to go into a bank and set up an account.”

This setting up her own bank account, was a turning point for AB.

“Yeh, it was like. I can really do this. I can LIVE in this world. “

4. Discussion

As stated in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians⁷ (which is still current) pending results of a current 2019 National Review, the two goals for Australian schooling are:

Goal 1:

Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence

Goal 2:

All young Australians become:

- successful learners*
- confident and creative individuals*
- active and informed citizens*

Extract from Page 7

This means that all Australian governments and all school sectors must:...

- ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes*
- reduce the effect of other sources of disadvantage, such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness*

All goals are aspirational. And like many goals, they are easier stated than achieved.

It is clear from a number of recent international, national and state studies that there are significant numbers of young people who are not ‘successful learners’. The recent PISA report released on December 3rd, 2019 showed that Australian students were a full year behind in science, maths and reading compared to those of more than a decade ago, and significantly lagging behind many of their international counterparts.

7 Melbourne Declaration On Educational Goals For Young Australians, 2008 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs

What is particularly concerning and relevant to this program is that the results showed *“that there was a difference of about **three years of schooling** in each subject area between students in the highest socioeconomic quarter (advantaged students) and those in the lowest socioeconomic quarter (disadvantaged students).”*⁸ All of the students discussed in this report come from the lowest socioeconomic quarter and have multiple other factors influencing their disengagement from mainstream, including family dysfunction and trauma, mental illness and bullying.

It is clear is that the mainstream education system cannot cater for ‘all young Australians,’ as the nation’s aspirational goals state. The needs of some young people are so complex that they require additional resources and alternative learning settings which can best support them to get a successful education.

According to another compelling report released on November 28, 2019 by Dr Jim Watterston, Dean of the University’s Melbourne Graduate School of Education, at least 50,000 students of compulsory school age are not participating in an education program of any type. Entitled, *Those Who Disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about*⁹, this report received national media attention.

It doesn’t just present numerical facts but also makes recommendations to address the issue. For example:

“Recommendation 1: A national commitment

*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”*¹⁰

The support from SPP for the NFT program is an example of this recommendation in action and of trying to ensure that the national goals set by all education ministers are met.

The ‘*Those Who Disappear.. Report*’ profiles a ‘tailored’ alternative education provider *Pathways College, Queensland* for disengaged young people, as an example of a successful program and gives a Case Study of one student Jack.

Nobody’s Fool Theatre could *easily* have been listed alongside Pathways College with any of the Case Studies profiled in *this* evaluation report. The same principles apply. As Dr Watterston expresses:

*“Indeed, like all of the student centred and unique alternative schools located around the country, Pathways College doesn’t need to advertise. Most are full and doing their best to save as many young people as possible. Unfortunately, there aren’t nearly enough of these bespoke educational alternatives to cater for the numbers of students who need them so many just simply detach and disappear. The inconvenient truth is that many of our finest schools have conditions where our most marginalised and vulnerable children are given no real choice but to leave because, for them, school is no longer tolerable.”*¹¹

This ‘inconvenient truth’ has been echoed by young people in case studies on previous pages and educators interviewed for this report.

Assistant Principal Newcomb Secondary College: *“The essential overarching framework for the funding and resourcing of mainstream public schools is geared towards a model of teaching and learning whereby there is one expert or learning mentor and a cohort of 25 individuals. I think it permits people who come with a solid foundational knowledge of the world and literacy and numeracy at or above standard.*

⁸ <https://theconversation.com/aussie-students-are-a-year-behind-students-10-years-ago-in-science-maths-and-reading-Dec-3>, 2019

⁹ Dr J Watterston and Megan O’Connell, *Those Who Disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about*, Uni of Melbourne, 2019

¹⁰ Ibid p. 5

¹¹ Dr J Watterston and Megan O’Connell, *Those Who Disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about*, Uni of Melbourne, 2019 p.10-11

It enables those aspirational, organised young people to do OK and get by. But students who need additional supports and need to be engaged on a more interpersonal level are often at risk of falling through the cracks in that system.

I feel very proud to be a part of this Nobody's Fool partnership and am grateful for the opportunities afforded by the team of staff involved to some very deserving young people. It is only a shame that the unique nature of the Program, along with its atypical resourcing arrangement, restricts the number of young people who can be involved. The Nobody's Fool Program is a terrific initiative that consistently achieves a profound and even life-changing impact, upon a diverse range of students."

This is reinforced by the experience of a NFT teacher.

NFT Teacher "Sadly, the current reality in mainstream is that you can't give all kids the equity they need. That only happens here because of the partnership and the spread of resources to provide a high adult professional to student ratio.

For a couple of the young people here, who I understand have been incredibly disruptive in mainstream – the intimacy of this program means they can't hide. There might be between six to ten students maximum in the NFT classroom at one time. While it is difficult to quantify in terms of actually leaps and bounds improvements in their 'on-demand test results' – you need to view success sometimes just in terms of their minutes focussing on tasks. For a student like OL with significant mental health issues, I can imagine how easy it would be for her in a class of 28 to do nothing five days straight, week on week. Whereas here, while it's still really difficult to get her focussed for really long periods of time, it's still a 1000% more than she would have done in the mainstream classroom of 28. She has already gone from focussing for ten minutes to half an hour, to an hour.

