



# 2021 REVIVE Evaluation Report Year One

## SOMEBODY'S DAUGHTER THEATRE COMPANY

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Report by  
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# Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company

## 2021 Evaluation Report

### REVIVE Project

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

### 1.1 WHO IS NOBODY'S FOOL THEATRE?

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

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

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

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

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

## NOBODY'S FOOL THEATRE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

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

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



**Painting by Nobody's Fool Theatre student 2021**

### Chasing Dreams

My painting represents hope in the darkness of night time. The fairy represents being able to fly away when sometimes that's what you need to do at night. The vines represent ropes and the negative things in life holding us back – the things I hope to fix. KB

## 2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Key features:

- respectful of the privacy and individual circumstances of each participant (appropriate)
- a process done *with* them not *to* them based on a relationship of mutual trust (participatory)
- the 'voice' of participants is the major feature of content
- an inclusive, non-judgemental process
- informed by the egalitarian principles of empowerment evaluation<sup>1</sup>

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection processes are used including:

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

The methodology employed is a combination of Narrative, Empowerment, Program Evaluation and Storytelling<sup>2</sup>.

Storytelling is becoming an increasingly accepted tool for evaluation. It is the basis of the Most Significant Change<sup>3</sup> model and many others. As a tool it enables more nuanced insights into the processes which lead to program outcomes.

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Fetterman, David M., Empowerment Evaluation, (2001) Sage Publications,

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

<sup>3</sup> Most Significant Change Technique, Davies R and Dart J (2002)

## 2.1 REPORT PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is twofold:

- to present a clear picture of how the Revive Project was delivered in 2021 and the outcomes achieved.
- to motivate action based on the information provided

As articulated by leading internationally recognised Researcher and Evaluator Professor Emeritus Richard Krueger.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

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

NFT students performing.



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

### 3. REVIVE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

*(from submitted Workplan)*

ACTIVITY	OUTCOME
<p>1. Education -Marginalised disadvantaged young people (12-18 years) from Greater Geelong re-engage in <b>arts-led fulltime education</b> at Nobody’s Fool Theatre (NFT). Teacher delivers Victorian education curricula at appropriate year levels. All students enrolled at Newcomb Secondary College.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 10 -15 young people enrolled per annum.</li> <li>● &gt; 75% attendance.</li> <li>● &gt; 75% successful completion school year.</li> <li>● &gt; 90% feel increase in confidence; 100% feel safe.</li> </ul>
<p>2. <b>Creative Arts program</b> delivered as core part of education curricula. Young people engage in intensive theatre, script-devising, music, dance, art, film skills workshops.</p> <p>Five sessions p/wk. Five Core-artists employed ongoing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● arts provide platform for vulnerable young people from economically/socially underprivileged areas to have their voice heard on issues that impact them.</li> <li>● creative skills development.</li> <li>● increased self-esteem, ability to work as team.</li> <li>● participate in live performances in Geelong and other areas.</li> </ul>
<p>3. <b>North East Victoria Outreach Program</b> - creative workshop delivery to communities in rural North East Victoria where partnerships already exist. The project will focus on empowering disadvantaged young people with the skills to create quality artistic works in their own towns</p> <p>Facilitated by team of 4 established SDTC artists and 4 emerging artists</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● young people have platform for their voice to be heard via theatre/digital media. Positive response to the performance.</li> <li>● &gt; 65% NE workshop participants see process through from workshop to completed performance.</li> </ul>
<p>4. <b>Training</b> and employment opportunities for young emerging artists with SDTC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● employment stability, intensive skills development and ongoing mentorship from flagship company enables safe passage for artists in their early careers. This investment also increases the resilience and sustainability of SDTC for the future.</li> </ul>
<p>5. <b>Creation of new performance</b> &amp; digital works with focus on youth mental health and other issues of concern as nominated by young people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Minimum 6 performances of new play over 2 years Geelong, Northeast Vic, Melbourne.</li> <li>● Motivate improved understanding of issues facing marginalised young people particularly those in regional and rural areas.</li> </ul>

## 4. ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

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

### NFT 2021 PARTICIPANT PROFILE

**86%** had been school refusers for more than 12 months upon entry to program.

**20%** displayed severe behavioural and anger issues at mainstream leading to regular suspensions

**30% (4)** students identified as Aboriginal.

**92%** students were from a low socio-economic status household.

**28%** reported being homeless at some stage in their life

**18%** have been in out of home or kinship care.

On average these young people had moved house/accommodation **seven** times in their short lives. High levels of residential mobility have been identified by the Australian Institute of Family Studies<sup>5</sup> as a key factor in early school leaving and student disengagement.

**80%** of students had dropped out/disengaged with mainstream school in Year 7, the remaining 20% had spasmodic attendance before exiting in Year 9 or 10.

**100%** reported feeling **unsafe** at mainstream school

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

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

Many of the young people have parents with mental health and/or addiction issues. It is not surprising that **30%** reported being carers for younger siblings. This is a major, ongoing issue.

In student survey at the end of 2021:

- 100% reported feeling **more confident**, happier and cared about since coming to NFT.
- 90% felt they now worked well as part of a team.
- 90% responded that they had discovered skills they never knew they had.
- 90% had goals to complete Year 12, and 10% to secure an apprenticeship/traineeship.
- 100% reported feeling **safe**, connected and improvement in wellbeing at NFT

### 4.1 ACTIVITY ONE: NFT EDUCATION OUTCOMES

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

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

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/statistics> accessed Dec, 2019 The Mental Health Of Children And Adolescents. Report on The Second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey Of Mental Health And Wellbeing. Canberra: Department of Health.

In 2021, 14 students were enrolled in NFT including 9 new enrolments. (Of the 3 who left during the year, one relocated to a new area for kinship care, one returned to mainstream school and one didn't complete due to severe mental ill health episodes).

100% of the core group of eleven students successfully completed their year level studies

Three students successfully completed Year 12 after three years of attending NFT.

Year Level	No Students	Successful Completion
Year 8	3	3/3
Year 9	4	4/4
Year 10	1	1/1
Year 12	3	3/3

## Learning and Covid

Remote Learning during Covid, posed a significant challenge for NFT students cohort. In regional Geelong – the lockdown period was shorter in 2021 than in Melbourne but it was still very significant. NFT was in lockdown for a week of Term 2 and most of Term 3 returning only in the second week of Term 4.

School *attendance* is a key indicator of NFT student progress, given their histories as either serial truants or long-term non-attenders,

- Average attendance face-to-face learning - 88%
- Average attendance on-line learning during regional Vic lockdown 26%. (A student is recorded as attending on-line if they log in to daily remote learning session. It doesn't mean they stayed on-line or completed work.

Students were asked to complete a survey about their experience of the two modes of learning.

