



22 October 2020

Committee Secretary
Senate Committee on Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries & Institutions, 2020

Dear Committee Chair and Members,

Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company (SDTC) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Nation's creative and cultural activities in light of the severe impact of COVID-19, which has exacerbated an already dire situation caused by many years of funding reductions and undervaluing of Australia's Community Arts sector.

In this letter we speak to the following terms of reference:

- Direct & indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries
- Non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing, promoting Australia's national identity and how to recognise, measure and grow them
- Impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries

SDTC is a unique Community Arts Company with forty years of experience working with some of the most vulnerable, disregarded and powerless in our society. Our arts practice (theatre, music, visual arts, film) provides opportunities for marginalised women and young people to break cycles of abuse, addiction and disengagement – offering them effective and sustainable pathways to education, training, employment and community engagement/inclusion.

Through high quality performances, exhibitions, film screenings and the distribution of digital resources, we reach a diverse range of audiences, including key policy-makers, justice, health and education workers, school students, teachers and members of the community – raising awareness of the complex issues facing our program participants, and inspiring personal, social and systemic change.

Our two major long-term and ongoing core programs are with:

- **Women in Victorian prisons and post release** – Delivered in partnership with the Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and HM Prison Tarrengower.

SDTC's internationally recognised program for women in prison has positively influenced the lives and directions of many hundreds of women over the years.

SDTC is the only company in Australia creating original productions and art exhibitions inside a maximum-security prison with a public presentation of the work every year.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company

- **Disengaged and disadvantaged youth who 'can't do' mainstream education** – Delivered in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and local schools, health/welfare providers.

SDTC's fulltime, arts-led education program, which we first introduced with HighWater Theatre in Wodonga (2000-2015) and are now delivering with Nobody's Fool Theatre (NFT), Geelong, for school non-attenders aged 12 to 19 years, is recognised as a methodology that works to solve complex issues associated with disengagement and marginalisation.

"Research shows that people with limited or no educational qualifications and those who have not completed school, are at significantly higher risk of recurrent disadvantage over their lifetimes (Tomlinson and Walker, 2010). In the most disadvantaged areas across G21, school completion rates are significantly lower than regional averages." **G21 Region Phase 1 Report, 2013.**

We have been in partnership with Newcomb Secondary and Barwon Child, Youth and Family for over 5 years now in the highly successful NFT alternative education program for some of Geelong's most vulnerable youth. The Strategic Partnership Program evaluation of NFT states *"before coming to NFT almost 90% of young people didn't care about gaining an education, whereas now 100% value education as highly important"* (SPP Report, Jan Osmotherly, 2018).

The catalyst for change is the arts process. The arts work – where often all else has failed – as the bridge to education and inclusion.

SDTC also works with young people in Secure Welfare for young women at Bloomfield and young men at Ascot Vale in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services and Parkville College.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre has long established collaborations in the justice, health and education sectors whereby potential participants are referred to us. Moreover, we have, a network of 'word of mouth' with past and present participants in some of our most marginalised communities.

As other longstanding Community Arts companies will attest, it takes decades to grow and maintain such trusted connections. This is why multi-year funding is so critical. These partnerships cannot be rebuilt nor replicated in the short term.

You will see throughout this document, the Company has extensive reach and impact. We reach many who have never stepped foot inside a theatre or a concert hall, as well as those who are regular theatre-going audiences.

We have witnessed time and time again the impact the arts have on the marginalised. For a high proportion, it has been life changing and even lifesaving. **(See attached letters)**. Our impact is not because of 'earnestness', it is because of the high quality of the work. This is supported through our extensive evidence-based research.

