

# The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a social impact model

Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project  
2023

## **Acknowledgements**

QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara peoples, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. The researchers pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. The researchers recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning. We thank Elders for their care for Country, Culture and Community.

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# Foreword

For First Nations Australians the whole Land is held together with stories. The songs and dances, paintings and stories of country hold the Land together, and in effect hold the people living on the Land in a deep sense of relationality and obligation. If you don't know your stories it is impossible to feel connected to the place you call home. If you don't share your stories you are likely to feel disenfranchised, disconnected and discombobulated. So strong is the power of the Arts that they can form communities by including them in your education systems, social rituals, households, streets and public buildings, and the contrary is also true, the absence of the Arts can create social issues that can tear a community apart.

There are many in the world who believe in the intrinsic value of the Arts in the proper functioning of a society. This core belief sometimes flies in the face of economic rationalist positions which seek more instrumental uses and justifications. Though in many urban areas we await a world where arts activities are accepted in the way we accept the need for a police service, roads, banks and high-speed broadband we have to accept that in many regional areas even these simple services are no longer guaranteed, putting more pressure on the Arts to justify their role and impact in a community.

It might be utopic to think we can hold the Land together through the stories we share and that it is an inalienable right to engage in the Arts no matter where you live but I hold this to be thoroughly true. This research however is the ever pragmatic answer to those who say - Why are the Arts in our town? - a way of helping more people to embrace and support the Arts in all communities.

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The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the ARC, nor the project's partners.

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2023

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The arts cannot be left simply to those who can afford to do it. It is an important part of our economy and that is important to recognise that. But it is also important to lift ourselves above the usual economic debate.

This is about our soul.  
This is about our identity.

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP  
Prime Minister of Australia  
Launch of National Cultural Policy  
30 January 2023

# Prologue

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“Story, when created with outsiders in our society, and told well with deep authenticity, and placed in the right forums, can be a powerful tool for triggering new thinking.”

Scott Rankin, *Soggy Biscuit: Invisible Lives - or the emperor's new social work* (2014)

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The story shaped through this report is about how two Australian communities understand the social impact of engagement in arts, culture and creativity. The story is doubly shaped by the release of Australia's first new national cultural policy in over a decade, *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* (Commonwealth of Australia 2023). This new policy necessarily responds to the deleterious effects of COVID-19 on the arts and cultural sector and provides support for a broad range of arts and cultural activities. While this immediate support is urgent, the National Cultural Policy also provides opportunities to further understand the existing strengths and innovation occurring in community-led arts, culture and creativity. It provides a path to build a more sustainable and impactful futures for place-based programs and practices which support wellbeing and thriving in communities.

The findings from this Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project *The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a social impact model* (LP180100477) indicate that arts and cultural projects and programs are profound drivers of community thriveability by attracting workforce, and improving wellbeing, employment and tourism opportunities. These findings emphasise that particularly in rural, regional and remote communities the social, cultural and economic outcomes of engagement with arts, culture and creativity are entwined.

The report offers a proposed language frame (see pages 78-80) that may assist rural, regional and

remote communities to identify success markers resulting from engagement in arts, culture and creativity. The frame and contents of this report suggest ways in which Australian communities can meet the challenge of measuring the value of creative arts, and proposes a way forward to adequately articulate those values. The research points to four significant outcomes that may be used to understand the social impacts arising from engagement in arts, culture and creativity. These outcomes are expressed as:

**Collective Wellbeing** - defined as not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. Walker et al. (2013, 208) emphasise wellbeing for First Nations peoples is “simultaneously a collective and individual intergenerational continuum that exists in the past, present and future”.

**Thriving Community** - defined as the liveability factors associated with a city or town, including notions of community regeneration. Thriveability goes beyond sustainability. It has the human dimensions of creativity, imagination, hope and compassion (see Wood et al. 2016; Nussbaum 2011). Thriveability is being able to reach your potential, feeling valued, and being able to positively contribute to your communities and our futures (Hes 2016). Arts, culture and creativity (including creative thinking and arts-based solutions to pressing challenges) are an essential part of a community's future across social, economic and environmental domains.

**Amplified Place** - defined as a social construct as much as a geographic location. Place is not something merely encountered; rather, “place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience ... There is no possibility of understanding human existence - and especially human thought and experience - other than through an understanding of place” (Malpas 2018, 13). Sensitivity to the specificities of place (geography, demographics, environment) and the assets of communities (culture, creativity, knowledge, lived experience) is increasingly





recognised as critical for delivering services that are meaningful, appropriate and relevant, and that support the strengthening of communities.

**Creative Ecology** - defined as embracing local skills and knowledge as fundamental local assets, and amplifying these through arts, culture and creativity. Acknowledging, preserving and celebrating local culture and heritage is part of the knowledge sharing function of local arts, culture and creativity. A creative ecology approach embraces a decolonial understanding of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups care for Country, Community and Culture (Gattenhof et al. 2022). The concept recognises that local ecosystems of practice and activity are key to flourishing communities.

*Revive*: a place for every story, a story for every place - Australia's Cultural Policy for the next five years (Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 16) ambitiously states that:

"The intention of this policy is to change the trajectory of the creative sector, to deliver new momentum, so that Australia's artists and arts workers, organisations and audiences thrive and grow, and our arts, culture and heritage are re-positioned as central to Australia's future."

The National Cultural Policy through five interconnected pillars offers communities the opportunity to develop a new discourse about what the arts contribute, how that contribution can be described, and what avenues exist to help communicate the outcomes of arts engagement in Australia.

Throughout this report the words 'arts, culture and creativity' are deliberately used together, rather than using only the term 'art'. Expanding the frame to include creativity allows for the valuing and representation of culture and cultural practices that are inclusive of ritual, custom and storytelling. Using the term 'creativity' may break down perceived barriers of elitism ascribed to the term 'arts'. Arts, cultural and creative activities support social cohesion through ameliorating a sense of isolation from others, fostering interaction and connection with others, and promoting an increased sense of shared identity and belonging. The impact ascribed to engagement in arts, culture and creativity can be expressed as "a sense of continuity with the past, and a pathway to the future" (Smithies and Uppal 2019). This future context is important for all of us. Engagement in and through arts, culture and creativity develops what theorist Anna Craft (2000) calls possibility thinking, a way of approaching everyday challenges in life moving from a "what if" mindset, to "what is" to "what might be". This mindset encourages playfulness, risk taking and can shed new light on ideas, concepts and practices.

Arts, culture and creativity constitute major areas of human endeavour and achievement. They represent a form of knowing which is situated in sensory awareness or what is described by theorists as sensuous knowing. It is a form of knowing that engages both cognitive and emotive capacities simultaneously. It is head and heart. It is thought and feeling. It is knowing and unknowing.

***It is connection.***



# Project Partners

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*The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a social impact model* research project has been supported and guided by the following organisations.

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**Australian Government**  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development and Communications

*Australian Government Department  
of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional  
Development, Communications and the Arts*

**[www.arts.gov.au](http://www.arts.gov.au)**

Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts supports inclusiveness and growth in Australia's arts, entertainment, cultural and creative sector, and we protect its workforces and promote Australian content and culture through existing functions and the five-year National Cultural Policy, *Revive*.

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*Performing Arts Connections Australia*

**[paca.org.au](http://paca.org.au)**

PAC Australia is the national peak body representing and supporting performing arts presenters, venues, producers and creators in Australia by providing leadership, building capacity and facilitating relationships that strengthen the connection between the art and the audience.

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***Burnie City Council***

**[www.burnie.tas.gov.au](http://www.burnie.tas.gov.au)**

Burnie City Council is a local government body responsible for delivering leadership, and accountable to the Burnie community. The Council and community vision for Burnie is a vibrant, thriving, beautiful place, with a caring community, and a regional leader in education, health, retail, services, arts and culture, engaged with the world through information, business, social and rich cultural connections.



***Red Ridge Interior Queensland Ltd***

**[www.redridgeinteriorqueensland.com](http://www.redridgeinteriorqueensland.com)**

Red Ridge helps create healthy and resilient communities in remote western Queensland by bringing people together in art and cultural activities. We enrich their lives and we protect our heritage by working with our communities, government and donors. Our focus is the social and economic health of central western Queensland communities and all who live here.



***Regional Arts Australia***

**[regionalarts.com.au](http://regionalarts.com.au)**

Regional Arts Australia is a not-for-profit peak body that is the national voice for arts in regional Australia. We advocate for informed national regional arts policy that represents the diversity of practice and cultural landscape and represents best practice.



***Remote Area Planning and Development Board***

**[rapad.com.au](http://rapad.com.au)**

RAPAD is an organisation of local governments who work collectively to support, facilitate, promote, deliver, and encourage the region's community, environmental and economic development. We work with relevant state and federal ministers, government agencies, industry organisations and our local communities to represent the central western Queensland region.



***Regional Australia Institute***

**[www.regionalaustralia.org.au](http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au)**

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) is the nation's first and only independent think tank dedicated to building robust regional economies and a better quality of life in our regional towns and cities. The RAI exists so that decision-makers at all levels of government, industry and community have the information they need to ensure the best outcomes for regional Australia.





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We insist that arts and culture are a key resource to this nation, and one that is generative, sustainable and contributes to the Commonwealth.

Christos Tsiolkas and Clare Wright  
(Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place  
- Australia's Cultural Policy for the next five years,  
Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 15)

# Introduction

More than 30 years of focussed research tells us that arts and cultural engagement - whether in a school or in societal contexts - result in improvements in self-esteem, connection, wellbeing, knowledge creation, cultural maintenance, creative problem-solving, imaginative responsiveness, and awareness of self in concert with others.

This project addresses the long-standing problem facing rural, regional and remote communities in Australia of how to strategically communicate and effectively evaluate the social impacts of the creative arts in communities.

The project adopts a social impact framework - both in the way it has engaged with the selected communities, and in reporting outcomes from the research. The Centre for Social Impact (n.d., 1) defines it as “the net effect of an activity on a community and the well-being of individuals and families”. Carnwath and Brown (2014, 9) say that impact “implies that something changes as a result of a cultural experience” and Landry et al. (1995, 23) extend this definition by saying that impacts are seen through “the effects that go beyond the artefacts and the enactments of the event or performance itself and have a continuing influence upon and directly touch people’s lives”. Social impact is an evolving field of research and investigation into its application to the creative arts has not been significantly understood or examined from an end user perspective. This project builds a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of what Brown and Trimboli (2011, 617) describe as the “alterations in the quality of life” resulting from engagement in arts, culture and creativity both for individuals and communities.

The aims of this project are to:

- significantly advance the approaches to design, development and delivery of arts-based projects in regional and remote areas of Australia that consciously represent the interests, needs and capacity of communities and promote healthy, sustainable communities.

- develop comprehensive, contemporary, and rigorous consultative and evaluative frameworks to account for a multiplicity of understandings related to the impact of arts and culture across diverse communities.
- conduct case studies of the arts and cultural activities and outcomes in two vastly different key regional sites to articulate the patterns of historical and contemporary funded arts activities, approaches to evaluation, and the legacy created by these programs.

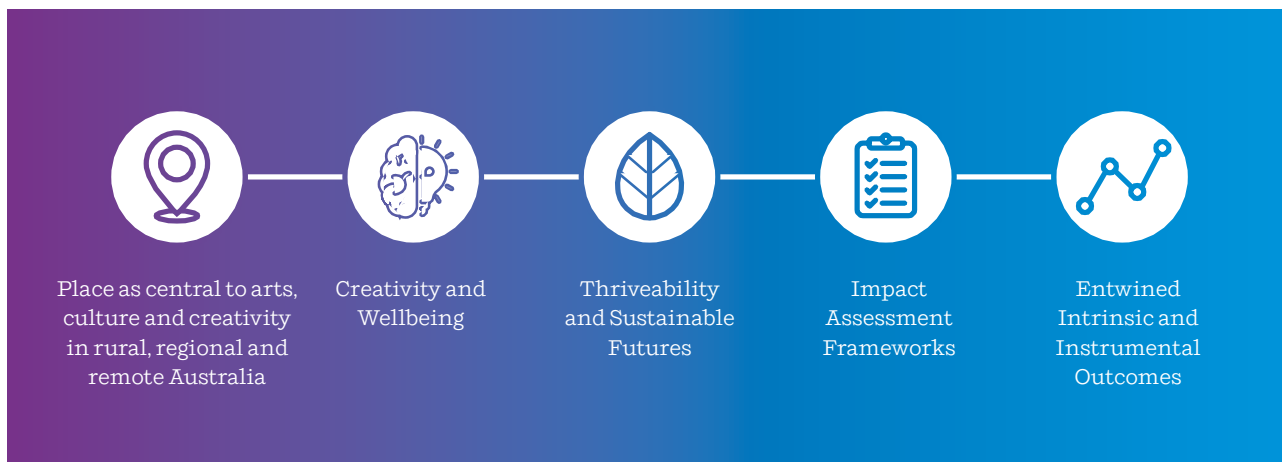
The project outcomes provide a language framework and evidence base about arts, culture and creative engagement that captures the creative capacity of communities. It offers an impact assessment approach that is replicable, comparable and scalable, and can be used across a variety of geographically, socially, economically and culturally different environments.

In this project’s two research sites, participants identified collective wellbeing, pride, hope, belonging and social cohesion as some of the outcomes of arts and cultural engagement. These outcomes are mirrored in the results of the 2020 Australia Council for the Arts national arts participation survey which shows improving wellbeing and connecting with others are two of the foremost reasons Australians attend arts and cultural events. Most notably, “[r]espondents in remote areas are more likely than those living in metropolitan or regional locations to attend the arts to improve their wellbeing” (Australia Council for the Arts 2020a, 121). As a corollary, the Regional Australia Institute (2022) observed in recent research that arts, culture and creativity make a significant contribution to the liveability of regional communities.

This project presents ways in which a more integrated understanding of the impacts of arts and culture for rural, regional and remote Australia can position the creative arts as central to the wellbeing and success of all communities.

## I Themes Emerging from the Research

Arising from this research are five key themes. While the themes articulated below are represented on the page as being discrete, they should be seen as interconnected.



### 1. Place as central to arts, culture and creativity in rural, regional and remote Australia

Mackay et al. (2021, 392) emphasise “place is everything for regional communities” and acknowledge that the characteristics of places profoundly shape experiences, behaviours and quality of life. Taking a place-based approach provides a means of unravelling the ways in which art, culture and creativity reflect, shape and enhance the lives of people in the communities, cities and towns where they live. It enables the multiplicity of arts practices and the creativity and culture of diverse communities to be illuminated, along with localised understandings and impacts in terms of how they make people feel, the ways they empower people and interact with place to foster legacy. The current research supports Gattenhof et al.’s (2022) position that expanding the frame of arts and culture to include the notion of creativity may break down perceived barriers of elitism ascribed to the term ‘arts’. Expanding the frame of arts and culture to include creativity allows for the valuing and representation of culture and cultural practices that are place-based and inclusive of ritual, custom and storytelling. Likewise, it is important to note that a different understanding of what arts, culture and creativity can mean in rural, regional and remote communities is required. The research highlights that rural, regional and remote Australian communities value creativity to preserve and innovate traditional crafts such as bush leathercraft and woodwork in central western Queensland, or heritage art practices such as papermaking in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania. It is important to note that embracing traditional or heritage art practices are not solely anchored in the context of the past, but communities use their knowledge of place to realise outputs for Australian and international engagement and impact.

### 2. Creativity and Wellbeing

The research shows that solutions to seemingly intractable problems, such as social isolation and low levels of wellbeing, already exist within communities. The case studies presented in this report demonstrate that local heritage, arts, culture and creativity are powerful assets and tools for rural, regional, and remote Australian communities, delivering impacts beyond the traditional measures of economics, tourism and trade. The ways in which art-based and community-led approaches can positively impact collective wellbeing, and particularly social cohesion, have gained widespread recognition. In 2019 the World Health Organisation Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report, *What Is The Role Of The Arts In Improving Health And Wellbeing* (Fancourt and Finn 2019), acknowledged the capacity for intentional and targeted arts activities to uncover solutions and approaches to health and wellbeing challenges. This project acknowledges the need for community-led perspectives and frameworks for developing arts-led, cross-sector approaches to enhancing wellbeing.

### 3. Thriveability and Sustainable Futures

Beyond sustainability, the concept of thriveability includes the human dimensions of creativity, hope, imagination and compassion. This concept is more useful for understanding how community members position arts, culture and creativity as foundational in the creation of inclusive, liveable communities. Thriveability recognises that local ecosystems of practice and activity are key to flourishing. The research supports that arts, culture and creative practices are levers for economic innovation and shape futures for individuals and communities that move

beyond historic notions and interests. The two research sites are shaped by First Nations art and culture as well as industrial and agricultural heritages. The vibrancy of the creative sectors in each site has allowed the communities to reshape their identities which in turn has opened possible futures in terms of inclusion, cohesion, employment, and economic growth. Importantly the research demonstrates that the thriveability of both communities is developed using an ecosystem approach to arts, culture and creativity. This is activated by an understanding that without the well-supported local arts and craft initiatives and organisations, larger arts initiatives such as festivals, exhibitions and performances cannot be developed and sustained.



#### 4. Impact Assessment Frameworks

One of the original aims of the research was to investigate the development of comprehensive, contemporary, rigorous consultative and evaluative frameworks to enable communities and organisations in rural, regional and remote Australia to describe and assess the social impact of engagement in arts, culture and creativity for individuals and entire communities. The report outlines existing frameworks (see pages 39-41) that may be used to help communities find languages to describe the impact of engagement in arts, culture and creativity. However, the research demonstrates that creating a generic set of impact assessment markers is not the preferred way in which rural, regional and remote communities would like to develop qualitative understandings regarding the value and impact of arts and cultural engagement. It is also important to note that one set of defined markers will not suit all communities - even those of similar population sizes - as differences in geography, infrastructure, engagement and equity of access to arts and culture need to be considered. It is imperative that communities collaboratively develop their own markers of success to report impact and change. This enables the impact of projects to not only be articulated through the goals of funders or delivery organisations but in the way it is understood and valued by the people who participate in arts, culture and creativity in their own communities.



#### 5. Entwined Intrinsic and Instrumental Outcomes

Examining and articulating the social impact or instrumental benefits of arts, culture and creative activities does not sit in opposition to acknowledging the intrinsic value of the arts. The research demonstrates that rural, regional and remote communities have the capacity to produce high quality creative outputs, and that these outputs have benefits including (but not limited to) community identity, tourism, economic development, jobs growth, and wellbeing. The research shows that the two sites included in this study produce creative outputs that are visible in the international market. Australian rural, regional and remote communities are aspirational about their creativity and believe that their creative capacity is not constrained or limited by their geography. They believe that the arts, culture and creativity they make and share should not be anything less than equal to the creative output of a larger Australian urban centre or international destination. The research finds that the historic binary between intrinsic and instrumental impacts may be a false binary. The inextricability of the social and economic outcomes of engagement with arts, culture and creativity in rural, regional and remote communities is reflected in the project findings.





## I Digital Stories

It is recommended that this report is read together with five digital stories created throughout the life of the research project. These digital stories frame the findings of the research project through the voices of the research participants.

### **Creating thriving communities**

[mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O\\_7ry1ld0c](https://mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O_7ry1ld0c)

Arts, culture and creativity are drivers of innovation and sustainability in rural, regional and remote communities. Community members in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania and central western Queensland highlight the value of place-based art, culture and creative activity for enhancing liveability and supporting their communities to survive and thrive amid socioeconomic change.

### **Creating wellbeing and social cohesion**

[mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O\\_8e0gn7p3](https://mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O_8e0gn7p3)

Rural, regional and remote communities are embracing local art, culture and creativity to foster social inclusion and enhance whole of community wellbeing and cohesion. In northwest lutruwita/Tasmania and central western Queensland, community members identify collective wellbeing, pride, hope, and increased belonging and cohesion as some of the foremost aims and outcomes of arts and cultural engagement.

### **The role of place in the creativity of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania**

[mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O\\_7ti5icpx](https://mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O_7ti5icpx)

Arts, culture and creativity assist with community regeneration, defining and articulating the identity of a town or region, and establishing liveability.

Community members in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania describe local arts, culture and creativity as inherently informed and shaped by place, while also articulating the profound placemaking, place-shaping functions of their arts and cultural activities.

### **Creating sustainable futures in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania**

[mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O\\_yahdlba0](https://mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O_yahdlba0)

The value of arts and culture in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania is centred on building cohesion, tolerance and connectedness within the community. Community members position art, culture and creativity (including creative thinking and arts-based solutions to pressing challenges) as an essential part of the community's future across social, economic and environmental domains.

### **Creating inclusive communities in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania**

[mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O\\_0wbkn09b](https://mediahub.qut.edu.au/media/t/O_0wbkn09b)

Community members in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania identify inclusivity, local social connectedness and community cohesion as defining features and functions of local arts, culture and creativity. Arts and cultural events and creative activities offer inclusive and accessible avenues for civic participation, for connecting and belonging with others, and powerful tools for fostering individual and collective wellbeing.



## I About the Research Sites

This project engages with two remote and geographically dispersed regions: central western Queensland and the northwest corridor of lutruwita/Tasmania. Both communities have active and unique arts ecosystems while also experiencing significant economic disadvantage and social isolation. The central western Queensland site comprises seven local government areas and has the highest rate of youth unemployment in the country at 28.4%. Burnie in northwest Tasmania is a recognised area of social disadvantage, with 45% of young people not completing high school. Both communities are much more than these statistics, and their capacity and challenges are reflected throughout much of rural, regional and remote Australia.

In Australia, the term “regional” is often a catch-all for vastly differing settings, from large prosperous regional centres to isolated townships. In this research, interviewees and participants did not characterise rural, regional or remote as homogenous places or experiences. This indicates categorisations, generalisations and comparison are not always appropriate. There are no consistent definitions of rural, regional or remote in Australia; rather, geographical remoteness is measured based on population size, distance from capital

cities, and relative access to services (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). However, the Modified Monash Model (2019) prepared by the Department of Health uses Australian Bureau of Statistics data to categorise all Australian locations on a scale from MM1 (major cities) to MM7 (very remote communities) and is useful in the context of this study. To illustrate, the central western Queensland project site is classified very remote (MM7), while Burnie in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania is classified as a large rural town (MM3). The broader northwest region of lutruwita/Tasmania is a mixture of categories MM3, MM4 and MM5 (see <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/rural-health-workforce/classifications/mmm>).

### Central western Queensland

Central western Queensland comprises seven local government areas and a land mass of approximately 62.5 million hectares, which is a third the size of the state and 2.5 times the size of the United Kingdom. Within this vast region, the communities of Blackall, Tambo, Barcaldine and Longreach on the lands of the Bidjara, Iningai, Malintji and Kuunkari peoples are key project sites. These towns and communities vary dramatically in population size and geography and carry distinct histories. Research participants from across the region highlight an intense pride in their

shared resilience, innovation and generosity, and universally position art, culture and creativity as a crucial feature and strength of central western communities. For interviewees and community consultation workshop participants, the diversity and richness of arts, cultural and creative activity – from high-profile programs and events to small community craft groups – was a natural product and reflection of place.

### **Northwest lutruwita/Tasmania**

The northwest corridor of lutruwita/Tasmania is palawa country and for this project includes the cities and towns of Burnie, Devonport, Wynyard and Smithton. The region is a nationally recognised centre of arts, culture and creativity, home to significant arts organisations and festivals including arts and social change company Big hART, arts festival *Ten Days on the Island*, and *Panama Music Festival*. Community members from across this region value their heritage, artists, culture and landscapes as crucial local assets, and embrace their creative skills and craft traditions to innovatively address local challenges. Interviewees and community consultation workshop participants framed arts, culture and creativity as inherently shaped by place, while encompassing critical tools and resources for sustaining their region and building inclusive futures for their communities.

A call for more nuanced approaches to and understandings of rural, regional and remote communities and their needs is reflected in international research literature, and increasingly in Australian Government policy. Internationally, policy recommendations include “the need to acknowledge differences among rural locations and circumstances ... There is a general plea for place-specificity, to ‘listen to locals’” (Duxbury 2020, 10). Echoing this call in the context of Australia’s rural communities, Driscoll et al. say “[e]very country town is a specific place; not just a geographical location but also an assemblage of people, environments, and experiences shaped by specific histories and social and economic circumstances” (Driscoll et al. 2017, 5).

A focus on local voices and place-based understandings of communities and locales is reflected in *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place – Australia’s Cultural Policy for the next five years* (2023). This policy emphasises the value of localised arts and cultural activities for enabling diverse communities “to tell their stories, evolve their own cultural identities and build local resilience” (Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 40). *Revive* also highlights the criticality of rural, regional and remotely-located artists and arts and cultural activity to the vibrancy of the national arts and creative sector, and to their own communities and economies. Echoing the call for place-specificity and local stories, this research privileges the voices of community members in articulating the ways individuals and communities experience arts, culture and creativity in the unique places where they live.

# Methodology: How This Research Was Undertaken

The project design uses qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, case studies and arts-based engagement and consultation workshops) and complements these with non-textual forms to articulate some of the findings from community consultations (digital stories, visual representations and immersive soundscapes).

These methods are integrated to maximize advancement for the sector, conceptual rigour, and partner and industry policy and benefit.

Arts-based research forms a foundation for the fieldwork and is by its very nature interdisciplinary. It seeks to uncover innovative and authentic methods to capture and project the voices of collaborators. Arts-based researchers strive for an understanding of universal conditions and predictable outcomes where possible, as well as using methods that can be repeated by others, while encouraging variation and even uniqueness in both methods and outcomes (McNiff 2011, 387).

The research adopts two lenses presented in *Valuing the Arts in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (Gattenhof et al. 2022) to capture, analyse, and report on data.

## 1. Arts, culture and creativity

Gattenhof et al. (2022) articulate the need to use the words 'arts' and 'culture' together rather than referring to one entity or another in the singular. Uniformly, research participants stated that culture is place-based and inclusive of practice, ritual, custom and storytelling that express people and place as well as what is valuable and meaningful. Such framing is of particular importance to First Nations peoples who understand that art is a product of a living culture, and that art and culture cannot be separated from one another. The research illuminates the need to make 'arts' framing more inclusive of peoples and

practices. In response to participant engagement the term 'creativity' has been added as part of the lexicon. Adding 'creativity' to 'arts and culture' opens avenues of practice and meaning in a more inclusive way. The term 'creativity' is viewed as experiential, able to break down perceived barriers of elitism ascribed to the term 'arts' and is seen as belonging to everybody.

## 2. People-centred impact models

Gattenhof et al. (2022) note the need to develop impact assessment models and approaches that are people-centred and have flexibility to be shaped by end-user defined outcomes. This ensures impact and change is not only articulated through the goals of funders or delivery organisations but is understood by the people who participate in arts and culture. Using evaluation approaches and language that go beyond audience, subsidy and economic modelling can build a more comprehensive picture of the transformative potentials of arts and culture for individuals and communities.

## I Data Collection Processes

The three dominant data collection processes foreground relationship-focused community engagement. Such an approach requires, from the outset of a project, that potential participants or community members are supported to determine for themselves how to frame the project, how to approach its design, how to include the people who will contribute and/or benefit most, and how to determine if the project was a success. This means that topics of discussion and debate will be different from those that are decided by people from outside the community, and often focus on strengths and capabilities in the community rather than deficits and challenges.

