Submission - Inquiry into arts and cultural philanthropy

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Social Enterprise funding for Children's Authors & Illustrators in Schools

This submission addresses
2. Emerging structures and mechanisms for philanthropy and private support, digital fundraising platforms, impact investment and public-private co-investment

Background

I am a children's author, community development professional, and social entrepreneur.

Before moving to Cairns in 2021, I was co-founder and for 10 years CEO of 100 Story Building, a not-for-profit social enterprise based in Footscray supporting creativity, literacy and community connectedness for children and young people. Since inception in 2012, over 60,000 children and young people and counting have participated in 100 Story Building programs.

I am the author of the junior fiction series *Big Trouble* (Hardie Grant Children's Publishing), illustrated by New York Times bestseller Douglas Holgate. The first book in the series *Big Trouble with Angry Chairs* was shortlisted for the Readings Children's Prize, and has appeared on a number of 'best of' lists.

I now continue this work in Cairns, but as an individual rather than with an organisation, alongside my practice as children's author and artist. This work involves regular school visits, ranging from one-off presentations through to multi-year school partnerships focused on curriculum development and professional learning for teachers in creative thinking and literacy.

I am Vice President of the Primary English Teacher's Association of Australia (PETAA), a board member of the Education Equity Alliance, and a member of the Whitfield State School P&C. I am also a member of the Community Leadership Council for the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children (IDAC). Previously I was a co-founder and founding board member of the Social Enterprise Network of Victoria (SENVIC), and have served as a Selection Panel Member for the Dromkeen Medal and the Children's Book Fellowship, as well as a number of arts and cultural advisory committees.

Over the past 15 years I have worked closely with philanthropic foundations and individuals that fund for impact both in and through the arts, including the Ian Potter Foundation, Besen Family Foundation, Gandel Family Foundation, several funds managed by Perpetual Trustees, Tim Fairfax Family Foundation, Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Helen Mcpherson Smith Trust and Aesop Foundation, both in my time at 100 Story Building and as an individual artist.

My experience with philanthropy while leading a metropolitan-based not-for-profit with DGR and TCC is vastly different to my experience as an individual artist in a regional city nearly 2,000km from the nearest capital city.

Current state

A large number of children's authors and illustrators earn a significant proportion of their income through **school visits**. As well as supporting engagement with audience, building name recognition and promoting book sales, there are **direct**, **tangible** and **measurable** social outcomes of this work, including:

- children's increased engagement in education
- children more likely to read and write for pleasure
- children's development of skills and understandings in reading, writing, creative thinking
- contribution to grassroots development of the creative sector
- professional development for teachers and other educators

In doing this work and achieving these outcomes, these children's authors and illustrators are essentially operating as lots of individual micro **social enterprises**.

Add all these individual engagements together, and there is a significant **collective social impact** being achieved.

Proposal - social impact funding for children's authors and illustrators

Philanthropic funding could be directed in two key ways:

1. Building capacity on the SUPPLY side - authors & illustrators
A funding arrangement that provides **basic income funding for children's authors and illustrators (**similar to grants offered to established social enterprises for core funding - see this example, and this one, and this one) allowing authors and illustrators to work on their craft, based on their social impact work in schools, **particularly in regional/rural/remote schools, and low ICSEA schools**.

2. Building capacity on the DEMAND side - schools
Specific funding made available to schools (prioritising regional/rural/remote, where access to authors & illustrators is far harder) to do the following:

- engage authors and illustrators
- build their capacity to engage and work with authors and illustrators
- funding to purchase discounted copies of authors books for individual students ahead of school visits

The LitUp program is designed in part to address this, however my experience so far is that its focus has been more about bringing authors to regional audiences, many from metro areas, without enough emphasis on supporting regional schools to engage with more local authors (where there is potentially more long-term relationship building that could be done). But also, LitUp could just be boosted and supercharged.

With all this, the impact that is achieved by author engagement would be taken as given based on the substantial existing body of evidence, and individual authors and illustrators would not be required to prove the value of their engagements (just as individual staff within an social enterprise organisation are not required to manage individual evaluation programs) - rather, the collective impact would be light touch, connected to existing educational outcomes tracking, and considered as a whole.

I don't have the stats on how many authors and illustrators do how many school visits to how many schools/kids across how many regions each year, but I'm sure if it doesn't exist, it's gettable.

Regional arts experience

My experience in engaging with schools in regional areas (Cairns, Western Downs, Atherton Tablelands) has been starkly different to my experience engaging with schools in Melbourne.

In Melb, there is a whole long-standing ecosystem and infrastructure that contributes to a culture in schools of engaging with authors, having an understanding of how to make the most of visits, having a budget line. These things are far less prevalent and ingrained here in Cairns, and it makes my work as an author engaging with schools far more difficult and time-consuming.

Related proposals
- Activate more localized arts philanthropy. Make explicit Arts as a community development driver for impact in the impact frameworks of PLACE and IDAC, and use these to seed place-based collective funding initiatives (like a local PAC for local arts) that can fund directly to individuals as well as artists
- Do not assume that local 'leader' institutions are best placed to deliver impact. Arts funding for individuals in Cairns is largely delivered through the mechanism of council, forming a single channel that requires established relationships to be able to access small amounts of funding. Regional areas need more diversity of funding for individuals.
- There are structural changes needed in philanthropy to make funding accessible to individuals. I do not know how these should be done, but I know they can.
- A huge amount of cultural and community development work happens in schools - artists engage with teachers and cohorts of students to deliver tangible impact through the arts. Arts-focused philanthropy needs to acknowledge this, and make available arts funding that occurs in schools. There are currently grants that exclude school-based initiatives from applying that would otherwise meet every criteria.