### What did you LIKE about on-line learning?

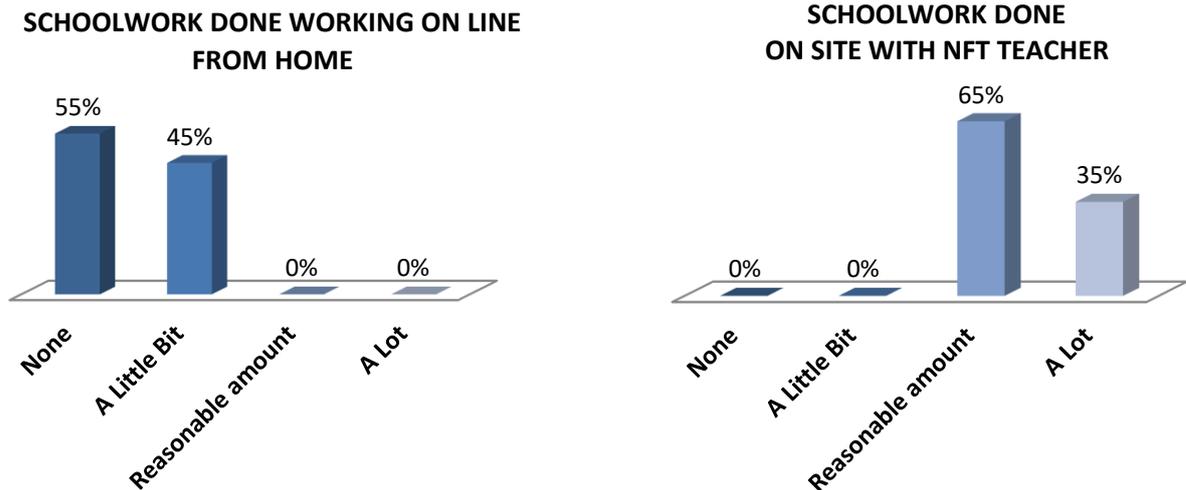
- Nothing (7 responses)
- I didn't like anything about on-line learning
- Being able to stay in bed all day.
- I'm lazy so I had more time to do nothing.
- What's there to like?
- Sleeping in.

### What did you DISLIKE about on-line learning?

- Was too easy for me to get distracted at home and not to work.
- Wi fi complications. Bad connection.
- Couldn't focus.
- I got worried that I just wouldn't get the work done that I knew I had to get done to get my year 12.
- Robotic sense and lack of feeling that the work I did was legitimate.
- Everything. (3 responses)
- Teacher not being able help me properly.
- Didn't want to turn camera on.
- Too noisy.



Students were asked about the **amount** of schoolwork done.



The above charts show that the amount of work completed almost reversed.

Students were invited to give a brief explanation as to why it was hard to get work done at home.

- Just too hard at my place. No one to help. Nowhere quiet.
- Because of poor Wi-Fi and complications
- Missed the social connection
- Wasn't motivated.
- Couldn't focus.
- I can't work well at home because it is always loud.
- I don't have a good attention span.
- At the very beginning I was in the middle of trying to find somewhere to live and then when I did find somewhere – there were just too many distractions.
- No one at home to help. Always playing video games. No motivation.
- I had no one pushing me to work.
- So many people were walking in and out and talking and yelling it gets so much you give up.
- I'd balance the laptop on my knee with my two brothers nearby playing video games on X Box or just jumping around. I had nowhere to work so I'd give up easily.

Most NFT students come from a low socio-economic status family, and ALL have significant risk factors - combinations of mental ill health issues, family dysfunction, histories of violence and abuse, drug and substance abuse, not to mention many having roles as carers for younger siblings, in the absence of adequate parental supervision.

As one NFT student expressed *"On-line learning at home doesn't suit me and a lot of NFT kids. A lot of us come here to get AWAY from home."*

On-line learning at home doesn't suit me and a lot of NFT kids. A lot of us come here to get AWAY from home

Given the lack of a supportive parent, the key to maintaining the engagement to the program was the flexibility, perseverance, and commitment of NFT staff.

NFT Teacher: *"It's very clear that to succeed at home - you need to be self-motivated, have reliable technology that you know how to use and have a supportive home environment. These are three factors that our students do not have."*

ALL NFT staff had to work extremely hard to retain a connection with the young people during remote learning periods, as they had done in 2020. In fact, as more Covid disruptions occurred the harder it became to retain engagement.

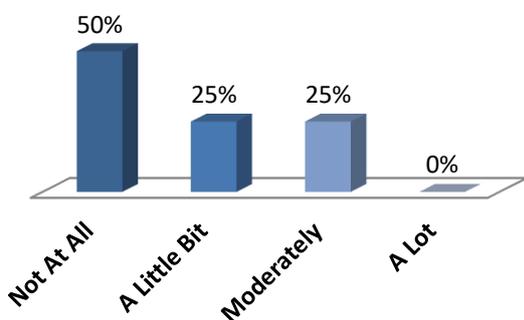
NFT Teacher: *"I don't think this disrupted year has been easy for anyone. Each lockdown - the engagement dropped. More and more. I could safely say in the last lockdown very little work was done at all. We would still have the morning online check-in and if they didn't check in, myself and SDT artists would 'chase' them. They knew we would keep ringing them until contact was made."*

The fact that connection was maintained is a key to the success of the year.

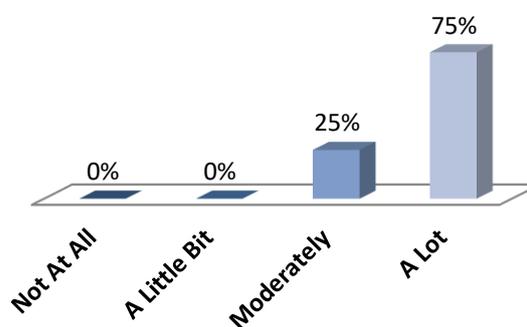
When face to face learning resumed week 2 of Term 4, students reengaged immediately.

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

**Importance of Education Before NFT**



**Importance of Education NOW**



NB: Figures relate to in person learning (Term1, 2, and most of Term 4).

For most NFT students and other young people like them, **HOME is not a safe space. Mainstream school has NOT been a SAFE space** – there they have felt bullied, judged and unable to function in large classes.

Most importantly, **Nobody's Fool Theatre is a SAFE space to come to.**

### Three students completed Year 12

An educational outcome highlight was the successful completion of Year 12 by three students who had spent the past three to four years at NFT. These young people had been mainstream school refusers in Years 7 and 8 and came from backgrounds of severe trauma.

#### Student One - KS

K was referred to NFT as a 14-year-old through a local Koorie education engagement officer in 2017. She had only attended a week or two of Year 7 at mainstream school before she dropped out completely when she had just turned 13. K presented at NFT well below benchmark in standardised assessments for both literacy and numeracy, with a history of poor school engagement. This was consistent with her childhood experiences of family violence and drug use, including various periods in out of home and kinship care.

NFT quickly became the safe home base that K never had. While K continued to find school and concentration difficult, she showed incredible persistence – empowered by her evolving skills and self-confidence found in the drama program.

K completed her Yr 12 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning in 2021 becoming the first member of her family to graduate high school.

NFT Teacher: *“If there was such thing as a peer reviewed standardised test for resilience, K would be in the top percentile.”*

In 2022, K has enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship Certificate course in Building and Construction.

### Student Two - HW

H first arrived at Nobody’s Fool Theatre aged 13 with a history of abuse, intergenerational poverty, family violence and substance addictions.

She missed almost a year of schooling in 2019 before reengaging in NFT in 2020. Despite incredible home life barriers, H committed to completing Year 11. With the intensive wellbeing support from Somebody’s Daughter and teacher scaffolding, H persisted through periods of remote learning (without reliable home internet or a quiet place to study) to complete the year successfully. She travelled daily from Werribee, consisting often of a walk/bus/train.

In 2021 H’s attendance and focus was almost unrecognisable compared to the young girl we first met.

H strongly developed her performance skills and has become a leader for not only NFT students but in the program’s outreach project with other at-risk young people in non-mainstream settings.

She had a lead role in NFT’s new work “When the Light Went Walking”.

In 2021, she successfully completed her Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, including VCE Drama Units 3 & 4 and 90 hours of a Certificate II in Volunteering.