## Interview

Research participants were engaged in semi-structured interviews, a method that prioritises the participant's unique voice through the provision of a clear framework that guides discussions while also supporting deviation and improvisation. This process produces data that is grounded in the experience of the participant. The participants' lived experience is revealed and interpreted through the interview process and not just in the analysis and interpretation of the data (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). The purpose of these interviews was to engage research participants in descriptive discussions about their engagement in arts, culture and creativity across the two research sites. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key members of each of the partner organisations, many of whom represent peak bodies in the sector. These interviews were augmented with conversations with arts leaders in each site, as well as local creatives. The interviews were designed to illuminate historical and contemporary attitudes and approaches to regional arts funding, changes to policy, and the evolution of priorities in the sector. Interviews were conducted throughout the life of the project both face to face and via Zoom. Yin (2018, 120) says the interview can allow the researcher to "capture an interviewee's own sense of reality and its meaning", making it an appropriate method of data collection for this research project.

## Community Workshops

The community consultation workshops in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania were held at the Burnie Regional Art Gallery. Similar workshops were held in central western Queensland in the towns of Tambo, Blackall and Barcaldine. These workshops adopted face-to-face arts engagement as a model encompassing fluid processes for supporting maximum participation (Nikolas 2014, 192). The intention of such an approach is that participants may 'join in', participate and contribute to the extent they feel comfortable. The community consultation workshops used creative prompts and processes to generate participant-led discussion about the role and value of creativity locally. Discussions explored the aspects of their community residents are most proud of and that can be amplified via arts and culture; the role of traditional and non-traditional venues and arts and cultural infrastructure; what progress looks like locally; and the types of creative projects that have had lasting impact.

## Digital Stories

Arts and culture represent fundamental practices of meaning-making, experience and engagement, and offer uniquely powerful tools for exposing root issues, centring under-represented voices and shifting sociocultural norms (Sonke et al. 2019, 6). To ensure an inclusive approach to the representation and sharing of data, the project engaged 'non-text based tools' (Gattenhof 2017) such as storytelling, yarning, performance, visual response and imagery to enable the participants

to convey value and meaning about arts, culture and creative experiences for individuals and communities. The dominant expressive mode used for this is a digital story. Hancox (2021, 103) notes that "digital storytelling has variously been described as a practice, a set of processes, an approach and a movement". A digital story is "generally a two-to-four-minute multi-media story in which photographs, sometimes film and drawings are used to convey a personal story that is narrated by the subject of the story" (Hancox 2021, 103). Through this process the personal is expanded out to a collective, community narrative told by multiple voices. "The storytelling process, as a social transaction, engages people in communicative relationships. Through identification and co-creation of story, the storytelling and reader/listener create an affective bond and a sense of solidarity: told and re-told 'my story' becomes 'our story'" (Davis 2002, 19).

## I Data Management And Language Use

This research was undertaken with approval from the Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 1900000841). To maintain the confidentiality of the research participants in accordance with research ethics names have been replaced with numerical coding. To maintain consistency all data has been de-identified. Interviewee data has been represented as follows:

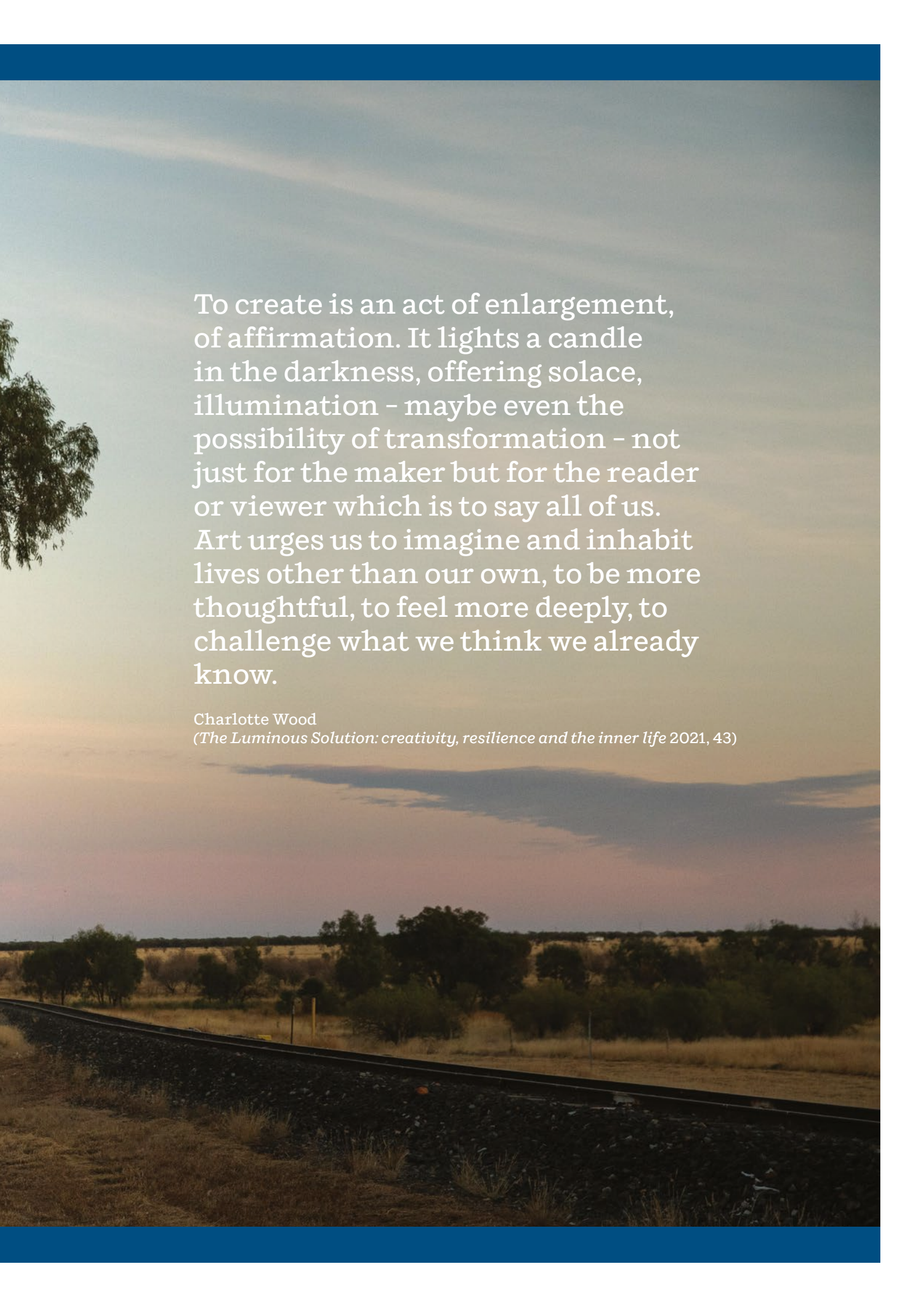
- B prior to interviewee number (e.g. B001) indicates stakeholder from Burnie or surrounds.
- CWQ prior to interviewee number (e.g. CWQ001) indicates stakeholder from central western Queensland.
- P prior to interviewee number (e.g. P001) indicates project partner organisation representative.

Throughout this report gender inclusive language has been used except for descriptions and analysis of activities and programs that research participants specified were shaped and delivered for an identified gender cohort.

In support of First Nations sovereignty the authors have used palawa language words without a capital letter. These words include: lutruwita, palawa, paranapple arts centre, and mapali.

*palawa kani* means 'Tasmanian Aborigines speak'; it is the only Aboriginal language in lutruwita/Tasmania today (Source: Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre <http://tacinc.com.au/programs/palawa-kani/>).





To create is an act of enlargement,  
of affirmation. It lights a candle  
in the darkness, offering solace,  
illumination - maybe even the  
possibility of transformation - not  
just for the maker but for the reader  
or viewer which is to say all of us.  
Art urges us to imagine and inhabit  
lives other than our own, to be more  
thoughtful, to feel more deeply, to  
challenge what we think we already  
know.

Charlotte Wood

*(The Luminous Solution: creativity, resilience and the inner life 2021, 43)*

# Literature Review

This section scopes government papers, industry reports and scholarly literature relating to the impact of arts and cultural engagement and participation in rural, regional and remote communities, and the challenge of its measurement. The literature review outlines key ideas that frame the research project including how value is understood in relation to arts, culture and creativity, and the role of place and creative placemaking in rural, regional and remote communities. It reviews the intersection between arts engagement and wellbeing, particularly how creative engagement enhances social cohesion, and an articulation of thriveability as it relates to the project. This section presents contemporary understandings of the value of arts and cultural engagement for First Nations peoples and their communities.

## I The value and impact of the arts

Research Councils UK define impact as “the demonstrable contribution research makes on society and the economy ... including enhancing quality of life, health and creative output” (Research Councils UK, n.d.). The requirement for arts and cultural projects or events to demonstrate markers of value to others from outside the project, thereby evidencing positive and measurable impacts on communities and individuals, is not a recent development. The use of public funds to create and deliver arts-based engagement has been long debated and documented. The term ‘value’ is imbued with “the long-held belief of the two-headed debate about the aesthetic and/or utilitarian outcomes of arts and cultural engagement” (Gattenhof 2017, 18). To be more accurate “[the] tension between the measurable and the immeasurable remains at the heart of the debates on cultural indicators” (Blomkamp 2015, 11). “At the core of the value system is how individuals, families and communities are affected and transformed by virtue of participating” (ibid.).

## *Defining the notion of value*

The notion of cultural or public value is complex and divisive with opinions falling into two broad themes: economic and non-economic. Within these themes are a variety of conceptual frameworks supporting different philosophical viewpoints. The dominant understanding, economic value, includes the measurement of worth; the dollar value of art, and the measurement of quality; and value for money. The current economic environment has sharpened discussions about the use of public funds to support the development and presentation of arts programs and events. Within this climate the need to prove that the arts offer value for money appears to be ever more pressing.

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The arts and culture landscape has entered a moment where measurement and attribution of value is seen as critically important.

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In this context it is not surprising that the arts and culture landscape has entered a moment where measurement and attribution of value is seen as critically important. Value, according to Belfiore (2014, 95), “has been inextricably linked to the challenge of ‘making a case’ for the arts and for public cultural funding”. Walmsley (2013) makes the point that value can be harder to pin down than demonstrable benefits, “mainly because as a concept it is more elusive and intangible” (Walmsley 2013, 74). Carnwath and Brown (2014, 9) agree by saying that defining value is complex because the term “carries many different meanings on its own and in combination with other terms”. They go on to define value as “not inherent in objects or events, but [as being] attributed to them by the beholder” (ibid.). As such, the value of arts and culture is “created in the encounter between a person (or multiple people) and an object (which may be tangible or intangible), as an idea or activity” (Carnwath and Brown 2014, 8).





The research concerning artistic and cultural value reveals a lack of consensus about the meaning of this terminology. Scholarly commentary (see Barnett and Meyrick 2017; McCain 2006) supports the need for a unified understanding of the terms artistic value, cultural value, and public value (Scott 2010), alongside agreement regarding evaluation measures and methods. Clarifying 'what' the value is and for 'whom' it is valuable, will allow for a more accurate articulation of what cultural value is, more nuanced evaluation methods (Scott 2010) and, according to Gilmore, Glow and Johanson (2017), improvements in the quality of art. Without a consensus about language and meaning, the cultural value conversation is reductive "...subsumed by the problem of measuring the cultural sector..." (Cunningham cited by Meyrick et al. 2019, 81), limited to evaluation and judgement.

John Holden defines "three types of cultural value: intrinsic value, instrumental value and institutional value" (Holden 2006, 11). Importantly, in Holden's articulation of cultural value, social and intrinsic worth is also considered. McCarthy et al. (2004) conducted a comprehensive review of the benefits associated with the arts, including cognitive, behavioural, health, social and economic benefits, and various forms of intrinsic benefits. McCarthy et al. (2004, 3) use the term "instrumental benefits" when "the arts experience is only a means to achieving benefits in non-arts areas", which may also be achieved by other (non-arts) means. By contrast, "intrinsic benefits" is used when referring "to effects in the arts experience that add value to people's lives" (McCarthy et al. 2004, 37). What has proven most valuable in the study by McCarthy et al. is the explicit recognition, "that arts benefits - both instrumental and intrinsic - can have both

private and public value” (McCarthy et al. 2004, 4). Rationales for non-economic value concern the intrinsic and social significance of cultural value. Often experiential (Meyrick et al. 2019; Juncker and Balling 2016) or expressive (Juncker and Balling, 2016), these include narratives of experiences with and through art and reflect benefits as experienced by individuals and communities (Scott 2010).

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The arts have positive impacts on our sense of health and wellbeing, our capacity to deal with stress, anxiety or depression, and understand other people and cultures.

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Although not the focus of current Australian political rhetoric, appreciation for arts and culture is observable in the opinions and values of Australians as evidenced in the landmark national arts participation studies commissioned by Australia Council for the Arts (2010a, 2014, 2017a, and 2020a). In fact, 84 percent of the 8,928 respondents of the *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey* acknowledged that the arts have positive impacts on our sense of health and wellbeing, our capacity to deal with stress, anxiety or depression, and understand other people and cultures (Australia Council for the Arts 2020a, 7). Additionally, 68 percent of survey respondents affirmed that “the arts make for a richer and more meaningful life” (ibid., 48). This response speaks to the intrinsic value of culture and lends itself to embodied notions of culture in which value is framed through social, symbolic and spiritual understandings (Meyrick et al. 2019; Scott et al. 2018; Throsby 2001). Embedded in an aesthetic philosophy, this viewpoint represents the diversity of participants within the value debate; artist and receiver, and their various tastes, preferences, knowledges and experiences (Juncker and Balling 2016). This diversity in cultural participants can be directly linked to the array of interpretations of cultural value (Barnett and Meyrick 2017). Synchronously, diversity is observable in the breadth of cultural activities being practiced and enjoyed.

The concept of value, in recent times, has aligned the notion of public value with government agendas and policies around innovation. The concept of innovation is loosely tied to intrinsic benefits of arts engagement - in particular, aspirations of creativity. Innovation, at least in terms of arts and culture in Australia, is about economic advantage. This position is eloquently outlined in Haseman and Jaaniste’s paper *The Arts and Australia’s National Innovation System 1994-2008 - arguments, recommendations, challenges* (2008). The paper’s central proposition is that “the arts sector - particularly the performing arts, visual arts and crafts, new media arts and creative writing - should be included in Australian Government innovation policy development and play a significant role in national innovation”

(Haseman and Jaaniste 2008, 5). The genesis of this position comes much earlier, through the release of *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994), launched as Australia’s first cultural policy, covering the traditional arts as well as film, television and radio, multimedia and cultural institutions. One of the policy’s flagship propositions was that “culture ... makes an essential contribution to innovation” (ibid., Introduction; Haseman and Jaaniste 2008, 14-15).

Instrumental benefits such as economic outcomes are the pervading commodity in the current quantitative climate enveloping the arts, evident in reporting and research. Meyrick et al. (2019) conclude that without the guidance of a robust and aspirational cultural policy, the current instrumental view of the value of arts and culture will endure. Criticisms exist that ‘whole of government’ approaches to cultural policy have inserted diverse instrumental agendas into cultural policy and diluted the cultural dimension (Craik 2013, 52).

Foreman-Wernet (2020) compared the values articulated by the cultural agencies of 92 countries around the world, including Australia. Heritage was found to be the most common values-oriented theme, followed by national promotion of the arts, and articulation of national identity (Foreman-Wernet 2020, 6-7). Some agencies highlighted Social Cohesion and Wellbeing as part of the mission or value of arts and culture in the country, but these were the lowest-articulated themes (ibid., 8-9). In a speech delivered to the Australia Council of the Arts Marketing Summit, titled *On the Brink of a New Chapter: Arts in the 21st Century*, Ben Cameron argued that arts organisations needed to rethink their relationship with communities and individuals. Cameron (2009) suggested three questions that arts organisations must answer in relation to the notion of value if they are to survive and have impact. Cameron framed the questions as:

- What is the value my organisation brings to my community?
- What is the value my organisation alone brings or brings better than anyone else?
- How would my community be damaged if we closed our doors and went away tomorrow?

While such questions could be seen within an economic framework of value around income generation through ticket sales, Cameron, in these questions, is challenging arts organisations to revise the nature of the cultural task. Cameron says that arts organisations can no longer afford to “think of themselves as producers or presenters of cultural product, rather they are orchestrators of social interaction with communities who are seeking opportunities for interactivity, participation, access and engagement” (Cameron 2009).

This approach and the questions posed by Cameron align with many of the comments made



by interviewees who frame the activity of their organisations through a lens of usefulness, benefit and a unique set of properties for communities.

According to O'Sullivan and Huntley such values are especially important for Australia's First Nations artists and communities. Meaningful and sustained community engagement, including opportunities for involvement and participation, are central to the development and presentation of cultural products in First Nations communities (Australia Council for the Arts 2020b, 61). If we take Cameron's (2009) position of redefining the cultural task beyond an economic transaction or, as Belfiore classifies it, "economic doxa" (2014, 95) but move it to a platform for social interaction, then it is imperative that the value equation ascribed to arts and culture is represented beyond numerical reportage.

Across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, examples can be found where value has a broader attribution. The findings set out in *Vital Signs: Cultural Indicators for Australia* consultation draft document (Cultural Ministers Council 2010) and the evolving New Zealand Wellbeing approach and the Living Standards Framework (Te Tai Ōhanga The Treasury 2021) acknowledge that arts and culture have a central role to play in the overall wellbeing of a nation, its communities and citizens. The Australia Council for the Arts' 2020 *Domestic Arts Tourism Report* highlights the value of arts and culture to Australia's tourism priority. Findings include "[m]ajor cities account for the largest volume of arts tourism", but "the destinations where tourists are especially likely to engage with the arts are in regional Australia" (Australia Council for the Arts 2020c, 20). A finding from the Australian Research Council funded

Creative Hotspots research shows that within the Cairns region, cultural soft and hard infrastructure must be 'owned' locally (appreciated, engaged in, supported) before it can be successfully embedded within tourism strategy (Cunningham et al. 2019a, 19). Cunningham et al. (2019a, 2) find that Cairns has spent 10 plus years of cultural policy building local ownership, and now cultural tourism can be a prominent strategy going forward. Additionally, Cunningham et al. (2019b, 1) note that volunteering in arts-related activities in central western Queensland are "way ahead of national and state averages", which speaks to the social value of arts and culture in remote communities.

### **Understanding impact**

Like value, the notion of impact arising from arts and cultural engagement has been coloured by an economic element. Impact, for the purpose of this research is defined as "an influence or effect on virtually anything, given its context" (Business+Impact at Michigan Ross, n.d.). In the context of the discussion in this report it is useful to drill down further to the specific notion of social impact, defined as "the net effect of an activity on a community and the well-being of individuals and families" (Centre for Social Impact, n.d).

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## Using evaluation approaches that go beyond audience, subsidy and economic modelling can build a more comprehensive picture of the “alterations in the quality of life” (Brown and Trimboli 2011, 617) that the arts create.

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This definition might seem to suggest impact may be easier to demonstrate than value, which can be a subjective angle if one tries to capture data from individual or community arts engagements. The determinant of value is reliant on a number of factors, such as demographics associated with cultural and linguistic diversity, gender, language, sexual diversity, geographic location and socio-economic status. Carnwath and Brown (2014, 9) say that impact “implies that something changes as a result of a cultural experience”. Landry et al. (1995, 23) extend this definition by saying that impacts are seen through “the effects that go beyond the artefacts and the enactments of the event or performance itself and have a continuing influence upon and directly touch people’s lives”. This section will demonstrate that there is no firm consensus on the attribution of impact. Rather than providing clarity about the nature of what is evaluated, this confusion results in tensions for both arts organisations and researchers.

### Identifying tensions in evaluating value and impact

Walmsley (2013, 74) notes, “impact in the arts tends to equate impact with either benefits or value” although the terms are not entirely synonymous. To confuse the debate even further, the terms value and impact are used interchangeably and as proxies for each other (Gattenhof 2017). This lack of clarity around the attribution of impact and how it might be applied within an evaluative framework makes work difficult for both arts organisations and researchers to clearly point to the outcomes of an arts-based project. Arlene Goldbard asserts deep concerns about the far-reaching impacts of impact evaluation on the field of arts and culture. Goldbard says:

“The trouble is, the very quest for metrics is contaminated with ideas and assumptions borrowed from worlds that have nothing to do with community and creativity. The notion that everything of value can be weighed and measured, which is one of the most grotesque artifacts of post-Enlightenment thinking, is antithetical to the deep values of community cultural development. Indeed, in this domain, the search for metrics actually harms what it seeks to help” (Goldbard 2008, 1).

Using evaluation approaches that go beyond audience, subsidy and economic modelling can build a more comprehensive picture of the “alterations in the quality of life” (Brown and Trimboli 2011, 617) that the arts create.

Concurring with Goldbard (2015), both McCausland (2019) and Badham (2015) note the ways in which measurements of success set by agencies or funding bodies external to a community may contradict or diminish local priorities. Badham (2015, 195) notes that “typical policy-oriented measures of cultural participation and cultural economics are not always relevant ... [and] local understandings of cultural value and progress are not universally translated or easily compared. Targets set by external agencies can conceivably contradict local priorities”. What this discussion demonstrates is that there are questions being raised about the indicators used to provide knowledge about the audience experience. Indeed, critics (Walmsley 2011; Radbourne, Glow and Johnson 2013) say that economic data anchored in ticket buying, attendance figures and the allied activity that Goldbard (2015) mentions, do nothing to provide evidence about audience engagement. To conclude this position, in a report entitled *More than Bums on Seats* (Australia Council for the Arts 2010, 30), a major Australian arts funding body noted that “if the link between the arts and the wide-ranging benefits they deliver could be more strongly established it would add even greater value to the arts”. And so, more than ten years on from this report, we are still struggling to find an authentic measurement approach to account for both the intrinsic and instrumental benefits of arts and cultural engagement.

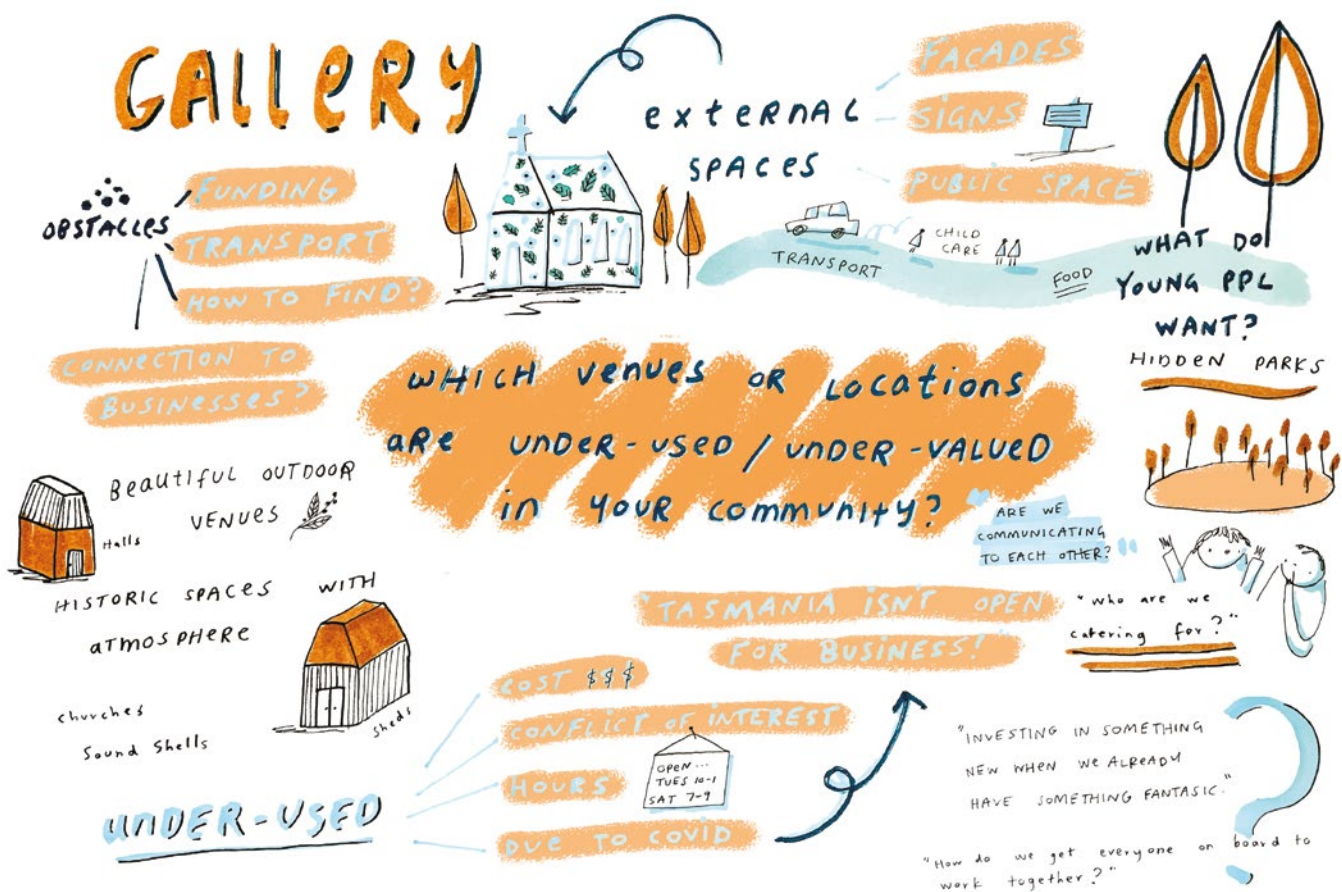
Commentators such as Goldbard (2015) and Blomkamp (2015) suggest that “... a plurality of approaches to measuring culture and understanding cultural change may be desirable” (Blomkamp 2015, 22). Lachlan MacDowall concurs with this position by saying,

“On the one hand, initiatives to make culture count can have an active and positive drive to include a cultural perspective, and to have it be made visible and taken into account in broader decision-making. On the other hand, too often, culture is *made* to count, in the sense that it is forced unwillingly and unhelpfully into systems of measurement, from where it can be pressed into the service of divergent agendas” (MacDowall 2015, 5, original emphasis).

Evaluations that look to assess the social impact of an arts program tend not to assess it from an arts perspective - that is, “the evaluation does not discuss the artistic merit or quality of the work as well” (Badham 2013, 100). As a vocal commentator in this field Goldbard sounds a note of warning:

“In any context, choosing quantifiable indicators tends to promote what can most easily be measured and counted. It is common for assessors to choose indicators that are easy to track and crunch, whether or not they go to the heart of necessary learning” (Goldbard 2015, 222).

Badham (2019, 212) suggests a relational and dialogic approach to unpack a community’s experiences and tacit knowledge, describing this as “a co-creative relationship” which includes



an evaluation on the processes of designing and delivering an arts experience and event, as well as the impacts for participants and audiences. Providing cases of participatory evaluation from Australia, Badham emphasises the need for multiple entry points so that community members can provide feedback in the way most comfortable for them (2019, 215), instead of solely through surveys or questionnaires. Describing the experience and value of participatory evaluation, she states:

Artists and participants report a greater sense of agency and ownership in the collaboratively developed, collected, and analysed material. This democratised and dialogic process of evaluation can then become integrated into practice as a form of critical reflection with the aim to empower those whose knowledge and experience are ultimately at stake (Badham 2019, 216).

Knell and Taylor (2011) argue for continued exploration of the interconnections between intrinsic and instrumental benefits and more “effective measurement of intrinsic value, which connects that measurement directly to the public’s experience of culture and what they value. Otherwise, the danger is that difficult to measure benefits – such as the aesthetic, spiritual or social – will continue to be under-emphasised in policymakers’ cost-benefit calculus” (Knell and Taylor 2011, 19).