We are not citing statistics and testimonials simply for self-promotion, but to highlight the reach and impact of Community Arts in Australia. **This often-invisible work, cannot continue to be overlooked, dismissed and undervalued. Never has its presence and need been more vital.**

"While I was well aware of the potency of theatre, even I was unprepared for the impact of this performance. The young people from HighWater with Somebody's Daughter bravely performed personal stories of homelessness, abuse, their experience of where our systems are failing. Not only this though, the group cleverly demonstrated the realities of those working in the frontline with these kids – the teacher and school Principal under so much pressure, the refuge worker, etc. An audience of 400 delegates, including my fellow ARACY Board members Professor Fiona Stanley AC, Sir Gustav Nossal AC and Dr Jeff Harmer, watched the performance transfixed.

Conferences, policy debates are frequently dominated by statistics and PowerPoint presentations – middle class academics, bureaucrats, and politicians. But here before us – were the beating hearts behind the statistics, the bar graphs, the thousands of pages of reports." **Professor Rob Moodie – Professor of Global Health, Nossal Institute for Global Health; Chair, National Preventative Health Taskforce**

Early in 2020, and as a combined consequence of COVID-19 and Federal Government funding cuts to the Australia Council for the Arts, SDTC was unsuccessful in securing further four-year funding through the Australia Council's latest round of applications. This decision was unfortunately taken despite SDTC being "ranked in the top third of applications assessed by the Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) Panel" following the highly competitive EOI stage of the application process. SDTC fell into the 'unfunded excellence' category – we were told that we were next on the list to be funded and dependent on final allocation of funds might have made the final cut, however there was simply "not enough money".

SDTC has been reliant on Australia Council multi-year funding to sustain our core programs for nearly 20 years and the withdrawal of support poses a significant threat to the Company's future. As you can imagine, this is devastating for SDTC as it not only places the work we do with vulnerable youth and women in prison and post-release at risk, it also means the loss of decades of artistry and knowledge SDTC has, in community arts practice.

This has been further significantly compounded by COVID-19. Tours and fee-paying conference appearances have been cancelled. There has been quadruple the demand for limited philanthropic funding during the current economic crisis.

Our work with the most vulnerable has been severely curtailed. There is already considerable evidence (*Reach Out and Beyond Blue*) that the vulnerable demographic with whom we work have fared worse in COVID-19 than others. There have been increased levels of abuse, trauma, family violence, mental ill-health and isolation. This is certainly true for many of our program participants.

In 2019 alone, SDTC:

- Delivered 624 community workshops to 214 program participants and 383 agency representatives
- Presented 23 performances and 4 exhibitions of our participants' artworks – seen by more than 9158 members of the public, policymakers, educators, students and agency representatives
- Created 2 new, original Australian theatre works, 1 new, original Australian music video clip and 3 other digital media works
- Supported and mentored 9 trainee/emerging artists

Our highlights included:

- A new production and art exhibition at DPFC – 'Miss... It Appears We Have Hit Some Turbulence' – was performed in DPFC three times for audiences from outside the prison and twice for women inmates
- Releasing a short film clip on YouTube, 'No More Hiding in Silence' – made by women in prison and post-release and young people in both Geelong and Wodonga
- Young people from Nobody's Fool Theatre Geelong and a number of disengaged local young people presenting a series of workshops and a Regional tour of 'Unapologetically Myself' to Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla
- Presenting public and school performances of 'Unapologetically Myself' within the Greater Geelong region
- Performing at the Melbourne Cricket Ground for the 9th International ACSO conference - Nobody's Fool Theatre youth performing alongside 3 women on day release from DPFC

"Having been involved in theatre for 10 plus years, I have seen a lot. I have never been so moved, inspired and completely immersed in any production (theatre or film) before. I am so grateful to have witnessed the play tonight." (F 34 Theatre Producer)

The immediate impact of SDTC's work includes:

- Hundreds of disadvantaged young people in our core program since 2001, destined for lives of social welfare dependence, poverty and/or crime are now healthy, engaged citizens.

- Most reengaged with education, many completed Year 12 and some have completed/are undertaking university degrees. Others have found employment. They have broken, often intergenerational cycles of abuse and institutionalisation.
 - o In the past 3 years – 90% of Nobody's Fool Theatre students successfully completed appropriate Year Levels including 7 students who completed VCE or other Year 12 equivalent. One student is in second year University Melbourne.
- Women in prison develop new skills and confidence and motivation to make positive changes to their life trajectories, and many on release take up productive work, remaining connected positively to community through employment and/or participation in our post-release programs.
- Communities and relevant professionals are motivated to identify, and address issues, practices and policies connected to homelessness, mental illness and out of home care.
- Systemic negative attitudes are addressed, policies reconsidered and professional practice changed to be more inclusive.
 - o 80% of our mainstream audiences indicate that attending one of our performances/workshops has changed the way they view people – they are more empathetic and less judgmental & most importantly 75% professional in education/health welfare indicate that the performances have motivated change in their professional practice.

Economic Impact

As with most other organisations in Australia, SDTC's work generates economic activity that is both direct and indirect. We employ 5 fulltime artists, 7 part time, casual and seasonal artists, 8 trainee/emerging artists, 7 part time and casual support/administration personnel and 6 seasonal technical providers. SDTC also regularly provides program participants with financial support for their personal needs. Each year, the Company's expenditure stimulates measurable economic activity within the Melbourne Metropolitan area while also contributing to Victorian rural/regional communities through travel, accommodation, workshops, performances and associated expenses.

The significant, indirect economic impact of effecting transformational outcomes in the lives of our program participants, however, can neither be accurately measured nor overestimated. The financial benefits to Australia when one young person who is otherwise destined for a life trapped in the intergenerational cycles of disengagement, addiction, violence, mental ill-health, homelessness and institutionalization is successfully diverted into sustainable engagement with education/training, employment and community, must – to some degree – be considered in this Inquiry.

"NFT has given so many people like me an option who have dropped out or are dropping out. This is a place you can go to when you feel there is nothing left you can do about getting an education even though you do want to get somewhere." **NFT 15-year-old female participant**

"Before I came to NFT, I felt like I couldn't breathe. I felt anxious about everything. School was a place I feared. It was only when I started to breathe that I started to learn." **NFT 16-year-old male participant (now studying a Bachelor of Arts, Acting, at the Victorian College for the Arts)**

So too, when a woman in prison (and ultimately, her children) who can be classified as a recidivist is set on the path of education, training, employment and community inclusion, the societal and economic benefits reverberate across generations.

"I was inferior. I was a thief. I was a junkie. I was a whore. I was despised. I disappeared. I offended and re-offended, and learnt the word recidivist. I am a woman."

When I joined Somebody's Daughter on the inside I had nothing to lose. Ultimately everything would be gained...

"I sat in a circle of women, who just like me had some incredibly sad tale. It was the same grim episode in this real life "Prisoner". A story of pain, self-harm, addiction, sexual abuse and hopelessness. It was of homelessness and lost children."

"I found a purpose. I will share my stories, and maybe I will play a part in creating an awareness of women just like us, woman from the inside. And one day those of us who have been relegated and neglected, will be remembered as somebody's daughter." CB

Recommendations:

Given the significant contribution that Community Arts makes towards Australia's national identity, social wellbeing, community cohesion and economic landscape, we recommend that the Federal Government takes appropriate action to provide recognition of the important role that Community Arts plays. Immediate steps should be taken to increase investment in the arts sector – particularly noting the importance of Community Arts that reaches those who are the most marginalised, excluded and invisible, and reflects the rich diversity of Australian culture.

Restoration/increase of Federal funding for the Australia Council with the specific aim of providing multi-year funding for at least 80% of those organisations who passed the recent EOI phase for the 2021-2024 grant round, would provide a meaningful step towards addressing some of the negative impacts experienced by the sector as a result of COVID-19 and previous cuts to Federal funding.

"Compassion is the primary experience — the heart event — out of which emerges the genius and generosity of the imagination. Creativity is an act of love that can knock up against our most foundational beliefs, and in doing so brings forth fresh ways of seeing the world. This is both the function and glory of art and ideas.

We are a culture in transition, and it may be that we are heading toward a more equal society."

Nick Cave

Yours faithfully,

Maud Clark AM
Chief Executive Officer
Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company

Please also see:

NFT promotional video: <https://www.somebodysdaughtertheatre.com/nobodys-fool-theatre>

ABC article about SDTC's program for women in prison:
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-24/somebodys-daughter-arts-drama-women-in-prison/11537534>

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Letters from:

- **Young participants of SDTC's Community Arts programs for disadvantaged youth – explaining the impact of the arts on their lives**

13 October, 2020

Parliamentary Inquiry into benefits and impact of arts during COVID

My name is _____, I am 20 years old and studying a Bachelor of Entertainment Business Management full-time at JMC Academy.

I am writing to you today to tell you of my deep concern – no shock, that Somebody's Daughter Theatre may not be able to continue because of this economic crisis. This would mean the end of so much more than an arts company, it would mean shutting out the last bit of light at the end of a dark tunnel someone is trying to crawl out of, I was once that someone.

When I was fourteen years old, I was introduced to Somebody's Daughter Theatre through HighWater, an arts based program for at risk youth (out of school, in child protection, juvenile justice etc). When I came to HighWater, I had no interest in performing or as morbid as it is, living.

I had already overdosed once, I was continuously feeling let down by the system and slipping through every crack in the education or healthcare sectors. Coming to Highwater was not easy, I felt abandoned by the world, disengaged and apathetic towards any attempt to put me on the right track.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre gave me the time, attention, patience, tough-love and motivation to get back on my feet. Performing across Australia, including at Parliament, gave me a whole new sense of self, a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of belonging. A lot of us had not accomplished much, or anything in our short lives. We had not had applause or admiration, it was something new for all of us. We were forced to work together, to cry together and through that, we all helped each other stand up straight, even if our legs were shaking a little.

I currently study Entertainment Business Management at a Bachelor degree level, I have worked stage crew for Elton John and Katy Perry, that is something I owe Somebody's Daughter Theatre entirely. I would not have had the confidence or experience to apply for those type of things if I had not been to HighWater, in fact, I highly doubt I would even be alive right now if I hadn't made one last ditch attempt to make a life for myself the day I walked into HighWater. I have seen firsthand how important the arts are and how important it is to continue to display new art, especially from those who have felt silenced or neglected and now I want to spend the rest of my life creating the experience that Somebody's Daughter Theatre created for me.

For Somebody's Daughter Theatre to cease functioning, would be a catastrophic loss to young people, particularly those in rural areas who have not had a voice and have repeatedly been through the system, whether that be child protection, juvenile justice or not attending school. I know that other kids going through the same things I was talking about on stage, sat in the crowd at our shows and for a few short minutes, felt like they weren't monsters, they weren't strange or forgotten, they were heard, they were valid and they were going to be okay.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre is way more than an arts company and not funding them is way more than no more plays on a stage.

I hope you take my letter seriously. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

15 October 2020

To the Senate Inquiry into the Impact of the Arts

Hi my name is I'm a 20-year-old Indigenous man from the Palawa people in Tasmania.

I am writing to you to let you know of but also MY first hand experience of the **impact** that Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company has had on my life and so many others I could name.

This is who I am and what my story is.

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

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

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

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

Then in 2017 my mum changed our lives by moving to Werribee and getting us back to school. After many months of looking for a program that suited the needs of our life style we found ourselves at SDTC Nobody's Fool in Geelong. This was arts led education with a teacher from Newcomb Secondary. The arts are such a big part of healing, it mends every broken heart, it provides a shoulder to cry on when everything else is absent.

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

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

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

The Arts work for me and that is what I want to do. If I can leave the drugs behind I'm hoping to become an emerging artist and work alongside Somebody's Daughter Theatre.

The last two years we have toured to Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla, which has been amazing the workshops and performances, are so powerful.

The impact it had on the people we worked with and showing them that even though we might look confident we are still struggling with the same problems, whether you are from Geelong or a small country town that it's the same issues that we are dealing with.

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

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

It took me 19 years to have the strength to face myself.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre also helped me through my stay at Bunjilwarra Aboriginal Rehab Facility in Hastings. While in Bunjilwarra Somebody's Daughter Theatre provided emotional, spiritual and healing support throughout my stay. After meetings with Uncle Dave and SDT I was allowed leave to perform and tour under the guidance of SDT.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre is an amazing company and if its young peoples' program discontinued it will not only disrupt the education and healing but will also mean that we cannot continue to connect and share our story to people that have never had a voice: for people that don't have a say, people that are in country towns, abusive families, caught up in drug addiction and thinking that there's no way out. When we tour to a town it's not just a tour, it's an emotional, spiritual and physical connection we make - a connection like no other.

A bond through the arts.

If Somebody's Daughter Theatre dies the impact that we have had on these peoples will forever be there, but we're thinking of the future. We're trying to think of the future, the future of the kids that aren't thought about.

The kids like me,
The kids like us.

Please find the funding necessary – there are so many young people like us and while there's always a lot of talk there's not much that works. Thank you for your time

10 October 2020

To the Senate Inquiry into the Impact of the Arts

My name is I am 28 years of age.

I am a fulltime mother to my 2 children - they have an amazing father and a beautiful extended family.

I am qualified in Aged Care Support and employed casually through a company called Japara.

Over the years I have still worked very closely with SDT (Somebody's Daughter Theatre) as an emerging artist and a mentor to students.

I am a previous student from HighWater Theatre, an arts based education program that was created by SDT in order to provide disadvantaged and disconnected youth with an education and most importantly for kids like us, a FUTURE that seemed impossible.

I am writing to you to express my concern about the future of this irreplaceable company and hopefully provide some insight on why SDT is so important to so many people.

I started attending HighWater Theatre when I was 15 years old.

I was homeless and frequently couch hopping at the time.

I had been out of mainstream school for about a year, my toxic home had started to take a toll on my mental health and I became disruptive and full of anger. Mainstream school became too demanding for what I could mentally cope with.

I grew up far too quick in a home without love - instead my 20 childhood homes... we moved a lot, were full of abuse, drug abuse, drug dealing, domestic violence, neglect, fear, confusion and heartache. All things I grew up assuming were normal behaviours.

I left home at 14. I was already addicted to drugs. I stayed wherever people would let me and when I couldn't find somewhere to stay I'd sleep in empty housing commission houses, which were only ever empty for about 2 days. I started to deal drugs so I had money. It made it easier to couch hop as I'd run out of favours. I only ever thought about getting through the day - I never thought of the next day, let alone my future. I didn't see one.

I found out about HighWater Theatre whilst I was on someone's couch wondering how to get my next meal. I suppose it sounds horrible now that I think about it, but it was so normal to me at the time.

A girl that attended HighWater mentioned to me that she goes to this school and they provide the students lunch. So instantly and humorously I thought well there's my next meal. The students were also picked up for school so when my friend was getting picked up I enquired about whether I was eligible or not. I was.

To me, and I confidently speak for every other person that has ever been connected with SDT, it is so much more than just a Company.

Personally to me the unique programs that SDT provide were critical for me to succeed in life.

To survive really.

When I started to attend HighWater I didn't have much interest in any sort of education. I believe now that this was because of my sense of self-worth - how I had been made to feel in

mainstream school, not being able to keep up with the learning, being bullied by both teachers and students because of family connections and reputations, being stereotyped and labelled, being distracted, distracting myself. I began to label myself as worthless. I started to limit myself and my possibilities in life. I felt angry and everything felt unfair.

Through the arts based program that SDT provided me with, I started to feel a sense of self-worth I began learning again, finding other interests such as drama, dance and the visual arts, which gained my attention the most. Not only did HighWater provide me with the resources, guidance, support, education, references and opportunities I needed to build myself a future, they also provided me with a sense of self-worth, unconditional love, acceptance, a safe place - somewhere I didn't feel fear anymore.

And because of all these attributes, I started taking an interest in my education again. The more I did, the more I learnt, the more I achieved - the more these people were proud of me, I'd never felt such pride before.

Pride was something HighWater taught me that I will cherish forever.

I began to heal from traumatic experiences through my own accomplishments and personal growth.

This Company was my lifeline, my connection to the outside world. They supported me and encouraged me to break the chain and build my own pathway to a safe, independent and positive future. Which I have done and continue to do for my own children.

There are so many kids that easily get lost in the system - so many that fall through the cracks, kids without voices, kids without choices.

The shows these kids (now Nobody's Fool Theatre) devise and perform working with SDT, are real and raw. It gives them a voice. These amazing shows impact every person involved especially their audiences - which are extremely important so that we can raise awareness on these issues, and ensure that *no* kid falls through the cracks.

This Company is critical to the future of so many - what these women do... it WORKS when nothing else does.

Regards

13th October 2020

To the Senate Inquiry

Hi, my name is . I'm a 17-year-old disadvantaged indigenous youth.

I'm writing to you because of the concern I have of hearing that our program with Somebody's Daughter Theatre may not keep going.

I am very fearful that if this program doesn't continue I will NOT be able to continue my studying. I will end up back on drugs, have no education and be back into a bad mindset. I and so many other students have benefited in multiple ways from SDT, including my brother and many of my friends that have come to watch the plays. Performing has opened my ability to so many opportunities, in ways that are unexplainable.

I'm doing things I never thought I could and it makes me happy.

Before I found SDT I was a drop out with multiple drug addictions and problems at home with the family, I felt I never would have a future. This program is so much more than 'drama' - it lets me express myself, and because of that I can perform and help the audience feel they not alone.

I'm also learning year 11 VCE and arts – drama, dance, visual arts, and film. Arts and drama in particular have let me express myself, taught me to deal with my anxiety, and working in team groups helps me get over my difficulty in speaking in large numbers and my fear of being in groups. This isn't just a 'program' like any other, it's a family of acceptance and love, we build as a family.

I really enjoy performing a lot. I've done a few plays so far; 'Geelong After Dark ' has got to be one of my favourites. I connected with my culture more and let other people have a view and outlook on how us aboriginals are. Because wanted to perform work connected with our culture SDT contacted aboriginal elder Norm Stanley and we all worked with Norm – and that was really exciting. Norm ended up performing with us and played the didgeridoo. We also looked into the past of the old Geelong Courthouse and did a few things on that.

Drama allows me to tell my story, it allows me to express myself and my feelings, for example I played a part in the performance, 'Submit She Whispers' with my brother about our struggle with drug addiction and past problems at home growing up rough. This also lets me be the voice for others. It has really opened me and others up for a fact. I've had multiple people, such as my friends and family - even STRANGERS, come up to me and tell me how the play we did at that time affected them and helped them grow as a person.

I think this would be such a devastating loss in the area especially for us, the kids who are lost and need guidance, the kids with no voice, the kids in need.

People like you need to know more about us and how much we need this program for our community and most importantly our future.

Thank you for your time

To the Senate Inquiry into the Arts

Hello,

My name is . I have been working with Somebody's Daughter Theatre company for the last six years.

I first met the company when I saw a production of theirs in Geelong. When I was sitting there watching that show, I would have never known that at that moment my life was about to change. I was so fascinated and liberated by the art form that I was witnessing. People like me. Young people like me. Who had also been dealt a shit hand in life? On stage, free and invigorating. It made me feel like I wasn't alone. I had spent my whole life at the ripe old age of fourteen, feeling like I was stuck in a bubble. And the more I tried to pop the bubble the stronger it became. My anxiety was at an all-time high, my feeling of self-worth an all-time low. I wasn't what society wanted.

Tired of suffocating under my own judgment...
I started to attend workshops, I started to move freely, I started exercising my muscle of the creative mind.
I was awoken.
For the first time in my life I felt my value.
My mellifluous soul was thundering and roaring, wanting to challenge myself, wanting to prove myself to the world.
I met a group of the most caring and loving humans I had ever met.
All of a sudden, I was doing things that I would of had a panic attack just thinking about.
My confidence was soaring, I was performing shows, I was telling story's that were deep and meaningful to me.
My education was ignited, I was learning, I was moving, I was free, I wasn't stagnant anymore.
I learnt the most important lesson throughout the last six years.
I learnt how to be vulnerable.
How to be comfortable and stable within this vulnerability.
How to be me.
The true me, not what I want to world to view me as, but who is hiding deep within the self-judgment, and shame.
Some people don't ever get to this place.
Sometime even I still forget this place of idle peacefulness.
But I always come back to it.
And I always learn something along the way. But that's just a snapshot of my story.
I'm living proof that THEATRE WORKS!
I would hope that every young person struggling out there, gets the same experience that I've been so blessed and privileged to have.

I've watched Somebody's Daughter Theatre change the lives of many. Because what they provide as a company, works. Mainstream school doesn't work for everyone, it certainly didn't work for me.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre provided me the opportunity to finish Highschool, something that I would have never thought possible. To graduate and really feel a sense of accomplishment.

I was then coached by SDT in my audition for the Victorian Collage of the Arts. And thanks to the company, I was successful, and now I'm currently in my second year of studying Acting.

This connection between human and art is primal in our DNA. Go back thousands and thousands of years, and you will encounter art, in many forms.

Right now, in today's culture and society I feel like a big part of that connection is lost.

And as a result, humans can often find themselves lost.

We need to reconnect back into that inner pathway, of self expression, critical analysis, to ask questions, to discover, to learn, to grow, to love, to feel pleasure in the uncertainty of life, to breathe.

To ask ourselves:

Why am I here?

Who am I?

What am I moving to?

What am I moving away from?

What can I do to live the best life I can?

In my case, and in many cases, these questions of life can be discovered through theatre, through music, through dance, through writing, through painting, through art.

Not necessarily finding these answers straight away, that would be absurd, but to be constantly asking ourselves them, to grow and move forward.

To sum up, some people just need the creative arts, especially when they feel lost. Somebody's Daughter gave me a life line.

Yours sincerely,

13 October 2020

Parliamentary Inquiry into benefits and impact of arts during COVID

Dear Inquiry Committee Members

I was first introduced to SDTC way back when I was a teenager, I was offered a ticket to see a performance at the Malthouse Theatre. It was the tale of love, loss, hope and light. It was clever and I was inspired. It was the real life episode of *Prisoner*, with less violence.

By the time I was 40 my life had amounted to nothing but disappointment and lots of tears and regrets, it was over. I dropped what ever I had left, and lost hope.

I am 55 now.

I was to become a hopeless heroin addict and over the years had lost much, gained a bucket load of regrets but ultimately maybe those stints in prison saved me because here I am, living amongst a community. I am independent of any judicial pressure. I have many important stories of hope and living to offer. I am the classic, '*if I can you can*' woman.

It was at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (Women's Prison) where I was encouraged by, and became enthralled with, the excitement, the joy and buzz that SDTC brought in with them through those gates. I became a member of the group. We sat in a circle and swapped stories of self-harm, addiction, sexual abuse and pain. It was a story of lost children and loneliness. I was encouraged to write, to speak up and the women heard me and valued what I had to say when no one else ever had.

Had I have not gone to prison I would never have been introduced to the arts. Being in those couple of plays made me feel proud. The audience was seeing what I saw, feeling what I felt. I was able to express my fears, hopes, dreams, grief and remorse. I felt remorse for a very long time. It never goes away. And the audience listened with empathy and gratitude and thanked me with tears in their eyes.

The most important role SDTC has played in my life is to have encouraged me to continue my writing. I did and am now chipping away at a B.A in Professional Writing at Swinburne University. I am still being heard. I am happy, I am healthy and am admired. In this role I can and do offer my life stories, my words, on behalf of and in unity with those woman who, like me, didn't find the world a place where they could become all that they could be.

Having been out of prison now for over 14 years, I have been invited by SDTC to work as an emerging artist and mentor to other women who have been through the system. This has been the most important project of all for me.

A time in my life where I can say I've made it and although still have lots to do, I am where I should be. I, along with other women post release, are devising a new play, yet the lack of funding to continue this magnificent and specific work may not continue. I for one cannot imagine a world without SDTC and I know of many, many more whose lives will be worse off without the family that is SDTC

I have also had the pleasure of working with the many lost and abandoned young people that have worked with SDTC and many of those kids have grown to become educated, proud, productive people who without the teachings, kindness and consistency the company have offered could have lived the next 30 years as I had, skirting around the edge of a world that just didn't want us.

I have found my purpose and maybe I will play a part in creating an awareness of women like us, women from the inside and one day those of us who have been relegated and neglected will be remembered as somebodies daughter.

This is my story and the impact that the arts have had – particularly by this unique community arts group that is SDTC. I only wish more people understood how invaluable this work is and what a tragic loss for the whole community is will be if they no longer have the funding to continue. I thank you very much for taking the time to listen.

Yours Faithfully,

Parliamentary Inquiry into benefits and impact of arts during COVID

11 October 2020

Dear Committee Members

My name is _____ and I'm a 23-year-old trainee artist currently working with Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company (SDTC). I'm writing to you to express my deep concern of the impact of Covid and lack of funding on the Company. As a young woman in the arts, I have trouble finding spaces and people I feel strengthened to work and create meaningful art with. My time working with SDTC has been just that and so much more, so you could imagine how saddened I feel at the very real possibility of it coming to an end.

My first connection with Somebody's Daughter Theatre, was in 2018 when I attended their play: *What Will It Take*, at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre devised by the women in prison. I was so moved by the performance, by women and their courage and bravery to stand on stage and tell their stories. I started attending the drama sessions in Geelong open to young people with the kids of Nobody's Fool Theatre. NFT is an arts-led partnership between SDT, and Newcomb Secondary College. I didn't know what to expect, I just knew that I wanted to be there, to be a part of creating something bigger than myself.

I continued working with Somebody's Daughter for the rest of 2018, then in 2019 as a trainee artist after receiving a professional development grant from the Australia Council for the Arts. I'm now employed full-time by Somebody's Daughter as a trainee artist, doing work that I love, work that I'm passionate about.

I initially thought it was ridiculous for someone like me to be doing something like this. I saw myself as only a writer. I felt safe within the confines of that title because I never needed to worry about the colour of my skin and foreignness of my name. As a writer, I found solace in the anonymity of it. However, you cannot be anonymous on stage in this work. I was frightened, but I kept coming back because I felt like there was a place for me. In the short time I've worked with SDT I've grown significantly not only as an artist, but I've also grown into someone I'm proud to be, and I'm just a tiny piece of the puzzle.

To step into a space where I'm nearly always the only black face, and to feel part of a group, to feel comfortable enough to share my culture; is no small feat. I can't tell you what it is about working with SDT that brings out the best parts of me, *all* of me, I just know that I won't stumble upon something like this again. There will never be a shortage of people like me. I consider myself lucky to have found this - or to have this opportunity find me. The reality of this situation and the threat this economic crisis poses for the future of SDT, is devastating. It feels like we are being robbed of the opportunity to be something more.

Yours sincerely