In 2022, H has enrolled in a Certificate 4 Community Services course.



KS & HW at their Year 12 graduation ceremony, December 2021

### Student Three - ET

E had been out of mainstream school for some time, after trying two different secondary schools before enrolling at NFT. There is a background of serious mental illness in the family and incidents of trauma. Suffering mental illness and carrying the weight of multiple adverse childhood events, managing a full day in a mainstream setting became untenable. Because of NFT, E was able to complete her Victorian Certificate of Education to attain an ATAR.

The flexibility, safe and reliable NFT support base, was a foundation upon which E could manage term by term to complete Year 11 and 12. The growth in her confidence and self-esteem was really highlighted in her Unit 4 VCE Drama solo performance examination.

The drama aspect of the program gave ET not only a huge amount of confidence but provided purpose for her whole education.

*"It made me realise that what you do on stage can really send a message .. I mean when you are performing you think people only think about it at the moment but it can even make a lasting impact. We saw that on our tour in northeast Victoria. Kids realised that our story was theirs too and it gave them hope. That was amazing! ...and that made me realise that we are doing something that matters. The drama has given me such purpose. It's much better than mainstream school where what you do doesn't matter to anyone except your grades. In school you SHOULD be doing stuff that matters."*

ET has successfully gained a place at RMIT University to undertake a Bachelor of Arts (Creative Writing) in 2022.

## 4.2 ACTIVITY TWO: CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM OUTCOMES

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

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

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

Maud Clark CEO:

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

*Theatre is about voice. This is very important especially for those individuals who are totally outside of the polite normative structures. Theatre enables you to have your own voice, not someone speaking for you, about you and defining who you are, be it workers, lawyers, judges, psychologists, policy makers - but speaking your own truth and being heard. It's not about moving away from who you are but claiming it and finding that there are thousands of others that are not only interested but many who have lived it also. It is about connection with a positive supportive group - where you are working for something that is bigger than you (a performance) and is for benefit. It has a positive outcome not a negative one."*

After a very disrupted 2020, intensive arts workshops began in 2021 for NFT students with a view to two major outcomes:

- developing a new performance work to be performed publicly to a live audience
- leading a creative outreach program for other disadvantaged young people in North -East Victoria (Activity Three).

Improvisations, song writing and script writing workshops in Terms 1 & 2 generated ideas for a new play which explored amongst other issues, the theme of consent.

However, the optimism of a more 'normal year' fell away in June as Covid restrictions were reintroduced. Plans for collaborative development and performance of a work with North East students were shelved for the year.

Hands-on creative workshops for NFT students in Geelong in Term 3 had to be abandoned for 8 weeks.

This makes the outcomes actually achieved quite extraordinary.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA

- **126** creative workshops with NFT students in drama, music, movement, digital media and visual arts
- **34** workshops with other secondary students in at risk outreach program (Wangaratta/Benalla)
- **8** live performances
- **1** art exhibition
- **2** videos
- **158** page views/digital downloads

Audience for Live Performances included: (NB: numbers restricted due to Covid)

- 32 educators/health workers
- 96 students
- 140 community members

When NFT students returned to on-site learning in week 2 of Term 4, SDTC knew after two years of disruption that they needed to work towards a full-scale performance (be it a shorter play than was originally envisioned). This was critical to regain the focus and the energy of the program.

Maud Clark:

*"There is so much in being able to do that show that sums up our Company. We saw a window of opportunity. We knew the kids really wanted to do a performance. We knew there was a whole lot of material that was garnished before we stopped for Covid that was not going to come together unless we had that push for performance. So in deciding to go for it we knew it was going to be very very demanding and very very intensive. We also knew that the outcomes would far outweigh all those challenges.*

*It was also important for us as artists to remind us of what's unique about this Company. It was great for us as artists practice what our craft is after the past two years of stop, start, stop, start."*

The two main activities of this program work hand in hand with each other - education and the creative workshops and productions. The artists support the teacher, and the teacher supports the artists. It is the creative arts led by Somebody's Daughter Theatre (SDT) which is the glue that binds this program together.

**NFT Teacher:**

*"The whole energy level lifts when the kids are working towards a performance. I have to say it's the zest that SDT brings to the space - the energy. It's really hard to quantify that and explain to others what that means .. **but it's their creative energy which holds this program together. I'm sure of that.**"*

**NFT Students' perspectives:**

*HS: "That's the thing with coming here and doing the drama - its helped me open up a lot. Really helped me deal with my anxiety. Like the drama. It's not just the drama. Like it actually helps me the person and my depression. Like you get up there on stage and there's people in front of you but you just have to do it and then it just shows you - once you do it. It shows you - you can do it. That's huge. If I can do that I can do other things as well."*

*ET: "It's the drama and stuff that really gives us confidence. It gives us the balance to do our education. It's an alternative school for kids like us who can't do mainstream style learning and the drama and art flows through to how we do with the academic work."*

*JB: "I'm hopeless trying to get motivated or concentrate with schoolwork. Now back doing the drama - I'm much better. It gives my mind something else to set on and to focus on that so as I don't keep thinking about all the other bad things that are going on."*

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

#### **NFT Parent Perspectives:**

*KB Parent: "He's making the biggest progress I've seen in a long time. Probably more in the past few months than the past few years - definitely. It's the **drama** that does it. He loves it - the fact that he has **a voice and he is being heard**. That's given him more desire to express himself and be included. He definitely feels he has a voice now."*

*CM parent: "I look at her with such pride and just can't believe that this young person who couldn't leave the house two years ago is now up on stage in front of all these people performing and singing and smiling and happy. Just the fact that she is going to school at NFT every day now. She's not scared to leave the house. She gets up. She's excited. She can't wait to go."*

*It's the drama that really gives us confidence. It gives us the balance to do our education.*



### 4.3 ACTIVITY THREE: NORTH EAST OUTREACH PROGRAM

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

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

Regular contact between the Principals and SDTC was maintained, and workshops are planned to resume in 2022.

This is a report on the progress to date.

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#### WHAT HAPPENED?

SDTC and NFT were due to return to North East Victoria in 2020 at the request of local communities, (after highly successful tours in 2018, 2019). Unfortunately, this was cancelled – due to Covid-19. Poor youth mental health was already a major concern in these communities, exacerbated by Covid and the ongoing economic and social impacts of the 2020 bushfires.

The significant point of difference in this outreach project as compared to previous tours, was that these marginalised communities were to work with the SDTC's experienced and emerging artists along with some NFT students, to create their **own** quality performance/music/digital resources based on issues defined by **them** as of critical importance.

In February 2021, SDTC CEO Maud Clark and Artistic Director Kharen Harper met with the principals of two alternative learning settings – Borinya Community Partnership, Wangaratta and Benalla Flexible Learning Centre. Both schools offer tailored programs for young people whose needs are not met by mainstream education or training settings.

At this initial consultation, general issues and concerns were discussed in the context of developing a program/timetable/potential outcomes that could work for all.

Common issues raised as potential foci for workshops included increased levels of anxiety/ depression and sexuality. A relatively high proportion of young people in these settings were contemplating or undergoing gender transition.

Workshops were carried out over 5 weeks in the two alternative school settings with the project gathering momentum and focus. Then the Victorian Covid lockdown was announced.

Attempts at keeping connection via phone/ZOOM were made. However, student absences amongst other digital issues made this problematic.