## First Nations perspectives of arts, culture and creativity

Across the literature there is a call to decolonise the approach to, and understanding of, the public and cultural value of engagement with arts and culture. Australia’s National Cultural Policy *Revive* has as its first pillar a commitment to “First Nations First” (Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 21). From the outset the National Cultural Policy ensures that Australian art, culture and creativity is focused on, “[r]ecognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia’s arts and culture” (ibid.). This positioning is echoed by other First Nations voices in settler countries. Paquette et al. (2017, 282) state that “a post-colonial cultural policy needs to destabilise [and] challenge the colonial order and render precarious its certainties and identities. Cultural policy as a politics of recognition is doomed to fail because it does not challenge the symbolic order in place”. These authors make clear that “[m]any of the remnants of colonialism are most saliently felt through cultural institutions and policies – through their acknowledgement and, in some cases, unbridled flaunting of colonial rules via established and engrained social and political values and norms” (Paquette et al. 2017, 270).

For First Nations peoples “culture is far from a secondary or marginal concern” (Paquette et al. 2017, 280). Paquette et al. (2017) ground Canada’s cultural policy in its colonial history to identify some of its contentious grounds and build on the

notion of resurgence to offer a constructive path forward for a post-colonial cultural policy and attribution of value in post-colonial and settler countries such as Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Canada. Paquette et al. (2017, 281) suggest that “resurgence is a path to decolonisation” to reclaim the notion of value through land, learning from traditional customs and culinary practices, and language. They write,

“we approach cultural policy and ethics as something that is practiced and open-ended - not as an institution, form of governance, or institutional configuration of sorts. The subjectivity of the agent who cares for culture, heritage, and Indigeneity is primordial, and building a post-colonial ethos is crucial” (Paquette et al. 2017, 282).

As noted by O’Sullivan and Huntley, years of research by the Australia Council for the Arts has highlighted “the need to build opportunities for First Nations decision-making ... First Nations peoples’ self-determination must be central in theatre and dance-making in Australia, including greater opportunities for First Nations’ creative control” (Australia Council for the Arts 2020b, 12).

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Rather than ascribing the colonial dichotomy of intrinsic or instrumental value, a decolonial attribution may be more dynamic and inclusive as Indigenous cultural practices “do more than present heritage. They are sites where cultural processes and politics are negotiated and advanced” (Jones and Birdsall-Jones 2014, 314).

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The Australia Council for the Arts and Australian think tank A New Approach acknowledge a need to redefine the ambit and value attribution of the arts in contemporary society. Rather than ascribing the colonial dichotomy of intrinsic or instrumental value, a decolonial attribution may be more dynamic and inclusive as Indigenous cultural practices “do more than present heritage. They are sites where cultural processes and politics are negotiated and advanced” (Jones and Birdsall-Jones 2014, 314). First Nations cultural centres such as Gwoonardu Mia in Western Australia’s Carnarvon region “are part of a more complex and historical shift in the communication of [First Nations] heritage that is likely to both complement and transform cultural maintenance practices” (Jones and Birdsall-Jones 2014, 313), rather than replicating cultural maintenance practices of previous eras. Jones and Birdsall-Jones (2014, 312) say First Nations cultural centres provide value in terms of social benefits that include bridging social capital between First Nations peoples and non-First Nations residents and visitors, addressing tensions within the First Nations community, and providing opportunities for young people to create

their own futures. More recently, O’Sullivan and Huntley note

“Touring work in First Nations communities can also provide opportunities and pathways for the new generation of First Nations artists and arts sector workers - although this seems to be an undervalued and underestimated impact of First Nations creative output” (Australia Council for the Arts 2020b, 56).

## Place-based arts, culture and creativity in rural, regional and remote communities

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Sensitivity to the specificities of place (geography, demographics, environment) and the assets of communities (culture, creativity, knowledge, lived experience) is increasingly recognised by diverse sectors - including health, and arts and culture - as critical for delivery of services that are meaningful, appropriate and relevant, and that support the strengthening of communities.

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Place is a social construct as much as a geographic location. Place is not something merely encountered; rather, “place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience ... There is no possibility of understanding human existence - and especially human thought and experience - other than through an understanding of place” (Malpas 2018, 13). The characteristics of places profoundly affect the quality of life, behaviours and experiences of the people who live in them (APPGAHW 2017, 66), and sensitivity to place provides a means of unravelling the ways in which arts and culture reflect, shape and enhance the lives of people who engage with them. Human geographer and philosopher of place Tim Cresswell (2011) distinguishes between space and place, stating that space is associated with abstraction and action, while place suggests meaning and attachment. For Cresswell, places are “spaces which people have made meaningful ... This is the most straightforward and common definition of place - a meaningful location” (Cresswell 2011, 12). While space might be viewed as ephemeral, place can be considered in context of positionality and “one’s place in the world” (Massey 1991). This concept of positionality and the understanding and claiming one’s place in the world is a crucial part of place-based creativity.

Sensitivity to the specificities of place (geography, demographics, environment) and the assets of communities (culture, creativity, knowledge, lived experience) is increasingly recognised by diverse sectors - including health, and arts and

culture - as critical for delivery of services that are meaningful, appropriate and relevant, and that support the strengthening of communities. In the UK context, Symons and Hurley (2018) find an increased focus on place is critical for engaging a greater diversity of people in arts and cultural activities, and for understanding the kinds of creativity people find meaningful. Describing strategic partnerships between health and arts in the UK, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing's (APPGAHW) 2017 *Creative Health Inquiry Report* emphasises that sense of place is critical to developing community wellbeing (APPGAHW 2017, 69). They argue that as an organising principle, place offers a means of enhancing responsiveness, ensuring more appropriate policymaking and service delivery, and therefore better outcomes in terms of individual and societal wellbeing (APPGAHW 2017, 70).

An increased focus on place has salience for rural, regional and remote communities. Mahon et al. (2018, 214) urge "an alternative conceptualisation of creativity in the rural ... one that reflects the ways in which rural places and communities have made the arts and culture relevant to them in managing change and development in economic, social and cultural terms". This is further reflected in Australian research by Bartleet et al. (2019) who emphasise the need for "new theories of creative placemaking, entrepreneurship, and industry in regional and remote areas, particularly those that feature majority First Nations populations" (Bartleet et al. 2019, 187). These arguments follow Dunphy (2009, 3) who over a decade ago noted that "most research on social impact has not been applicable to rural and remote areas because they necessitate highly specific models, partnerships and strategies".

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Arts and culture encompass "everyday 'little c' creativity", including craft, hobbies, creative experiences and stories and that are important to local people, as well as "high Culture" practices of art or theatre that are more traditionally associated with the term art and culture (Symons and Hurley 2018, 123-124).

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Increased sensitivity to place - including the needs and interests of distinct communities and the kinds of arts and cultural practices that are locally significant - is critical for widening and developing engagement in arts and culture, particularly in underserved communities (Symons and Hurley 2018, 124). Such positioning of the importance of place as it applies to arts, culture and creativity for rural, regional and remote communities is central in Australia's Cultural Policy, *Revive* (2023). Pillar 2 of the policy, "A Place for Every Story", notes "[s]tories communicate shared identities and a sense of belonging to place and each other, and can be shared through an artwork, narrative, dance, screen content, music or an idea

(Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 38). A focus on place makes necessary an expanded view of arts, culture and creativity as encompassing a broader range of activity in communities. Or as outlined in *Revive*, "[o]ur stories are shaped by histories, places, identities, languages, cultures, families and communities" (ibid., 38). Symons and Hurley (2018, 126) see an opportunity for "a re-imagining of creativity as something accessible to all rather than being innate to particular individuals". As advocated in *Revive*, arts and culture encompass "everyday 'little c' creativity", including craft, hobbies, creative experiences and stories and that are important to local people, as well as "high Culture" practices of art or theatre that are more traditionally associated with the term art and culture (Symons and Hurley 2018, 123-124).

Part of this conceptual reframing of arts, culture and creativity involves giving people 'permission to be creative' (Symons and Hurley 2018, 126), encouraging them "to identify their creative potential through their everyday interests and activities", and tackling ideas of creative failure through providing training and support to develop self-confidence and self-belief and debunk myths that creativity is 'not for people like them' (Symons and Hurley 2018, 127). Symons and Hurley (2018, 133) argue that expanding notions of what it means to have creative potential "enables people to think about ideas that they may have for their community", the benefits of which include 'widening and deepening' the local and national cultural offer (ibid., 133).

The literature on arts and culture in rural, regional and remote communities supports this call for a broader conceptualisation of arts and creativity. For instance, Gibson (2010, 6) notes the variety of community activities, individual hobbies, professions and passions that "count" as creativity within small, remote and rural places: "In Darwin, conventional creative industries are present, but small, and activities as diverse as whip-making, tattooing and gardening are part of the creative economy" (Gibson 2010, 6). Bartleet et al. (2019, 68) find that "[w]hile some definitions of arts or creative practice may not encompass traditional practices such as bush medicine ... this kind of activity plays a crucial role in the creative lives of First Nations Peoples that cannot be separated from other activities such as painting". The diversity of rural and remote creativity is reflected in the practices of arts organisations around Australia, such as Big hART, Red Ridge Interior Queensland, and the Artesian Originals case study included in this report which includes activities such as gardening, wood and metalwork as important and valued local creative activities and artefacts.

In Australia, arts organisations, cultural institutions and all levels of government share a tacit agreement and understanding that arts and cultural engagement make a significant contribution to the lives of individuals and entire communities. Historically, there has been a tendency to position art and culture on the

periphery of community life (see Skippington 2016, xvii; Skippington and Davis 2016, 224). Skippington and Davis (2016, 237) find that, despite research literature and community perspectives which recognise the potential for arts and culture to contribute to community development, arts and culture remain under-recognised and under-valued as a critical resource and asset in whole of community development.

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Increasingly around the world, the growing momentum around creative placemaking is positioning arts and culture at the heart of community development initiatives and recognising them as critical tools for advancing whole of community wellbeing (Sonke et al. 2019, 4).

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“The impetus towards whole-of-government approaches may position the arts as integral in policy debates and programmes, linking the arts to reconciliation, social cohesion and economic prosperity” (Skippington and Davis 2016, 224). Over the past decade, in the USA, the UK, and increasingly around the world, the growing momentum around creative placemaking is positioning arts and culture at the heart of community development initiatives and recognising them as critical tools for advancing whole of community wellbeing (Sonke et al. 2019, 4). Creative placemaking theory and practice is nascent in terms of its application Australia, and requires more attention in the context of small, remote and rural communities (Duxbury 2020, 11; Bartleet et al. 2019, 187; Handwerker 2019). The development and application of creative placemaking in rural, regional and remote Australian communities may be further assisted through Pillar 2 “A Place for Every Story” outlined in *Revive* (Commonwealth of Australia 2023). This pillar explicitly outlines how “stories are shaped by histories, places, identities, languages, cultures, families and communities” (ibid., 38). The Australian National Cultural Policy notes that, “[l]ocal voices and place-based arts and cultural activities enable communities across Australia to tell their stories, evolve their own cultural identities and build local resilience” (Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 40).

Duxbury (2020, 3-4 and 9) notes that, across the literature on cultural and creative work in rural, regional and remote locations, researchers have highlighted the social embeddedness of creative and cultural initiatives, the criticality of relationships and networking to support the sector, and the role of arts and culture in connecting community members. This literature has foregrounded “the interconnected world of creative production as networks and flows of people, information, and creative production” (Duxbury 2020, 3). Creative activity is “enmeshed in local social networks and expectations, occurring within a broader composition of local cultural

work”, including writing groups, local historians, and volunteering at local visitor centres and museums (Mayes 2010, 5). In small rural towns, arts and cultural engagement and creative production by individuals and non-arts professionals often take place as “part of a larger cultural network of engagement and representation” (ibid., 6), rather than being an isolated or stand-alone instance of creative and civic engagement. Like Mayes (2010), Anwar McHenry (2011) notes the importance of understanding that cultural production and consumption is embedded in social systems and relationships (Anwar McHenry 2011, 339). That is, arts, cultural and creative activity is sustained by formal and informal networks and relationships (Gattenhof et al. 2021, 94). Contributing to local creative and cultural production and attending local arts and cultural events is also an important way through which individuals contribute and show their support to their local community (Anwar McHenry 2011, 338; Mayes 2010, 6).

The results of the Australia Council for the Arts's national arts participation survey show that improving wellbeing and connecting with others are two of the foremost reasons Australians attend arts and cultural events such as festivals (2020a, 120). This research distinguishes between attendance and participation. Notably, “[r]espondents in remote areas are more likely than those living in metropolitan or regional locations to attend the arts to improve their wellbeing (35%, compared to 25% in metropolitan areas and 24% in regional areas” (ibid., 121). Also significant is the fact “[a]lmost half of Australians living in remote areas creatively participate in the arts (48%) - a similar rate to those living in metropolitan areas (45%) or regional areas (45%)” (Australia Council for the Arts 2020a, 135). Reflecting Bartleet et al. (2019) and the interconnections between economic, social and cultural forms of value, the Australia Council report noted that “[a]lmost all First Nations respondents interviewed believe the arts provide social, cultural and economic value, including by bringing customers to local businesses and building creative skills needed for future employment” (Australia Council for the Arts 2020a, 182).

Research in Australia and elsewhere has highlighted the interconnections and interdependencies between arts organisations and a range of other sectors - including health, education and regional development, local businesses and community support services - that characterise creative production in rural and regional communities and sustain rural creative ecologies (Bartleet et al. 2019; Duxbury 2020; Skippington 2016; Skippington and Davis 2016). Findings from a three-year Australian Research Council Linkage Project which mapped the creative and cultural ecology of the very remote Barkly region found that cross-sector collaboration was a defining feature and strength of the local arts sector ecology (Bartleet et al. 2019, 173). Organisations outside of local arts and cultural ecologies, such as Red Cross, local governments, and voluntary community organisations including the Country Women's Association, are involved in





the delivery of arts and creative programs, and as such contribute importantly to sustaining local arts and cultural sectors (ibid).

The case studies unpacked in this report similarly highlight the inherently intersectoral and collaborative nature of arts, culture and creativity in rural and remote communities. The *Shorewell Presents* series of projects in northwest Tasmania, for instance, emerged through a collaboration between an arts and cultural festival, social impact theatre company, and community service providing organisation. In central western Queensland, *Dress the Central West* involved strategic partnerships between an arts organisation and health and employment service providers in central western Queensland. Such collaborations are formed as community members, artists and organisations seek to address challenges facing their communities - such as social isolation and loneliness - and deliver projects and programs that support meaningful outcomes for their towns and regions.

## The social impacts of arts and culture in communities

In remote communities the social, cultural and economic outcomes of arts and cultural activity are inextricably linked.

The scholarly and grey literature describing the role and impact of arts and culture in rural, regional and remote communities demonstrates ways in which arts and cultural activity is entwined with community development and identity (Mayes 2010; Anwar McHenry 2011), valued for its role in facilitating a sense of being and belonging (Gordon and Gibson 2017; Mair and Duffy 2021) and enhancing health, wellbeing and resilience for individuals and whole communities (Anthony et al. 2018; Brownett 2018; Bartleet et al. 2019; Duxbury 2020). The economic impacts have arguably received the most attention in studies of the contributions of arts and culture to communities and continue to be the focus in Australian arts and cultural policy decision-making. This can mean that the social outcomes of

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Sensitivity to place and local dynamics in the design and delivery of health and care services potentially enables a community's specific resources and capacities - including culture, heritage, creativity, and environmental attributes - to be harnessed as an integral part of creative solutions to pressing health and social care challenges (APPGAHW 2017, 70-72).

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arts and cultural engagement in rural communities - including wellbeing, social cohesion, quality of life and belonging - are often overlooked as researchers and policy focus on economic outcomes (Anwar McHenry 2011, 339-340).

Importantly for the current research, Bartleet et al. (2019, 8) find that in remote communities the social, cultural and economic outcomes of arts and cultural activity are inextricably linked. Mapping the arts and cultural ecology of Australia's very remote Barkly region, they argue that "all of the contributions that arts and creativity make to the social and cultural life of the Barkly cannot be separated from the economic outcomes for individuals and communities" (Bartleet et al. 2019, 164). That is, arts and creativity were valued for contributing health and wellbeing outcomes and supporting cultural maintenance and transmission, and these values were entwined with individual and collective economic values and outcomes including sale of works, employment, economic independence, and cultural tourism (Bartleet et al. 2019, 165-167).

### *Health and wellbeing*

The past twenty years has seen a dramatic increase in research into the effects of arts and cultural engagement on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities (Fancourt and Finn 2019, vii). Wellbeing - understood as happiness and positive affect, feeling a sense of purpose and meaning in life, and general satisfaction with life - is a key contributor to good mental and physical health and "now lies at the heart of the research and policy agenda of many governments globally" (Fancourt 2017, 32-33). Noting wellbeing is distinct from mental health but inextricably linked to an individual's overall health, the *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* report states "[a] high level of wellbeing is associated with positive functioning, which includes creative thinking, productivity, good interpersonal relationships and resilience in the face of adversity, as well as good physical health and life expectancy" (APPGAHW 2017, 17). These understandings of wellbeing include personal, social (Fancourt and Finn 2019, 21) and cultural (APPGAHW 2017, 18) dimensions.

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"Arts and culture ... are critical because they have the power to connect people, expose root issues, center underrepresented voices and concerns, and shift sociocultural norms and collective behaviours" (Sonke et al. 2019, 6).

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Increasingly, arts, culture and creativity are recognised and positioned as core components in collaborative efforts to achieve wellbeing. For public health, "[a]rts and culture ... are critical



because they have the power to connect people, expose root issues, center underrepresented voices and concerns, and shift sociocultural norms and collective behaviours” (Sonke et al. 2019, 6).

They encompass the potential to alter structural and societal inequities and strengthen preventative strategies to maintain good health for all members of a community (APPGAHW 2017, 2). The World Health Organisation Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report *What is the role of the arts in improving health and wellbeing?* (Fancourt and Finn 2019) recommends strengthening structures and mechanisms for collaboration between the culture, social care and health sectors; sharing knowledge and practice of arts interventions found to be effective in promoting health, improving health behaviours or addressing health inequalities and inequities; and supporting research in the arts and health, particularly focusing on policy-relevant areas such as studies that examine interventions scaled up to larger populations, or studies that explore the feasibility, acceptability and suitability of new arts interventions. Pre COVID-19 there were already several possibilities to examine and embrace previously underestimated ways to ‘value’ arts and culture in relation to community wellbeing. Additionally, a range of reports over the past eight years addressing social inclusion and connection have presented recommendations and interventions as part of a wider strategic approach such as: using existing community resources; involving community members in the planning, delivery and evaluation of programs; and bringing together community services for a targeted and cohesive set of strategies (Vines 2011; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022).

The *Creative Health Inquiry Report* (APPGAHW 2017) and the ArtPlace America whitepaper *Creating Healthy Communities* (Sonke et al. 2019) represent two significant recent efforts to assert the role of arts and culture in advancing health and wellbeing, with a view to advance policy and practice in the UK and USA respectively. Both reports advocate community-based and societal approaches to improving wellbeing through the arts, as opposed to individualised approaches. A wealth of literature has illustrated the significance of specific types of arts activities for certain types of individual health conditions (see for example studies on music and dance programs for dementia patients) (Fancourt and Finn 2019, 53); yet individualised approaches do not alter underlying structures which contribute to poor health (Sonke et al. 2019, 9; APPGAHW 2017, 31).

Community-led, community-based approaches to advancing health and wellbeing align with Indigenous worldviews which frame health and wellbeing as collective, relational concepts and experiences (Willing et al. 2019; Ganesharajah 2009; Tiwari et al. 2019; Walker et al. 2013). For Australia’s First Nations peoples, the overall concept of health includes a holistic understanding of wellbeing (Ganesharajah 2009, 2; Tiwari et al. 2019, 26): “Australian First Nations peoples’ health’ means

not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community” (Department of Health and Aged Care 2013, 9). Walker et al. (2013, 208) emphasise “[m]ost importantly, health for First Nations peoples is simultaneously a collective and individual intergenerational continuum that exists in the past, present and future”. Community-based, locally specific and sustained approaches to integrating arts and health are needed to address the social determinants of health and advance the wellbeing of entire communities (APPGAHW 2017, 23). Sensitivity to place and local dynamics in the design and delivery of health and care services potentially enables a community’s specific resources and capacities - including culture, heritage, creativity, and environmental attributes - to be harnessed as an integral part of creative solutions to pressing health and social care challenges (APPGAHW 2017, 70-72).

Wellbeing is a multidimensional concept, and engagement with and participation in arts and culture have been found to have a range of positive impacts on community wellbeing. Arts and cultural activities and programs promote wellbeing through supporting collective behavioural change (Ings et al. 2012); helping overcome inequalities of access to healthcare (Sonke and Baxley 2016, 106); and by positively shaping the physical and social characteristics of places (APPGAHW 2017; Sonke et al. 2019). For marginalised or disadvantaged communities, arts and cultural approaches can challenge a trend of interventions being imposed upon communities and instead empower cohorts to support their own wellbeing (Anthony et al. 2018; BOP Consulting 2019). Of course, not all arts and cultural engagement produce wellbeing outcomes. The literature highlights that quality arts and cultural programs, that are sensitive to local contexts and relevant and meaningful for distinct populations, are vital to positively contributing to wellbeing (Ings et al. 2012, 18; Fancourt 2017; APPGAHW 2017).

### **Social inclusion and cohesion**

The social benefits of arts engagement most linked to health pertain to decreased loneliness and social isolation, and increased social support, inclusion and cohesion (Fancourt 2017). Arts and cultural activities and events support social cohesion through ameliorating a sense of isolation from others, fostering interaction and connection with others, greater participation in society, and an increased sense of shared identity and belonging (Brownnett 2018, 77; Fancourt and Finn 2019, 9). Social support fosters wellbeing, and “[t]he arts have been shown to impact directly on various aspects of social support, including social bonding, with enhanced social support itself becoming a mediator to wider health enhancements” (Fancourt 2017, 39). The United Nations’ Department of Economic and Social Affairs outlines a range of approaches to facilitating dialogue with the aim to support co-existence and collaboration such as town hall meetings and focus groups (Marsh 2019, 312; United Nations

2005, 5; 2007, 95-96). However, for achieving the most desirable level of social inclusion - that of cohesion - it notes the power of metaphor, humour and storytelling "to explore peace and conflict in ways not always possible through rational analysis and decision-making", for giving voice to underserved cohorts, discovering already existing commonalities, shared meanings and values, and exploring alternative ways of being and relating (United Nations 2007, 95-96).

In rural, regional and remote Australian communities, arts and culture have been noted as providing inclusive approaches, processes and opportunities for enhancing connectedness and solidarity amongst disparate community groups (Rentschler et al. 2015a, 13). In a series of reports produced for Regional Arts Australia and the Australia Council for the Arts, Rentschler et al. (2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e) summarise the value of arts and culture across a range of social and economic domains, many of which influence community wellbeing. Arts, culture and creativity maintain community morale, and also provide spaces and avenues for networking, self-expression, a sense of achievement, economic opportunities and supplementary income provision. In this way the arts become a vehicle to increased social and civic participation to build resilience to inequity as they strengthen community connectedness, essential for health and wellbeing (Rentschler et al. 2015a, 5).

The theme of connectedness is reflected in Gordon and Gibson (2017, 42) who find that singing in community choirs helps residents of rural towns "find new ways of belonging to their community". Brownnett (2018, 75) also argues that the process of collaboratively designing, organising and delivering a local regional arts festival supports community members to develop a sense of connection to each other, and to the event.

## I Thriving communities

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Arts, culture and creativity make important contributions to regional economic development through the creation of employment, skills and training opportunities (Hearn et al. 2020; Skippington 2016).

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Beyond sustainability, the concept of thriveability includes the human dimensions of creativity, hope, imagination and compassion (see Wood et al. 2016; Nussbaum 2011). This concept is more useful for understanding how community members position art, culture and creativity as foundational in the creation of inclusive, liveable communities. Research has noted the important role of arts,

culture and creativity in the development and sustainability of communities in rural, regional and remote Australia (see Anwar McHenry 2011; Rentschler et al. 2015b; 2015c; Skippington 2016; Anwar McHenry et al. 2018; Bartleet et al. 2019). Considering the role and value of the arts to country town sustainability in rural Western Australia, Anwar McHenry (2011) argues that "social bonds were strengthened, and the identity of the town and region were formed through creative and cultural activity, not undertaken by artists, but by ordinary community members through a sense of obligation to their communities". The social outcomes of arts and cultural engagement are often framed in terms of fun and celebration though also contribute important placemaking, place-shaping functions. For instance, residents often attend events to show support for the organisers, which is part of defining sense of community and shows "collective social identity is important for individual place identity" (Anwar McHenry 2011, 340). Research by the Regional Australia Institute confirms this view, pointing out that Australian Census data "does not capture the value of unpaid creative activities that form a significant part of regional community life" (Achurh 2019, 27). Such unpaid and 'everyday' cultural and creative practice are central to constructing, challenging and refashioning "the rural" (Mayes 2010, 1).

Arts, culture and creativity make important contributions to regional economic development through the creation of employment, skills and training opportunities (Hearn et al. 2020; Skippington 2016). The Australia Council for the Arts also notes that "[a]lmost all First Nations respondents interviewed believe the arts provide social, cultural and economic value, including by bringing customers to local businesses and building creative skills needed for future employment" (Australia Council for the Arts 2020a, 182). Arts, culture and creativity support industries such as tourism, but they also "play a role in the attraction and/or retention of regional populations and therefore may be vital for broader socioeconomic vibrancy of regional communities" (Achurh 2019, 28). Research by the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) finds that the character of a town, its cultural vibrancy, and availability of artistic and cultural activities and events are important liveability factors which support the desirability of a place and influence people's decisions to move to or remain in a regional community (see Houghton and Vohra 2021, 19; Achurh 2019, 31). RAI positions art and culture within the Amenity and Lifestyle and Opportunity indicators of liveability, which include greater connection to community. "Access to and participation in arts and cultural activity contribute to a town's 'cultural vitality', which is important across all demographic groups" (Houghton and Vohra 2021, 21).



## I Conclusion

The literature illustrates the key attributes and features of arts, culture and creativity which contribute to positive wellbeing outcomes for individual and communities related to social inclusion or social cohesion, and the enhancement of communities using the concept of thriveability. The literature demonstrates that the concept and experience of place is central to all creative activities and outcomes for Australian rural, regional and remote communities. Arts, culture and creative engagement provide inclusive models of community engagement and participation which enable the delivery of interventions done 'with' rather than 'to' people. Creative engagement enables the co-creation of shared meanings while also supporting a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences to be articulated and acknowledged.

# Frameworks for Articulating Impact

This section explores frameworks that have been developed to assist with impact assessment of arts, culture and creativity. The section begins by exploring three pre-existing frameworks that have applicability to the field of social impact arising from creative engagement. The latter half of this section articulates how this project developed a community-led language framework that may be of use for rural, regional and remote Australian communities to assess the outcomes of arts, cultural and creative activity for individuals and community.

## Current Impact Assessment Landscape

The debate in Australia, and internationally, about the best way to report value and impact of arts and cultural engagement by individuals and communities is not new. Belfiore (2014) notes that a universal issue is situated around measurement of value attributed to arts and culture, particularly arts products and experiences supported through public funding. This creates a problem that “lies in the way in which the attribution of value to the outcome of aesthetic encounters has become part of the technocratic machinery of cultural policy-making” (Belfiore 2014, 97) and highlights that “arts and culture gives rise to forms of value that cannot be captured within the framework of mainstream, neo-classical economics” (Carnwath and Brown 2014, 8).