That's one of the main differences here – the intimacy of the classroom space here and the number of adults around. They can't hide"

What is clear is that a number of factors need to coalesce to ensure equity of education. The formula will differ. Not every disengaged, detached young person will be suited to the Nobody's Fool Theatre model which is arts-led and requires students to commit to the drama as well as to their schooling. However, this is an example of a 'tailored, alternative and flexible' program as described by Professor Watterson¹² that *is* working very effectively for a proportion of disengaged young people and is deserving of more long-term resourcing and support.



Circle discussion time with artists, teacher and NFT students

¹² Ibid

5. Conclusion

The NFT program clearly met its Year 2 targets for Activity One by supporting three students to successfully reengage with education and make significant progress in improving their literacy, numeracy and other subject specific academic skills.

There are pivotal ingredients at NFT that are key to its success:

- Leading role of the arts and in particular drama with professional public outcomes
- Partnership between a community arts organisation SDTC, local public school – Newcomb Secondary College and health provider – Barwon Child and Youth Family Services (BCYF)
- High ratio of adult professionals to students – artists, teachers, welfare worker
- Holistic approach - emphasis on individualised learning plans which take into account the student's physical and emotional health at the time and not just scores on standardised tests

As NFT teachers and artists expressed, the initial focus for most students is assisting them to feel comfortable and safe. They need to feel they belong. They need to feel cared about. This came up time and again in interviews with the young people. Whenever asked what they liked about NFT, there was always an expression of feeling cared about, of belonging, of being part of a supportive family.

NFT Teacher: "If you didn't care, the kids know that. These kids (well all kids really) work on relationships, they work on feeling safe and accepted. They can sniff it out a mile away if you don't care and if you don't care – they won't care. Sometimes it's very difficult to get these teenagers to find some intrinsic motivation but the fact that they know that you care, gives them at least some extrinsic motivation to want to do well."

The uniqueness of the program enables multiple and varied opportunities for the young person to experience success. It isn't a linear two dimensional test score – it does not foster comparisons between students. It values other elements of being a worthwhile functioning human being in addition to their educational progress. Most cannot be counted or easily measured.

NFT Teacher: "Success is not a test score. For some even stepping in the door is an achievement. It is different for everyone. This program puts the kids as a holistic person first and acknowledges that education and achievement and where you are going looks different for everyone. "

Assistant Principal Newcomb Secondary College: "Programs like the NFT initiative celebrate the personal and the character growth of the individual and not just their academic achievements. And I think that's what makes it so unique and so powerful."

It is important to stress that in focussing on these other more difficult to measure personal achievements, such as – comfort in social situations, willingness to trust, ability to focus and so on, academic achievements are NOT ignored. It's just that these things are a prerequisite to learning.

If you cannot sit still for five minutes and are not comfortable in a room with an adult, then you are not going to be open to learning how to write an essay.

All students came into NFT feeling that they had 'failed' at getting an education. Not that education had failed them. Failure loomed large in their minds, in their hearts and was a barrier to even attempting tasks.

All students interviewed who had been in the program a minimum of 6 months, *no longer* felt that way. All expressed emphatically that they wanted an education and they valued it. They just couldn't function in the mainstream setting.

"Success is not a test score. For some even stepping in the door is an achievement. It is different for everyone. This program puts the kids as a holistic person first."

NFT Teacher

Student ET: *"I think people need to understand that there is not just one specific school route or education route that you need to be stuck to. NFT has given so many people like me an option who have dropped out or are dropping out. This is a place you can go to when you feel there is nothing left you can do about getting an education even though you do want to get somewhere."*

All NFT students have been making progress and some have made significant leaps in their literacy and numeracy benchmark scores. Students are successfully completing year levels appropriate to their age, after missing years of schooling.

Two students profiled in this report who had anxiety attacks at the thought of even entering the school gate, after 12 months or more at NFT, now feel able to return to mainstream in 2020 to do at least one VCE subject next year.

When asked, 'What do you see as the critical features of this program that work for formerly disengaged kids?'

NFT teacher: *"... well it's the teacher student ratio which means we can give each young person the attention they need, and we have Matt, the Young Persons Advocate who helps them with a lot of the extra support – like picking them up and bringing them here, arranging counselling, appointments with Centrelink and so on, but I have to say it's also 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.**"*

Assistant Principal Newcomb Secondary College: *"...the unique nature of the partnership, along with the vast energy, talent and compassion of the team of staff involved. I think the program is magical. The only thing I ponder is how could we create a space to enable more and more students to access that kind of opportunity and supports to grow in the same way that the NFT participants do. But it's the creative nature of the program that makes it so special, that enables it to have the effect it does."*

I think it's verified for me that all people are capable of extraordinary personal growth. It serves as a timely and powerful reminder of the fact that all young people, given those chances can develop and grow and aspire in ways that perhaps even they didn't think possible."