Maud Clark:

*"In terms of the drama work, we were not at the stage where the kids could have done a ZOOM voice session or drama session. We tried the ZOOM check in but there were issues at the other end. The individuals we are working with are volatile in terms of what's going on in their lives and their mental health on any given day. Sometimes stuff just happens so everything can go out the window. And that is why the regular face to face contact is so important."*

When asked "Will this big interruption impact the project much?" Maud replied:

*"It may in terms of what we end up getting together this year, but the important thing is that trust has been established. We have the history of working with those schools before and we have come back. I think that's an important thing."*

*They know that we come back - we don't just drop and run. And look - the Covid interruption has been terrible, but these kids are used to that kind of thing but what they are not accustomed to is when people hang in there."*

## **BENALLA FLEXIBLE LEARNING CENTRE**

SDTC and NFT visited Benalla Flexible Learning Centre just before the end of Term 1, with a short performance followed by workshops. The purpose was to reconnect with the school community after working closely together in 2019 and stimulate interest in participating in the new longer-term project starting in Term 2.



**Principal BFLC:** "SDTC is providing another very healthy medium whereby the students can tell their story and express what's going on in their lives. We know just how successful it's been - because every student who went to watch has come back and participated in the first workshop after the break. And now we are going into the second workshop after lunch, and they are back to participate in that as well. And honestly - that is pretty amazing."

**Staff member:**

*"I think it was fantastic. It was great to see some of our more challenging students getting involved in something that was way out of their comfort zone and interacting with people they haven't met before. It was really fabulous to see and really fun for all of us to participate in as well. There was just great positive energy."*

It was great for the Nobody's Fool Young people too - especially those new to the group. When asked about challenges and learnings:

*"I learnt how to not be as shy and be more social. I talked to four people that were students there and we had a lot in common - I never find people that I have things in common with."*



## WORKSHOPS TERM 2

Some of the keenest participants also happened to be those who had to travel 1 - 2 hours by train and bus to school and were limited by country transport timetables. There were also significant episodes of mental ill health. Both of these issues led to a 'staggered start' but a core group of 6 - 8 enthusiastic students was established. Maud Clark:

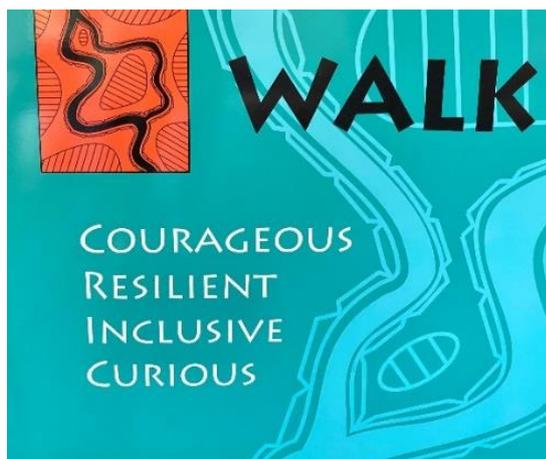
*"With one thing and another - we haven't had enough **consistent** time at Benalla. There's no doubt about the energy and there's no doubt that there is trust but in terms of our understanding of the best way to work, we are still in the 'finding out' time.*

*We had been working on performance skills sessions with them and discovering students' various levels of literacy through reading of existing scripts from Oscar Wilde's 'Importance of being Earnest' to scenes from previous Nobody's Fool Theatre plays. The next workshops planned before the end of term was to bring up the Geelong NFT kids for developmental workshops for the new script."*

Then Covid struck. The next stage of bringing NFT students to Benalla is planned for 2022.

## BORINYA WANGARATTA COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

As a framework for learning and school culture, Borinya is using the theme of WALK (moving forward) within a strong local indigenous context



**Courageous** – dare to learn, learn to change

**Resilient**- being ready to try again when we are challenged

**Inclusive** – we work together to embrace and celebrate our differences

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

SDTC artists used this as an initial focal point for workshops that began in Term 2.

### WORKSHOP SUMMARY

There were 7 days of workshops at Borinya. The first day saw maximum involvement of Borinya staff and students in a range of activities to introduce 'what was possible.' Four SDT artists led the day along with the support of several current NFT students, one former HighWater Theatre student (Huddo) and NFT teacher Emma.

It was a great day of intermingling of alternative settings – geographically hundreds of kilometres distant from other. As one teacher expressed "It had a wonderful vibe." The positivity, the energy was palpable. This was epitomized in the impromptu basketball 'match' between the two groups at lunchtime.



Borinya students interested and able (*some constrained by VCE/VET/VCAL timetable commitments*) in continuing longer term with the project attended on the next 4 occasions – roughly one day per week. A core group of 8-10 students have committed – developing drama and script-writing skills and contributing ideas for performance/film/songs.

Workshop photos



## REFLECTIONS AFTER FIRST 2 DAY INTENSIVE

### Principal

*"There's a couple of kids that were really anxious about being involved but they came out at the end absolutely loving it and so pleased that they put themselves into it."*

### Welfare Co-ord

*"Their response at the end of the day with students' reflections was ample to see that they had well and truly really connected to this new experience in the most positive way."*

### Sample Student responses

What did you think it would be like before you began the workshops?	What are your impressions now you have participated?
I thought I'd be put on the spot and judged.	Everything was explained and everyone was encouraging and supporting
I was scared and shy	Amazed it's really fun
Nervous	I want to do more
I thought I might be judged and put on spot to do stuff	Really good and I would love to do it more

## SUBSEQUENT WORKSHOPS

There were 14 further sessions on 5 individual days following the initial intensive. This included workshops in music, song-writing and particularly drama. A core group of eight students attended most sessions. They were a varied group in terms of ages, literacy levels, interests and backgrounds.

### Maud Clark:

*"There were two things running in tandem with these young people. There was the skills development which was very much about the group working together and us getting to know them and them getting to know us. Here we were working on scenes from previous Nobody's Fool plays to give them some performance experience.*

*And secondly, they had started to express the stories they wanted to tell.*

*We had established a real relationship and a plan for moving forward when Covid lockdown hit. Our short term aim was to enable the students to perform short pieces which would also be part of a song and a music video. We've talked about little scenarios like foster care and the issues with the system from their viewpoint and also how unsafe they can feel in their own community. Despite the best intentions - Covid meant we could not return to Borinya in 2021."*

Sam Reed, SDTC's digital artist, led a series of workshops in animation with one student, who had a history of being largely non-verbal and with high social anxiety.

### Sam Reed:

*"Prior to my working with him, Clay\* a student at Borinya, had expressed an interest in filmmaking, and had created a basic plasticene animation of an astronaut floating in space in his art class. Clay\* has extreme social anxiety, and finds it very hard to work in groups, or even to look someone in the eye. I began to do lessons with him, hoping to draw him out, and give him more skills in animation/filmmaking.*

*In our first session Clay did a pencil sketch of a character, and we talked about what we could achieve over the next months. He seemed more interested in plasticine than drawn animation, so we decided to put his character to the side and focus on an animation of the four indigenous logos that represent Borinya's ethos; Courageous, Resilient, Curious and Inclusive.*

*Apart from a platypus, the logos are quite abstract, so these were good for teaching him simple animation techniques. Clay really came out of his shell in his first animation with me - growing a plasticine line from a dot, then flipping it into a circle. I was quite surprised when he asked if we should employ "follow through" a sophisticated animation technique where a motion goes past its final resting place, then flips back, like a spring, giving life to the movement. After he had completed the animation, he was quite excited when we imported the images into the computer then played them back on the screen.*

*The next time I came to Borinya, Clay showed me various animations he had created on his iPad, using the pixilation technique in which you take stills of people in various positions and put them together to create movement. For example a person can be made to glide across the screen. Clay was excited to share these, and I was impressed with the quality of his work.*

*It was really rewarding working with Clay, watching as he relaxed over the sessions. As we progressed, he had even become quite chatty, in stark contrast to the shy, anxious person I first encountered.*

*After many interruptions from the Covid outbreak, we managed to get together on line over a few more weeks and animate the three other logos, including the platypus swimming. We then imported them into Adobe After Effects. Clay was extremely interested in how the software worked, so he took the controls and I guided him in how to put them together and add text and camera movement.*



*Sam and Clay working on animation*

*Unfortunately, Covid halted our momentum but hopefully when we resume face to face we can complete the final touches and plan for a launch at Borinya."*

*\*Clay is not his real name.*

## **NOBODY'S FOOL THEATRE STUDENT OUTCOMES**

Several Nobody's Fool students travelled to the North East to participate and assist with workshops.