Evaluation methods have been dominated by quantitative methods and are, according to Holden (2004, 17), “increasingly being questioned, both in terms of the utility of methodologies employed and the extent to which the results illuminate our understanding”. The current impact frameworks and evaluation models focus on project outcomes generally tied to audience engagement measures, rather than on investigating why and how a project works, which can then be scaled up and replicated if necessary. Holden (2004, 22) believes this is a “missing ingredient” in the impact

debate. Data-driven approaches have received detailed commentary around the “over-focus on economic indicators, and the fact that this domain is, inappropriately, currently positioned first” (Morton 2014, 4). Brown and Novak (2007) discuss the dilemma of capturing data and reporting on outcomes. They say “[a]rts organisations, historically, have had difficulty articulating their impact.

In brief there are four dominant ways in which impact assessment can be understood. These frames are not unique to arts, culture and creativity, but are broadly applicable to many activities and outputs. The four frames can be described as:

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### Simple Ratio

measuring ratio between investment and income generated.



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### Social Return on Investment (SROI)

cost benefit analysis that measures social impacts by monetising them to provide a common economic language for comparison with other investment.



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### Input-Output (Multiplier) Model

‘snapshot’ model and assumes economic flows in an industry are fixed and not subject to changes in market supply and demand. The downside of using the IO model is that there is the potential to overstate impacts measured.



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### Public Value Measurement Framework

attempt to measure the intrinsic, instrumental and institutional impacts of the arts. Audience driven measurement process.





All four frames deliver a predominance of reportage expressed through graphs, tables of figures and percentages. Goldbard (2015, 214) says this overemphasis on numeric records that try to capture value and impact of arts engagement has placed us into 'Datastan - the empire of scientism'. This is not an incorrect approach but it may not result in a nuanced assessment or understanding of the social impact arising from creative engagement. Goldbard sounds a note of warning saying "in any context, choosing quantifiable indicators tends to promote what can most easily be measured and counted" (2015, 222). Discussing evaluations of First Nations policy in Australia, McCausland (2019, 69) finds that while policymakers (and funding bodies) expect visible, easily quantifiable outcomes, program deliverers at the coalface of communities prioritise relationship-building, participation, and capacity-building which "is a process that takes time and care that may not fit neatly into government funding cycles". McCausland (2019) and Badham (2015) highlight the need for models and processes that are appropriate for diverse communities, that privilege local voices and ascribe worth to locally-relevant indicators of success. McCausland (2019, 75) warns against decontextualising evaluations outside of specific places and communities and says, "the perspectives and priorities of their communities must be central in determining evaluation approaches, metrics and the nature of policy and programmes that are intended to benefit them. Context emerges as crucial".

In recent years there have been significant inroads into measurement of impact and audience

surveys. Based in the United States of America arts evaluation and research organisation WolfBrown developed CultureLab Research Community (CRC) using the "principles of crowdsourcing, crowdfunding and peer learning" (WolfBrown n.d) to understand audience engagement patterns. CultureLab was piloted in Australia under the auspice of Performing Arts Connections (PAC) Australia in 2019. The data set used to measure the public's engagement with performing arts venues and activities included buyer behaviour, audience preferences and household data. The CultureLab measurement tool included attention to data about audience core values, self-perceptions and beliefs that influence arts attendance. The CultureLab assessment tool demonstrates flexibility to respond to concerns by arts evaluation theorists and practitioners (see McCausland 2019, Gattenhof 2017; Goldbard 2015; Badham 2015) about numeric driven reporting and the need to frame indicators of success relevant to place, people and communities.

There are existing language frameworks developed in Australia and internationally that could be adopted to measure social impact outcomes. By way of example, the following three frameworks attempt to frame the language for impact assessment markers, and chart change because of a cultural or creative experience. While no single framework discussed below offers a complete set of indicators to capture impact related to social impact, across the three frameworks there are languages and approaches to move impact evaluation beyond numeric data and into the field of human experience.

**Table 2.1** Framework One: Alan Brown and Jennifer Novak-Leonard (table adapted from Brown and Novak-Leonard 2013, 227-228).

1	Captures the audience member's engagement in the arts experience by considering their feelings of aliveness, being emotionally charged, and absorbed in the moment.
<i>Art as a Means of Feeling</i>	
2	Involves the connectedness that can emerge from arts experiences, both in an individual sense (with regards to self-understanding and identity construction) and in a community sense (with regards to community pride, including gaining an understanding of people different to yourself).
<i>Art as a Means of Social Bonding &amp; Bridging</i>	
3	Encapsulates outcomes associated with exposure to new art, artists or artistic styles and forms to progress an individual's understanding of the context of art, regardless of the individual's taste. This makes clear the value of aesthetic exposure.
<i>Art as a Means of Aesthetic Development &amp; Creative Stimulation</i>	
4	Speaks to the gathering and interpreting of new information about an issue, idea, or culture. It relates to the art's <i>content</i> and how it might challenge or provoke new thinking.
<i>Art as a Means of Learning &amp; Thinking</i>	

Drawing on considerable work as evaluators of the impact of live performance for audience members, Brown and Novak-Leonard's language framework (2007; 2013) in Table 2.1 employs an affective and place-based approach to accounting for impact. Brown and Novak-Leonard set out to "measure the short-term intrinsic impacts of audience members' aesthetic experience at a performing arts programme" (2013, 224). The research attempted to "capture the immediacy of the experience", and part of the research was to "capture what audience members could self-report within 24 hours after their audience experience" (ibid.). Sample questions included:

1. "To what degree were you absorbed in the performance?"
2. "To what extent did the performance serve to celebrate and sustain your own cultural heritage?"

Collating the responses from audience members allowed Brown and Novak-Leonard to shape the impact statements seen in the framework. The downside of this framework is that it is focused on outcomes from an audience perspective, or what Dunphy et al. (2020, 479) describe as "receptive engagement rather than the full spectrum from receptive right through to creative participation". That is, "it does not enable a complete measurement of outcomes" (ibid.).

**Table 2.2** Framework Two: John Smithies and Surajen Uppal. (Table adapted from Smithies and Uppal 2019, 152)

1	Increased desire to participate or create new cultural works by igniting imagination and curiosity.
<i>Has creativity been stimulated?</i>	
2	Non-typical experiences (often moving experiences sparked by beauty, joy, awe, discomfort or wonder) that engage the senses to take an individual out of their everyday experience.
<i>Has an aesthetic enrichment been experienced?</i>	
3	Stimulating the mind, deeper understanding, and critical and creative thinking and reflection.
<i>Has new knowledge, insight and new ideas been gained?</i>	
4	Appreciation of diverse cultural expressions and the way these interact with each other.
<i>Has the diversity of cultural expression been appreciated?</i>	
5	Providing context to the present and visions of the future by considering the past, including history and heritage.
<i>Has a sense of belonging to a shared cultural heritage deepened?</i>	

In Table 2.2, the measurable cultural (intrinsic) outcomes of engagement in cultural development activities have similar framing to Brown and Novak-Leonard (2013). Smithies and Uppal's framework (2019) has been developed as part of their research through the Cultural Development Network based at RMIT University in Melbourne. Smithies and Uppal (2019, 152) engage cognitive and emotive language to account for impact and uses a place-based focus to outline impact which can be described as belonging. The framework has been trialled in Australian and international





contexts and was developed in response to the challenge of identifying language to account for the “... intangible nature of cultural activities that makes them inherently unmeasurable, while their ‘intrinsic’ properties render them essentially valuable” (Dunphy et al. 2020, 474). The Smithies and Uppal framework overtly uses arts-based language and aesthetic disposition to account for the impact of the arts and cultural experience by individuals and communities.

**Table 2.3** Framework Three: Daisy Fancourt. (Table adapted from Chapter Four in Fancourt 2017 and subsequent work in Fancourt and Finn 2019, 3)

<b>1</b> <i>Components</i>	Aesthetic engagement; involvement of the imagination; sensory activation; evocation of emotion; cognitive stimulation; social interaction; physical activity; engagement with themes of health; interaction with health-care settings
<b>2</b> <i>Responses</i>	Psychological; physiological; social; behavioural
<b>3</b> <i>Outcomes</i>	Prevention; promotion; management; treatment

Impact assessment frameworks and approaches should embrace words and concepts that everyone can understand so as to reflect the myriad ways people experience and value arts, culture and creativity in their communities.

Other indicators of impact can be borrowed from indices developed outside of the cultural sphere, such as Fancourt’s (2017) discussion of the impact of arts in health, adapted in Table 2.3 (see also Fancourt and Finn 2019). Notably, the first five indicators in the cell titled *1) Components* are framed through affective language and have similarities to both Brown and Novak-Leonard’s language framework (Table 2.1) and Smithies and Uppal’s measurable cultural (intrinsic) outcomes (Table 2.2). The responses in Fancourt’s ideas (2017; Fancourt and Finn 2019), presented here in Table 2.3, are framed in a salutogenesis approach. This is an approach focussed on factors that support human health and wellbeing, rather than on factors that cause disease (pathogenesis). Of note is that the model includes social outcomes that point to an indicator of social cohesion.

What is noticeable across all three frameworks is the overt use of language and concepts associated with arts and cultural engagement. They are effectively using the language of the arts to report on the impact of the arts. Impact assessment frameworks and approaches should embrace words and concepts that everyone can understand so as to reflect the myriad ways people experience and value arts, culture and creativity in their communities.



Badham (2019, 212) suggests a relational and dialogic approach to unpack a community's experiences and tacit knowledge, describing this as "a co-creative relationship" which includes an evaluation on the processes of designing and delivering an arts experience and event, as well as the impacts for participants and audiences. Providing cases of participatory evaluation from Australia, Badham (2019, 215) emphasises the need for multiple entry points so that community members can provide feedback in the way most comfortable for them, instead of solely through surveys or questionnaires.

### **Developing place-based and community-led impact assessment**

Consultation is often considered as arriving at a place and asking a series of questions about what people might need and what their experiences are. Such an approach elicits a particular kind of information, but it does not always give an honest or very thoughtful response. A much more creative approach to consultation is where we start to ask people to give a sense of how they inhabit a space and the ways in which they remember or feel as though they belong to a place. Then we can start to uncover the needs of that community in a way that a series of questions cannot possibly uncover.

Taking this approach allows communities to show a much more holistic, authentic and nuanced way of representing their place. It also allows people to find their own vocabulary, one in which they feel comfortable describing what it is they need or what they feel is urgent and pressing in their community.

While the models shared previously in this section are useful and can be deployed, the research demonstrates that creating a generic set of impact assessment markers is not the preferred way in which rural, regional and remote communities would like to develop qualitative understandings of the value and impact of arts and cultural engagement for individuals and communities. The research indicates that one set of defined markers will not suit all rural, regional and remote communities - even those of similar population sizes - as differences in geography, infrastructure, engagement and equity of access to arts and culture need to be considered. It is imperative that members of communities collaboratively develop their own, locally-meaningful markers of success to report on impact and change. This enables the impact of projects to not only be articulated through the goals of funders or delivery organisations, but in the way it is understood by

the people who participate in arts, culture and creativity within their communities.

One goal of this research was to bring a community together using participatory workshops and to support new conversations. The researchers identified that bringing a wide range of community members together for the engagement process might amplify voices and perspectives not always heard considered in traditional consultations. Some of these community members may not have always been involved in discussions about arts, culture and creativity in their community. Inviting their contributions increases the richness of ideas and illuminates diverse perspectives, as well as shared values, and broadens understandings of the reach and impact of the arts within a community.

Instead of using traditional individual written responses the workshops used a series of prompts to generate productive conversations, and to adopt a more holistic approach to the creative arts that includes ideas and conversations about community and place. The prompts were open-ended to encourage in-depth discussion rather than simple answers, and they were also targeted to focus the conversation and generate insights that could inform and direct arts programming and funding applications. This approach was previously trialled through a different research project in two rural and remote Queensland communities in 2018 - Charters Towers and Roma (see Gattenhof et al. 2021, 54-59).

The community consultation workshops engaged these four prompts to elicit discussion:

1. How would you describe the creativity in your community?
2. What are you most proud of in your community?
3. What venues or locations are under-used/ under-valued in your community?
4. How would you like to see your community grow over the next 5 years?

During the workshops, a visual notetaker transformed the discussion into visual representations to capture summaries of participants' key ideas. Additional non-text based data was captured with workshop participants in the form of vox pop discussions which used the same prompts above. These vox pops were captured on film and transformed into the digital stories that accompany this written report.

Using data gathered in the community workshops and individual interviews with key stakeholders in each research site, a common set of impact assessment markers have been determined. The three markers articulated below are broad thematics that resonate across the two sites. The key terms included with each marker denote language and ideas expressed by the workshop participants and individual interviewees that may be used to develop nuanced assessment frameworks to understand the social impacts of arts, culture and creativity in Australian rural, regional and remote communities.



## Theme 1 Connectiveness between Creativity and Wellbeing

Key words from research participants: belonging, community-centred, community-led, Country, empathy, hope, pride, social cohesion

The impact of arts, culture and creativity in communities is more profound, complex and nuanced than is currently articulated and captured by the arts sector in general, or funding agencies - both government and philanthropic. Importantly, while the outcomes of arts and cultural engagement can be broadly expressed as social impact, such impacts are experienced in multiple and diverse ways by different individuals and communities. Across the interviews and community consultation workshops in Burnie, participants identified collective wellbeing, pride, hope, belonging and social cohesion as some of the outcomes of arts and cultural engagement. Data demonstrates that there is strong and tangible connection between arts and cultural engagement and social inclusion or belonging for the Burnie community. One interviewee described the value of arts and cultural engagement as a “conduit for empathy” (interviewee B002). The same interviewee elaborated on this idea by saying, “for better understanding between disparate communities you couldn’t do any better than create a system like art to be able to help one relate to the other” (interviewee B002).

Inclusivity, local social connectedness, and community cohesion were cited as defining features and functions of local arts, culture and creativity. An interviewee summarised “there is a social aspect to the arts and I use the word social in its broadest term, including health and wellbeing, and liveability” (Interviewee CWQ003). High profile arts and cultural events and activities including *Dress the Central West*, along with small community craft groups and workshops were described as “another extension of our community social interactions. It’s just part of the culture of small communities” (community consultation participant). Shops established to sell locally made craft, such as *Artesian Originals* in Barcaldine, and craft workshop *The Lost Art* in Blackall, generated income, gave people “a place to be” (community consultation participant), and facilitated social interactions and friendships. Such community-led activity was valued as a means of “problem-solving” (community consultation participant) as it addressed issues of social isolation and loneliness. This social and wellbeing aspect of arts, culture and creativity was highly valued in the community.

## Theme 2 Thriveability

Key words from research participants: futures, human potential, possibility thinking, visibility

Arts, culture and creativity assist with community regeneration. This is particularly important for a city such as Burnie that has faced high unemployment and potential loss of identity resulting from the closure of the Wesley Vale paper

pulp mill in 2010. One interview captured the potential loss of community identity by saying,

When the old papermill closed ten years ago there was a ‘what do we do now’ moment. It’s arts events like Paper on Skin, Burnie Shines and cultural projects like Maker’s Workshops that helped to reshape our community identity and to identify as agents of change personally, culturally and professionally (interviewee B002).

The data points to the role that arts and cultural engagement have in establishing liveability for a city or town. As one interviewee commented this is “... important in encouraging and supporting people to see the place that they live in as being equal to if not better than, other places. It’s not a place of impoverishment that in fact they can aspire to extraordinariness as well” (interviewee B001).

Residents are overwhelmingly proud of the people who comprise their community. The value of arts and culture in Burnie is centred on building cohesion, tolerance and, connectedness within community. The data points to a future focused orientation within the community with the capacity to challenge preconceived understandings of Burnie and surrounds. The reputation for nurturing artistic capacity outlined in the overview was captured by one interviewee who noted, “... we wanted to say yes we’re in Burnie but we’re not doing what people might expect us to do in Burnie. We are going to do something that was last in Venice or Sydney or Tokyo because we think Burnie deserves, and can do it” (interviewee B001). An interviewee noted that Burnie and its residents, including arts and cultural organisations, are “only limited by our own imagination” (interviewee B004). The city is imbued with a “can-do attitude and grassroots mentality that you can make things and you can get it done” (interviewee B006). Resilience and leadership were cited as core strengths, while locally designed and delivered arts and cultural activities and events emerged as local assets. Participants positioned arts, culture and creativity (including creative thinking and arts-based solutions to pressing challenges) as an essential part of the community’s future across social, economic and environmental domains.

For young people in Burnie and surrounding towns, the visibility of arts and cultural activity is key to “communicate and encourage human potential” (interviewee B002). One challenge for young people living in rural and remote communities is that “they can’t be what they can’t see” (interviewee B002). Towns adjacent to Burnie such as Wynyard and Smithton are dominated by jobs that are highly agricultural and industrial. Engagement in arts, culture and creativity provide young people examples of other possible ways of living their futures. This possibility thinking was articulated as, “the impact of watching a craftsperson making something in the community, or a moment of self-realisation after seeing one of David Keeling’s Tasmanian landscapes in a formal gallery. It is a realisation of the possibility of life” (interviewee B002).



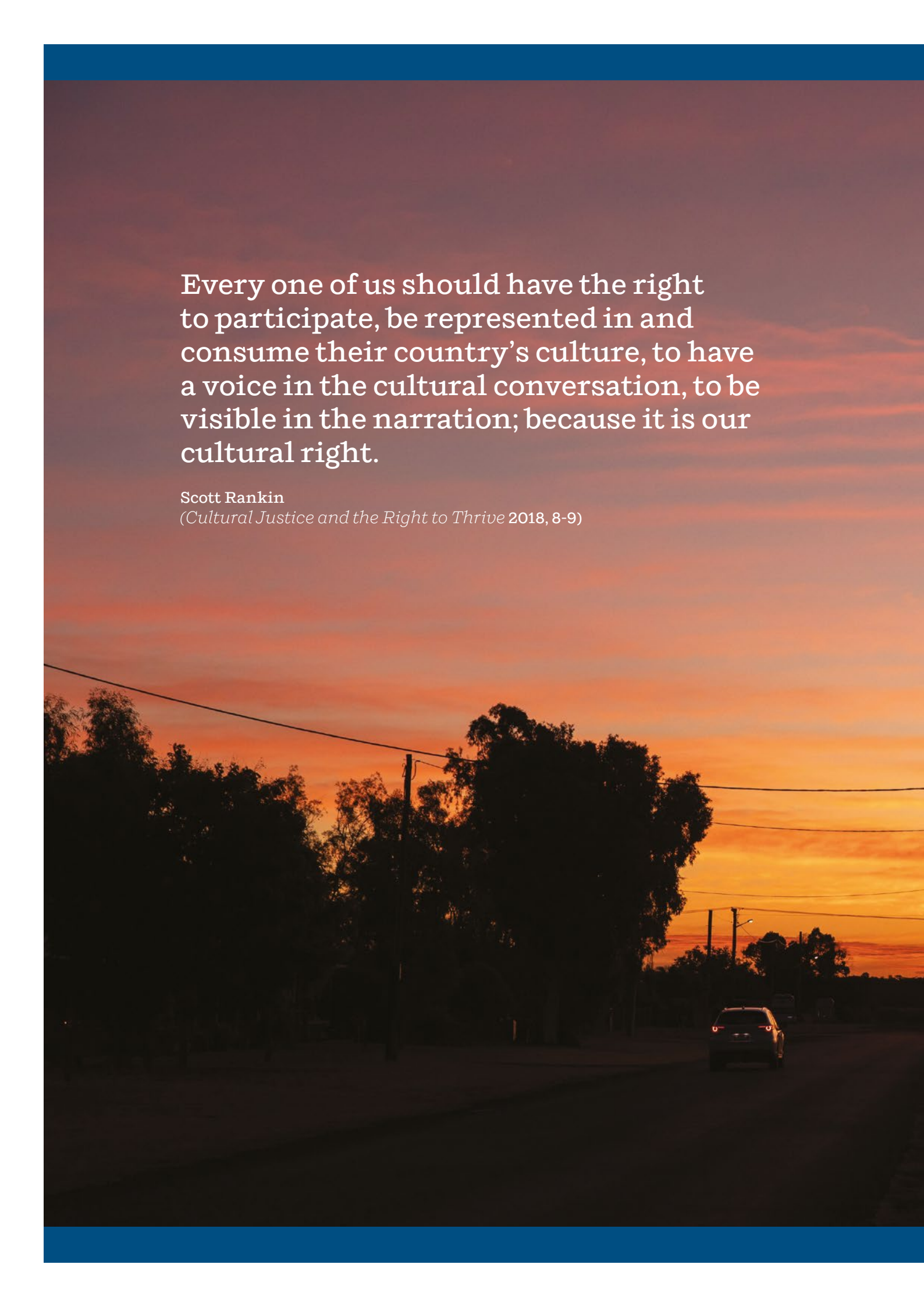
### **Theme 3 Arts Ecologies to Support Innovation**

Key words from research participants: celebrate, Community, Country, Culture, knowledge sharing, legacy, place, preserve, sustain

Embracing and amplifying local skills and knowledge as fundamental local assets emerged as a core feature and outcome of local arts, culture and creativity, such as the *Dress the Central West* project and event (interviewee CWQ004). Community consultation participants characterised local arts, culture and creativity as “nurturing”, “evolving”, “collaborative”, involving “developing”, “learning together”, and “sharing” of skills and knowledge. These participants recognised knowledge sharing between community members and across generations as integral to sustainable arts and culture. This meant their local arts and cultural ecology was diverse and continually evolving as new skills and ideas were learned and shared.

Knowledge sharing, and building on existing skills and successes, contributed to the sustainability of local arts and cultural sectors. An interviewee emphasised the importance of sustaining successes and building legacy in regional arts delivery: “A fly-in provider can come in and get the job done and go. But when you are a local provider, you get the job done, and you’re growing another job while you’re doing it, because you can see the next step” (interviewee CWQ004). While the sustainability of the sector emerged as a critical concern for the Burnie community, central western Queensland community consultations revealed less anxiety about the future of their local arts and cultural events, programs and activities.

Acknowledging, preserving and celebrating local culture and heritage is part of the knowledge sharing function of local arts, culture and creativity. Supporting this approach embraces a decolonial understanding of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups care for Country, Community and Culture. Creative placemaking and place-based creativity is continuing to emerge as a useful and inclusive framework for decentring colonial, white and urban priorities in arts, culture and design (Gattenhof et al. 2022, 13). As an interviewee stated, “[c]ouncils have quite a commitment and understanding of arts from the point of view of not only tourism but the point of view of preserving our heritage ... If it is part of preserving our cultural heritage, we value it very highly” (interviewee CWQ008). Ideas for the future growth and sustainability of central western Queensland towns and communities centred on further embracing and valuing tangible and intangible assets - including natural landscapes, locations and venues along with local knowledge, skills, culture and histories - that already exist in communities. Extending current local successes and investing in people, rather than new infrastructure and initiatives, were viewed as key to the future vitality of communities.

A photograph of a sunset over a road. The sky is a mix of orange, red, and purple. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of trees and utility poles. A car is visible in the distance on the road.

Every one of us should have the right to participate, be represented in and consume their country's culture, to have a voice in the cultural conversation, to be visible in the narration; because it is our cultural right.

Scott Rankin

*(Cultural Justice and the Right to Thrive 2018, 8-9)*



# Project Case Studies

*The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a social impact model* project developed case studies that highlight innovative ways regional communities are embracing arts, culture and creativity to create healthy, thriving communities.

As arts-based researchers the team has chosen to use the power of story and share narratives of social impact arising from this research project. The following five case studies examine and represent the role that arts, culture and creativity play in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania and central western Queensland. The case studies are wearable art initiatives and events *Dress the Central West* and *Paper on Skin*; the large-scale performative work *mapali - Dawn Gathering*; social enterprise initiatives *Artesian Originals* and *Shoppportunity*; and community arts project series *Shorewell Presents*. These cases are projects which strongly reflect each region's creative capacities, amplify local assets, and have been designed and delivered to address locally identified challenges.

Together these case studies represent the richness and breadth of arts, cultural and creative activity in the two project sites - from high-profile arts events such as *Paper on Skin* to grassroots, community-driven initiatives such as *Artesian Originals* - and the inextricable link between this activity and the thriveability of rural, regional and remote communities. The case studies highlight the need for an ecosystem approach to encompass and value the full breadth of this activity, and the interconnections and interdependencies between grassroots and high-profile activity in rural, regional and remote communities. Importantly, these projects, performances, initiatives and activities show the social impacts of arts, culture and creativity are multifaceted, emerging and expressing differently across sites and settings.

## Case study one: *Dress the Central West*



Woolen garment created by community members for *Dress the Central West* 2019. Photograph supplied by Red Ridge Interior Queensland.



*Dress the Central West* is a wearable art project and community event which responded to the social and economic impacts of long-term drought. Produced by non-profit arts organisation Red Ridge Interior Queensland, *Dress the Central West* combined participatory art and craft elements, First Nations art and storytelling, and community performances to produce a professional and high-profile performative work which brought people together to celebrate the beauty of their community and landscape during a time of shared hardship. The project began in early 2019 as a series of wearable art workshops facilitated in towns throughout the central western Queensland region and centred on the theme 'beauty within the drought'. Guided and mentored by Meanjin/Brisbane-based artist and designer Claudia Williams, participants created garments from local and "found" materials - such as sheep's wool, stock feed bags, twine, tree bark and feathers - to represent their region's agricultural industries, landscapes, and many stories. The project culminated in fashion parades and gala events held in Blackall and Longreach in June 2019.

*Dress the Central West* attracted local and state media attention, and the garments have since been modelled and displayed at other events across the state, including state regional arts conference Arts Ablaze in October 2019, and an exhibition at the State Library of Queensland in Brisbane in February 2020. The project has inspired and enabled other high-impact initiatives throughout the community, including First Nations fashion label Red Ridge the Label which now sells internationally, and the performative work *Matya*, which is described in more detail later. This case study was informed by individual interviews, field observations during site visits to central western Queensland in 2019 and 2020, and analysis of mainstream media coverage of the project. The following discussion focusses on the significant economic and social impacts of *Dress the Central West*, and the deeply collaborative and participatory processes which supported these outcomes and legacy.

### **Collaboration and collective success**

Red Ridge Interior Queensland is a small social-impact arts organisation based in the remote town of Blackall, a sheep and cattle producing community 1,000 kilometres northwest of Meanjin/Brisbane. Red Ridge's projects and initiatives respond explicitly to community-identified needs and embrace arts, culture and creativity as critical tools and local assets for supporting central west communities to thrive. Red Ridge developed the idea for *Dress the Central West* through collaborative processes of consultation and co-design to determine the most immediate needs of community members, and the most desirable outcomes for the project. An interviewee described that "at the end of the day what you really want to achieve is buried in your project. The project's not what you want to achieve, it's the things inside the project that you want to

achieve, and the project just becomes the vehicle" (interviewee CWQ004).

Opportunities for skills development, intergenerational connections and collaborations, music and performance, and building young people's self-confidence were amongst the community's identified priorities (ibid.). The community was also acutely affected by long-term drought and wanted an activity and event that brought people together, generated feelings of hope and pride, and fostered wellbeing during a time of extreme adversity. *Dress the Central West* was developed around these needs and objectives and continued to evolve through ongoing community conversations to achieve them.