What is clear is the solid link between the students' educational achievements and the intensive arts base of the NFT program. It is the arts program which has brought them back to education. SDTC Director, Maud Clark:

"The arts have been the stepping stone for them to reengage and maintain their engagement".



JS (left) performing with NFT in 2019

"It's SDT's creative energy which holds this space. I'm sure of that."

NFT Teacher

POSTSCRIPT: It is worth noting that one NFT student, JS, profiled in last year's report, was accepted into the University of Melbourne's, Victoria College of the Arts and has just successfully completed his first university year. *(At the time of writing last year he had just successfully completed his Year 12 VCE.)*

JS had previously dropped out of mainstream in Year 7 suffering acute anxiety and depression and had been with the NFT program for 3 years. JS returns to NFT when possible and was able to accompany the group on the north east tour during his semester break. He is mentoring other students and is a wonderful role model.

REPORT ON ACTIVITY TWO

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 devised work.

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

1. Context

Intensive arts workshops in drama, singing, dance, music and multi-media were conducted by SDT artists for three days a week throughout the school year.

When nearing a public performance, there were rehearsals on five to six days a week and some evenings. The central role of the arts – of drama, music, dance, art, multi-media is the key to the success of NFT. It assists the individuals to get over many of their fears and instils in them the confidence needed to succeed in other tasks. Program Co-Director - Maud Clark:

“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.”

Throughout the year, on a Wednesday afternoon after school, NFT students were joined by other young people from the Geelong area in drama and singing workshops led by SDTC artists. A few participants were mainstream school students from local schools; others were young people outside the education system but with an interest in the arts. A number of these young people performed alongside NFT students in various performances. This clearly benefitted all.

Their inclusion, in the words of Maud Clark *“enhanced the diversity of the group and enabled the performance script to capture more voices.”* Having young people come from outside the NFT group challenged the NFT student perceptions of themselves as ‘outcasts.’ This is often the way with alternative school settings. The same self-image was found with the students in the non-mainstream schools in Benalla and Wangaratta, visited by NFT in May, 2018 and again in June, 2019. They also saw themselves as the ‘dropout losers.’ Having these additional young people come into NFT weekly, in Maud’s words *“broke down that NFT notion of being outcasts, totally.”* It was clearly a two way street of mutual benefit.

The public performances are always a highlight of the year and have a twofold benefit for those who see the plays and for the NFT students performing.

2. Quantitative Information

All targets were met or exceeded. (See Appendix)

3. Performances and Workshops

During the year, there were a number of public performances of “Unapologetically Myself” and presentations at conferences, forums and schools. These included:

- Give Where you Live Foundation – one short performances at the old Courthouse Theatre and discussions with members of the Foundation. The Give Where you Live Foundation exists to address disadvantage in Geelong. Its Mission is to be “a catalyst for social change through innovative philanthropic solutions to challenging social problems”. Those attending the first performance were so impressed that they asked NFT to hold another one so they could invite more potential supporters. This time the group performed to hundreds at the Novotel Hotel in Geelong.
- Performance to *Bunjilwarra Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service*, Hastings (where one of Nobody’s Fool Theatre artists had received support)
- ‘Loaned Executive Team’ performance and presentation. This is another branch of the Give Where You Live Foundation. NFT performed to this group of executives with the intention that these executives spread the word to further influential corporate decision makers in the community.
- North-east Victoria tour (See 3.1)
- ACSO (Australian Community Support Organisation) 2019 International Criminal Justice Conference at the MCG in November. Closing performance to all delegates (approx.450) on main stage. This was highly successful and there have been a number of positive responses including requests from some conference delegates for performances at their organisations in 2020. NFT students/performers met with and spoke to the Minister for Corrections the Hon Ben Carroll MP at this conference, who posted the following on his Facebook page (*pictured below*)



Ben Carroll MP 22 November

Victorian-based theatre company Somebody's Daughter is harnessing the power of the arts to help transform the lives of imprisoned women and marginalised youth.

Inspiring to meet some of the young Nobody’s Fool students engaging in drama and art and accomplishing something they set their minds to.

Standing up on stage and performing takes courage and is quite an achievement. They should be very proud of what they are achieving individually and collectively.

- ‘Unapologetically Myself’ – 4 performances at the old Courthouse Theatre. Attending were students and teachers from three local schools, Oberon High School, Newcomb Secondary College and Bellarine Secondary College. Also, a performance for workers from Barwon Child and Family Youth Services, the Traffic Accident Commission and other Geelong agencies and corporates. There was one well attended evening performance for the general community.

The size of the audience varied from twelve young people with mental health and learning issues to many hundreds of delegates at the International Justice Conference.

The venues for these performances were incredibly diverse including the Courthouse Theatre, the Betty Cuthbert Lounge at the MCG a small meeting room at the Quest Hotel, an art and craft room in an old school, and School Halls.