There were many positive outcomes of this:

### **Maud Clark – CEO:**

*"When you're away and you're together all the time there are some real positives. It allowed us to establish a real group solidarity again. This is so important as it was so stripped away during the months of lockdown in 2020."*

And for all the NFT students who participated it was overwhelmingly positive – despite the hesitancy of some. For half of the young people, it was the first time they had travelled outside of Geelong.

### **NFT Student Comments:**

*"I'm very grateful for the opportunities to do this stuff and all the support from everyone."*

*"I'm appreciative of the opportunity to show other kids that they aren't by themselves and there are others like them."*

*"I got over my anxiety and socialised with new people."*

*"Talking to new people was challenging and being a part of the group for the first time was hard because I am super shy. But I did it. I surprised myself."*

*"I was able to be comfortable instead of feeling weird."*

### **Teacher Emma**

*"I was probably most surprised by the extent to which the NFT students found meeting and working with new students a motivating factor. Whilst I knew it would be exciting, I think I underestimated the power in bringing students from different towns together - mostly in terms of generating enthusiasm and eliciting leadership skills from the NFT students."*

*"You see the arts really boosting feelings of inclusion and connection in a big way. It's like "I belong here - I'm part of something big" not "I'm just part of a classroom. I'm part of a Theatre Company. This is my place." That going away and having days together strengthens that sense of belonging more quickly than anything else I can imagine."*

## **ADDITIONAL NORTH EAST VICTORIA OUTREACH PROJECT**

When word spread around that Somebody's' Daughter Theatre were going to be in Wangaratta, an additional request for a creative partnership came from the Wangaratta Community Digital Hub. This organisation, in collaboration with Merriwa Industries - a supported employment social enterprise – had secured funding for a social inclusion pilot project. This was intended to skill vulnerable young people, employed at Merriwa to create short films/animations as training resources for Merriwa's all abilities employees. They asked SDTC artists to provide sessions of skill development for these young adults. By the 26<sup>th</sup> May, there had been 3 meetings and a workplace tour with all key stakeholders and potential participants of the Merriwa Industries project. Animation sessions were scheduled to begin first week of June at the Wangaratta Community Hub. These of course were postponed.

Thankfully due to some easing of Covid restrictions and after all relevant personnel were vaccinated-approval was granted by the project partners for SDT Filmmaker/Digital Artist, Sam Reed to resume his work with Merriwa participants in term 4. All participants were over the age of 18 years.

### **Wangaratta Digital Hub & Project Coordinator Amanda Aldous:**

*"This pilot project worked with a group of all-abilities young people to co-design an innovative and potentially replicable program which provided access to real world digital skill development opportunities in a safe and supported environment. The young people gained foundation digital skills in industry standard design programs (and soft skills) to improve work- readiness and community connections. Exposure to the digital media professional from SDTC encouraged aspirational thinking about pathways into a range of technology-based roles. Many successful outcomes were achieved. The products (two training videos) are highly innovative and a demonstration of the potential for this format of training."*

*Sam brought the highest of levels of expertise to the project. His vast experience working with young people enabled him to engage the participants and establish a trusting and respectful learning environment. Sam also demonstrated an extraordinary level of commitment to the project through his willingness to adapt to the often-changed arrangements brought about by the rolling lockdowns. "*

**Merriwa Participant Comments:**

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

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

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



**Sam Reed SDT Artist comments:**

*"Although twelve staff members from Merriwa were involved in some form or other, two young people, M and S, were the constants who did most of the work. Although they are listed as 'special needs' workers, they are both very bright young people with varying skill sets, their 'needs' being more social than physical or mental.*

*M and S were both brimming with ideas during the writing process. As M had some previous experience with animation and voice acting work, we decided on a photo montage technique, in which S, M and a third person, J, performed in front of a green screen, and we superimposed their faces onto virtual puppets we created in Digital Hub's computers.*



*Together we produced two videos, Stay Alert - Don't Get Hurt, and The Importance Of Personal Protective Equipment. It was a lot of fun to see M and S learn new skills in the Adobe Creative Suite, and to watch their pride as the videos came to life. M's skills as an animator really came to the fore, and S was constantly suggesting improvements to the content of the videos.*

*As a member of Somebody's Daughter Theatre, I felt honoured to be able to work with the people of North East Victoria, and I look forward to seeing everyone involved when the videos are launched in 2022."*



#### 4.4 ACTIVITY FOUR: TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

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

In 2021, this involved two of the older NFT Year 12 students taking on leadership/ emerging artist roles. Given, the considerable amount of work SDTC does with young people, it is important the older experienced professional artists of the Company nurture some younger artists. This not only assists with their ability to 'connect' with teenagers but also strengthens the ongoing resilience and sustainability of the Company for the future.

Maud Clark, CEO:

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

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

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

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

*We can help them grow as community artists with the skills to know their own boundaries and work within that. Yes - they are going to bring a young voice and their lived experience - and of course SDT is going to benefit from that but it is also taking what we are committed to, to another level.*

*K has shown a huge amount of self-understanding, so has H and if they are going to bring that degree of self-understanding to work with other young people - that is powerful stuff. There is a huge benefit in the drama process where you are always talking about things and pulling things apart.*

*They will be a huge benefit for the Company. They have developed to the point where they have earned this. It's not tokenistic - it's just the most obvious thing to do with these 2 young people.*

*It will have huge positive ramifications for us and huge positive ramifications for them."*

These two young women assisted with the leadership of workshops in North East Victoria and took on roles of responsibility during the rehearsal and production of the new play performed in December.

One of these young women HW (17 year old) with a long history of drug addiction, trauma and severe anxiety reflects:

*"I'm really enjoying it. It's kind of work experience almost. If I were to go out and do something else, I would have this past experience of a leadership role with some responsibility.*

*You can see how the arts helps ... the drama. When we first went into the school (Borinya-Wangaratta) they were all timid and shy but once you get into the drama, they all expressed themselves. They feel better .... it's like you can see a relief because they've been able to tell their story.*

*They've been able to explain it to someone who understands - to people who have experienced it before. So this drama is very very important in my opinion.*

*And I just I love helping others. It makes you feel good that you can do it. The comparison to when I was on ice, like I wouldn't help other people! I was doing bad with people. But now I'm more mature and I'm helping other people do good things. I'm really learning to listen.*

*Coming away like this to Wangaratta, has so helped my anxiety. Being away from what I'm typically used to is so good for me.*

*When you have anxiety you are trapped in it. You just want to hide. And you've got to take baby steps to get out of it ... like even just coming here to Wangaratta such a long way from home - that's BIG!!! But in doing that, I've helped myself realise that it's possible to make a big change. it really is.*

*I really now can see what's possible."*

NFT Teacher Emma reflected on her observations of these young women taking on leadership roles:

*"It's actually really hard for them to step up.. and there is some hidden resistance there... but when they actually do it - it's so worth it. They get that "Wow, I really did that" kind of feeling.*

*They always come back with that sense of satisfaction, of achievement, of self-worth. And that confidence flows on to other things in their life."*

More opportunities for young emerging artists are planned for 2022.

*"I've helped myself realise that it's possible to make a big change. it really is. I really now can see what's possible. "*

## 4.5 ACTIVITY FIVE: CREATION OF NEW WORKS

Activity 5 involves the creation of new performance/digital works. Students are given opportunities to present their own stories and ideas to audiences consisting of mainstream students, teachers, agency workers, political representatives, family members and the general community.

Four digital works were created – three in North East Victoria reported on in Activity 3. These will be launched in 2022. NFT drama improvisations early in the year led to the generation of a theme for a song *Too Young To Be Old*. Some of the lyrics were developed via ZOOM sessions during lock down.

When the original song was finally completed it was recorded by SDTC Music Director Justin.

Extract of the lyrics devised by the students:

*I'm losing light and I'm only 15  
I should be much older  
The things I've seen  
At home, online, I've lost my carefree  
Am I too young or too old am I stuck in  
between?  
Am I too young to be old  
These are the questions  
That my little hands hold.*



This was followed by creation of a film script. Students were involved throughout the process of filming and editing the music video. There have been screenings at schools and hundreds of views online.

Click this link to view video. <https://vimeo.com/678430207>

Despite major Covid disruptions for more than two months, SDTC presented a number of live performances with limited audience numbers (health restrictions).

In the first half of the year, four of those were 'workshop' performances. (That is, presentation of scene/s in process of development for new play. Presented with minimal set/staging).

Teachers and welfare support staff from partner school, Newcomb Secondary College viewed one of the workshop performances at the end of Term 2. (pictured)



100% rated the workshop performance as excellent and relevant to their school community.

TEACHER: *"The performance gave me goosebumps. Absolutely amazing. I am privileged to be in your audience."*

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: *"There were a number of young people in this whom I have worked with at school over the course of this year. At school, they often struggled to attend, to engage with their learning, and to find their own authentic voice. However, seeing these same individuals in this performance left me feeling immense satisfaction and joy at how comfortably they presented, how confident they looked and how perfectly accepting they seemed of their own unique story."*

*This performance inspired a number of conversations back at school. It left teachers reflecting on the incredible effect that the program has on young people, who would otherwise be at such great risk of falling through the cracks."*

## WHEN THE LIGHT WENT WALKING



An intensive Term 4 culminated in the final scripting of a new play, 'When the Light Went Walking'.

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

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

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

A Geelong warehouse space was hired for the full production involving professional lighting, sound and stage design. This added another dimension.

The space was transformed for the public performances.

Maud Clark CEO: *"You've got the whole thing of working in a disused space - which somehow really was so appropriate. There was no capability to black out the whole area - it was like bringing things out into the light."*



*Rehearsal in Warehouse at Cricket Studio*



*Transformation to full stage/set*



Four public performances were presented over three days.

Audiences included the young peoples' families and friends, teachers, Principals, health and welfare workers and general public.

Strict Covid restrictions were adhered to with all audience members needing to show vaccination status and sign in. There was a limit of 50 people per show.

An exhibition of students' art was also on display



## AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO PERFORMANCE

Audience members completed feedback sheets and some were interviewed.

Their responses clearly indicate the impact of the show.

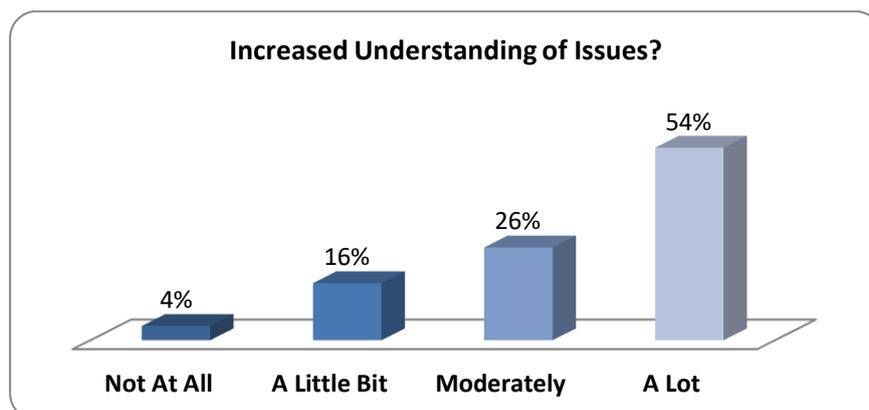
Sample responses:

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

- I thought the performance was brilliant – very powerful and very real. I felt very connected to the teens. (56 Education Support)
- The performance was amazing. I felt alive and right there in the moment. I felt the emotions – I felt the stories. (CEO Not for Profit)
- Brilliant show. Feel sad and a bit angry that we can't do better for the kids that need us. (63 Retired)
- So impressed by the way the kids expressed the way they feel so that the adults could see and understand more. (55 Self Employed)
- The whole performance impacted me. Demonstrated/portrayed critical issues of sexism and racism accurately. (34 Disability Support Worker)
- Fantastic. Sensitive cultural elements created great depth and connection. Songs. Beautiful. (46 Occupational Therapist)

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

4% Not at all    16% A little bit    26% Moderately    54% A lot



**Please explain your response:**

- I was aware of the issues but this was a very powerful way to represent them. Made me feel about them more keenly. (Welfare Support Worker)
- It was very informative in a very engaging way. I learnt heaps. (18)
- A lot. Message of healthy boundaries for women was powerful. (51 Personal Care Worker)
- Living and working in an Aboriginal organisation – it explains the issues I see every day. (34 Disability Support Worker)
- Know it all from my life. It was truth triggering but honest. (31 Support Co-ord for Aged Care & Disability)
- I live with all of the above daily! (37 Mental Health Clinical Support Worker)
- Understanding that regardless of age – some may have lived very traumatising lives. (21 Retail Warehousing)
- To be mindful of consent, anxiety – other people’s lives and boundaries. I felt empowered. (Chef)

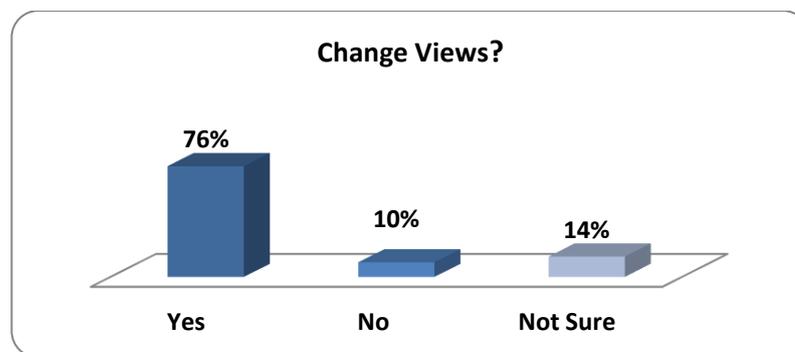


- Powerful reminder of how those challenges can be affecting a young person even if they are presenting as ‘okay’ on the surface. (38 Assistant Principal)
- A lot!!!! Showed how each person can be different but still the same people. (16 Student)
- I work with teens so am quite familiar. The resi care parts were quite brilliant in showing all the facets. (43 Education Support)
- It made me think of things from a different perspective and gave me a lot of insight. (35 Aged Care)
- Will be more thoughtful of how others are feeling. (49 Prison Officer)
- Helped me get some insight into how much indigenous kids have to deal with. (63 Retired)

- Whilst I know these issues exist, it is always confronting when people speak so openly. (34 Accountant)
- More understanding of what's happening in today's society. (64 Cleaner)
- A lot. In their own words. No better explanation. (68 Self-employed)
- I am aware already. (44 Mum)
- It helped me understand the problems that our youth in the current climate face. (37 Mental Health Clinical Support Worker)

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

76% Yes 10% No 14% Not sure



### If yes, how?

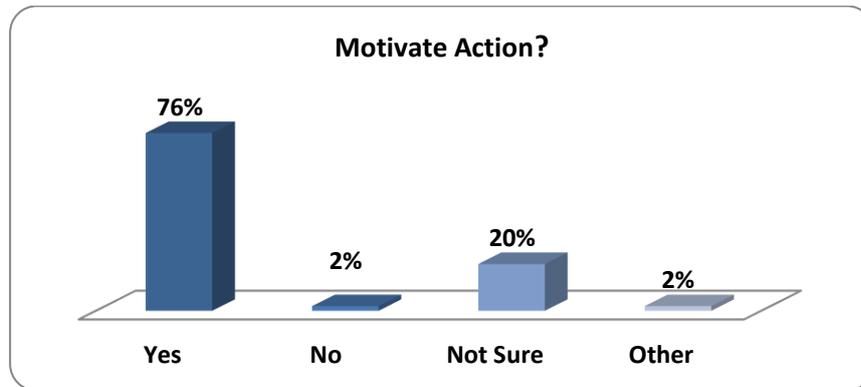
- Yes – it will make me think before I judge people. (53 Chef)
- Yes – I see it more from the young people's perspective. (Parent)
- Give out as much love as you can because you don't know what they've been through. (NSC Receptionist)
- Don't be so quick to judge a person without all the facts. (36 OSHC Coordinator)
- Diversity acceptance. (51 Personal Care Worker)
- Everyone has their own story and we probably know nothing about it. (18)
- Has enhanced my views that the voice of young people matters. (56 GWYL)
- Think more about young people and social media. (49 Give Where You Live)
- Try to be more understanding. (64 Retired)
- Never judge a book by its cover. You never know what someone else is going through. (37 Mental Health Clinical Support Worker)
- More empathy. (42 Teacher)
- I will be more mindful of people's struggles – in particular women. (Dad)
- Yes. It serves a reminder that all young people have a story to share! (38 Assistant Principal)
- I'll be more understanding and have a different approach. (37 Mental Health Clinical Support Worker)



- I will think more about how or why some people are the way they are. (35 Aged Care)
- Yes. I now have a lot more understanding. (63 Retired)
- Not judging people. (26 Education Support)
- Remembering the importance of kindness. (46 Teacher)
- As a foster carer (respite) – greater insight into kids’ view of the system. - DHHS/Resi. (46 Occupational Therapist)
- Don’t judge as you don’t know what people are going through. (18 student)

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

**74% Yes    2% No    20% Not sure    Other 2% “My motivation remains constant.”**



**If yes, how?**

- Be more tolerant and also more aware. (53 Chef)
- Listen and try to understand what’s behind actions. (70 Retired)
- Do the best I can to be more understanding of other people and their journey. (NSC Receptionist)
- Yes. Speak up. (7 Child)
- Be more supportive. (41 Nurse)
- Wanna help more children. (31 Support Co-ord for Aged Care & Disability)
- Yes. Be nice! Think before I speak. (37 Mental Health Clinical Support Worker)
- First and foremost - in my parenting.
- Yes. Reminds me of what a privilege it is to work with young people. (38 Assistant Principal)
- To make sure that I respect people and their boundaries/personality. (16 Student)
- Be more supportive of all women. (70 Self-employed)
- Yes. Take the time to listen to individual stories. (34 Education Support)
- Be more available and present for young ones. (46 Teacher)
- Connect with young people through the arts. (46 Occupational Therapist)
- Support women more. (68 Self-employed)
- Further educate my kids about consent. (44 Mum)
- Take a more proactive approach. (37 Mental Health Clinical Support Worker)



### **OTHER RESPONSES:**

#### **EMAIL SENT FROM A NEWCOMB SECONDARY COLLEGE YEAR LEVEL COORDINATOR TO ALL OTHER STAFF:**

*"So, last night I attended the performance This is the first time I had. I have been meaning to but ... just haven't got around to it or ... have been too busy ... life stuff!*

*Before last night, I probably wouldn't have been able to even describe what the Nobody's Fool program was really all about. Seeing the performance hit me like a ton of bricks. It was SO good. A performance which was personal for each and every student and demonstrated an amazing investment by each student which came together to become the whole show. I spoke with KS and HW and AF and KM after the show. KM and AF's reaction to seeing some teachers they knew was incredible! I was quite overcome by shame and a little embarrassed that this was the first performance I had seen and of how little I knew about the program and all the work that these students, and their teachers and of course Somebody's Daughter Theatre folk have put into this for over many years.*

*So my message for you all - my fellow NSC staff. Change your plans, put yourselves out for the afternoon or evening, get the in-laws to baby sit, turn your cars around and drive back into Geelong (even though we all look forward to being home!) and make sure you attend next year's performances! "*

#### **FROM INTERVIEWS AFTER SHOW:**

**ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL NEWCOMB:** *"The performance was visceral and evocative . I was so proud to see the growth that was so manifest in these young people - some of whom - a few months ago couldn't say a word in a mainstream classroom and now they are on stage performing with such confidence and conviction. To witness that and see evidence of their growth and personal journeys is so mind-blowingly powerful.*

*It gives me goosebumps and gives me perspective - it is a powerful reminder to me of what all young people can achieve with the right opportunities and supports. An inspirational intervention by the right people."*

**ACTING PRINCIPAL NEWCOMB:** *"The show was absolutely fantastic. The kids were amazing. To see the growth in them! Every child has their pathway... and mainstream offers what it offers. To have options such as this program for students who don't fit in mainstream but find their niche here and then to see them perform like that - just incredible. To see that growth that they wouldn't have achieved with us is amazing. It's a testimony to SDT and their teacher, Emma and everyone in the program including the kids themselves that work together - because they all come from very different environments yet they jelled together to perform as one tonight.*

*It would be great for other Principals in our regional network to see this."*

**PARENT:** *"I never thought I'd be here today watching her perform so confidently. So beautifully, telling her truth. I thought I was going to lose her.. (cries).. through drugs.. but here she is. She got Year 12! She graduated this week! She's here performing amazingly!! I'm the proudest and most grateful mother in the world.*

*H has broken the cycle of living at home in poverty, with domestic violence, with no food - with drug and alcohol addicted parents - having to look after siblings - having to make her own tea, do her own washing. That's the life that H has come from. And so do many of the NFT kids. Like they have nothing at home. They are the adult at home. And when they come here - that mind space is gone. They can be kids. They don't have to worry about their brothers and sisters or their mentally ill mum or their dad stabbing himself. They come here and they are allowed to freely express themselves.*

*I am just the proudest mother. I think that everyone that watched all the children in this production today. You would have seen the look in their eyes. They were proud. I hope the audience listened like I did to every story. Some people walk around with blinkers. They only see what they want to see. They have no idea. If some of these people would just sit down for 10 minutes and actually LISTEN not just hear but LISTEN. Feel these kids' emotions. What they've been through. It can be a hard life and a normal person doesn't really understand.*

*Everyone should see this show."*

One of the two objectives of the Nobody's Fool Theatre program (page 2) is to:

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

As is evidenced by all the above responses to the December public performances – this is clearly being achieved.

Theatre is such a powerful way to motivate change, empathy and understanding.

Young people from some of the most traumatic backgrounds imaginable and with little to no experience of success in the mainstream world, perform confidently because it is their truths. They have a sense of purpose – that they are making a difference.

*I never thought I'd be here today watching her perform so confidently. So beautifully, telling her truth. I thought I was going to lose her through drugs .. but here she is. She got Year 12! She's here performing amazingly!! I'm the proudest and most grateful mother in the world.*

**NFT student:**

*"Doing these performances is a really positive thing to do. I feel I have purpose. You want people to realise there are consequences to abuse. You want them to ask - why is this kid self-harming? Why has he got a drug problem? I hope they realise through seeing this play, that these things are all connected. There are reasons why kids go off the rails. And I hope other kids realise they're not alone in this."*



**Maud Clark CEO:**

*"What the young people achieved over those several weeks was quite extraordinary. They grew in their understandings of themselves - that they were capable of discipline - that they were capable of things they never imagined they could do. And the more they did - the more they could do."*

*It's the whole thing that drama does - that theatre does - it builds the spirit up - it builds the psyche up and so - that sense that 'I am able. I am worthy. I can'.. becomes tangible*

***That performance really showed the resuscitation of NFT.***

*It really did. You can actually see what's happening for those kids. They are standing tall, they are standing proudly, they are being heard, they are working together and they've got a story that is bigger than them that is taking everyone on a journey."*

*That performance really showed the  
resuscitation of NFT.*

*You can see what's happening for those kids.  
They are standing tall, they are standing proudly,  
they are being heard, they are working together  
and they've got a story that is bigger than them  
that is taking everyone on a journey.*

## 5. CONCLUSION

The REVIVE project, in its first year, is more than meeting its objectives.

Some of the outcomes are quite extraordinary given that 2021 was the second year of significant Covid disruptions.

There were clear highlights – the successful completion of Year 12 by three NFT students; the outreach tour to work with other disadvantaged students and the performance of the new work ‘When the Light Went Walking.’

Through the intensive arts program culminating in public performances, NFT young people have demonstrated how they can move out of their comfort zones – to challenge themselves and other peoples’ perceptions of what they are capable of.

They have inspired many who work in education and health to reassess their professional practice and the way they may be unconsciously judging and reinforcing stereotypes.

*I have learnt a lot from hearing the young people’s perspectives. I have been underestimating the impact of trauma and abuse on them. (Teacher)*

*(This program) has verified for me that all people are capable of extraordinary personal growth. It serves as a timely and powerful reminder of the fact that all young people, given those chances can develop and grow and aspire in ways that perhaps we and even they didn’t think possible.” (Principal)*

Young people lost to education and future opportunities due to backgrounds of trauma, poverty, anxiety – have reconnected to learning and life.

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

Reconnecting these disadvantaged young people to education is critical for their futures.

For the many trapped in poverty, often intergenerational, a good education is their best chance to break cycles of disadvantage and create more positive opportunities and choices.

The most recent PISA (*Program for International Student Assessment*) report 2019, showed that Australia’s most disadvantaged students were on average three years behind the most advantaged ones. There has been no closing the gap in terms of educational achievement in recent years.

In 2020, it is estimated that approximately one in six children live in low-income families where even the basics are hard to come by.<sup>7</sup>

Numerous studies confirm that children from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from school than other students,<sup>8</sup> and children who are suspended or expelled from school are more likely to enter the criminal justice system. The Victorian Ombudsman found that the majority of young people in the juvenile justice system had been suspended or expelled.<sup>9</sup>

In crude economic terms, Deloitte Access Economics (2019) estimates that improving academic achievement for these low SES students could generate a positive national economic impact of \$148.8 billion.<sup>10</sup> That figure doesn’t take into account further savings to the economy, if disadvantaged young people remain out of jails and live healthier lifestyles.

Disadvantage is, of course, not just about poverty.

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<sup>7</sup> Dav dson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B. and Wong, M. (2020), Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 1, Overview. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 3, Sydney: ACOSS.

<sup>8</sup> Hemphill, S. A., Toumbourou, J. W., Smith, R., Kendall, G. E., Rowland, B., Freiberg, K., & Williams, J. W. (2010). Are Rates of School Suspension Higher in Socially Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods? An Australian Study. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 21(1), 12–18.

<sup>9</sup> V ctorian Ombudsman (2017) Investigat on into Victorian government school expuls ons.

<sup>10</sup> Delo tte Access Economics (2019). *Unpacking drivers of learning outcomes of students from different backgrounds*, Canberra: Australian Government Department of Educat on.

When people refer to disadvantaged or 'vulnerable' students it is understood to be a very multi-faceted concept. However, for the most part – vulnerability<sup>11</sup> is accepted as being characterised by a combination of **some** of the following:

- low household incomes – poverty, living conditions with housing stress, overcrowding, lack of facilities, little or no space conducive to learning
- less access to support and resources to facilitate appropriate learning
- physical and mental health issues in young person/and or parent/s/carer
- history of abuse and trauma
- special needs associated with some form of disability
- parent/s or carers ill-equipped to assist with young person's learning
- young person acting in caring role for parent/s and/or siblings

There is a significant proportion of young disadvantaged young people who do NOT function well in ANY mainstream education setting. Their needs are such that they are unable to be met within the confines and resources of that system.

In Dr Jim Watterson's December 2019 report, *Those Who Disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about*, it was estimated that at least 50,000 students of compulsory school age were not participating in an education program of any type.<sup>12</sup>

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

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

Not every disengaged, detached young person will be suited to the Nobody's Fool Theatre model. The needs, health status, circumstances, cultures, and location of disadvantaged young people will vary enormously meaning there will be NO one successful model for reengagement. However, NFT is an example of a 'tailored, alternative and flexible' program as described by Dr Watterson<sup>13</sup> that *is* working very effectively for a proportion of disengaged young people and is deserving of more long-term resourcing and support.

#### **Assistant Principal from Newcomb Secondary College:**

*"I feel Somebody's Daughter Theatre brings a bit of magic because reengagement is not easy. We try and we try and we try at mainstream, but we don't succeed with these kids. We might get them back in for a day or a week and then they take off again.*

*It's very hard in mainstream school. For all our best intentions and all our efforts, because we DO want to see every child engaged in education - there are just too many barriers for them in mainstream education. The NFT Program is a terrific initiative that consistently achieves a profound and even life-changing impact, upon a diverse range of students.*

*When I think of those students who wouldn't speak in front of a group of five kids who now, through the right supports and opportunities find themselves on stage performing in front of several hundred strangers.... it really is a transformation that is immeasurable."*

May the magic continue.

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<sup>11</sup> Drane, C., Vernon, L., & O'Shea, S. (2020). *The impact of 'learning at home' on the educational outcomes of vulnerable children in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic*.

Literature Review prepared by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University, Australia.

<sup>12</sup> Dr J Watterson and Megan O'Connell, *THOSE WHO DISAPPEAR THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION PROBLEM NOBODY WANTS TO TALK about*, Uni of Melbourne, 2019

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

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