Rich networks, formal and informal relationships, and sustained collaborations within and beyond the arts and cultural sector are critical to the design and delivery of arts and cultural programs and activities in rural, regional and remote communities. Small arts organisations in rural, regional and remote Australia recognise their work as intensely collaborative and inherently intersectoral (Gattenhof et al. 2021, 74). Red Ridge, for example, collaborated with multiple local service providers to deliver the project. Collaborators included neighbourhood centres, healthcare and employment services, non-profit organisation Central West Aboriginal Corporation, local businesses and individuals to deliver the project. An interviewee described:

"It's the network of people, community, family, friends, industries, other service providers. That was a classic example with *Dress the Central West*. We had no money to start with and the project just kept growing and growing ... we had no idea how we were going to fund it. But all of a sudden people would say, 'okay I've got a spare X amount and I can support it with this' and we were just able to work with that network to make it succeed" (interviewee CWQ004).

The organisation secured funding from state government department Queensland Health, through the Tackling Regional Adversity with Integrated Care program; philanthropic agencies Tim Fairfax Family Foundation, and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR); as well as state government funding for arts and culture.

Red Ridge's intersectoral and inclusive approach provided multiple and various avenues for individuals and organisations to become involved in and connect with the project. For instance, Central West Aboriginal Corporation became a key project partner and collaborator throughout the project, leading the design and making of garments with First Nations community members to depict culture and stories. For example, the Sun Woman dress drew upon a Bidjara Dreaming story of the Sun Woman being pursued across the sky by the Moon Man. The dress was modelled by a local First Nations community member at the gala events in June 2019 and was displayed as part of the

State Library of Queensland's *Spoken: celebrating Queensland languages* exhibition in 2020.

Over several months, more than 40 wearable art workshops were held in the towns of Winton, Longreach, Barcaldine and Blackall. While these workshops were mostly attended by adults, the gala events which concluded the project involved a greater diversity of the community. Held in Blackall and Longreach on 30 May and 1 June 2019, these events involved 110 volunteers, 34 models, 34 dancers, ten makeup artists and four hair stylists (Red Ridge Interior Queensland 2019). Community members participating in the Work for the Dole program created the production set and stage. First Nations young people modelled the garments on the catwalk. This was a specific strategy to engage and empower these young people in community life and support feelings of pride. Community members also ushered audiences and managed the bar, while local community groups provided catering at the events (interviewee CWQ009). Each gala event showcased 33 individual garments and drew audiences of over 300 people from towns and outlying sheep and cattle stations.



*Dress the Central West gala and fashion parade, Longreach, June 2019. Photographs supplied by Red Ridge Interior Queensland.*

Noting the small population sizes of central western towns, participation and engagement with *Dress the Central West* was significant. The project prioritised authentic community engagement, participation, and supported local individuals and groups to emerge as leaders. Through their involvement in and contributions to the project, community members and groups such as Central West Aboriginal Corporation were positioned to feel a great deal of ownership and pride towards the project, and success was framed as a shared achievement and experience:

“It’s the community’s project. Success is not for one person, success is for a whole heap of people and things only grow and succeed if everybody’s involved. *Dress the Central West* wasn’t just [Red Ridge], it was the Central West Aboriginal Corporation. But it was based on respect, on confidence, on relationships, networks, and on supporting each other. I think that is the model of

*Dress the Central West*. We had four towns working on the project separately, then we came together as a whole region” (interviewee CWQ004).

While media coverage of the gala events highlighted the beauty of the garments and the creativity and innovation of the groups and communities who had created them, there was an equally strong emphasis on how the project brought people together and facilitated community cohesion and supportive social relationships. The *Queensland Country Life*, for example, highlighted drought as a shared local burden and the project’s aim to “find a way of helping people to reconnect with their communities, stories and culture after battling drought for six relentless years” (Cripps 2019). Shared experiences of hardship, acknowledged and addressed through a collaborative creative project sustained by supportive relationships and trust, fostered feelings of pride and collective success.

### **Creativity and community wellbeing**

As an explicit response to both the social and economic impacts of widespread drought, *Dress the Central West* involved vulnerable community members and directly connected people with health services. Red Ridge collaborated with health service providers including Central West Hospital and Health Services, and the wearable art workshops became an avenue for clinicians to connect informally with community members. While health providers “wouldn’t get up with a screen and talk about mental health like that ... they’d be present at the community workshops, helping with the garments and having informal chit chat” with participants about their experiences of drought (interviewee CWQ009). Arts and cultural programs and activities are recognised as providing important avenues for overcoming inequalities of access to health services (APPGAHW 2017, 11; Sonke and Baxley 2016, 106; Sonke et al. 2019, 6). Such programs

“reduce barriers to healthcare by connecting people to systems, services, and community members. In fact, the arts are uniquely positioned to create a neutral hub across which seemingly disparate groups of people can come together to create solutions to accessing health and human services” (Sonke and Baxley 2016, 106).

Art and culture support collaboration and partnerships between otherwise unconnected cohorts, organisations and sectors - such as arts organisations and health services. They can make health and care environments more humane, less threatening, and provide a sense of hope and connection (Sonke and Baxley 2016, 106). While many people attending the wearable art workshops may have been reluctant to attend formal information sessions about mental health, the creative and hands-on workshops provided spaces that were safer and more inclusive for health conversations. Creative workshops were acknowledged as “a good way to get your message out there ... When you’re sitting and you’re painting

you're just chatting - it's not like I'm talking to you about your mental health. When they say art therapy is the best, we've proven that" (interviewee CWQ011).

Participants and stakeholders made explicit links between involvement in *Dress the Central West* and both personal and collective wellbeing. One workshop participant told the *Queensland Country Life* newspaper:

"When I first saw the workshops advertised, I thought what the heck I might just go along and give it a go, not really being a self-confessed creative person or understanding the concept of the whole project ... I just needed an out from the daily grind of living through the drought, the monotonous load of caring for our property's stock and my family. I just fell in love with the project, amazed at what 'us' as a community were creating, and just wanted to keep coming along" (Cripps 2019).

Participation in arts and cultural activities provide opportunities for developing a sense of belonging with others (Ennis and Tonkin 2017, 346), for making sense of and expressing experiences (Lee et al. 2020, 109; Saavedra et al. 2018, 910), and for co-creating shared meanings (Marsh 2015, 312). For participants of the wearable art workshops, an "escape" which provided connection with others and fostered feelings of shared pride were key wellbeing outcomes. An interviewee summarised "you just think you're coming to a workshop and think 'yes I'd like to do this', but to see the knock-on effect - it's really quite empowering, especially in the middle of drought. Drought affects everyone, whether you're on a property or in town" (CWQ010). The workshop series, completed garments, and final gala event provided participants with an opportunity to gather for a positive occasion and experience a sense of pride which was both personal and collective in nature. Reflecting the project's success in terms of health promotion, stakeholder and financial partner Queensland Health described "Dress the Central West: Beauty Within the Drought is an exemplar of community connectedness and resilience promotion".

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**While such outcomes are individual and personal, they connect strongly with collective outcomes and experiences.**

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*Dress the Central West* was described as having significant individual outcomes for First Nations young people who modelled the completed garments in the catwalk parade and gala event. First Nations interviewees described a number of young people who had faced self-esteem and self-image issues and for whom involvement in *Dress the Central West* has had a lasting positive impact on their self-confidence (interviewee CWQ010; interviewee CWQ011). Similar anecdotes were related by other interviewees who described individual outcomes that were deeply personal,

and perhaps only visible to those who belong to the community. For example, "[y]ou see the impact in people, you saw who they were a week ago to who they are through the impact of their engagement in the project. The whole community will tell you it has changed that person's life" (interviewee CWQ004).



*The Sun Woman dress was featured on the cover of Junkies magazine in October 2019.*

While such outcomes are individual and personal, they connect strongly with collective outcomes and experiences. For instance, increased individual self-esteem was attributed to collaborating with others to deliver the project, and positive effects extended beyond those directly involved in the project to include participants' family members and audiences (interviewee CWQ009). The large volume of social and mainstream media reportage on the workshops, gala events and legacy projects evidences the widespread interest in and enthusiasm for *Dress the Central West* across the region and state. The project has featured across six mainstream media platforms in print, digitally and on radio. It has also featured in several special-interest magazines and blogs including Junkies Magazine (October 2019), Visit Scenic Rim (October 2019), Arts Queensland (October 2019) and on the State Library of Queensland blog (November 2019).

An interviewee identified the key outcomes they perceived from the project stating "just so much community pride on so many levels, whether you were the creator, or the person on the runway, or you got to watch the show. It just really connected

with the community” (ibid.). Quality arts and cultural programs that are sensitive to local contexts and relevant and appropriate for distinct populations are those which are most likely to enhance wellbeing and produce positive health outcomes for individuals and communities (Ings et al. 2012, 18; APPGAHW 2017, 70). As a project designed to directly respond to community-identified needs and showcase and celebrate local stories and cultures, *Dress the Central West* supported wellbeing across personal, social and cultural dimensions.

### Connecting to culture and community through art and performance: *Matya*

Building on their successful collaboration for *Dress the Central West*, and its value and impact for First Nations community members, Red Ridge and Central West Aboriginal Corporation collaborated again through 2020 and 2021 to produce *Matya*, a theatrical retelling of a local First Nations legend about the sun, moon and eclipse. The story encompasses First Nations knowledge and values around caring for Country and has been shared orally with children in the Barcaldine community for almost 25 years (interviewee CW011). The performative work was developed through four months of community cultural engagement and skills-development workshops in Blackall, Barcaldine, and Longreach. Community members collaborated with arts professionals and cultural leaders to create music, dance, and song for the performance, digital animations, and wearable art inspired by *Dress the Central West*. *Matya* was presented at the Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Festival on Iningai Country on 30 April 2021. Like *Dress the Central West*, it is demonstrative of the role of collaborative arts, culture and creativity in supporting collective wellbeing. In particular, *Matya* highlights the importance of community-led art and creativity for cultural expression and continuation, and hence for supporting wellbeing across social, emotional and cultural domains.

*Matya* was developed in response to the need to provide opportunities for First Nations young people to learn and express cultural identity, and strengthen sense of community and connection between generations. Describing *Matya*'s goals for community engagement and participation, an interviewee said “when we talk about ‘connecting’, we need to start connecting with our kids as well so they know if things are troubled at home they have their Aunties and they have other people as well” (interviewee CWQ011). From a First Nations perspective, wellbeing is a collective, relational concept and experience which encompasses the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community (Commonwealth of Australia 2021, 21; Willing et al. 2019; Ganesharajah 2009). Kinship and connection to other First Nations community members and to land and country are characteristics of First Nations culture, and connection to culture is a crucial component of wellbeing for First Nations peoples (Commonwealth of Australia 2021, 8; Dockery 2010, 329). *Matya* was an intentionally intergenerational



*The Matya performance at Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Festival, 2021. Photographs by Skinn Deep Photography.*

creative project which engaged and included First Nations community members of all ages and provided opportunities for being together, learning and sharing cultural knowledge and traditions. Young people participated in a range of creative and cultural engagement activities with First Nations artists and creative practitioners including singer songwriter Leroy Wilson, company Virtual Songlines, and Aboriginal cultural immersion company Milan Dhiyaan. Elders and senior First Nations community members designed and created costumes for the performance, reflecting traditional arts and cultural practices, and continuing the legacy of *Dress the Central West*. The April performance involved a cast of 50 community members of all ages, to “proudly perform as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people walking and talking together as one in a vibrant showcase of wearable art”, local talent and skills (Australian Workers Heritage Centre 2021).

Recent research undertaken for the Australia Council for the Arts and Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, New Zealand, illuminated an innate connection between cultural knowledge and tradition, arts and culture, and the wellbeing of Māori, Pacific peoples, and First Nations Australian individuals and communities (Gattenhof et al. 2022, 69). For First Nations young people, arts, culture and creativity are practices of learning, “reconnecting and rekindling” knowledge and story (ibid.). This is reflected in the Australia Council for the Arts’ *First Nations Arts and Culture Strategy 2023-27* which positions art and creativity

as a source of culture and human connection, and foundational to social and emotional wellbeing (Australia Council for the Arts 2022, 18). In the case of *Matya*, interviewees noted that First Nations community members, and young people in particular, “crave” opportunities to connect with culture, such as through dance and traditional cultural practices which show respect for land and country (interviewee CWQ011). They stated “we need to do more with our young people ... for our own [First Nations] community, you need to build them up, you need them to feel proud and strong and make them feel good” (interviewee CWQ011). This is enabled through projects such as *Dress the Central West* and *Matya* which centre First Nations peoples’ self-determination and creative control in arts and cultural production and presentation (Australia Council for the Arts 2020b, 12).

Part of *Matya*’s legacy in Barcaldine may be greater social cohesion through strengthened relationships between First Nations peoples and the wider community. In June 2021, Central West Aboriginal Corporation led Barcaldine’s first public, community-wide Reconciliation Week event. As stated in local newspaper *The Longreach Leader*, “the community’s positive response to the *Matya* performance at the *Tree of Knowledge Festival* in April showed that this was the time to get people involved in reconciliation week” (Williams 2021). This article describes “after the *Matya* dance on May Day the community came to the Corporation, with many children wishing to learn their dances and culture” (ibid.), suggesting that *Matya* had established a foundation for further meaningful community-building work to happen. *Dress the Central West* and *Matya* both model the power of community-led arts, culture and creative initiatives to generate positive change and collective action, with wellbeing outcomes for individuals and communities.

### **Economic opportunities**

In remote communities, the social and cultural impacts of arts and culture are often inextricably linked to economic outcomes for individuals and communities (Bartleet et al. 2019, 164). In addition to supporting significant wellbeing outcomes, *Dress the Central West* leveraged and “nurtured” people’s skills and creative capacities and created paid employment opportunities for local professionals (interviewee CWQ004). The observations of interviewees reflected scholarly literature showing that drought profoundly affects the social and economic character of places through reduced consumption expenditure in local towns, and increased mobility as residents relocate in search of work (Edwards et al. 2009, 119). Responding to such challenges, *Dress the Central West* drew on and enhanced the skills of local hairdressers and make-up artists instead of flying professionals into the community from elsewhere. Employing local people was an important part of the project’s impact for those individuals, creating ripple effects within the broader community. For one hairdresser,



*Preparing for the Dress the Central West fashion parade at Arts Ablaze, Kooralbyn, October 2019. Photograph supplied by Red Ridge Interior Queensland.*

“when we gave her this project she got so much magic out of it. She was so re-energised that she could see hair is not just for a salon but hair is for theatre, for performance ... she loved the challenge of it and it reconnected her back to her professional career ... And I think for our communities that is the impact: you’re recognising and using local [talent] and nurturing and building that capacity, and you’re offering them new opportunities” (interviewee CWQ004).

This anecdote highlights economic and social, personal and communal outcomes. Through providing an avenue for hairdressers, makeup artists and models to extend their skillsets and represent themselves to their community as diversely skilled professionals, the project stimulated career satisfaction and personal pride. These personal outcomes also have public impact as fresh and empowering challenges and employment opportunities can help stem the outflux of young professionals from the region.

### **Legacy**

*Dress the Central West* laid the foundation for a variety of new opportunities, community events and high-profile initiatives, particularly for First Nations artists and community members. Following the success of the wearable art workshops and gala events, Red Ridge worked with community members to explore further opportunities to depict local stories and cultures through fashion. First Nations Elders and artists Anpanuwa Joyce and Aulpunda Jean Crombie from Wangkangurru/Yarluyandi Country around Birdsville, Queensland, collaborated with Red Ridge to depict their art on textiles for inclusion in the Global Indigenous Runway Project at Melbourne Fashion Festival in March 2020. Inclusion and recognition of central western Queensland arts, culture and stories in a major national event generated personal pride for the artists and important outcomes for First Nations young people who saw that personal dreams and success could be achieved at any age (interviewee



Red Ridge the Label: [www.redridgethelabel.com.au/pages/about](http://www.redridgethelabel.com.au/pages/about)

CWQ004). Strong local leaders and role models are critical for expanding young people's visions of the kinds of careers and futures that are possible.

Red Ridge and Joyce and Jean Crombie built on the success of Melbourne Fashion Festival to launch First Nations fashion label Red Ridge the Label (<https://www.redridgethelabel.com.au/>) in May 2021. The prints and garments are designed by the artists and produced in Blackall by local small businesses. The artists highlight cultural maintenance and transmission as critical functions and values of the label:

"this is our way of teaching the younger generation. They learn from us. Our language is our art ... To have these stories on different materials, and even a catwalk, means so much to us. We are telling our stories through our artwork and these dresses - that is a first for us. If we don't pass our culture on to our young ones we will lose it" (Red Ridge the Label 2021).

Arts and creativity play an important role in maintaining traditions and practices unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Linderman et al. 2017; Jones and Birdsall-Jones

2014). First Nations arts centres, for example, are important sites of cultural and identity maintenance, and places of learning, care, work and income (Jones and Birdsall-Jones 2014, 302). Such functions are also evident in Red Ridge the Label which, for the artists, is a way of keeping culture and stories alive.

Red Ridge the Label sells around Australia and internationally and has been included in state and national events including Brisbane Fashion Month and the *Women of the World (WOW) Festival*. In addition to significant cultural and economic outcomes, Red Ridge the Label contributes importantly to place identity by giving "local heritage a public viewing. People all over the world are getting an insight to what we have to offer ... it is part of us and it's what we do and whether tourists come and appreciate it or not we're going to continue doing it because it is us" (interviewee CWQ008).

## Case study two: *Paper on Skin*

*Paper on Skin* is a wearable paper art competition and series of activities held biannually in Burnie (2012-2020) and Devonport (2022) on the northwest coast of lutruwita/Tasmania. Initiated in 2012, it has evolved alongside the maturation of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania as a region of arts and cultural significance. The values underpinning *Paper on Skin* have always emphasised local heritage and identity, and artistic innovation. These values are realised through a varying suite of activities that reflect the industrial heritage of the northwest city of Burnie and the importance of the former paper mill as a mainstay of the local economy. For example, competition entries must be wearable garments made from at least 80% paper, and events such as papermaking workshops, public lectures and exhibitions are programmed around the competition judging and gala event. Through centring the heritage craft of papermaking, *Paper on Skin* has maintained a strong local significance and contributed to evolving northwest lutruwita/Tasmania's identity and self-image, while having national and international relevance and appeal. Over the years its growth and prestige has helped advance northwest lutruwita/Tasmania's national reputation as a site of culture and innovation.

*Paper on Skin* partners with state and local governments and a range of community organisations and businesses to deliver the competition, main gala event, and suite of activities. It was initiated by the volunteer-run Burnie Arts Council and between 2012 and 2020 developed and delivered in close partnership with Burnie City Council. In late 2021, reflecting its success over the years and growing significance across the northwest region, *Paper on Skin* secured competitive state government arts funding and a new partnership with Devonport City Council. This case study traces this growth and analyses *Paper on Skin's* role in shaping the identities of Burnie and the broader region of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania. The following discussion is informed by individual interviews, community consultation workshops undertaken in Burnie, and field observations during site visits to northwest lutruwita/Tasmania in 2019, 2021 and 2022. The discussion focusses on the ways *Paper on Skin* contributes to a distinctive regional identity, and its role in supporting communities in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania to thrive.

### **Creatively shaping northwest lutruwita/ Tasmania**

*Paper on Skin* emerged during, and in response to, a period of significant economic and social change in the city of Burnie. Community members acknowledged the centrality of the former paper mill to Burnie's growth and prosperity throughout the twentieth century, as well as the environmental and social challenges associated with an industrial city. They noted "Burnie had an incredibly bad name" (interviewee B008) and

"was the very model of a dirty industrial town. So dirty that Midnight Oil wrote a song about the place" (interviewee B002) (see Midnight Oil 1981). At the same time, community members overwhelmingly expressed pride and admiration in their community's resilience and desire to reimagine, "reinvent" (interviewee B002), and "transform" (interviewee B009) their city, its image, and build new opportunities following closure of the mill and significant local economic disruption. Locally driven arts, cultural, and creative activities and events such as *Paper on Skin* were positioned as critical in revitalising Burnie, developing community capacity and pride.



2018 *Paper on Skin* gala event, 'Empress at Forbidden City' by Cynthia Hawkins. Photograph by Grant Wells Photography. Image supplied by *Paper on Skin*.

*Paper on Skin* reflects a conscious process of creative place-making, whereby arts, culture and creativity are strategically deployed to support socioeconomic vibrancy and enhance liveability (see Fielding and Trembath 2019, 20). Through "picking up that papermaking legacy and creating something really beautiful and innovative in relation to paper art" (interviewee B007) it repositions the region's industrial heritage as a distinctive and important local asset and source of pride. Community members felt that "not shying-away from the industrial heritage of a place, making the most of it ... is really important", lending a sense of authenticity to local creative activity



Two-time *Paper on Skin* competition finalist Chloe Townsend facilitated a 'Create Your Own Headpiece' workshop as part of *Paper on Skin*'s 2022 program of activities. Pictured: Chloe with workshop participants. Image supplied by *Paper on Skin*.

(interviewee B002). *Paper on Skin*'s connection to the region's industrial past, and involvement of community members, was cited as key to its success:

"It feels real. You have people who worked in the pulp mill that are making beautiful things or advising on papermaking. ... And also they love to see that that isn't dead. That is part of what fed their families for generations. I absolutely respect how important that was for the whole northwest coast - the mills and production - because it fed generations of people. It was so ingrained in all aspects of community life" (interviewee B008).

*Paper on Skin* shapes place through embracing the history of the community, its values and lived experiences, and reflecting these stories back to community members (Redaelli 2019, 180-181). It also exemplifies the value of art and culture for counteracting negative perceptions and representations of a place imposed from outside and enhancing a community's image and self-esteem (Bartleet et al. 2019, 102).

The wearable paper art competition attracts entries from local, national and international, hobbyist, emerging and established artists, including "artists who are absolutely at the top of their game" (interviewee B007). In 2022, the competition attracted entries from 40 artists representing 12 countries. The program and its global recognition have clear resonance and significance in the city of Burnie; for instance, "it put Burnie on the map as a centre to be reckoned with in the promotion of textile art" (interviewee B009) and shaped the community's self-image and self-esteem. Describing the 2012 gala event, an interviewee said "it was just the most remarkable thing. And we did that. We did that. The Burnie community did that ... And I came out of there so uplifted and I think the other 200 people in the room did as well" (interviewee B008). This perspective suggests sense of community

and place identity were strengthened through engagement with arts and culture. By emphasising the place-based tangible and intangible assets of a community, projects such as *Paper on Skin* can influence how a community perceives itself, its stories, and anticipates the future (Brownett 2018, 76). *Paper on Skin* is a demonstration of the community's sense of pride toward Burnie's heritage, identity and success. Pride is one of the event's intangible, "take home" impacts (ibid., 78), and part of *Paper on Skin*'s living legacy in the community.

Rentschler et al. (2015b, 15) note the potential for success when the arts celebrate a distinctive local identity while lauding an international canon, though warn that arts activities and events which focus too heavily on international competition and external audiences can risk neglecting local communities, their cultural needs, and local resources. *Paper on Skin* appears to avoid this through a consciously 'place first', 'community first' approach (community consultation participant), its focus on specific local assets, and involvement of a range of local partners and stakeholders. Over the years, *Paper on Skin* has been made possible through financial and in-kind support from local businesses and partnerships with a range of sectors including education, government, and arts and culture. Local partners and sponsors have included, for example, Betta Milk, Design Eye, University of Tasmania, Burnie City Council, Reflexions Dance Studio, Cocoon Designs, and Big hART. It has also secured funding through state and federal competitive grant rounds. These factors make it a hyperlocal event with a national and international outlook which, rather than undercutting its authenticity for locals, amplifies their sense of pride and shared success.

While having hyperlocal significance in Burnie, *Paper on Skin* is reflective of the culture of creativity that characterises the broader region of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania, and a program that advances the region's reputation as a site of arts, culture and creative innovation. As an interviewee articulated:

"The event is representative now of not just Burnie but the northwest coast - it is representative of lutruwita/Tasmania. It is attracting international interest and that's not because it was based in a paper town. It is because of what value that program has to offer" (interviewee B014).

The event and associated activities reflect efforts throughout the region to shape and strengthen communities by centring arts, culture and creativity in regional revitalisation strategies. For instance, state government investment in place-based arts and cultural experiences such as festivals and a literary prize have helped grow cultural tourism throughout the state following the decline of manufacturing (Lehman and Reiser 2014). In the northwest city of Devonport, arts, culture and creativity are positioned centrally within local government's Building Quality of Life goal (Devonport City Council 2022, 34-36), and identified as a local strength and strategy to





Behind the scenes - making the 2020 *Paper on Skin* film. Photograph by Grant Wells Photography. Image supplied by Paper on Skin.

support tourism across the region (Wootton 2022, 4). Northwest lutruwita/Tasmania is the second most visited region in the state for arts and culture (Australia Council for the Arts 2020, 76), which reflects the success of the region's arts-based place-branding strategies, and the strength of programs such as *Paper on Skin* in shaping the region's reputation.

### **Innovation and thriveability**

*Paper on Skin's* program of activities changes every year as the project responds to the needs and interests of northwest communities, seeks to engage new audiences, and embraces opportunities for collaboration and impact. As an interviewee expressed, "it has just evolved every year - it is one of those things that seems to be a little bit more than the sum of its parts and has a momentum all of its own" (interviewee B007). In 2020, *Paper on Skin* collaborated with Big hART, Australia's leading arts and social change organisation, and local employment services to provide professional development and employment opportunities for young people in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania. COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 prevented the delivery of face-to-face events, and so young people involved in Big hART's Project O initiative formed part of a film production team, working with Burnie Arts Council, models and filmmakers to produce a film showcasing competition entries in lieu of the *Paper on Skin* gala and fashion parade. In addition to paid employment and the development of soft skills - such as time management, teamwork and problem solving (Big hART 2020) - this

collaboration with *Paper on Skin* expanded young people's perception of possible careers and futures. As an interviewee noted, "in this area it's that whole you can't do what you can't see thing. There's not a huge diversity of different jobs that young women in a highly agricultural and industrial area are seeing as ways of living their future". However, collaborating with artists and creative professionals 'broaden out horizons' and provide young people with examples of other pathways (interviewee B003).

Previous research has noted the important role of arts, culture and creativity in the development and sustainability of communities in rural, regional and remote Australia (see for example Anwar McHenry 2011; Rentschler et al. 2015c; Skippington 2016; Anwar McHenry et al. 2018; Bartleet et al. 2019). Arts, culture and creativity make important contributions to regional economic development through the creation of employment, skills and training opportunities (Hearn et al. 2020; Skippington 2016) and supporting industries such as tourism, but they also "play a role in the attraction and/or retention of regional populations and therefore may be vital for broader socioeconomic vibrancy of regional communities" (Achurch 2019, 28). Research by the Regional Australia Institute finds that the character of a town, its cultural vibrancy, and availability of artistic and cultural activities and events are important liveability factors which support the desirability of a place and influence people's decisions to move to or remain in a regional community (see Houghton and Vohra 2021, 19; Achurch 2019, 31). *Paper on Skin* is part of

the ecosystem of creative activity that supports the sustainability of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania and one of the attractions that bring people to the region and support locals to stay (community consultation participant).

Community members highlighted how place-based and locally driven arts, cultural and creative initiatives produce social and economic, inward and outward-facing outcomes, through highlighting a region's uniqueness as a destination to visit and reframing a community's own sense of self. For instance, an interviewee noted that community-led art, culture and creativity serve "as a repository of the community's stories" (interviewee B002) and generate "real economic impact as well as emotional impact" through fostering community pride, as well as opportunities for employment and increased visitor spending (interviewee B008). The close relationship between the social, cultural and economic impacts of arts, culture and creativity noted by community members is reflected throughout the literature exploring the role of arts, culture and creativity in rural, regional and remote Australia. For instance, Anwar McHenry (2009, 63) argues "cultural tourism not only provides additional economic opportunities but also builds capacity and strengthens local identity, thus improving social wellbeing". Bartleet et al. (2019, 163) find that in remote communities, the social and cultural contributions of arts, culture and creativity cannot be separated from economic outcomes. In the case of *Paper on Skin*, the program intentionally links a range of opportunities for local people - including employment, skills development, arts engagement, and social interaction - with hyperlocal and regional outcomes.