Not much room to perform in at LGBTIQ workshop event at Quest Wodonga

To equip students with the skills and confidence to perform to such a daunting range of audiences in vastly divergent spaces, there were scores of intensive creative workshops and rehearsals throughout the year.

3.1 North-east Victoria Tour

A major highlight of the NFT year was their performance and workshop tour to north east Victoria in June. This was a follow-up to a shorter tour in 2018, particularly building on relationships established with two north east alternative education settings - Borinya Community Partnership, Wangaratta and Benalla Flexible Learning Centre. Both these schools offer tailored programs for young people whose needs are not met by mainstream education or training settings. These two places were keen for NFT to return and not only perform but spend more time doing creative workshop with students.

Additional performances in Wodonga were included for the 2019 tour.

In total, NFT presented 11 full-length theatre performances of “Unapologetically Myself” and numerous workshops:

- Performance to open the Wodonga LGBTIQ Inclusion Workshop
- 4 performances and Q & A sessions with hundreds of students from Wodonga Secondary College plus an evening community show.

- Performances at Borinya Community Partnership, Wangaratta for students/staff and an evening community show
- Creative Workshops with students and staff from Borinya
- Performances at Benalla Flexible Learning Centre (BFLC) to BFLC students and staff, Benalla community show, as well as shows for Shepparton Flexible Learning Centre (SFLC) students and staff who travelled to Benalla
- Creative Workshops with students from BFLC & SFLC

3.1.1 Highlights - Wodonga

Ro Allen, Victorian Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality officially ‘launched’ the tour at the Wodonga Community Performance on June 18. Earlier in the day NFT had impressed the Commissioner when they performed a scene from their play to the LGBTIQ Inclusion Workshop which she chaired.

Commissioner Allen emailed the Company in following days with these words:

“The power of telling stories can be life affirming and life changing. When you combine stories with song, told authentically from a young person’s perspective, the impact can be limitless.

I was fortunate to have the Young People from Nobody’s Fool Theatre and Somebody’s Daughter Theatre Company performs an excerpt of ‘Unapologetically Myself’ at an LGBTIQ Inclusion Workshop I hosted in Wodonga in June 2019. It was the perfect way to start our event and set the tone of inclusion. Our Rainbow alphabet never sounded so good.”

Ro Allen Victorian Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality June 18, 2019

3.1.2 Sample Feedback from Wodonga Mainstream School Students

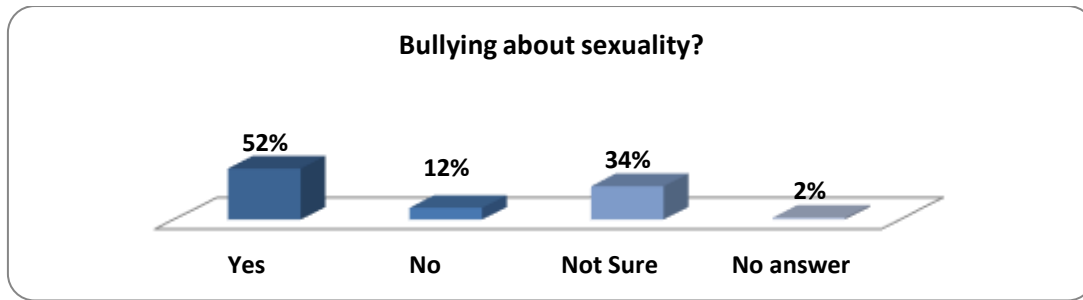


Performance to Year 10 students Wodonga Secondary College

- So good. It made me feel like I can be accepted anywhere no matter what.
- It made me feel good because it focussed on LGBTIQ problems!! That makes me happy. Hopefully others will understand me more.
- I loved the performance and it made me feel more connected to myself.
- I didn’t really think much about these things like gender and identity and stuff until this performance. It really widened my point of view.

Responses to one of the questions on the Feedback Form clearly showed that the play had raised very important and relevant issues for the school community. Acceptance of diversity is a challenging task, even more so in rural communities.

Is bullying about sexuality an issue at your school?



3.1.3 Responses from Wodonga School Leaders

Assistant Principal Wodonga Middle Years College: *“The performances were outstanding and gave our students an experience some will never get again. The messages within the performance were very important for our students to deal with. The issues that were raised (such as sexual identity, race) are the issues our kids are going through right now - very relevant. Gave us staff a chance to reflect quietly on this.”*

Executive Principal Wodonga Secondary College: *“The area of refugees and how they are treated in our community provided particular insight to what we are currently involved in as we have an increasing number of Congolese students. It provided a dramatic representation which allowed for discussion on how accepting we have been to our own recent arrivals. For those who were lucky enough to see this show, I think it has had a **major effect** on improving their understanding of the minority groups we cater for in our school and what challenges they face.”*

3.1.4 Highlights - Borinya Community Partnership, Wangaratta

A performance to staff and students was followed by drama workshops in movement and improvisations based on issues students wanted to explore.

During lunch together the Borinya students took their NFT visitors on a guided tour of their school site, proudly showing them some of their environmental projects before some further creative interactions. It was a wonderful day. But it was not over yet

Borinya, were hosting a *Stand Tall* evening for parents and friends of the school community. More than 60 people came along and saw some of the Borinya student work, mixed informally with staff over refreshments before a presentation of ‘Stand Tall’ awards for student achievement.

At 6pm these people were joined by others from the local area for a full performance of *Unapologetically Myself*. As one of the audience said on leaving, “this is the best piece of drama I’ve seen in a long time anywhere.”

3.1.5 Sample Borinya Student Feedback

- I thought it was awesome. It made me feel connected.
- It helped me see that it’s OK to be different.
- This performance made me feel happy and not alone. It might help me with my anxiety
- It was really awesome because I don’t feel so different now. These were kids like us... maybe one day I could do something great too.
- I wasn’t looking forward to a drama thing but it was awesome. It made me look at myself. Maybe I should be more positive

3.1.6 Sample Borinya Wangaratta Community Performance Feedback

- Great. It influenced me to be open about being different. That’s it’s OK to be different.
- Really excellent performance. It brought light and normality to some tough issues relevant to our community.

- I felt admiration for the performers and the writers/collaborators of this performance. Thank you so much for your insights into lives and challenges in a wonderfully entertaining way.
- You brought it home that different skin colours, different genders are all the same. We're all the same.
- You have prompted me to think about what assumptions I have been bringing to some people.
- You really helped grow my understanding as a parent of life for our young.

3.1.7 Sample Borinya Staff Feedback

- Brilliant performance. I love the wonderful way in which you bring many challenges to the audience and reflect to us that in life – it's all normal. It's all challenging.
- Enjoyed it IMMENSELY. It energised me as a teacher.
- These issues are so relevant to our local community. Indigenous issues. Racism. Xenophobia. White-washing. Bullying. Disengagement. Domestic violence. LGBTIQ+ - difference between generations. You guys are absolutely amazing.
- Loved seeing our kids connect with other students going through similar things
- Our students were inspired by the honesty of the NFT students and willingness to 'know themselves' – to be approachable and non-judgmental
- On speaking with one student the next day (who rehearsed with me a speech he was to give) he mentioned his nerves. He reflected that he had spoken with one of the NFT girls after their performance and he thought that she would be very confident due to her acting, but that she was very quiet and nervous. He felt that if she could do that, then he could too.
- The VIBE of the day was so positive. Seeing our kids come out of their comfort zone and participate in the drama workshops was so good.

“Our students were inspired by the honesty of the NFT students and willingness to ‘know themselves’ – to be approachable and non-judgmental.”

Borinya Teacher

Borinya Principal: *“The performance was thought provoking, providing valuable insights into what is going on for our young people. It was clever, entertaining and had powerful messages around the fluidity of gender identity.*

Drama is such a powerful tool to provide young people with a voice. If we have the ability we would like to access more opportunities like this for our young people to access drama/performance. Our students participated in workshops and without exception report the experience as having a significant impact on their sense of self and well-being. Parents also were very positive and found the performance illuminating. We are very grateful for the opportunity to host this.”

3.1.8 Highlights Benalla Flexible Learning Centre

The team travelled to Benalla Flexible Learning Centre where they spent the morning transforming an old art and craft space into a ‘theatre.’ In the afternoon, they performed to students, staff and some parents.

However ... before that performance was a surprise.... During the morning set up, a member of SDT had been chatting with the school’s music teacher. She told them how their visit the previous year had inspired their students to take on some of their own creative projects and a small music group had formed. They happened to be practising that day. It was suggested that perhaps they would like to perform publically as the ‘opening act’ for the afternoon show. And with quite a considerable amount of encouragement, they did ...

It was an amazing time. For the first two or so agonising minutes, the lead solo singer sang very quietly and tremulously with her back to the audience and ever so gradually with members of SDT & NFT singing out whoops of encouragement and exclamations of ‘beautiful’ (she did sing like an ‘angel..’).. she turned around and sang to the audience. This solo was followed up by another song by the whole group.



BFLC singing group performing in public for first time

Every NFT student recalled this moment in their evaluation interviews as one of the major highlights of the year. Sample comments:

NFT Student JS: *“Watching the girls sing at Benalla, inspired by our performance there last year was such a highlight for me”*

NFT Student ET: *“The stories we tell in the drama are very important – if it’s mine or someone else’s in the group. It’s about giving voice to silenced thoughts. This really gives impact to the audience and we saw that going back to a place they’d seen us before – like at Benalla. It was life changing for me to see first-hand how our group had helped from a year prior. Like seeing that group of disadvantaged kids have the guts to sing, perform – I cried every single time a certain girl sang .. it just got me.. it still does when I think about it.*

The Benalla young people were so buoyed by their public singing experience that they volunteered to sing before the evening community performance, another amazing unpredicted outcome. Their music teacher wrote:

“What a wonderful opportunity for our students! The Somebody’s Daughter/Nobody’s Fool Theatre experience has inspired and encouraged many of our students to step outside of their comfort zones, share their ideas and talent and collaborate with others.

Thank you for providing such a safe and encouraging platform for our music students to perform to a public audience – this has built their confidence IMMENSELY.

Above all, the sense of connectivity and relatability between our students and the performing students has been so strong – expressing shared experience has played a huge part in encouraging many students to engage further in their learning, particularly in the Arts.”

“The SDT/NFT experience has inspired ..many of our students to step outside of their comfort zones, share their ideas, talent & collaborate with others. Expressing shared experience has played a huge part in encouraging many of our students to engage further in their learning..”

BFLC Teacher

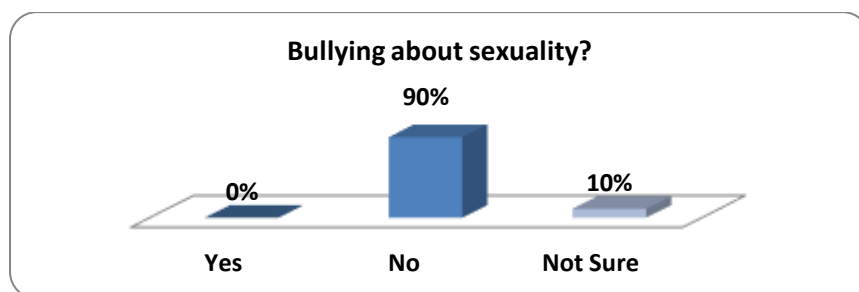
There were a further 2 performances at BFLC with students from Shepparton Flexible Learning Centre also attending. Two days of creative workshops then ensued.

3.1.9 Sample Benalla & Shepparton Flexible Learning Centre Student Feedback

- I liked it how it was from others experiences but we could all relate to them.
- Fantastic. I'm not alone anymore.
- It was so relatable. The bits about anxiety and not being able to breathe. I know that feeling. It was all pretty great. It made me think I could I should come out.
- It was good seeing others around my age having the courage to share their stories and discuss topics that us teens struggle with.
- Whole thing was good. When the mum was on drugs and the uncertainty of the kids.... I related to that.
- The parts about Aboriginal culture had the most impact on me.. Because I relate and am still confused about my identity.
- I loved it. It was like my story. The bullying part made me think on the same way I was bullied.

It is worth noting that students from these alternative settings were asked the same question as students at the mainstream Wodonga Secondary College about bullying and sexuality. **Not ONE** said it was an issue. There were a number of LGBTIQ students attending the flexible Learning Centres who all clearly *felt* and *were* very supported. There is a message in that.

Is bullying about sexuality an issue at your school?



3.1.10 Sample Staff Feedback

- The performance was absolutely amazing. The skill, competence and passion displayed by performers were awe inspiring!
- The whole thing was wonderful. The opening was great. The music and singing was great. It all had a huge impact on me. Particularly loved how you showed getting through all the struggles to the other side. Inspired hope.
- The students absolutely loved it. Some of the songs sent shivers down their spines. They loved the characters and how the performance covered so many different aspects of diversity. The stories or aspects of the characters' stories rang true to many of the students.

Benalla Staff Member: *"It was so wonderful having the SDT & NFT team from Geelong come to our school and run workshops with our students. Watching the students being prepared to share their stories and portraying so much more confidence as the workshop progressed was something special. I believe this has been such a rewarding process for our students, and the visiting performers, realising the stories are very similar no matter where you live.*

It was particularly beneficial for one of our students who keeps very much to herself and rarely joins in with any activities. After a little cajoling to be just an observer, slowly this young person began to realise these visiting young people had similar stories to herself. The young person stayed for most of the day, and with encouragement from Maud and Luke involved herself in a group. This group was led by Luke,

who was so encouraging and supportive. It was wonderful to see this young person, feel safe and comfortable enough to participate, and help write material that she and others could relate to. Her comment as she left was: "This was fun, and they are nice people". Thank you to all involved and I hope we are able to come together again, and perform more magic."

Benalla Flexible Learning Centre Principal: "The reactions to the SDT/NFT performances were fantastic. To see students engaging with the performance in a positive way was inspiring to all. Many of the messages that were portrayed in the performance were **identical** to those that many of the students have experienced in their own private lives. SDT/NFT were able to break down the barriers that often exist with our students.

They understood that many of the students were anxious and self-conscious but were able to encourage them to participate in an extremely positive way. One student who could not attend the performance due to anxiety – attended the workshop as a passive observer – she normally can only remain at school for an hour- however, she remained at school, participated in sharing ideas and thoughts, wrote a poem and called her family to let her stay till lunch (some 3.5 hours). An amazing breakthrough. One very proud student shared a copy of her work (poems) the following day.

The collaboration between the SDT/NFT and the Benalla FLC has been an outstanding success. A small country alternative setting school does not often have the opportunities to see / perform in live theatre. The students and staff from SDT/NFT were amazing people and understood the needs and supports required for our students to have a positive experience from the visit. The sharing of lunch, the casual conversations and the social interactions that occurred over the days were also very valuable. Thank you so much for your efforts in making this a success."



NFT students with Benalla and Shepparton Flexible Learning Students after 2 days of workshops

3.1.11 Feedback from Nobody's Fool Theatre young people

The outcomes for the Nobody's Fool Theatre performers and emerging artists were as positive as they were for those in audiences and workshops.

In focus group discussions and written evaluations to review the tour, the young performers' enthusiasm and pride was palpable. They were almost overwhelmed by the impact on others of sharing their stories through the play and workshops. To their credit, this led to feelings of humility rather than 'swollen heads'. Their reflections were predominantly about the experiences of others. Responses to the question: "What were the highlights of the tour for you?"

- Seeing kids that have never expressed themselves in a creative place and watching them love and enjoy it.
- Making people smile and seeing people come out of their shells in the workshops.
- Knowing that we changed at least one person's life and that's such a privilege to be a part of
- I loved it. It was such a special thing. What stands out is the people who were really shy at the beginning and then after we performed for them and then worked with them they were singing and joking and smiling.

And another NFT student, when asked what was most worthwhile:

"The impact it has on the people we work with and showing them that even though we might look confident - that we are struggling with the same shit. Whether you are from Geelong or a small country town that it's the same issues that we are dealing with.

I believe that we should do more workshops and performances to bring awareness that these people aren't alone and maybe give them HOPE. I believe 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.

Also, seeing people that are fighting their own demons like being LGBTQIA, or telling their true blue Australian parents that they are gay or they feel like they're in the wrong body - gives me hope because it took me so long to find who I was and to find the strength to express myself. It took me 19 years to have the strength to face myself."

Two NFT students claimed it had been life changing.

"(The tour).. was a life changing experience in the most exhilarating and eye opening way."

"It was life changing I reckon. Yes, I'd go so far as to say that. It was life changing. I could not believe that the stories we performed could have such an impact on others.."

I believe 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 Student

3.1.12 Summary of Major Tour Outcomes

- Many young people in north east Victoria were **reassured, inspired**. A significant proportion of students reported really 'connecting' with the issues as portrayed in the performance. Most commonly expressed was reassurance that 'I'm not alone anymore' that others 'are going through similar things' and find positive ways forward. When a 14 year old says *"I don't feel so different now. These were kids like us... maybe one day I could do something great too"* .. the power of the tour comes sharply into focus.
- For others, **prejudicial views were changed**. An average of 62% of people who saw the performances recorded that it had changed the way they would view some people in the future. *"This performance helped me be more understanding and not to be judgmental. "From simple comments as .. "because I understand more. I won't judge," to "you have prompted me to think about what assumptions I have been bringing to some people."*
- All school Principals reported that the performance/discussions and workshops had been extremely valuable for students and staff.
- All schools are considering further opportunities to incorporate more creative opportunities into their curriculum with the view to creating their own works giving voice to their stories
- Students at Benalla Flexible Learning Centre have been motivated to pursue more public performance opportunities

- Members of Nobody's Fool Theatre have realised the potential of their work to change lives – which in turn has given them the strength to continue on their positive educational and creative journeys.

The tour proved to participants the powerful role that the arts can play in creating more inclusive, empathetic and informed communities. Unique collaborations have been formed with enthusiasm for further work together. Lives have been touched and changed for the better.

4. Old Courthouse Theatre Geelong Season

The script of “Unapologetically Me” was substantially revised after the north east tour.

Maud Clark Director: *“A major reason for revision is simply that there has been a changeover of individuals in the group. We like to see the play as a dynamic living thing. The new people inject their own energy and personalities into the play and for each of them, there is something of their own which has been written into the script.”*

There is a level of honesty with these people. It gives them energy to tell their story. We have seen it strongly with the young people – that their story is the story of so many others - that they are being the voice for many who are normally voiceless. It takes them to another level in how they view themselves. In the telling of the story and finding some practical resolutions – they are also saying this is our story but now we are moving on from that. It is possible to own the story without being trapped by it.”

Early December saw four public performances of the revised show at the Old Courthouse Theatre, Geelong. Students and teachers from surrounding mainstream local secondary schools attended, along with youth and family service workers and representatives from local corporate organisations.

The finale was an evening performance for the general community.



Article in the Weekend Edition of the Geelong Advertiser

The feedback from the audience was overwhelmingly positive.

4.1 Sample Feedback

- It made me feel like it was actually real life and not a performance. (Student 15)
- Was an excellent performance. I could feel the emotion. (Student 15)
- Amazing performance. High energy. (Teacher)

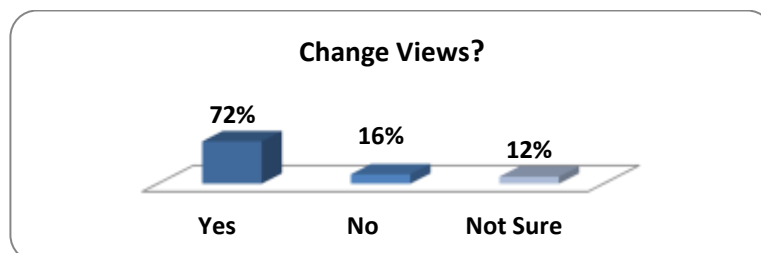
- I loved it. I. I don't feel so alone. (Student 14)
- So good. It made me feel like I can be accepted anywhere no matter what. (Student 15)
- It was good. Changed my view on things. (Student 15)
- I liked it because I know people who this impacts. It felt good to know others do go through the same and overcome it. (Student 15)
- The script was great. It wasn't 'annoying' like other programs/shows that talk about these kind of topics. (Student 15)
- This communicated important themes for the kids which we as teachers need to connect with. (Teacher)
- Raised a lot of awareness and important issues. You never know what's going on in someone's life. (Case Worker BCYF)
- Brilliant! Reminded me of clients I have worked with. (Youth Worker Headspace)
- Thank you for shining a light on reality of living in a RESI unit. (Case Worker BCYF)
- A real reminder to be more mindful of people's experiences. (Team Leader BCYF)



Scene from "Unapologetically Myself"

The responses to this question indicate the educative and motivational aspects of the NFT program.

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



Typical comments:

- I didn't really think much about these things like gender and identity and stuff until this performance. It really widened my point of view. (Student)
- I have learnt a lot from hearing the young people's perspectives. I have been underestimating the impact of trauma and abuse on them. (Teacher)

- Changed my perception towards aboriginal people, how they look and the challenges they are facing. (Student)
- Before I treat someone in some way I will think more about how it will affect someone. (Student 15)

A number of mainstream school teachers indicated it had made them reflect more on their teaching, which is consistent with one of the program’s objectives: to increase understanding of reasons of disengagement and motivating more inclusive professional practice to better meet the needs of at-risk young people.

4.2 Conclusion

The program clearly met and exceeded its Year 2 targets for Activity Two. The NFT students, through the intensive arts program culminating in public performance, have learnt to move out of their comfort zone – to challenge themselves, and other people’s perceptions of what they are capable of.

Performing was an astonishing transformation for most.

KS: “When I came to NFT, I couldn’t speak in front of people. Even a few people. It gave me bad anxiety but with the drama – its showing me that I can speak in front of people and it gives me that .. I can’t find the word because its more than confidence. It’s changed my life really. I just know how to put it..”

ET: “Everyone needs to hear their own voice and to embrace themselves rather than being stuck and the drama does that. It gives a voice to our silenced thoughts.”

Assistant Principal Newcomb Secondary College: “When I think of those students who wouldn’t speak in front of a group of five kids who now, through the right supports and opportunities find themselves on stage performing in front of several hundred strangers.... it really is a transformation that is immeasurable.”

Young people with histories of trauma and with little to no experience of success in the mainstream world – perform confidently and present themselves confidently because it is their truths. They have a sense of purpose – that they are making a difference.

This sense of purpose was cemented in the tour of north-east Victoria with its focus on performing for other young people like themselves. As already reported, many of the NFT students saw it as life changing.

“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 believe 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.”

Wow.



NFT take a bow

APPENDIX ONE

Quantitative Targets as per SPP Funding Agreement

Quantitative Targets for Activity 1

TARGET DESCRIPTION YEAR 1	YEAR 2 TARGET	ACTUAL NUMBERS
Total number of participants*		
- Students	3	3
School type (number of students)		
- Secondary	3	3
Primary delivery location (number of students)		
- Courthouse Youth Arts	3	3
Identified target equity cohorts		
- Koorie	1	1
- Low SES &/or disability	3	3
Number of secondary students		
- VCE	1	0
- Yr 7 -10	2	3

Quantitative Targets for Activity 2

TARGET DESCRIPTIONS	YEAR 2 TARGET	TARGET	ACTUAL
Total number of participants			
- Reengaged Students		3	3
School type (number of creative workshops)			
- Secondary		40	86
School type (number of creative workshop hours)			
- Secondary		120	225
Delivery location (number of performances)			
- Courthouse Youth Arts		1	8
- Local/Other Schools*		1	10
Delivery location (Audience numbers)			
- Courthouse Youth Arts			
i. Educators/ Agency workers		5-10	110
ii. Students		20-30	190
iii. Community		40-60	200
- Local/Other Schools*			
i. Educators		5-10	45
ii. Students		50-100	800
- Other			
i. Educators/ Agency workers		5-10	75
ii. Community		50-100	560

* In 2019, other local Geelong schools came and saw performances at the Courthouse Youth Arts Theatre rather than at own school. This was by mutual agreement. NFT did do ten performances at other schools in Victoria.