Beyond sustainability, the concept of thriveability includes the human dimensions of creativity, hope, imagination and compassion (see Wood et al. 2016; Nussbaum 2011). This concept is more useful for understanding how community members in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania position arts, culture and creativity as foundational in the creation of inclusive, liveable communities. Arts and cultural initiatives like *Paper on Skin* "focus on the community and how we can connect people with opportunities" (community consultation participant). As the case of *Shorewell Presents* also demonstrates, "projects like this [*Paper on Skin*] lift spirits; they lift what you believe is possible" to achieve and experience (interviewee B008). These

perspectives highlight how arts, culture, heritage and creativity are "more than amenities to improve the quality of life but as a foundation upon which the future of these rural/small communities resets ... the arts and creative activities can profoundly affect the ability of a town not only to survive over time but to thrive" (Duxbury 2020, 4). By creating opportunities for learning, employment, skills development, positive emotion, and connection and collaboration with others, arts, culture and creativity support community members to imagine a location as a place of opportunity and potential.



2022 *Paper on Skin* gala event at paranaple convention centre, Devonport. Photograph by Grant Wells Photography. Image supplied by *Paper on Skin*.

*Paper on Skin* demonstrates the social, cultural and economic potentials of arts, culture and creativity that is locally generated and community-led. Since 2012 the program has consciously situated unique place-based characteristics (including the region's heritage and history) and the assets of communities (including arts, culture, creativity, resilience and lived experience) as critical tools for redressing and reshaping place identity and developing community pride. Alongside its growing international prestige, *Paper on Skin* maintains local relevance; in the words of a community member, "it still belongs to everyone" (interviewee B007). By embracing local creative capacities and heritage features as distinctive strengths, the program has shaped community members' perception of their region and its potential, while influencing the reputation of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania as a tourist destination.



Community members gathered on pataway beach for *mapali - Dawn Gathering* at *Ten Days on the Island* in March 2021.

## Case study three: *mapali - Dawn Gathering*

*mapali - Dawn Gathering* is a large-scale performative work which celebrates the palawa creation story. For the remainder of this discussion *mapali - Dawn Gathering* will be referred to as *mapali* but recognises the full name as *mapali - Dawn Gathering*. The palawa are lutruwita's/ Tasmania's First Nations peoples, and through dance, music, circus, visual art, storytelling and First Nations cultural practices, *mapali* tells how the great creator moinee made lutruwita. *mapali* was created and directed by trawlwoolway man, artist and cultural leader Dave mangenner Gough for Tasmania's biennial festival *Ten Days on the Island*. It encompassed the Welcome to Country ceremony and launched the festival program in 2019 and 2021.

In 2021, *mapali* involved a cast of over 200 performers including First Nations Elders, visual artists and performers from around lutruwita/ Tasmania, and other local artists, groups, performing arts organisations, and school students from the wider community. Over ten organisations and four northwest lutruwita/Tasmanian schools were involved in the event and its preparation, working with Gough and *Ten Days on the Island* to choreograph dance and circus performances, music, and create costumes, installations, and artefacts such as clapsticks and firesticks. Organisations included Burnie Taiko, Reflexions Dance Studio, Slipstream Circus, Stompin, Taiko Oni Jima, Tasdance, South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, the University of Tasmania, and Burnie Surf Lifesaving Club. The following schools were involved: Wynyard High School, Rosny College,

Marist Regional College and Parklands High School. Performed at dawn on the pataway beach in Burnie on the first day of the festival, *mapali* drew an audience of over 1,000 people, including federal and state government officials and community members. It received local and state media attention and continues to be referred to as an event that has had lasting impact for communities in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania.

This case study focusses on the large and intensely collaborative 2021 iteration of *mapali - Ten Days on the Island* was awarded A\$95,000 federal arts funding through Festivals Australia to support the development and delivery of *mapali* in 2021. This iteration was a redeveloped and larger version of *mapali* 2019, and involved a deliberately greater degree of capacity building, community engagement and participation. The work represents an inclusive and highly collaborative model of artmaking, storytelling and community building, and evidences the value of arts and creativity for cultural reclamation and expression. The following case study is informed by individual interviews with artists and community members from northwest lutruwita/Tasmania, community consultation workshops undertaken in Burnie, and field observations during a site visit to northwest lutruwita/Tasmania for the *Ten Days on the Island* festival in March 2021. The discussion also draws on information provided by Dave mangenner Gough in a presentation at the Artlands conference in Launceston, lutruwita/Tasmania, in September 2021, and a research interview conducted by the research team with Gough in March 2022, as well as media reportage. Conceptualised, developed and performed by First Nations artists and communities, *mapali* is a powerful example of cultural reclamation and community building through collaborative artmaking. Amidst national

calls to centre First Nations voices and creative control in the creation and presentation of artistic work that represents their culture and stories, *mapali* demonstrates how First Nations self-determination in artistic and cultural expression has community-wide benefit and impact.

### **Reclaiming culture through art and community creativity**

*Ten Days on the Island* and Dave mangenner Gough's vision for *mapali* was to bring the community of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania together in a Welcome to Country and celebration of culture, place, arts and creativity. *Ten Days on the Island* is recognised as lutruwita's/Tasmania's "most consistent and significant contributor to the creation of new performance works" (Hume 2021). It has historically brought international and touring work to the state, while also supporting the development of Tasmanian artists and companies (interviewee B001). Formerly based in lutruwita's/Tasmania's capital city, Hobart, *Ten Days on the Island* moved its headquarters to Burnie in the state's northwest in 2017. Coinciding with this move, the 2019 and 2021 festivals marked an increased emphasis on uniquely Tasmanian arts, culture and creativity, including increased commissions and collaborations with local, regional companies and artists (Keenan 2017). *Ten Days on the Island*'s collaboration with Dave mangenner Gough to develop *mapali* is an example of the festival's role in supporting impactful new work which tells important local stories and builds the capacity of Tasmanian artists, creative practitioners and communities. In particular, *mapali* centred First Nations peoples' self-determination in the design and development of new artistic work, and provided opportunities for diverse community members to connect with First Nations culture and stories.



*mapali - Dawn Gathering performed on pataway beach in March 2021.*

In a keynote address at the Regional Arts Australia conference, Artlands, in 2021, Gough described *mapali* as a journey of learning, celebrating and sharing First Nations culture. To this end, the work's long gestation and collaborative processes were fundamental objectives and key to its success. First Nations communities from around Tasmania were involved as participants and collaborators in *mapali*'s development and performance. In 2020, specific individuals, organisations and schools

were approached for inclusion, and call outs were made on social media inviting First Nations peoples, artists, youth, and "all sorts of people to be involved to learn, create and perform" (Gough 2021). Gough and key collaborators including Slipstream Circus, Tasdance, Stompin and Goldberg Aberline Studio facilitated creative workshops in northwest communities and online to develop the multiple narrative and performative components. School students worked with Gough to make fire sticks and enough clap sticks to enable participants and audiences "to clap with us" on the morning of *mapali* (Gough 2021).

*mapali*'s goal was to draw palawa peoples together "in one place celebrating and understanding our deep time culture, through to who we are today, and [understanding] that we are all community here" (interviewee B016). Subsequently, it sought to foster "collaboration and inclusion of as many people as we could" (Gough 2021), and build palawa peoples' involvement, participation and attendance into the project processes. Gough (2021) described that busses were organised to transport First Nations community members to the performance on pataway beach in March 2021, and community members worked together to ensure accommodation was available to Elders who needed to stay in Burnie overnight. These decisions were significant to *mapali*'s capacity for impact. palawa people from across Tasmania were supported in the creation, performance and enjoyment of new artistic work and its inherent processes of cultural expression and maintenance.

Conceptualised, developed and performed by First Nations peoples, *mapali* represents a response to the call to build opportunities for First Nations self-determination in artmaking in Australia (Australia Council for the Arts 2020b, 12; 2022, 16). Arts, culture and creativity are processes and occasions through which culture is expressed, learned and continued (Jones and Birdsall-Jones 2014, 314; Australia Council for the Arts 2020, 8; Australia Council for the Arts 2022, 6). As processes of cultural maintenance and transmission, arts, culture, and projects such as *mapali*, are as such critical to the social and cultural wellbeing of First Nations peoples (Australia Council for the Arts 2022, 18; Trembath and Fielding 2020, 54; Gattenhof et al. 2022, 71; Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts 2007, 20-21).

Australia Council for the Arts research reports highlight "the need to build opportunities for First Nations decision-making ... First Nations peoples' self-determination must be central in theatre and dance-making in Australia, including greater opportunities for First Nations' creative control" (Australia Council for the Arts 2020b, 12). Recent research undertaken for the Australia Council for the Arts and Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, New Zealand, supports and extends this call. The report *Valuing the Arts in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (Gattenhof et al. 2022) notes the value of First Nations peoples' arts, culture and creativity for connecting and reconnecting



Rain flags during the *mapali* - Dawn Gathering performance, March 2021.

artists and communities to traditional knowledges, story and languages, and its subsequent vital role in supporting wellbeing (ibid., 71). *mapali* provides a powerful example of these national policy recommendations being enacted on a local level.

Strong relationships and trust were critical in supporting First Nations peoples to shape and have ownership over *mapali*. Community engagement processes form part of *mapali*'s impact and legacy. As Gough stated, "the actual trust of my community and people to say 'I want to be involved in this', really to trust me to come on this journey" was integral to the artmaking process (Gough 2021). They further described:

"I keep saying journey because that is the important part of the work and all the work that I do now. We're always working to get some sort of outcome but the outcome is determined by the journey and the relationships ... Looking back, seeing the relationships that were built and seeing the pride in my family and community, and to see that everyone that came at that time in the morning were there and became part [of it]. So I wanted to make sure that we could get the crowd involved and bring everyone in, and that everyone was part of this journey" (Gough 2021).

*mapali*'s emphasis on relationship-building and the project's journey with community members reflects calls for sustained and long-term processes of community engagement in the creation of art and culture with and for First Nations peoples. Investing time and energy in relationship-building supports community trust and ownership, and therefore far greater impacts in terms of building audiences for First Nations work and pathways for emerging First Nations artists (Australia Council for the Arts 2020b, 55, 60-61).

These potentials were strongly reflected in *mapali*. Interviewees described northwest Tasmania as a region rich in arts, culture, and creative activity (interviewees B001, B002, B014, B016) and noted the value of *mapali* for building local artistic capacity and providing pathways for emerging artists and children to "dip your toe in", explore, experiment and learn (interviewee B016). Through its large-scale community engagement, *mapali* generated a great deal of community pride and self-belief. As an interviewee stated, "so many people are like 'I was in that', and that was the thing that I really loved ... for people in the community to know that some of the things they can do and the networks they can make, they don't have to leave home to be an artist and to be creative" (interviewee B016). Its overtly inclusive approach and processes meant *mapali* provided an avenue for supporting First Nations artists and community members to shape and collaboratively lead the development of an artistic work which represented their stories and languages.

### Sharing culture and building community through artmaking processes

*mapali*'s emphasis on inclusion and participation evidences a community-wide approach to engaging people in the learning, understanding and continuation of First Nations culture. For instance, the creative development workshops provided opportunities to share First Nations culture with diverse community members. Gough (2021) described "I really wanted to start with everyone getting an understanding about our deep history and connection and how we were created, and how we created the land where everyone is today, and especially on that beach". Workshops facilitated face to face and online

guided participants to conceptualise and creatively represent components of the palawa creation story, such as First Nations peoples' journey to lutruwita down the Milky Way and across the Star Bridge. Artworks created in the workshops were used to make lanterns and rain flags which represented the arrival of women and children.

Arts, culture and creativity have a role to play in creating and asserting the identity of a community and of a place. Describing the performance on pataway beach, an interviewee noted how these processes of engagement supported both audiences and participants to (re)connect with First Nations culture, and with place:

“Once you have been to something like that, immersed in culture, you will - I see it on a very small scale when people are touched. For everyone to be immersed so everyone gets that feeling, it helped because of the amount of community, the narratives, and the working together on it” (interviewee B016).

pataway beach is sacred to palawa peoples, though also formerly a site of industrial waste and pollution during Burnie's industrial peak in the late 1900s and early 2000s. One of the lasting outcomes of *mapali* for community members was “we changed a beach. Everyone looks at the beach differently now” (interviewee B016), indicating the potential of arts and cultural engagement and participation to profoundly alter places, and strengthen connection to place and belonging for First Nations people (Woodland et al. 2022, 73).

*mapali*'s development and performance evidence the role of arts, culture and creativity for bringing together disparate groups, and facilitating dialogue and increased understanding between people. An interviewee suggested *mapali* offered an exemplary model of arts and cultural engagement, with the result of increased togetherness and unity:

“How we can bring the community together as we do with *mapali*, and the thing that I find extraordinary about something like that is that we just made a piece that encourages people to get up and be on the beach at dawn. Because they're curious ... But when they come down there they are actually seeing the [First Nations peoples] of their community on display, in control, leading. And that just tells a different story, it gives those people, and in fact I know that it has been quite a significant community unifier” (interviewee B001).

As demonstrated by a great deal of research and policy, arts-based processes and activities offer some of the most effective and inclusive tools, techniques and settings for facilitating dialogue, collaboration and sense of community, thereby promoting greater tolerance and cohesion within and across diverse communities. The United Nations (2005, n.p.), for example, lists the arts as the foremost tool and methodology for facilitating dialogue, enabling communities to build peace, culture and unity in diversity with social justice. It notes the power of arts activities including theatre, storytelling, and digital media for transforming

social relations and achieving social cohesion, where people “recognize their common humanity and shared destiny” (United Nations 2007, 6). In the case of *mapali*, involvement of community members - both as creative participants and as audience members - supported increased sense of community and belonging with others, which is one of the markers of inclusive, cohesive societies (United Nations 2016, 21; Fonseca et al. 2018, 246).

Part of the value of arts, culture and creativity in terms of social inclusion and community building lies in their capacity to enable a multiplicity of experiences to be expressed and acknowledged, without homogenising experiences or identities (Marsh 2019, 312). Arts and cultural approaches are more conducive to supporting grassroots community participation and offer more culturally appropriate methods through which testimony can be delivered and acknowledged (ibid., 311). The storytelling processes inherent in art and artmaking processes are a communicative medium which “help to explore connectives/dividers and alternative ways of being” (United Nations 2007, 96), along with potential shared futures. At the end of the *mapali* in March 2021, audience members were encouraged to leave their seats and walk down onto the sand to “the village” with the palawa performers. This was an intentional performative moment and an explicit move to represent the overcoming of community divisions and share a more cohesive future. Relating the event, an interviewee said:

“everyone was on a journey then everyone [was] coming together ... Then we started to sing out those words: ‘arts, culture, community: together we are strong’ ... so we just sang that a few times because that is the take-home from it: without art and culture and everyone doing it together in community ... It is through things that we do that people come together” (interviewee B016).

For community members in Burnie, that *mapali* was “welcoming to everyone” was one of the event's lasting impacts (community consultation participant).

*mapali* provides a case of a regional community responding to national cultural policy calls to ensure First Nations self-determination, cultural authority and leadership in the creation and presentation of First Nations arts and culture. By positioning First Nations people as leaders in the telling of their own stories, *mapali* provided a pathway to build the capacity of First Nations artists and connect and reconnect community members with culture and story. The event, and the lengthy processes of creative development that enabled it, supported the trust and relationship-building imperative for making art that connects meaningfully with First Nations peoples and supports the continuation of culture. *mapali* represents the inseparability of art, culture and wellbeing for First Nations peoples and recognises that broader social cohesion is grounded in active, proud communities.

## Case study four: *Artesian Originals and The Shop of Opportunity*

This case study examines two social enterprise initiatives in central western Queensland – *Artesian Originals* and the *Shop of Opportunity* – which mobilise the creativity of community members to enhance individual and collective wellbeing. Located in the remote town of Barcaldine, *Artesian Originals* and ‘*Shoppportunity*’ are explicit responses to the effects of social isolation and loneliness. They represent innovative efforts to address limitations in mental health and community support service provision within the Barcaldine Regional Council area and demonstrate the value of arts, culture and creativity for providing accessible and inclusive avenues for participation in community life. This case study was informed by interview data, information from social media, and data obtained through field observations during visits to the central western Queensland region during 2020 and 2021. Community consultation workshops facilitated in June 2021 also illuminated community members’ perceptions of *Artesian Originals* and *Shoppportunity*. The following sections describe these initiatives and explore their contribution to social inclusion and wellbeing on both individual and collective levels in central western Queensland.

### **Artesian Originals Cooperative**

*Artesian Originals Cooperative* is a shop which brings community members together to sell their art, craft and handmade items to support their own wellbeing and the work of vital health and care services. In 2019, a group of community members, through their personal and professional experience living and working in the remote Barcaldine region, recognised that social isolation and loneliness were profoundly affecting the wellbeing of people in their community. Simultaneously, they recognised the diversity of creative talent in the region and the potential for a community-run shop dedicated to selling local art, craft and handmade items. Consciously embedding the values of social inclusion from the outset, the founders drew on the local knowledge, ideas, and practical support of the whole community to establish *Artesian Originals*. A business owner provided an empty shopfront on Barcaldine’s main street and a Facebook page was set up to share ideas for the shop with the broader community. Via Facebook and face-to-face meetings, community members were involved in decision-making processes to determine the shop’s name and logo, and the range of functions it could perform in the community. Donations of paint, furniture and shelving, along with several community working bees, helped prepare *Artesian Originals* for its official opening in February 2020.

*Artesian Originals* currently stocks the works of art and handmade crafts of 59 local makers, creators



*Artesian Originals* shopfront, Oak Street, Barcaldine: “We rise by lifting others”. Image supplied by *Artesian Originals* Cooperative.

and craftspeople aged between eight and eighty. It includes a gallery space, book exchange, and seating for customers and community members. The commission it earns from the sale of makers' products is donated to local charities and services. Its aims are "to be community minded and give back to who's given to us" (interviewee CWQ016) and provide "a community meeting point to combat social isolation encouraging the community to come chat and have a cuppa" (Artesian Originals n.d.). In striving to meet these goals, *Artesian Originals* supports wellbeing in multiple ways, for individuals as well as the broader community.

### Addressing loneliness to support wellbeing

*Artesian Originals* seeks to decrease loneliness for people who live in Barcaldine and on surrounding remote cattle properties by fostering a creative community of interest and the socially supportive relationships foundational to wellbeing. The cooperative structure of *Artesian Originals* means all artists, makers and creators who sell items are engaged as volunteers who are fundamental to the shop's day-to-day functionality and long-term sustainability. For these individuals, involvement in the shop provides a sense of shared purpose, and an avenue for inclusion in community life. An interviewee described:

"One of the really significant things that I have learned is that there's a terrible thing of just being lonely. Often there are multiple things that go on in people's lives, but if they feel like they have a purpose and a reason and they're included ... Those are the little things that I think make life a little more bearable for people" (interviewee CWQ015).

*Artesian Originals* "creates not only groups with like-minded people but it also gives people a social outlet ... My experience is that I've created a lot of friendships I would not have created because the shop brought us together" (interviewee CWQ016). The positive atmosphere and camaraderie of *Artesian Originals* were highlighted as key benefits: "I go there every Saturday morning just to get a dose of the energy and the smell and just catch up with the girls and see what's going on ... I just love going" (interviewee CWQ015). By providing opportunity for makers and creators to work together to make the shop a success, *Artesian Originals* fosters a sense of shared motivation and extends social networks - factors known to reduce loneliness and support social inclusion (Fancourt and Finn 2019, 9).

For people who live in rural and remote communities such as Barcaldine, the opportunities for social inclusion that arts, culture and creativity provide are significant. Loneliness and social isolation are linked with a range of adverse physiological responses and mental illness (Wakefield et al. 2022, 386; Fancourt and Finn 2019, 4; APPGAHW 2017, 126), and rural communities are considered to be at significantly greater risk of social isolation and loneliness compared with metropolitan communities (Vines 2011; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022). On the



*High profile arts and cultural events, along with craft groups and activities, were described as "another extension of our community social interactions" and "part of the psyche" of remote communities.*

other hand, social inclusion - understood as improving the terms of participation in society for individuals and embracing greater equality and tolerance (United Nations 2016, 20) - promotes a wide range of positive health outcomes and is a determinant of wellbeing (Fancourt 2017, 39). A multidimensional concept distinct from mental health but inextricably linked to an individual's overall health, wellbeing encompasses happiness and positive affect, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, general satisfaction with life, human flourishing, and resilience in the face of adversity (Fancourt 2017, 32-33; APPGAHW 2017, 17-18). Through supporting grassroots community participation, social inclusion and connection, arts, culture and creativity have an important role to play in improving wellbeing for individuals and entire communities (Rentschler et al. 2015a, 15; APPGAHW 2017, 123).

### Broadening definitions of arts and culture, artist and maker to promote inclusion

One of the strategies *Artesian Originals* employs to include and engage community members is to adopt broad definitions of artist, craftsperson, maker and creator. The only requirement for inclusion in the shop is that items are handmade or homegrown by people who live in the Barcaldine Regional Council area (interviewee CWQ016). Subsequently the shop stocks the work of professional and hobbyist milliners, woodworkers, leatherworkers, jewellers, sewers and dressmakers, gardeners and bakers. Describing *Artesian Originals'* rapid growth from its early group of 10 makers to now almost 60, interviewees said the shop inspired and incentivised people to be creative:



“we’ve had quite a few people join [as makers and volunteers] saying this inspired them to move forward with what they thought they might like to do, but never have done. People who want to make earrings, for example, they’re inspired to do it ... Then they are selling them and it is an incentive to make more and be more creative” (interviewee CWQ016).

*Artesian Originals*’ “anything goes, as long as you make it, bake it, sew it, grow it” (ibid.) approach “gives people the confidence to do something” (interviewee CWQ015). This enables it to extend the benefits of arts and cultural participation throughout the community, beyond those who may normally consider themselves an artist or creative practitioner.

The shop’s broad definitions of maker, creator and artist aligns with calls for a more expansive and inclusive terminology and definitions of arts and culture. Research undertaken for Australia Council for the Arts and Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, New Zealand, illuminated a strong need to make ‘arts’ framing more inclusive of people and practices (Gattenhof et al. 2022, 11). The research found:

“Using the term ‘creativity’ as part of the lexicon may open up avenues of practice and meaning in a more inclusive way. The term ‘creativity’ is viewed as experiential, able to break down perceived barriers of elitism ascribed to the term ‘arts’, and is seen as belonging to everybody” (ibid.).

As argued through this report, using the terms arts, culture and creativity together better acknowledges and includes the wide spectrum of activities and practices that are undertaken in - and impactful for - diverse communities (Gattenhof et al. 2022, 78-79).

In the context of rural and remote communities, Mahon et al. (2018, 214) note the need for “an alternative conceptualisation of creativity in the rural, not one derived from urban-centric notions ... but rather one that reflects the ways in which rural places and communities have made the arts and culture relevant to them”. Gibson (2010, 6) also outlines important discussions of “what counts as creativity within small, remote and rural places” and the diversity of activities - including whip-making, tattooing and gardening - which exist alongside traditional arts and cultural activity and are fundamental to the social and cultural life of community members. These findings are reflected in central western Queensland where grassroots social enterprises such as *Artesian Originals* and *The Lost Art* are part of the rich creative ecosystem that sustains communities. Based in Blackall, *The Lost Art* is a social enterprise activity which supports job seekers and provides social inclusion for disadvantaged groups to learn new skills in traditional bush leather craft, wood and metal work. Research participants described high profile arts and cultural events and activities including *Dress the Central West*, along with small community craft groups and workshops as “another extension

of our community social interactions. It’s just part of the culture of small communities” (community consultation participant), and “part of our lives ... part of the psyche” of remote communities (interviewee CWQ008).

The need to encompass ‘everyday creativity’ in understandings and discussions of art and culture is echoed in arts and health literature which notes “everyday creativity, which may be undertaken alone or in company ... has an immense contribution to make to happy, healthy lives” (APPGAHW 2017, 21). For communities such as Barcaldine, widening definitions of arts and culture to include a broader range of creative activity provides an important and powerful avenue for engaging people who live in remote places as active participants in community life.

*Artesian Originals*’ broad call for any and all handmade and homegrown products supports social inclusion and self-esteem for people at particular risk of social isolation due to their geographic remoteness and lack of face-to-face contact with others. An interviewee described a community member from an isolated cattle station who expressed a desire to become involved in the shop but did not self-identify as ‘creative’ and therefore lacked the confidence to volunteer:

“Initially she just started baking for the shop and over the first 12 months she is a changed person. She said ‘if this shop didn’t come into fruition I don’t know where I’d be’. She said ‘I’d be a basket case’. It has given her so much direction. She is now our treasurer - her background is in finance - it just got her out of a slump. Now she sews and make earrings and bake and she has a whole new group of friends ... It completely turned her life around” (interviewee CWQ016).

For another, elderly community member, the shop provided social support, a source of joy, and a reason to be creative following the death of a spouse. The interviewee reported: “she says to me nearly every time I see her ‘thank you so much - it has given me so much purpose, because what would I do all day?’” (interviewee CWQ016). These anecdotes demonstrate the multifaceted ways engagement in arts, cultural and creative activity can support personal wellbeing. In addition to wellbeing outcomes produced through stimulation of personal expressions of creativity and imagination (Sonke et al. 2019, 13), *Artesian Originals* provided these community members with an increased sense of purpose and an avenue for connecting with others which are determinants of social inclusion (Sonke et al. 2019, 38; Fancourt and Finn 2019, 21; APPGAHW 2017, 52).

### **Economic innovation**

*Artesian Originals*’ founders are explicit that the shop’s core goal is to support social inclusion in the community, though also note important local economic outcomes. For instance, “the philosophy is about friendship, spreading the love, connection, supporting one another ... It is not about making a lot of money and selling product, though that

is a purpose” (interviewee CWQ016). Another interviewee described “the benefit of you making some money was a bonus. It was about bringing all these people together in a place with like-mindedness that improves mental health, gives back to community, is a great tourist attraction locally for people to come to” (interviewee CWQ015). In addition to potential tourism outcomes, these interviewees noted the significance of economic and business development outcomes for some makers and creators (interviewees CWQ015, CWQ016). In 2021, *Artesian Originals* collaborated with Queensland Government initiative the Regional Arts Services Network to offer a weekend product development workshop which provided an introduction to business planning and creation of merchandise within an arts or creative practice (Artesian Originals 2021). The shop has become the main source of income for a number of makers and provided important opportunities for them to grow their small businesses (interviewee CWQ016). Reflecting the case of *Dress the Central West*, *Artesian Originals* supports research by Bartleet et al. (2019, 164) which demonstrates that the social and economic outcomes of engagement with arts, culture and creativity are often inseparable for individuals and communities.

Acknowledging the contributions that arts, culture and creativity made to social inclusion and wellbeing in their community, Barcaldine residents also feel creative and community-led initiatives such as *Artesian Originals* “breathe new life into the town” (community consultation participant), foster civic pride, and contribute to the overall vibrancy of place. Research by the Regional Australia Institute finds “[a]ccess to and participation in arts and cultural activity contribute to a town’s ‘cultural vitality’” (Houghton and Vohra 2021, 21) and that creativity plays a role in local innovation and liveability (Achurch 2019, 5). Public art, festivals and events also ‘activate’ and inject vibrancy into towns by transforming public spaces into creative places and instilling in residents a greater sense of ownership and pride in the places in which they live (Rentschler et al. 2015d, 13). Occupying one of the formerly empty shopfronts on Barcaldine’s main street, *Artesian Originals* is a vibrant space which represents new business activity in the town centre and contributes to local economic vitality. Barcaldine residents not directly involved in the shop describe it as an example of how their community has embraced its creativity to address complex problems, such as social isolation and regional decline (community consultation participant). For Barcaldine, the creativity of community members was a critical resource which could be leveraged to enhance their wellbeing, helping them to engage with society with wider economic gains.

### **The Shop of Opportunity, or ‘Shoppportunity’**

Building on the success of *Artesian Originals*, the founders opened its ‘sister shop’, the *Shop of Opportunity*, in May 2021. ‘Shoppportunity’ is an op shop which donates all proceeds to local community groups and services such as

Barcaldine Aged Care. It was initiated to address the limitations of existing health and care services and the need for additional, accessible financial and social support for community members. While *Artesian Originals* primarily engages artists and makers in processes which support and strengthen their community, *Shoppportunity* “is for people who are not artists, but they want to be able to do something and it helps the community” (interviewee CWQ015).



*Shoppportunity, Willow Street, Barcaldine. Image supplied by the Shop of Opportunity.*

As is the case with *Artesian Originals*, supporting social inclusion in Barcaldine is one of *Shoppportunity's* most effective functions. Through volunteering at the shop, community members develop confidence, connect with others, and actively contribute to supporting and strengthening their community. Volunteering is closely associated with social inclusion as it provides opportunities for marginalised individuals to participate in community life and builds a sense of connectedness and belonging with others (Rentschler et al. 2015a, 13).

While anyone may volunteer at *Shoppportunity*, elderly people, youth, and community members who are unemployed are three cohorts interviewees identified as at particular risk of social exclusion and who it particularly strives to engage and include. Reflecting the values and particular advantages of the voluntary sector for social inclusion, the op shop reaches cohorts who are, for various reasons, cut off from community services and social activities and engage with these community members on their own terms

(Redmond et al. 2019, 234; APPGAHW 2017, 123). For instance, “[s]ome of the older [community members] don’t want to work on the counter, they don’t want to have to interact too much, but they will fold or hang clothes so there is capacity for inclusion” (interviewee CWQ015). Other volunteers “have a degree of insecurity and are just a bit lost and wondering what I do with life” and *Shoppportunity* provides a sense of purpose and pride in being able to contribute to the community (interviewee CWQ015).

### **Creatively supporting frontline health services**

Place-based and community-led initiatives such as *Shoppportunity* and *Artesian Originals* have significant potential to alleviate pressure on frontline health services by improving social inclusion and enhancing the wellbeing of entire communities. Two of the founders of *Artesian Originals* and *Shoppportunity* are health professionals whose experience of the limitations of remote health and community care services inspired *Shoppportunity*: “when you are involved [in health and care services] in a professional capacity you see where the system lets people down ... there are people who need help and I am just sick of the system of how difficult it is to be able to help them” (interviewee CWQ015). These personal experiences are reflected in national statistics which note that rural and remote communities are at greater risk of poor health and wellbeing than metropolitan communities due to the limited availability and accessibility of health services, small and ageing populations, lower incomes, and higher unemployment (Vines 2011; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022). In Barcaldine, interviewees noted that limited funding, staffing, lengthy administrative processes and long waitlists meant that many community members were unable to access mental health care when they needed it, and *Shoppportunity* and *Artesian Originals* both had a role in supporting mental health services by providing social support:

“The best thing for me is that it [*Shoppportunity*] brings so many people joy. Whether it be a little trinket or a bargain or being [the person who] makes all the hangers for us, or the [people] that volunteer and tidy up the shed. That thing of bringing people together and people being able to take some little bit of joy away from it ... it is the same for *Artesian Originals* - there are [community members] there that definitely say the shop has saved them. They really talk about the mental health component of what the shop has done for them. You know that meeting people when they are in a dark place, that support network that came. It is the same for *Shoppportunity*” (interviewee CWQ015).

Adequate social support and a sense of community and belonging are associated with good mental health, quality of life and overall wellbeing, and therefore can reduce primary healthcare use (Wakefield et al. 2022, 387). For communities whose access to primary care is limited, community-led initiatives such as *Shoppportunity* and *Artesian*

*Originals* provide important avenues for addressing social factors that contribute to poor wellbeing.

Creative interventions anchored to the places in which they operate have the advantage of being highly responsive to local needs and attuned to the economic, social and cultural circumstances that affect people’s access to healthcare. Reflecting the benefits of place-based health and care described in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing’s (APPGAHW) 2017 Creative Health Inquiry Report, *Shoppportunity* harnesses the specific capacities and strengths of its community - including local knowledge, lived experience and creativity - to provide targeted, appropriate support for individuals and community services (APPGAHW 2017, 70-72). For example, *Shoppportunity* supports the emergency response work of Uniting Care Community by providing clothing, household items and money to people in need. An interviewee described that under-resourced providers were not always able to meet the needs of community members and *Shoppportunity* ‘plugged the gaps’ in timely and respectful ways:

“We just fly under the radar. You don’t want to embarrass people, but if people need something we can just buy it for them, and no one even needs to know. There are people in town who have been in really tough predicaments ... so we just pack up bags of stuff to give to them” (interviewee CWQ015).

In small, remote communities such as Barcaldine, strict boundaries on self-disclosure and limited anonymity can be disincentives to seeking mental health support (Vines 2011), along with other forms of practical assistance and financial aid. In response to this, *Shoppportunity*’s anonymous Book of Wishes invites people to note down items they need, then a call-out is made to the community via Facebook to ask whether anyone can supply those items and bring them to the shop. Interviewees noted the generosity of the region’s residents and how the shop encourages and enables community members to support and care for each other (interviewee CWQ015).

Since opening in 2021, *Shoppportunity* has formalised its approach to supporting local health and wellbeing service providers. It has developed partnerships with remote Queensland mental health and wellbeing organisation Outback Futures, and employment and training service RESQ+. Community members involved in the activities of RAPAD Employment Services Queensland (RESQ Plus), and the Work for the Dole program assist *Shoppportunity* by installing shelving and repairing furniture, and Outback Futures will provide mental health support training for the shop’s volunteers. The need to equip volunteers with knowledge and tools to engage with and support mental health and wellbeing arose during the shop’s first year as its founders recognised its role in bringing people joy, addressing loneliness and connecting community members (interviewee CWQ015). Through equipping volunteers with the skills and confidence to respond to the mental

health needs of their own community  
*Shoppportunity* may be seen as 'catalysing a health-creating community' that strengthens its own ability to care for itself, thereby augmenting the work of local services (APPGAHW 2017, 72).



Landsborough Highway, Barcaldine.

*Artesian Originals* and *Shoppportunity* are underpinned by the philosophy that collective wellness in a community can be achieved by investing in its people. Each initiative places human connectivity and community-led creativity as central aspects and value the knowledge and skills of local people as critical resources for advancing community-wide wellbeing. As Fancourt (2017) notes, the social benefits of arts engagement most commonly linked to health pertain to decreased loneliness and social isolation, which are essential for enhanced collective wellbeing. *Artesian Originals* highlights how broadening definitions of arts and culture to encompass the range of creative activity that is locally meaningful provides accessible and inclusive avenues for social interaction and community engagement. *Shoppportunity* further demonstrates the value of initiatives designed specifically for the people they are for and the community-wide benefits that may be realised through enhancing inclusion for people at particular risk of social isolation. Both cases signal that genuine impact is possible where efforts to engage and connect are community-led and responsive to the unique characteristics and needs of specific places.



"We have each other": billboard produced for the Shorewell Presents project installed in the community in 2021.

## Case study five: Shorewell Presents

*Shorewell Presents* is a series of arts-based projects and activities designed to engage and connect community members, and support social inclusion and collective wellbeing within an underserved and marginalised suburb in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania. A multi-year collaboration between the residents of Shorewell Park in Burnie, Sydney-based company Urban Theatre Projects (Utp), peak arts festival *Ten Days on the Island*, and Burnie Community House, *Shorewell Presents* highlights the value of community-led art and creativity for building community cohesion and pride, and the importance of authentic relationships for achieving maximum success in collaborative art. This case study focuses its discussion on the three creative outcomes of this collaboration: a community dinner event; the *Dear Friend* letter writing program; and the outdoor installation *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams*. This discussion draws on data produced through community consultation workshops and field observations during site visits to Burnie in March 2021, individual interviews, and analysis of social and mainstream media coverage of *Shorewell Presents*.

### 'Connecting the city'

Northwest lutruwita/Tasmania is one of the lowest socio-economic electorates in the poorest state in Australia, and the suburb of Shorewell Park is one of the most underserved and marginalised communities in this region. Shorewell Park was established in the 1970s as a social housing estate and continues to face stigma in the city of Burnie. In 2018, biennial arts festival *Ten Days on the Island* contracted Utp to develop a community-led project

with the Shorewell Park community for their 2019 festival program. Based in Shorewell Park and providing a range of critical services to those residents, Burnie Community House became a key collaborator and worked with Utp to design and deliver a project with the community. Although the Community House had never partnered with an arts organisation nor delivered arts-led programs, Utp's respectful, community-led approach complemented the Community House's social inclusion values. The collaboration provided the Community House an opportunity to trial a new approach to supporting community participation, cohesion and belonging (interviewee B013).

The community and Utp knew they wanted to deliver a quality event which made the people and place visible and challenged some of the views which had stigmatised their suburb since its development. Utp co-created with Burnie Community House and the Shorewell Park community an outdoor community dinner in the park beside the community house. Utp described the event as "part dinner party, part blind date, part outdoor celebration under the stars. An opportunity to explore the history and future of Shorewell Park over a killer three-course menu" (Urban Theatre Projects 2019). As part of the 2019 *Ten Days on the Island* festival, guests (50 from Shorewell Park and 50 from the rest of Burnie, plus local dignitaries) were selected by ballot to attend the community dinner. Attendees mingled in a gala style ambient setting of good food, performances and live entertainment with card prompts as conversation starters.

The concept of the dinner party was developed by Utp in collaboration with the community and takes a performative approach to bringing Burnie to Shorewell Park, whereby Shorewell Park residents were primarily in control of

their own representation and identity narrative. A Burnie resident who attended the dinner described their city as comprising two distinct and separate communities: Shorewell Park and the rest of Burnie. However, “what that arts event did was connect the two parts of the city ... only arts can do that” (community consultation participant). By creating an opportunity for the Shorewell Park community’s self-representation, and for connecting two seemingly disparate groups, the event highlights the value of arts, culture and creativity for fulfilling “that function of community unification, community pride, community identity, community conversations” (interviewee B001).

Arts-based processes, activities and events provide some of the most powerful tools, techniques and settings for facilitating conversation, collaboration, and the co-construction of meanings within and across diverse communities, which are precursors to greater social cohesion and less community fragmentation and exclusion. The United Nations’ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, for instance, outlines a range of approaches to facilitating dialogue with the aim to support co-existence and collaboration such as town hall meetings and focus groups (Marsh 2019, 312; United Nations 2005, 5; 2007, 95-96). However, for achieving the most desirable level of social inclusion - that of cohesion - it notes the power of metaphor, humour and storytelling “to explore peace and conflict in ways not always possible through rational analysis and decision-making”, for giving voice to underserved cohorts, discovering already existing commonalities, shared meanings and values, and exploring alternative ways of being and relating (United Nations 2007, 95-96). For the Shorewell Park community, the dinner event provided an occasion and informal setting for the community to lead a meaningful dialogue with broader Burnie, on their own terms, potentially uncovering shared hopes for their communities and initiating greater understanding across the ‘two parts’ of the city.

The event was a highly positive experience for Shorewell Park residents and Burnie Community House and “a beautiful start” to the collaboration with Utp (interviewee B013). A social enterprise catered the event and community members were involved in the set up and pack down. An interviewee highlighted the sense of achievement the dinner provided these community members, stating “the community really rose to the challenge, and I think they very much felt like they did it, they owned it” (interviewee B013). Reflecting Brownnett (2018, 73), actively co-creating and developing communal experiences such as arts festivals and events can provide opportunities for communities to develop and deepen strong bonds and relational ties.

Through collaboratively designing, organising and delivering events for their community, people can develop a sense of connection both to each other and the event (Brownnett 2018, 75). While the dinner event only involved a small number of Shorewell

Park residents and was hence “both exclusive and inclusive” (interviewee B013), it successfully laid the groundwork for future iterations of Shorewell Presents. As the interviewee described “the people who did not go really saw it as a beautiful event, the ones that watched on. And so it did create in the community a desire for more” (interviewee B013). The event cemented the community’s affiliation and trust with Utp and supported continued collaboration between *Ten Days on the Island*, Utp, Burnie Community House, and the Shorewell Park community in 2020-2021.

### Addressing social isolation and loneliness

The dinner party event provided insights and learning opportunities about what the next iteration of Shorewell Presents should be. For instance, “the community very much post the dinner was very, very clear that they wanted a lasting legacy, and they wanted something that involved all community ... while it was a beautiful start the next iteration needed to be inclusive of community” (interviewee B013). The intention for the next project was for the Shorewell Park community to work with filmmakers and artist facilitators to author a series of short films to be shown across Burnie in a series of pop-up drive-in theatres. The benefits of this proposed project were skills development in the community and the outcomes would be shared widely across the region. When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, however, Burnie was one of the first clusters in Australia and endured a strict early lockdown. The filmmaking model relied on Utp and facilitators being on the ground with the community, which would not be possible for the foreseeable future, and a new project and new ways of engaging with the community needed to be designed.



*Dear Friend information and mailbox at the Burnie Community House in Shorewell Park.*

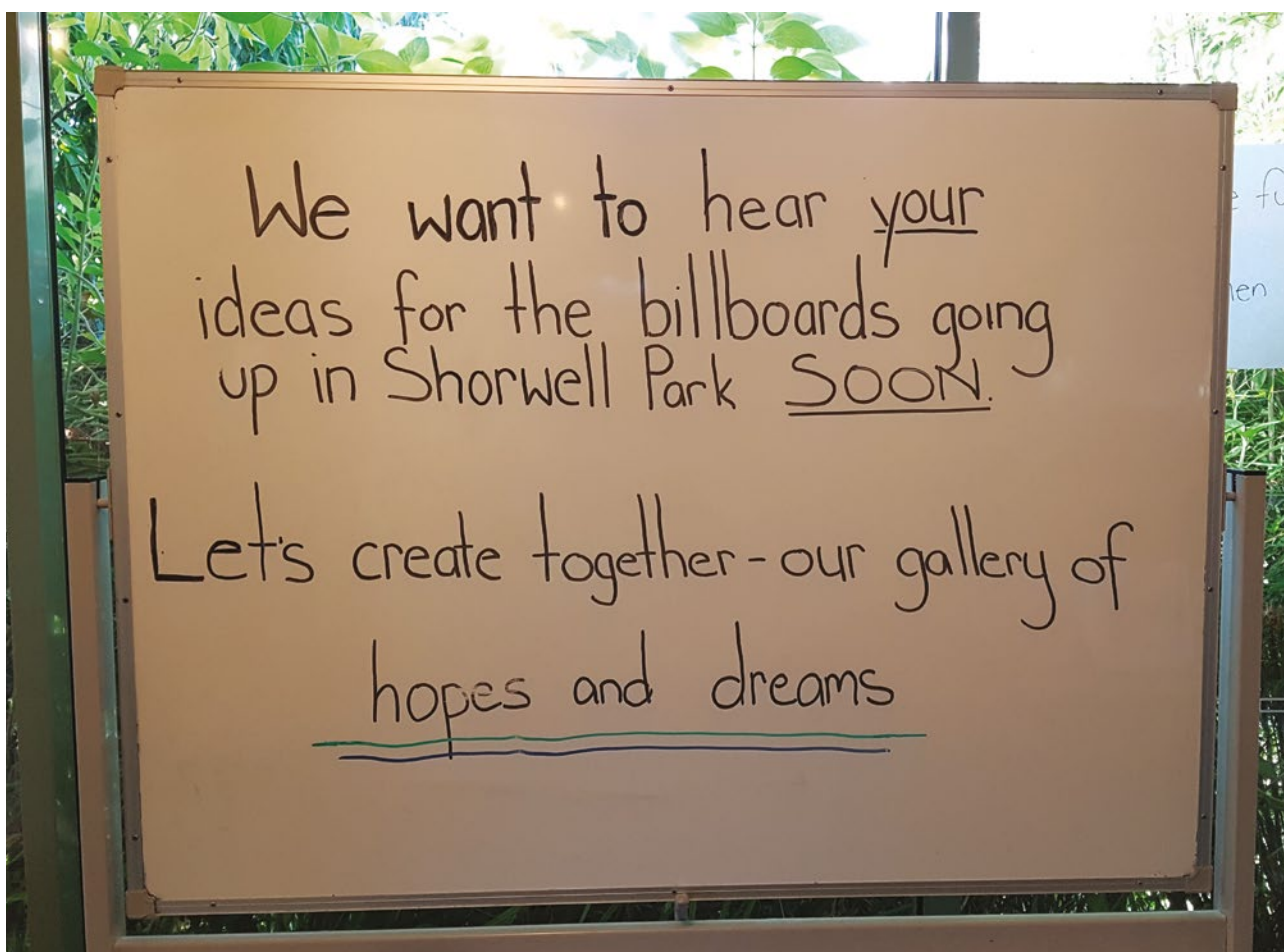
The Shorewell Park participants knew they wanted a project that could promote connection at a time of increased social isolation, and that online activities presented multiple barriers to participation and access for their community. A letter writing program called *Dear Friend* was conceived and designed so that any resident from Shorewell Park could write a letter and put it in a physical mailbox outside Burnie Community House. For residents who were not able to write a letter, a free-call 1800 number was set up so they

could leave a voice message. To begin the pen-pal relationship, Utp posted a letter to all residents of Shorewell Park describing how they could participate. They also recorded a short video reintroducing their team following the dinner event of 2019 and describing their process of collaborating with the Shorewell Park community, emphasising “we think that every single person is creative. That’s why a big part of what we do at the company is work with local communities to help tell their stories” (Burnie Community House - Hilltop Central, 2020).

*Dear Friend’s* intention and potential was to cultivate new connections and dialogue to address social isolation and support people to feel connected, and positively towards and hopeful about their community. The project brief was to imagine and share hopes and dreams of an optimistic community future beyond COVID-19 lockdowns. The letters and messages were sent to one of three artists involved in the project. In this way artists, and creative and imaginative processes, were positioned as critical assets and tools for connecting with community members, while also researching their visions for their suburb (Sonke et al. 2019, 26). Through ameliorating a sense of isolation from others, fostering interaction and connection with others, greater participation in society, and an increased sense of shared identity and belonging, arts, cultural and creative

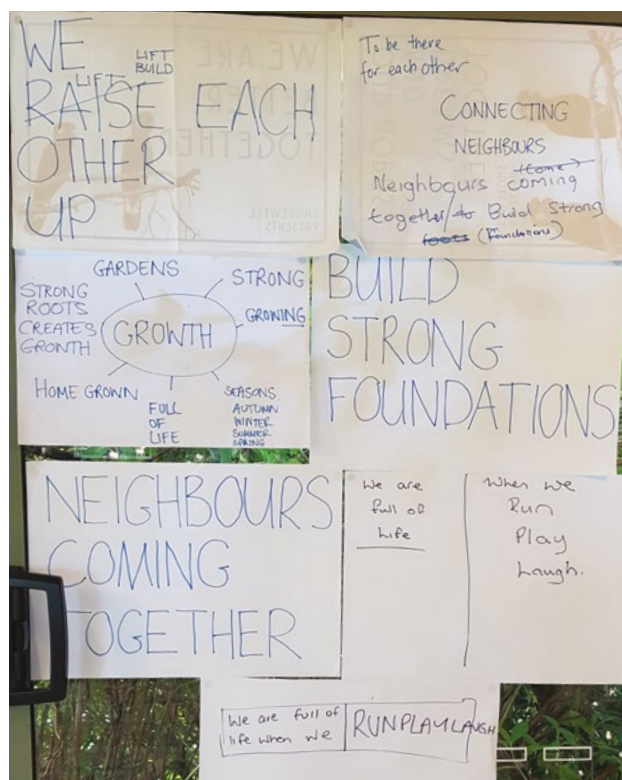
processes support social cohesion (Brownnett 2018, 77; Fancourt and Finn 2019, 9). In fact, the social benefits of arts engagement most linked to health pertain to decreased loneliness and social isolation which are essential for enhancing collective wellbeing (Fancourt 2017). Burnie Community House project coordinator Shandel Pile stated *Dear Friend* was about “extending the relationships” forged between people at the dinner (Bennett 2020). The stories, ideas and emotions conveyed through the letters would inform the development of a new artwork which would reflect “what is uncovered in the stories, what people want to share and what the community wants” (ibid.). The voices, perspectives and needs of the community were centred from the outset.

*Dear Friend* letters were collected for six months. The intention was that artists would draw from them a series of themes and ideas that would be brought to life in a mural project called *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* which would feature in the 2021 *Ten Days on the Island* Festival. Once COVID-19 lockdown restrictions eased, *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* was further developed during an eight-week community engagement process led by Burnie Community House. In describing this process, an interviewee demonstrated how *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* evolved and was re-envisioned as community members made the concept and project meaningful to them.



*Burnie Community House’s invitation to community members.*

“We started to ask everybody that came through the door what was important to them. Look, hopes and dreams is a fairly middle-class luxury in some ways, and so we were interested to see how that sat with people just generally coming through the door. And it sat relatively well but possibly not the way – it was more about visuals and things in the neighbourhood that actually gave you hope in the moment ... It was not for the future. It was for the survival of the day, or the week, or the next month” (interviewee B013).



Shorewell Park community members shared their ideas for the billboards at Burnie Community House.

Signs were placed at the entry of the Community House to remind staff to ask Shorewell Park residents what was important to them, and long tables with paper and coloured pens were spread throughout the reception area so people could write or draw responses. Weekly meetings were held so residents could share their thoughts about words and images for the murals. Through these avenues, community members took a great deal of ownership over the project and reimagined or “switched” the idea of hopes and dreams “to make it relevant to where they were right there and now, and it absolutely worked beautifully” (interviewee B103). Similar to *Dear Friend*, these flexible, responsive and place-based creative processes highlight the value of arts, culture and creativity for supporting “the ‘drivers’ of social cohesion—the ways in which people become closer to one another, more connected to the place in which they live, more likely to engage in civic life, and more likely to hold aspirations for improving the common good” (Sonke et al. 2019, 26).

*Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* resulted in a series of public billboards which are visually striking

and are easily understood by the passing public. It was important to the community that the images and words were inclusive of everyone, including children and young people. This meant the choice of phrases used was a participatory, deeply thoughtful process, and the community gave careful consideration to all aspects of design – including background, borders and symbols, and wording. All the billboards feature black cockatoos which are the totem of the local First Nations peoples, the palawa, and commonly seen in the area. To reflect the closeness of their community and valued relationships, the community determined that no bird should be depicted alone; as such, all billboards feature at least two cockatoos. While the outcome of this project may not have been entirely the one Utp envisaged, the flexibility of the project brief and method of engagement with community members supported the Shorewell Park residents to collaboratively realise an outcome that was wholly authentic to them.

During the *Ten Days on the Island* festival in 2021, project participants from Shorewell Park hosted guided tours through their suburb so festival attendees could view the billboards. Guides described the Shorewell Presents projects, the gala dinner, the letter writing activity, and the creation of the *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams*. Our research team participated in a tour, and our guide shared their personal story and articulated what Shorewell Presents had done personally for their self-esteem, social confidence and wellbeing within their community. They also expressed how important it was for their mental health living in a diverse, often challenged community, to stay connected and supportive of each other through COVID-19 with activities as simple as *Dear Friend* and *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams*. In articulating their experiences, our guide revealed how the process of participating in the projects generated wellbeing outcomes that were personal or individual, as well as a collective experience of pride and belonging they shared with others. Lett, Fox and Le von der Borch (2014, 210) refer to this as “what is meant by process being of value, since it can serve personal integration and sense of coherence and build interpersonal relationships”. For marginalised and under-represented cohorts, participation in arts and cultural activities provide opportunities for developing a sense of belonging with others, and in this instance a sense of belonging in the wider Burnie community. Arts and culture expand the ways people may communicate with each other, develop, make sense of and express experiences, beyond merely verbal communication (as demonstrated in studies by Marsh 2019 and Lee et al. 2020). The *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* certainly had this intention at its core.

*Dear Friend* and *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* evidence the potential for arts and cultural activities to foster social connectedness and wellbeing on both individual and collective levels, through empowering people to identify their personal hopes for their community, then collaborating with others to articulate the values and strengths which they collectively share. Arts



and cultural programs and activities that are place-specific and responsive to the needs of specific communities provide nuanced and inclusive tools for recognising and supporting this close relationship between individual and collective wellbeing.



*Gallery of Hopes and Dreams billboards outside the Burnie Community House in Shorewell Park.*

The non-prescriptive and open nature of *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* provided room for community members to exercise a great deal of control and shape the project in a way that responded to their specific cares and concerns. This project had a relatively low barrier to access and provided various avenues for participation, and therefore supported people to be personally invested and affected, while also feeling connected to others as they collaboratively produced the outcome. An interviewee described a *Shorewell Presents* participant who felt a great deal of pride in what they had personally achieved, one of the outcomes of which was “he begins to think about himself, his life, his community, his place in quite a different way” (interviewee B001). That is, the Shorewell Park community “is not a place of impoverishment ... in fact they [community members] can aspire to extraordinariness as well” (ibid.).

### **Legacy**

*Shorewell Presents* - in particular the *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* project - has resulted in increased participation in health and social inclusion promoting activities at Burnie Community House, particularly amongst men. An interviewee described that one surprising outcome of the projects was that the weekly *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* meetings were attended mostly by men who became deeply invested in the project (interviewee B013). Engaging men in health programs had been a long-term challenge for the House; however, *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* provided a catalyst for men to connect with each other and engage more actively with the Community House’s programs. It also provided the Community House with an opportunity to connect more meaningfully with men in the community and develop a new program that specifically engaged them. According to an interviewee, “I can’t imagine not having had *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* to make that such a successful program” (interviewee B013).

While research participants seemed to frame *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* as the most impactful of the three components of *Shorewell Presents*, it is important to note the significance of the dinner event and *Dear Friend* in enabling the success of this final iteration. The dinner event and *Dear Friend* were each individually impactful as separate projects. As part of a three-year creative collaboration, though, they enabled Utp, Burnie Community House and Shorewell Park residents to establish relationships of trust, and enabled Utp and the Community House to better understand the ways the community wanted to engage with arts-based projects. Mackney and Young (2021, 6) note the value of longer term ‘slower’ projects for supporting meaningful community engagement and maximum impact for participants. They write “practice that takes place over time, and with an understanding of place and context, both enables individual participants to be supported as part of a process of transitional development and allows organisations to build meaningful and embedded relationships with local communities” (Mackney and Young 2021, 6). The success of *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* can largely be attributed to the fact this was the final product of a long-term collaboration between Burnie Community House, *Ten Days on the Island* and Utp. The three-year engagement supported the community’s developing engagement with and interest in Utp and *Shorewell Presents*, and their developing sense of ownership of the project.

Following *Shorewell Presents*, Shorewell Park residents articulated a desire to continue creating art-based projects to both address the issues in their community and to share their strengths with wider Burnie community. While Utp completed their contract with *Ten Days on the Island* in 2021, Burnie Community House has approached the festival to request inclusion in the 2023 festival program and are in the process of securing funding for a community filmmaking project and regional film tour. Rather than view arts and culture as something ‘not for them’, more residents also expressed interest in visiting the local art gallery for inspiration for *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* and potential future projects (interviewee B013). A research participant noted the inclusiveness and accessibility of *Shorewell Presents*, and the importance of supporting people to be creative on their own terms rather than imposing projects and activities on communities (community consultation participant). Symons and Hurley (2018, 122-123) find that marginalised and underserved cohorts are often not recognised as creative producers in their own right and are instead often the recipients of prescribed sets of arts and cultural activities produced by others. However, broadening engagement in and enthusiasm for arts and culture requires greater sensitivity local dynamics to understand and support the diversity of ways people find benefit in and want to engage in creative activity (Symons and Hurley 2018, 124). Adaptive and flexible projects such as *Gallery of Hopes and Dreams* enable people to realise their own ideas about art and culture and support them to create new opportunities for themselves and their communities.

## Key themes arising from the case studies

This section outlines the three key themes arising from case studies.

### Theme One: Sustainable Futures and Thriveability

Currently and historically, the types of arts and cultural activities that are valued are driven by small, committed groups of individuals. Local arts leaders tend to be elderly, and communities cite volunteer fatigue as a critical issue. Despite best intentions, local arts and cultural groups lack the supportive systems and human or financial capacity to diversify offerings and engage with a broader cross-section of their community, including young people. This means current models of arts and cultural delivery in communities is neither representative of the community, or sustainable.

Research participants are overwhelmingly proud of the people who comprise their community. The value of arts and culture in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania and central western Queensland is centred on building cohesion, tolerance and connectedness within the community. The data points to a future focused orientation within communities that has the capacity to challenge preconceived understandings. An interviewee noted that community members and organisations are “only limited by our own imagination” (interviewee B004). Cities and towns are imbued with a “can-do attitude and grassroots mentality that you can make things and you can get it done” (interviewee B006). Resilience and leadership were cited as core strengths, while locally designed and delivered arts and cultural activities and events emerged as local assets. Participants positioned arts, culture and creativity (including creative thinking and arts-based solutions to pressing challenges) as an essential part of the community’s future across social, economic and environmental domains.

Acknowledging, preserving and celebrating local culture and heritage is part of the knowledge sharing function of local art, culture and creativity. As an interviewee stated, “[c]ouncils have quite a commitment and understanding of arts from the point of view of not only tourism but the point of view of preserving our heritage ... If it is part of preserving our cultural heritage, we value it very highly” (interviewee CWQ008). Ideas for the future growth and sustainability of towns and communities centred on further embracing and valuing tangible and intangible assets - including natural landscapes, locations and venues along with local knowledge, skills, culture and histories - that already exist in communities. Extending current local successes and investing in people, rather than new infrastructure and initiatives, were viewed as key to the future vitality of communities.

### Example - Sustainable Futures and Thriveability In Action

Since 2016, Big hART’s Project O has worked with young women in rural northwest lutruwita/Tasmania to build capacity, resilience, and equip them with the personal agency and professional skills to lead positive change in their own communities.

Dedicated to removing barriers and creating new opportunities for young women from disadvantaged backgrounds, Project O occupies a unique space in the arts and cultural landscape of northwest lutruwita/Tasmania. The region is an identified family violence hotspot and a recognised area of social disadvantage, ranking in the lowest quintiles of the Socio-Economic Disadvantage Index (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018).

However, locally designed and delivered arts and cultural programs and events amplify community strengths and build capacity while addressing these profound challenges. Project O is an explicit response to the barriers produced by entrenched inequality. The program embraces arts, culture and creativity to build confidence and community visibility for local young women, while providing them with alternative training and professional development opportunities.

In Wynyard, Project O is offered as an in-school elective for 13-16 year-olds. In Smithton the program is run through the youth centre. The program includes arts and media skills development - including filmmaking and songwriting workshops - and mentors young women to design and deliver arts and media content that amplify their voices and stimulate social change (for example the *This is Us: Stories of Strength* zine and podcast project). Project O also connects older cohorts of young women with employment opportunities locally, such as event facilitation and stage management at events and festivals including *mapali* and *Acoustic Life of Sheds*.

Project O lutruwita/Tasmania Producer Rachel Small told the RAASI team that one challenge for young people living in rural and remote communities is that ‘they can’t be what they can’t see’. She said:

“there’s not a huge diversity of different jobs that young women in a highly agricultural and industrial area are seeing as ways of living their future. We work with a lot of different artists and bring them here from lutruwita/Tasmania and from the whole country to run workshops and programs with the girls. A big part of bringing them in is having them sharing their skills but also sharing their story and their pathway into how they’ve got to where they are”.

The program expands young people’s view of what is possible and prioritises long-term engagement and mentorship. Young people are often part of Project O for several years, and alumni stay

connected to the program through becoming facilitators and mentors for younger participants.

Rachel described one young person's personal journey through Project O and expressed how important long-term mentorship was for building leadership capacity and supporting self-determination. Over 18 months, the young person was mentored to deliver their own audio and sound recording project which enabled them to tell their own story, in their own way. Their story was shared with an audience including the Minister for Social Services and the Commissioner for Children and Young People at an International Women's Day event in 2020. This is a powerful example of the value of creative media for amplifying unheard voices and demonstrates the potential for personal stories to have public impact.

Project O's broad spectrum of activities place arts, culture and creativity at the heart of initiatives designed to support individuals and entire communities to thrive. It recognises that arts and culture offer some of the most nuanced and inclusive models of community engagement and for advancing community-led approaches to change (Sonke et al. 2019, 8). Project O is engaged in communities in northwest lutruwita/Tasmania, Frankston in Victoria, and Roebourne in Western Australia.

### **Theme Two: Identity and Placemaking**

Central western Queensland community members who participated in the community consultation workshops expressed enormous pride in their people, "community spirit", "attitudes", towns and natural landscapes. Small population size was never described as a problem; rather, the smallness of communities such as Tambo and Windorah were associated with greater community cohesion, supportive relationships and friendliness. Geography and place were central to the ways communities viewed their identities, opportunities, and local strengths. Arts, culture and creativity was deeply informed by the community's understanding and values around place, including physical features of the landscape such as rockpools and jump-ups, local stories and histories, and sense of shared dedication to the collective success and wellbeing of the region. The vastness of landscapes, "wide open spaces" and "the night sky" created a sense of largeness and possibility. Living and working in remote communities provided diverse lifestyle options and skills development opportunities, yet sustainable employment - particularly for young people - and access to health services were challenges.

Arts, culture and creativity assists with community regeneration. This is particularly important for a city like Burnie that faced high unemployment and potential loss of identity resulting from the close of the Wesley Vale paper pulp mill in 2010, one of the largest employers in the region. One interviewee captured the potential loss of community identity by saying,

"When the old papermill closed ten years ago there was a 'what do we do now' moment. It's arts events like *Paper on Skin*, *Burnie Shines* and cultural projects like Maker's Workshops that helped to reshape our community identity and to identify as agents of change personally, culturally and professionally" (interviewee B002).

The data points to the role that arts and cultural engagement have in establishing liveability for a city or town. As one interviewee commented, this is "... important in encouraging and supporting people to see the place that they live in as being equal to if not better than, other places. It's not a place of impoverishment that in fact they can aspire to extraordinariness as well" (interviewee B001).

### **Example - Identity and Placemaking In Action**

Embracing local skills and knowledge as fundamental local assets, and amplifying these through arts, culture and creativity emerged as a core feature and outcome of the *Dress the Central West* and *Matya* projects and events (interviewee CWQ004). Community consultation participants characterised local art, culture and creativity as "nurturing", "evolving", "collaborative", involving "developing", "learning together", and "sharing" of skills and knowledge. These participants recognised knowledge sharing between community members and across generations as integral to sustainable arts and culture. This meant their local arts and cultural ecology was diverse and continually evolving as new skills and ideas were learned and shared.

*Dress the Central West* is an exemplary case of maximising and building upon the diverse skills of local people - including design, performance art, makeup and hair - and unique place-based attributes - such as landscape and culture - to collectively drive social, cultural and economic outcomes across remote central western Queensland. This project cemented wearable art as an accessible and meaningful avenue for sharing cultural knowledge and celebrating place-identity, laying the foundation for projects such as *Matya*, and First Nations fashion label Red Ridge the Label. *Paper on Skin* similarly reflects a conscious process of creative placemaking through embracing northwest lutruwita/Tasmania's industrial heritage and the creativity and leadership of community members to strategically reimagine or "reinvent" Burnie (interviewee B002), and enhance the region's socioeconomic vibrancy and liveability.

On the importance of place-based arts events like *Paper on Skin*, one participant described the initiative as "not only as an intrinsic art project but as a wonderful project for the community and the region". In 2022 *Paper on Skin* was hosted by Devonport's parana arts centre and ran between 23 June and 20 July 2022, with the gala held on 17 June. *Paper on Skin* evolved from the Burnie community and brought value to the Devonport community as it expanded its creative offering to include new sister initiative *Paper Off Skin* curated

by Dr Grace Pundyk. *Paper Off Skin* explored the unique and versatile qualities of paper as a medium of creativity without needing to be wearable. *Paper Off Skin* comprised 45 finalists from eleven countries with fourteen international and sixteen lutruwita/Tasmanian artists represented.

Burnie is situated in an arresting and rugged landscape that carries a marred history. One interviewee captured two key elements that have informed the identity of Burnie, describing it as a dichotomy:

“Our history is very present here. The proximity to a number of mass murder sites of [First Nations] people - a tangible and uncomfortable presence. There is an awful and inescapable history here. Another uncomfortable part of Burnie’s history is the awful amount of pollution which was generated by the oxide and paper industries here” (interviewee B002).

Not shying-away from the industrial heritage, interviewees noted that Burnie and northwest Tasmania “is a crucible for creativity” (interviewee B002) and that “there are more artists per head per capita in northwest Tasmania than anywhere in Australia” (Interviewee B002). Alongside *Paper on Skin*, the region is home to significant arts events including *Ten Days on the Island* and *Panama Music Festival*.

Interviewees characterised Burnie and northwest lutruwita/Tasmania as a “place that develops and supports entrepreneurs” (interviewee B004), and a place that “is open to social innovation and possibilities of cultural shift” (interviewee B007). Community members acknowledged the pivotal role of local government in building and sustaining creative, inclusive, thriving and liveable communities. The notion of authenticity is also foregrounded as capturing the essence of Burnie in terms of arts and culture engagement. This is described as

“connection to land ... the landscape itself is such a big character in Burnie. So that needs to be brought to the forefront in some way. And whether or not that’s the materials you choose or the themes you portray or the influences you have, it has to be there in some capacity” (interviewee B002).

Outcomes that embrace place as a creative catalyst result in “underground property-based weekend concerts and making things from kelp and place-based materials” (interview B007). There is a sense that art, culture and creativity in Burnie and northwest Tasmania embrace the hyperlocal with a national and international outlook. An interviewee captured the duality of Burnie by saying

“there are all these complexities working together but it’s a very culturally rich...there’s an abrasion that happens. ... It needs that grit in order to make something beautiful and it does have the grit here, you’ve got grit in abundance” (interviewee B002).

### Theme Three: Social Inclusion and Wellbeing

The impact of arts, culture and creativity in communities is more profound, complex and nuanced than is currently articulated and captured by the arts sector in general, or funding agencies - both government and philanthropic. Importantly, while the outcomes of arts and cultural engagement can be broadly expressed as social impact, such impacts are experienced in multiple and diverse ways by different individuals and communities. Across the interviews and community consultation workshops in Burnie, participants identified collective wellbeing, pride, hope, belonging and social cohesion as some of the outcomes of arts and cultural engagement. Data demonstrates that there is strong and tangible connection between arts and cultural engagement and social inclusion or belonging for the Burnie community. One interviewee described the value of arts and cultural engagement as a “conduit for empathy” (interviewee B002). They further elaborated: “for better understanding between disparate communities you couldn’t do any better than create a system like art to be able to help one relate to the other” (interviewee B002).

Inclusivity, local social connectedness, and community cohesion were cited as defining features and functions of local arts, culture and creativity. An interviewee summarised “there is a social aspect to the arts and I use the word social in its broadest term, including health and wellbeing, and liveability” (interviewee CWQ003). High profile arts and cultural events and activities including *Dress the Central West*, along with small community craft groups and workshops were described as “another extension of our community social interactions. It’s just part of the culture of small communities” (community consultation participant). Shops established to sell locally made craft, such as *Artesian Originals* in Barcaldine, and craft workshop *The Lost Art* generated income, gave people “a place to be” (community consultation participant), and facilitated social interactions and friendships. Such community-led activity was valued as a means of “problem-solving” (community consultation participant) as it addressed issues of social isolation and loneliness. This social and wellbeing aspect of arts, culture and creativity was highly valued in the community.

#### Example - Social Inclusion and Wellbeing In Action

*The Lost Art* in Blackall is a social enterprise activity which provides training and support for job seekers and enhances social inclusion for disadvantaged groups to learn new skills in traditional bush leather craft and woodwork. A collaboration between Red Ridge Interior Queensland and RAPAD Employment Services Queensland (RESQ+), *The Lost Art* aims to preserve traditional bush crafts while mentoring local people to become leathercraft workshop facilitators throughout central western Queensland. Sales of the handmade leather crafts including stock whips, belts and bags support further local projects.

*The Lost Art* is one of several creative spaces and community hubs on Blackall's main street, and part of a rich creative ecosystem which sustains the community. *The Lost Art Craft Room* next door provides a meeting place and regular craft circle for community members; social impact arts organisation Red Ridge is a short walk up the street, and Blackall Community Centre is across the road. Nearby, *Bushmans Artisan Gallery* exhibits and sells the work of 10 local artists, while Sew Barcoo stocks locally-designed and handmade clothing, along with homewares and fashion accessories by other Australian creators and suppliers. These community-initiated spaces activate the town centre, inject vibrancy and contribute overall to Blackall's cultural vitality which is a central ingredient in liveability (Houghton and Vohra 2021, 21; Achurch 2019, 5). Creative communities of interest form around these spaces and foster the socially supportive relationships foundational to wellbeing.

Community consultation participants felt "being a member of the arts community has given me a longevity of life" and described this community as "inclusive" where "everyone is welcoming". Community members at *The Lost Art* highlighted social interaction and pride as important personal outcomes resulting from their involvement. "A place to be in the morning", and a place to meet new people, share skills and stories were mentioned as benefits. In addition to supporting personal wellbeing outcomes for individuals, *The Lost Art* also links explicitly to community health initiatives. Queensland Health contracts *The Lost Art* to facilitate leatherworking workshops throughout the central west. While people are reluctant to attend health information sessions, offering creative and hands-on workshops reduced stigma and provided spaces that are safer and more inclusive for health conversations.

# Proposed Language Frame for Social Impact Assessment

In bringing the themes and ideas emerging from literature, interviews, community engagement workshops and case studies into conversation there are intersections between concepts related to the social impact of arts, culture and creativity in regional, rural and remote Australia. Taking guidance from the literature and the two communities - central western Queensland and northwest lutruwita/Tasmania - below is a proposed language framework that may assist rural, regional and remote communities to identify success markers resulting from engagement in arts, culture and creativity. The research points to four key frames that may be utilised to understanding social impact outcomes arising from engagement in arts, culture and creativity. These frames are expressed as:

**Collective Wellbeing** - defined as not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. Walker et al. (2013, 208) emphasise wellbeing for First Nations Australians is “simultaneously a collective and individual intergenerational continuum that exists in the past, present and future”.

**Thriving Community** - defined as the liveability factors associated with a city or town, including notions of community regeneration. Thriveability goes beyond sustainability. It has the human dimensions of creativity, imagination, hope and compassion (see Wood et al. 2016; Nussbaum 2011). Thriveability is being able to reach your potential, feeling valued and being able to positively contribute to your communities and our futures (Hes 2016). Arts, culture and creativity (including creative thinking and arts-based solutions to pressing challenges) are an essential part of the community’s future across social, economic and environmental domains.

**Amplified Place** - defined as a social construct as much as a geographic location. Place is not something merely encountered; rather, “place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience ... There is no possibility of understanding human existence - and especially human thought and experience - other than through an understanding of place” (Malpas 2018, 13). Sensitivity to the specificities of place (geography, demographics, environment) and the assets of communities (culture, creativity, knowledge, lived experience) is increasingly recognised as critical for delivery of services that are meaningful, appropriate and relevant, and that support the strengthening of communities.

**Creative Ecology** - defined as embracing local skills and knowledge as fundamental local assets, and amplifying these through arts, culture and creativity. Acknowledging, preserving and celebrating local culture and heritage is part of the knowledge sharing function of local arts, culture and creativity. A creative ecology approach embraces a decolonial understanding of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups care for Country, Community and Culture (Gattenhof et al. 2022). The concept recognises that local ecosystems of practice and activity are key to flourishing communities.

The four frames should not be viewed as static language or a fixed understanding of the concept. The frames and associated concepts are suggested starting points for Australian rural, regional and remote communities and organisations to begin articulating social outcomes for individuals and whole communities. This positioning supports the finding from this research that creating a generic set of impact assessment markers is not the preferred way in which rural, regional and remote communities would like to develop qualitative understandings regarding the value and impact of arts and cultural engagement. The language of the

four themes is open and flexible so that communities can consider differences in geography, infrastructure, engagement and equity of access to arts and culture. It is imperative that communities collaboratively develop and innovate on the language framework to shape their own markers of success to report impact and change.

The table below shows alignment and intersections between literature, previously published impact assessment frameworks and data sources. The final column of the table is a list of suggested key words and phrases that may be useful to communities to articulate social impact.

Frame	Interview and Community Engagement	Case Studies	Available Impact Assessment Frameworks	Suggested Key Words and Concepts
Collective Wellbeing	Connectiveness between Creativity and Wellbeing	Social Inclusion and Wellbeing	Art as a Means of Social Bonding & Bridging (Brown and Novak-Leonard 2013)  Social interaction (Fancourt 2017 and subsequent work in Fancourt and Finn 2019, 3)	belonging, community-centred, community led, connection, connectedness, Country, empathy, hope, pride, social cohesion, social inclusion
Thriving Community	Thriveability	Sustainable Futures and Thriveability	Speaks to the gathering and interpreting of new information about an issue, idea, or culture. It relates to the art's content and how it might challenge or provoke new thinking. (Brown and Novak-Leonard 2013)	futures, human potential, liveability, opportunity, possibility thinking, visibility
Amplified Place	Placemaking	Identity and Placemaking	Providing context to the present and visions of the future by considering the past, including history and heritage. (Smithies and Uppal 2019)	Community, Country, Culture, cultural maintenance, heritage, legacy, place, preserve, transform, maintain language and customs
Creative ecology	Arts Ecologies to Support Innovation	Economic innovation	Art as a Means of Aesthetic Development & Creative Stimulation (Brown and Novak-Leonard 2013)  Increased desire to participate or create new cultural works by igniting imagination and curiosity (Smithies and Uppal 2019)  Appreciation of diverse cultural expressions and the way these interact with each other. (Smithies and Uppal 2019)  Involvement of the imagination (Fancourt 2017 and subsequent work in Fancourt and Finn 2019, 3)	celebrate, Community, collaboration, Country, Culture, curiosity, knowledge, imagination, innovation, sharing, sustain



This proposed language frame may be activated in two ways. Firstly, the frames may be used at the outset of a project or activity to assist intentional shaping of the delivery or engagement to ensure that the four identified themes are embedded in the project to develop and sustain social impact outcomes throughout the duration of the project.

Secondly, the frames may be employed to assess project outcomes as part of the reporting process. The second application should be undertaken at multiple points in the life of the project rather than at a single point in time such as at the conclusion of the project. Moving through an iterative and ongoing assessment process allows the project to learn from cyclic review and be more responsive to individuals and communities where the project is located. Both applications may need communities to transform aspects of the language framework into shaping questions or key indicators to assist in the development and assessment of the project.

This proposed language frame should be viewed as a starting point the collaborate development of social impact outcomes arising from engagement in arts, culture and creativity. The four proposed frames should be nuanced according to community, place and project. Equally the activation of the proposed language frame should adopt an approach that is people-centred and have flexibility to be shaped by end-user defined outcomes (see Gattenhof et al. 2022). Therefore, the application of the proposed language framework should not be viewed as static but rather as adaptive to the community in which the impact assessment is taking place.



# Conclusion

This project engaged with the two remote and geographically dispersed regions of central western Queensland and the northwest corridor of lutruwita/Tasmania. Both communities have active and unique arts ecosystems while also experiencing significant economic disadvantage and social isolation. The project commenced at a time when Australia did not have a national cultural policy in place. Now in 2023 *Revive*: a place for every story, a story for every place - Australia's Cultural Policy for the next five years has been realised. Rural, regional and remote artists and communities are woven throughout this policy as evidenced in the case studies and proposed actions. Critically, the National Cultural Policy declares that "[r]egional artists are critical to a vibrant arts sector that reflects Australia's depth and diversity. A thriving cultural and creative sector is also crucial to supporting Australia's regional communities and local economies" (Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 41).

The intentions of *Revive* (2023) are borne out in the findings from this project. *The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a social impact model* supports and exemplifies the interconnections and interdependencies between the social and economic impacts of arts, culture, and creative activity as spoken about in *Revive*. Previous Australian Research Council projects focusing on arts activity in regional Australia point to "all of the contributions that arts and creativity make to the social and cultural life of the Barkly cannot be separated from the economic outcomes for individuals and communities" (Bartleet et al. 2019). That is, arts and creativity were valued for contributing health and wellbeing outcomes and supporting cultural maintenance and

transmission, and these values were entwined with individual and collective economic values and outcomes including sale of works, employment, economic independence, and cultural tourism (Bartleet et al. 2019, 165-167). Such themes were echoed through the current project in partner interviews which highlighted the value of arts and culture for preserving local cultural heritage while increasing tourism (interviewee PO08), and the need for arts and culture to be embedded across all sectors (interviewee PO01).

The results of the Australia Council's national arts participation survey (2020a) show that improving wellbeing and connecting with others are two of the foremost reasons Australians attend arts and cultural events such as festivals. This research distinguishes between attendance and participation. Significantly "[a]lmost half of Australians living in remote areas creatively participate in the arts (48%) - a similar rate to those living in metropolitan areas (45%) or regional areas (45%)" (Australia Council for the Arts 2020a, 135).

The research undertaken in central western Queensland and northwest lutrawita/Tasmania demonstrates that targeted and intentional arts and cultural activities and programs are profound drivers for community wellbeing, and social connection and cohesion. These are not unintended or incidental outcomes. Rather, these communities understand that participating in arts, cultural and creative activities connect people and create shared visions for thriving and healthy communities.

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# Appendices

## I Appendix 1: Project Team

### Lead Chief Investigator (CI)

**Professor Gattenhof** brings to this project demonstrated leadership in the field of arts and cultural evaluation. She has led major arts impact and evaluation projects and consultancies in Australia and international contexts since 2010 and has publishing in high profile and high-quality outputs from these projects, including sole and co-authored monographs. Sandra Gattenhof is lead CI on *The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a social impact model* (LP180100477 2019-2022), CI on and *Social Impact Evaluation: Puuya Foundation Lockhart River* (2021-2023) and led the *Valuing the Arts Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (2022) for Australia Council for the Arts and Ministry of Culture and Heritage New Zealand that have connectivity to this project.

### Chief Investigator (CI)

**Professor Donna Hancox** brings to this project expertise in community consultation across sectors. Donna Hancox is currently a CI on two funded research projects, *The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a social impact model* and (LP180100477 2019-2022) and *Social Impact Evaluation: Puuya Foundation Lockhart River* (2021-2023) and was a co-author of *Valuing the Arts Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (2022), all of which are relevant to this project. She is a 2021-2022 Fulbright Senior Scholar collaborating with the world leading Center for Arts in Medicine at the University of Florida and has previously been awarded a Leverhulme Visiting Research Fellowship and Smithsonian Research Fellowship.

### Chief Investigator (CI)

**Professor Helen Klaebe** has been Graduate School Dean at the University of Queensland, and Professor of Creative Writing in the Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences Faculty and was the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate Research & Engagement) at QUT. In these roles she has led the strategy and management of university-wide Higher Degree Research (HDR) programs in collaboration with Faculties,

Institutes, Divisions, brokered external local and global partnerships, and career development for researchers. Helen is a Chief Investigator on *Social Impact Evaluation*, for the Puuya Foundation of Lockhart River (2020-2023); and *The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: A Social Impact Model*- LP180100477 (2019-2022). Helen has also achieved the status of Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK) and undertook a Smithsonian Fellowship in Washington DC.

### Research Project Manager

**Dr Sasha Mackay** is an early career researcher in the Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice Faculty at Queensland University of Technology. Her professional background spans journalism and socially engaged arts in rural and regional Australia, and her research interests include the practices and impacts of co-created and participatory arts projects for underserved cohorts and communities. Sasha has been an online producer and editor for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Heywire* storytelling project for rural and regional youth, and a producer at social impact arts organisation Creative Regions where she designed and delivered oral history and digital storytelling projects with and for regional communities. She is currently a Research Fellow in the School of Education and the Arts at Central Queensland University.

### Videographer

**Bryan Crawford** is a seasoned digital media and television content producer with over 20 years of experience in the industry. As the owner of Longbow Productions, he has made a significant impact on the world of media production. His ability to create captivating content that engages audiences across multiple platforms has earned him a reputation as a skilled and innovative producer. Throughout his career, Bryan has worked with numerous prominent media production companies and established himself as a knowledgeable and talented professional. His expertise in identifying emerging technologies and working with talented individuals has contributed to his success in an ever-changing media landscape.





## Appendix 2: Publications

Mackay, S., Klaebe, H., Hancox, D., & Gattenhof, S. (2021). Understanding the value of the creative arts: place-based perspectives from regional Australia. *Cultural Trends*, 30(5), 391-408. doi:10.1080/09548963.2021.1889343

Gattenhof, S, Hancox, D, Klaebe, H, & Mackay, S. (2021). *The Social Impact of Creative Arts in Australian Communities*. Singapore: Springer.

Hancox, D., Gattenhof, S., Mackay, S., & Klaebe, H. (2022). Pivots, arts practice and potentialities: Creative engagement, community wellbeing and arts-led research during COVID-19 in Australia. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*, 13(1), 61-75. doi:10.1386/jaah\_00088\_1

## Appendix 3: Presentations

26-27 August 2019, Caloundra, Queensland, Performing Arts Australia, Performing Arts Exchange (APAX)

2-6 October 2019, Kooralbyn, Queensland, Arts Ablaze

27 November 2019, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Regional Arts Australia, Creative Regions National Summit

2 December 2019, Brisbane, Queensland, QUT Creative Industries, Creative Practices, Community Engagement and Social Impact Symposium

30 November-2 December 2020, Brisbane, Queensland, QUT Creative Industries, Creative Placemaking for Social Impact Symposium

June 2021, Longreach, Queensland, ABC Western Queensland

16 June 2021, Blackall, Queensland, Blackall-Tambo Regional Council

14 July 2021, Brisbane, Queensland, QUT Rural Research Group

9 September 2021, Online, Performing Arts Australia, Performing Arts Exchange (APAX) <https://www.apax.org.au/talks/thriving-communities>

23 September 2021, University of Sydney CREATE Centre Webinar

30 September, 2021, Brisbane, Queensland, QUT Research Showcase

3 August, 2022, Brisbane, Queensland, National Rural Health Alliance, 16<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference





