



2021 ANNUAL REVIEW

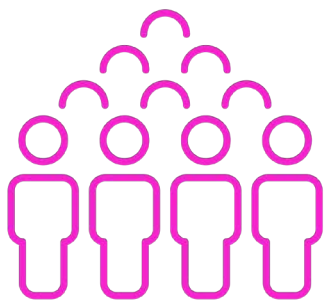


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Milk Crate Theatre pays respect to the traditional custodians of our land, and to elders past, present and emerging. We are grateful to work and create theatre on land historically owned by the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Eora Nation – always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

2021 SNAPSHOT



114

unique Collaborative Artists attended an average of 8.2 sessions each in 2021



107

days in lock down



114

workshops delivered face to face



41

workshops delivered online

93 %

feel more confident.

77 %

have a more positive outlook on their life.

67 %

have gained skills to help them manage their life needs.



675

audience at Tiny Universe, Emergence exhibition & showings

3,439

digital audience on Vimeo, YouTube and social media



FINALIST

City of Sydney Business Awards for Outstanding Community or Cultural Organisation



10

short films made with our community



NEWWORKS

Tiny Universe (performance)
Sit in that Chair (recording)
Emergence (exhibition)
Dust Storm (development)



6 core team members
12 artists delivering programs



1,665 Instagram followers
2,645 reach on Instagram



3,395 Facebook audience
13,990 reach on Facebook



4,007 visitors to our website
6,423 website sessions

CHAIR REPORT

2021 demonstrated that our community, led by Jodie, Margot and the rest of Milk Crate Theatre's wonderful management team, can rise to any challenge. The broader health and economic environment again created uncertainty, and another NSW lock down disrupted some plans. Yet Milk Crate Theatre united, adapted and shone.

The Company delivered some incredibly important work, expanded its reach, and finished the year in a very sound position.

I am particularly proud of the significant work undertaken by the company to develop an Impact Measurement Framework and mature its Theory of Change. I anticipate this work will be of broader benefit to other parts of the impact and arts sectors.

We were delighted to expand the breadth of expertise of the board during the year, with Paige Rattray, Katina Velkou and Kevin Lee joining. I would particularly like to thank each of my other directors who dedicate their expertise, talents and so much energy to this company. It has been a privilege to serve as chair.

A very large thank you to Milk Crate's wonderful supporters.

Among those, thank you to Create NSW, City of Sydney, Australia Council for the Arts, Office of the Arts, Australian Government RISE Fund, Department of Social Services, Parramatta Council, Sally White and the

White Family, Matana Foundation for Young People, Robertson Foundation, James N Kirby Foundation, St. George Foundation, Westpac Foundation, Macquarie Group Foundation, Community Sector Banking Foundation, ATC Foundation, Mirvac, Perpetual Impact Philanthropy, Edward C Dunn, the Linnel Hughes Trust, the Norman H Johns Trust, Debtfix, Commonwealth Bank Staff Foundation, the Mary MacKillop Today Foundation and our many other donors. It is this growing support that gives us the confidence to stretch our ambition.

Finally, a big thank you to each and every Collaborative Artist, to our Facilitating Artists, our Artistic Advocates, and our growing band of volunteers, who collectively embed the special place that Milk Crate Theatre holds in Australia's cultural and social impact life.

I am incredibly excited about the future for Milk Crate Theatre. I cannot wait to watch it continue to grow and thrive.



MICHAEL SIRMAI



FROM THE CEO

“Let those who are looking for some extraordinary people must know that all the extraordinariness is hidden in the ordinary people!”

Mehmet Murat ildan

If you have ever had the pleasure of attending a Milk Crate Theatre performance, you would have experienced the special kind of magic that occurs in the space when our professional artists come together with the community to develop their stories into extraordinary performances filled with rich authenticity and creativity that leaves you thinking differently about the world and your place in it.

Stories are so important to us as humans – they are how we connect and make sense of the world. They also offer a powerful tool to break stigma, challenge perceptions and build empathy. This year we have needed our stories more than ever.

For Milk Crate Theatre 2021 was a year of two Acts. The first Act filled with ambitious plans to scale our impact and reach into new communities and to engage new audiences with a range of performances as we emerged from the 2020 lock-down and the second Act seeing us back in lock-down again. However, while 2021 may not have been the year that we planned or hoped for at the end of 2020, it was a year of massive achievements.

In the first half of the year, we brought Tiny

Universe to the stage in collaboration with Shopfront Arts Co-op. This was an amazing work devised by 12 Collaborative Artists from both organisations ranging from 23-63 years in age and was positively received by audiences both live and through a filmed version that we were able to share when we went into lock-down in June.

We recorded the song, Sit in that Chair, with the Sydney Street Choir which gave us an amazing opportunity to bring our communities together to record a powerful anthem written by the community. We also had many workshops, including a number in new communities across Sydney such as Claymore Neighborhood Centre in Western Sydney.

When Sydney went into lock-down again in June, we transitioned programs to digital facilitation which meant we could stay connected with community members in Woolloomooloo and Waterloo. We also were able to undertake the next development for our 2022 major work, Dust Storm. Unfortunately, the remainder of our live performances for the year ended up postponed to 2022.

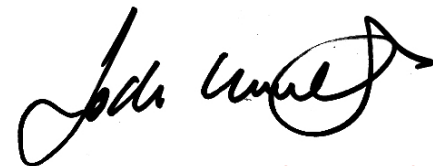
Alongside our programs, we invested resources to strengthen our Theory of Change and to initiate a project to build a rigorous Impact Measurement Framework. This has been a huge piece of work, bringing in expertise from the Social Sector to establish measures to identify our impact on the arts, participants and audiences. We look forward to sharing our first impact report in 2022.

It is my great privilege to work with an incredible

team of passionate and dedicated people who not only bring our amazing major performances to the stage but also to coordinate our many workshops, secure funding and keep things running. It was lovely to be able to keep some of our artistic team working on projects throughout the extended lock-down. The work created with the community through this period was just the antidote to a long lock-down. With a focus on comedy and play, the weekly zoom sessions were often a place of riotous laughter and joy.

I am also grateful to our dedicated Board of Directors for contributing their time, expertise and personal support to steward us through ongoing challenges and change.

Milk Crate Theatre would not exist without the support of many, and I would like to especially recognize our funders and supporters have been amazing, offering additional support and ongoing flexibility that have ensured that we were able to transition our programs and remain connected to communities throughout 2021. Many thanks to all those who were able to support us this year as we continue to meet the challenges with the resilience modeled by our community.



JODIE WAINWRIGHT



ABOUT MILK CRATE THEATRE

Milk Crate Theatre is the leading arts organisation in Australia working in the unique intersection of the arts, homelessness, mental health and disability.

Milk Crate Theatre harnesses the power of the arts to drive social impact.

At a person level, we provide creative opportunities to support participants to build individual capacity. Initially, increasing confidence, skills and connections and through longer engagement supporting an increased sense of self agency, improved wellbeing, and an improved outlook on life.

The performances created by Milk Crate Theatre provide a powerful tool to challenge perceptions and through the sharing of our work, we break down barriers, encourage inclusion and increase opportunities for people with lived experiences to thrive, thus tackling the issue of disadvantage from both sides.

OUR VISION

Milk Crate Theatre effects social change through the power of performance.

OUR MISSION

We provide opportunities for people whose voices are under-represented to engage in artistic practice and then share their bold and resonant stories to build empathy and break down barriers.

OUR VALUES

COLLABORATION

We work collaboratively within our creative processes, and in partnership with arts, social purpose, government, corporate and funding partners to further our reach and impact

ARTISTRY

We use a range of creative practices to develop skills and foster confidence and provide platforms for expression and open discourse for social justice and change.

OUR COMMUNITY

Our community of Collaborative Artists (participants) are generally living with, have experienced or are at risk of homelessness; living with mental health or disability support needs; have experienced domestic violence or come from First Nations and/or culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

RESPECT

We create an environment where the experiences, feeling and rights of everyone are respected and valued.

BELONGING

We put our Artists at the heart of everything we do, providing a safe and accessible environment for the community to connect and personally develop through creative practice.



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

THE ISSUE

Many people in our society live with disadvantage and face significant barriers to accessing the support, services and experiences they deserve to realise their life potential.

Lack of representation of people with lived experiences in our arts and media contributes to systemic exclusion, further limiting opportunity for people experiencing disadvantage.

The arts is known as a strong vehicle for boosting social capital of participants and also have the ability to challenge mindsets and break down social barriers.

OUR RESPONSE

Milk Crate Theatre utilises high quality and innovative CACD best practice model to harness the power of the arts as a vehicle for change.

We employ contemporary practicing community versed artists to work along side community producing high quality works that push the boundaries of creative expression, both in art-form and through those involved.

Creative engagement supports participants to build personal capacity and empowers them to pursue their aspirations.

Our works challenge societal norms and challenge preconceptions by sharing marginalised voices to create a more inclusive society with more opportunity for all to thrive.

ACTIVITIES

Milk Crate Theatre delivers a resonant artistic program incorporating a range of projects including workshops, artist development and performances that tackle the barriers, societal constructs, issues and systems faced by people with lived experiences.

WHO

Collaborative Artist's experiencing exclusion from arts and society including those living with, have experienced or are at risk of homelessness; living with mental health or disability support needs; have experienced domestic violence or come from First Nations and/or culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

We engage audiences from across the community with a focus on those who makes decisions impacting our community.

OUTCOMES

Using excellence and innovation in artistic practice...

By utilising innovative Community Arts & Cultural Development (CACD) best practice we provide platforms for expression and incorporate new voices into the arts environ, offering a more diverse range of stories to audiences and pushing the boundaries of the arts. Over the longer term, by championing social justice perspectives we can shift the sector dynamics so there is greater diversity and representation of people with lived experience in the arts.

Building individual capacity and readiness...

Through creative practice, individual participants gain creative and life skills, are more connected socially and to their communities and have an increased sense of confidence. Through longer engagement, participants have an improved sense of agency and are better able to voice needs and access supports which leads to higher expectations and a more positive outlook on life. Over the long term, we see improved wellbeing, ownership and the power to make changes.

Pushing for equal opportunity and inclusion...

By sharing works created by Milk Crate Theatre participants, we challenge audience perceptions around what it means to live with disadvantage and drive a shift in societal attitudes to create opportunities and ensure equitable access for all people to thrive.

VISION

Equality and inclusion for people, the arts and society.

For us this means...

All people can pursue lives of their choosing with equal opportunities to learn, work and engage with community.

We have a diverse and vibrant arts and cultural sector with work that shares stories from diverse backgrounds.

We live in an inclusive society where everyone's voice is equal.

COLLABORATIVE ARTISTS

Over the last 20 years, Milk Crate Theatre historically has worked with community members who are living with, have experienced or are at risk of homelessness.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported that 116,000 people were homeless on census night in 2016, representing 50 homeless people per 10,000. This includes those sleeping on the streets, in cars, at crisis centres and in overcrowded accommodation. This is an increase of 14 per cent from the last census in 2011.

COLLABORATIVE ARTISTS

We use the term 'Collaborative Artist' in place of the term 'participant'. This is to recognise the vital creative energy and experience individuals in our community bring to workshops, developments, productions and

performances. Where 'participant' connotes someone working within a system they may have little control over, we hope with this term to signify how active and powerful our community is in shaping our processes and productions. The term itself was created by our community, in a facilitated discussion within an open planning session in 2020.

LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

It is evident that the most common lived experience among our collaborative artists, is that of mental illness. Often, mental illness comes with co-morbidities, for instance the relationship between mental illness and homelessness is in the data from Australian Institute for Health and Welfare: 'Around 241,966 people aged 10 years and older were assisted by specialist homelessness agencies

nationally in 2019–20. Of these, 1 in 3 (88,338 or 36.5%) were clients with a current mental health issue.' (AIHW, 17 May 2022)

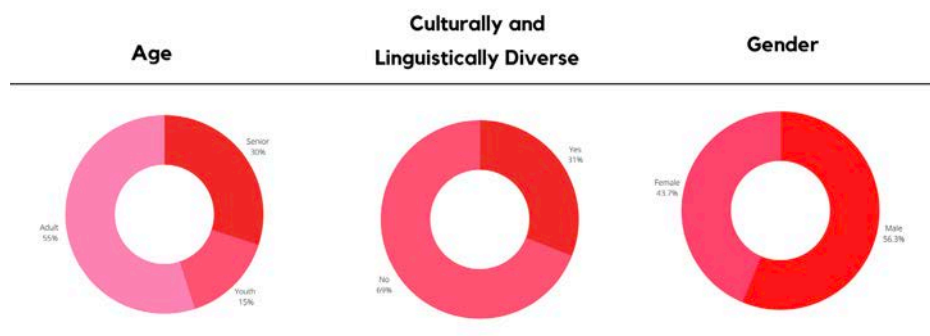
Mental illness is nondiscriminatory and affected so many during the COVID-19 pandemic: 'In 2020-21, 15% of Australians aged 16-85 years experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress.' (ABS, 2022) Enforced isolation, financial insecurity and worldwide fears was a clear contributor to higher levels of mental illness amongst Australians. Milk Crate Theatre supports our community by access to a social worker on the core team and by liaising with community partners for those who need further support.

HOUSING

Majority of our Collaborative Artists reside in government owned housing or Housing NSW, whilst a smaller portion reside in a private residence. A large portion at 38.9% are in alternative accommodations like community and supported housing, whilst the rest are experiencing some form of homelessness as seen under 'rough sleeping' and 'boarding house'.

73% of our community are experiencing severe housing stress.

DEMOGRAPHICS



SUPPORT NEEDS

Our community of Collaborative Artists have disclosed the following support needs:

- 73% identify as having a disability or mental health concerns.
- 30% identify as having a physical disability.
- 64% identify as being a survivor of trauma.
- 21% identify as having a neurological or learning disability.
- 24% identify as experiencing problems with alcohol and or drugs.

52% of Milk Crate Theatre's Collaborative Artists (participants) identify as having complex support needs, defined as having three or more co-occurring lived experiences or issues.



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR REPORT

While 2021 didn't provide us with a completely fresh deviation from pandemic status, we certainly did relish in the freedom to connect during the first half of the year – and how! It seems miraculous that we were able to mount our beautiful show *Tiny Universe* in partnership with Shopfront Arts Co-op in May, right before we had to retreat back into lock-down. This period of reprieve proved invaluable for us all – not only were we able to connect deeply with each other as humans after a really difficult 2020, but we were also allowed time to be artists. To continue challenging ourselves, excavating the nuances of the themes of this show – who we are when we are with others, compared to who we are when we are alone? Are they different? My brilliant co-director Natalie Rose and I were challenged and enamoured, to bring forth the story lines and revelations of the multi-generational cast – real and fictional. They were divine, humorous, challenging, and real.

Also during this year we curated and mounted our anniversary exhibition, *Emergence*. Searching through the archives and piecing together so many parts of our history was an incredible venture, and keeping the selection to a manageable size was difficult! Because there are so many images of theatre and performance, so many films, and so many beautiful records of the hundreds of people who have found their artistry at Milk Crate Theatre over the years. The resultant collection is stunning, and we cannot wait to tour it over the next few years.

And in June, as we locked down again, the creative team of *Dust Storm* gathered online to continue development of what has now become a show. Renamed *Dust*, we will be performing at the Richard Wherrett Studio, Sydney Theatre Company in 2022 – incredible considering this began as an online pivot workshop program in 2020!

Safe to say that the tumultuous times brought about by the global pandemic did not stop us from doing what we do. Maybe it is because of our lived experiences that we understand pivoting, adjusting, and making do with the situation at hand. This, and the power of the creative process – the space it provides us to search and question, to resolve, heal, and consider a future – makes for a pretty potent combination. At Milk Crate Theatre we embrace all of it, and look forward to doing it for another 22 years!

MARGOT POLITIS

TINY UNIVERSE

What's happening in our private moments that no one else might be able to see or understand? What are the rituals we perform, or methods of self-soothing that help us make sense of our place in the world?

Who are we "out there"? Who are we outside of our own tiny universe?

Comprising 60 years of impact in the Australian arts landscape, Shopfront Arts Co-op and Milk Crate Theatre joined forces on a bold new intergenerational work, *Tiny Universe*, which premiered at PACT Centre for Emerging Artists in Erskineville from May 20 – 29.

Co-directed by an award-winning team, Shopfront's Creative Director, Natalie Rose, and Milk Crate Theatre's Artistic Director, Margot Politis, *Tiny Universe* explored the delineation between inner and outer worlds – what we present to the world, and what is actually happening behind closed doors. It invites audiences to consider what we carry with us through life, and how that changes over time. What are the rituals we perform, the modicum of self-soothing that occur in our own little corners of our lives?

Who are we – and how do we cope - when no one is looking, especially if we feel there is something about ourselves that makes us different from others? Do we ever get used to the uncertainty that life throws at us?

Through conversations with "self", *Tiny Universe* reveals how we reckon privately with social pressures, systems, and expectations, through the exploration of set, space, movement, lighting, and text.

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The devised work reflects both companies' commitments to championing the voices of artists from underrepresented communities and backgrounds. Through this new partnership, Shopfront and Milk Crate Theatre will bring forward the stories and artistic expression of young people and people with lived experience of homelessness, mental health issues, and disability.

"Politis and Rose provide a tenderness to the treatment of their subjects, that moves us to a certain state of empathy; both for those on stage, as well as the persons we are, silent and contemplative in our respective seats."

SUZY GOES SEE

"Tiny Universe is a compelling communication of our emotions, thoughts, and personalities; offering the idea that despite our uniqueness on the outside, maybe we aren't so different on the inside."

THE BIG SMOKE

Directors:

Margot Politis, Milk Crate Theatre
Natalie Rose, Shopfront Arts Co-op

Devisors:

Harrison Bishop, Desmond Edwards, Lana Filies, Owen Gill, Lisa Griffiths, Lily Hayman, Steve Konstantopoulos, Brianna Lowe, Aaron Nasir, Matthias Nudl, Nick Vagne, Tiffany Wong

Key Support Artist: Lucy Watson

Composer & AV Design: James Brown

Lighting Design: Liam O-Keefe

Set Design: Margot Politis

Performers:

Harrison Bishop, Desmond Edwards, Lana Filies, Lily Hayman, Steve Konstantopoulos, Matthias Nudl, Nick Vagne, Lucy Watson

Production Manager: Tyler Fitzpatrick

Set Construction: Will Jacobs & Sophie Ward

Set Assistant: Sam Read

Guest Facilitating Artist: Kay Armstrong

Photographer: Clare Hawley

Videographers: Hugh Clark & David Molloy

Proudly supported by:



Special thanks to Sally White and the White Family for this support of this production.



Image Credit: Collaborative Artists performing in *Tiny Universe*. Photos by Clare Hawley 10

SIT IN THAT CHAIR

Milk Crate Theatre invited the Sydney Street Choir to join us in recording our political cabaret anthem, *Sit in that Chair*.

Sit in That Chair is a political cabaret anthem created by the Collaborative Artists of Milk Crate Theatre for their 2019 performance work *Natural Order*; a multi-art form immersive theatre show about systems, bureaucracy, and the myth of social mobility.

Composed by Tim Hansen, Milk Crate Theatre Collaborative Artists were invited to write lyrics for a song that would express what it feels like to be at the mercy of social systems such as housing and welfare. A veritable 'Bohemian Rhapsody' style anthem, this protest song balances frustration and anger with the fear, softness, and vulnerability of being human. *Sit in That Chair* combines a multitude of sections, melodies and viewpoints into one majestic, glorious and powerful number.

When Milk Crate Theatre received funding to record the song in 2021, they immediately knew that the Sydney Street Choir would be the perfect partner to join them on the recording journey – the companies sharing an ethos of giving a platform to the expression of underrepresented voices. The two companies gathered on recording day, with the backup power of the choir profoundly bolstering the message in the music created by the Milk Crate Theatre cast. The piece was recorded and mastered at the world-renowned Studios 301 Alexandria.

Director: Margot Politis

Producer: Lauren Vassallo

Artistic Program Coordinator: Jessica Saras

Composer: Tim Hansen

Milk Crate Theatre Collaborative Artists
Darlene Proberts, Lisa Griffiths, Matthias Nudl, and Pauline Trenerry

Guest Collaborative Artists: Sydney Street Choir, directed by James Paul

Senior Engineer: Jack Prest, Studio 301

Videographers: Rolling Media Productions

Development

Facilitators: Tim Hansen, Vashti Hughes & Lucy Watson

Material by and with Shane Davis, Desmond Edwards, Owen Gill, Lisa Griffiths, Sandra Hickey, Eugenia Langley, Felix Morgan, Katrina Morris, Ruth Oslington, Jemima Pal, Darlene Proberts, Steve Simao, Pauline Trenerry

Proudly supported by:





WATERLOO

In early 2021, Milk Crate Theatre started a 10 week project with the community in Waterloo to look at the challenges and hopes of residents in the face of redevelopment.

In 2015 news broke in the Waterloo Housing community that residents would have to move from their homes, due to plans for development in the area. Six years later and these residents have still received no certain information as to where they will be "relocated", let alone when.

We engaged the Waterloo Community in early 2021 and developed INTERIM, a new performance work and exhibition, asking the question of how is home possible when it could be gone tomorrow?

Over the course of ten weeks, a tight ensemble formed and were due to open the performance on the 30th June 2021 at 107 Projects when Sydney was plunged into our second lock down.

In the face of further disappointment and uncertainty for the community, we decided to keep connecting weekly and moved to workshops over zoom.

Due to the Delta outbreak in NSW in 2021, the online workshops continued through until 2022, when six short films were shared with the world of the Waterloo neighbourhood, seen through the lens of six residents individual talents and imaginations.

The films are available to watch at: www.milkcratetheatre.com/waterloo-1

Directors/Facilitating Artists:

James Dalton & Bethany Simons

Artistic Program Manager/Producer:

Jessica Saras

Collaborative Artists:

Larry Billington, The Fresh Buddha of Sydney, Rebecca Reddin, Garry Richards, Hana_in_Sydney, Flora Zaydenberg

Videographers: Adam McPhiblin

Community Partners: Adam Antonelli, Counterpoint Community Services & 107 Redfern

We acknowledge other key members of the Waterloo Community who joined the project in person and online workshops over the course of 2021.

A special dedication to Jack and Warren, friends we sadly lost along the way. Their impact was far reaching and we dedicate the project to them.

Proudly supported by:



EMERGENCE EXHIBITION

Coming together to Reclaim Narrative

Emergence is an exhibition of photography and film that looks back on the two-decade history of socially relevant and paradigm-shifting performance work made by Milk Crate Theatre.

In systems theory, 'emergence' is the production of an outcome that cannot exist without the specific sum of all its parts. We find this to be a powerful expression of how Milk Crate Theatre's artists, art forms and processes have catalyzed in various forms over the years to effect transformations. Nothing we do as a company is generalised, everything is specifically crafted for and formed by the individuals involved – who is in the room and what they wish to express. This spans multiple performance styles, structures and processes, and in presentation includes our audiences and the wider community – the creative power required for vital acts of emergence is found, shared and utilised collectively.

Part of this emergence is what we refer to as 'reclaiming narrative'. Our collaborative artists have a wide range of lived experiences, such as homelessness, but we do not present a stereotypical journey from struggle to redemption. We aim to shift that paradigm – to challenge audiences to consider what kind of work they expect to see made by people with these lived experiences, and create space for the emergence of new narratives and visions.

The exhibition demonstrates the profound experiences of artistry, ownership and self-empowerment made possible by best-practice CACD facilitation.

The exhibition was originally installed at Vandal Gallery in 2021 but unfortunately audiences were limited due to COVID restrictions. The exhibition is scheduled to tour in 2022-4, with Artistic Director Margot Politis conducting masterclasses and small creative developments with host communities. Emergence will also be available as a Virtual Reality experience in 2022.





WORKSHOPS

Milk Crate Theatre delivers a range of creative workshop opportunities in partnership with social purpose organisations across Sydney.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had lasting effects on the arts and cultural industries. Milk Crate Theatre was greatly affected in its ability to host workshops through its various community partners. Not only were we no longer as accessible to our community of Collaborative Artists, but some of our facilitating artists also lost work. Milk Crate Theatre staff were forced to work from home, recalibrate and think of innovative ways to reach our community.

We were able to quickly transition programs to online workshops via zoom, which allowed for connection, creativity, and a break from the monotony of isolation: 'Provided a great occasional distraction from pervading depressing news and events whilst in "lock down isolation": the ideal "home delivered" therapy' (Collaborative Artist). Whilst a difficult time for all arts organisations, it gave us space and time to see things from a new light. It became evident that our workshops are more than just a skills learning place, but a way for our community to connect to others.

Our workshop programs are coordinated by Milk Crate Theatre's amazing Artistic Program Manager, Jessica Saras.

Image Credits (top to bottom):
 Dust Storm online development screenshot.
 Waterloo workshop image. Photo by Bethany Simons.
 Waterloo online workshops screenshot.
 Tiny Universe development at Shopfront. Photo by Margot Politis.

STORYTELLING – BACK TO BASICS

Ozanam Learning Centre

Two rounds of workshops with a range of creative exercise designed to help Collaborative Artists build their stories into small performances ready for an audience.

Lead Facilitating Artist: Graeme Rhodes
Support Artist: Sarah Eastermann
Social Worker: Laura Hurstfield

STORYTELLING FOR LAUGHS

Online workshops

Two rounds of workshops with a range of creative exercise designed to help Collaborative Artists build their stories into small performances ready for an audience.

Lead Facilitating Artist: Graeme Rhodes
Support Artist: Sarah Eastermann
Social Worker: Laura Hurstfield

THE BIG PICTURE

Rev. Bill Crews Foundation

Develop unique stories and this is a space to help you tell them in creative and original ways by collaging performance, movement, poetry, film, drawing, and photography.

Lead Facilitating Artist: Kay Armstrong
Support Artist: Aslam Abdue-samad

WATERLOO CREATIVE ENSEMBLE

Online workshops

Creative workshops focusing on developing performance skills and storytelling.

Lead Facilitating Artist: James Dalton
Support Artists: Bethany Simons

VIGNETTES

Women's workshops at Parramatta

Cultivating storytelling to build voice and skills through an exploration of performance, writing and video, poetry, film, drawing, and photography.

Lead Facilitating Artist: Bethany Simons
Support Artist: Sarah Easterman
Social Worker: Laura Hurstfield

CLAYMORE PRIDE (YOUTH)

Claymore Neighbourhood Centre

Working with school aged children the group creatively investigated their connection to community and place in the face of redevelopment.

Lead Facilitating Artist: Kay Armstrong
Support Artists: Suzy Dunne & Tori Duckett

DUST STORM DEVELOPMENT

Online workshops

Small group worked with our creative director to develop characters and a narrative for our 2022 Major Work.

Lead Facilitating Artist: Margot Politis
Support Artist: Lucy Watson
Social Worker: Laura Hurstfield

Proudly supported by:





MEASURING IMPACT

Milk Crate Theatre uses the arts as a vehicle for change. We look to strategically improve the breadth and depth of impact that the arts can have on participants and society and builds equity in our sector by enabling more people to share in the benefits of the arts. Our Strategic Plan is underpinned by a Theory of Change and Impact Measurement Framework (attached) which delivers impact and identifies metrics across three areas:

Artistically we offer a more diverse range of stories to audiences and pushing the boundaries of the arts. Over the longer term, by championing social justice perspectives we can shift the sector dynamics so there is greater diversity and representation of people with lived experience in the arts.

At a person level, we provides opportunities for people with lived experiences to engage in creative practice to build individual capacity. Initially, increasing confidence, skills and connections and through longer engagement supporting an increased sense of self agency, improved wellbeing, and an improved outlook on life.

The arts also offers a powerful tool to break stigma and challenge perceptions or bias and through sharing our work, we look to break down barriers, encourage inclusion and increase opportunities for people with lived experiences to thrive, thus tackling the issue of disadvantage from both sides.

Milk Crate Theatre utilises a Social Impact Measurement Framework to track program success against our identified outcomes. We employed an Impact Manager who works with the team to ensure we are taking appropriate measures and surveys as projects roll-out. The Framework incorporates a range of tools which provide both quantitative and qualitative data, including:

- Intake forms to gather key demographics.
- Session reporting which details attendance and observations regarding activities and individual participant progress against priority outcomes in our Theory of Change.
- Surveys/observational reporting to measure shifts in personal well-being across a number of domains as well as aspirations for future.
- Interviews and case studies to gather rich qualitative data.
- Ticketing or foot traffic reports and audience surveys to measure our impact on audiences.
- Tangible outcomes including both film and photography showing the works created and process.

IMPACT ON WELLBEING

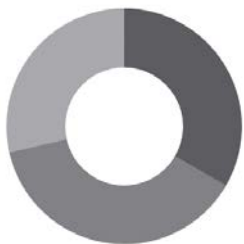
“There is a burgeoning literature that demonstrates that art – both creating and viewing – has many positive impacts that include: increased mental health and wellbeing, enhanced community inclusion, increased empathy, reduced social isolation, decreased anxiety and depression, and reduced stigma.” Inspiring NSW 2017, November 29 2021

Milk Crate Theatre’s programs are built around outcomes that aim to positively impact the wellbeing of collaborative artists, facilitators, community partners and audiences. Whilst our main objective is not to use the work we do as a mean of therapy, we believe that the arts are a vehicle towards:

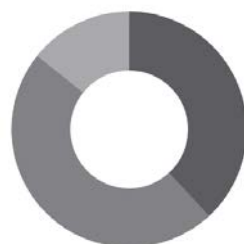
- More confidence
- Connection to others and community
- Gaining creative and life skills
- Improved agency; better able to voice their needs and access supports
- High expectations and outlook on life

Through a reflective survey completed by 21 collaborative artists, we gained valuable insight into the impact Milk Crate Theatre programs have had on individuals throughout the years and the difficulty of the pandemic.

CONFIDENCE



71% feel comfortable voicing their opinions



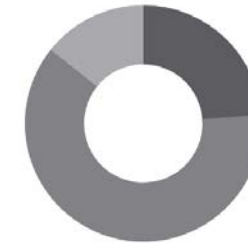
85% feel more confident about making positive changes in their life

CONNECTION

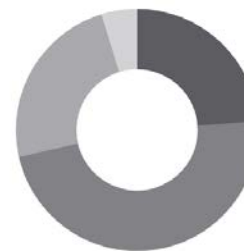
Connection to others and to community is an impact that comes quite naturally from being involved in Milk Crate Theatre programs as the work is almost always, collaborative. We believe from connection and feeling like a valued member of the ensemble or workshop and by extension the wider community, provides collaborative artists with fulfillment and improved wellbeing relating to loneliness and isolation.



81% feel they have made new friends



85% feel connected to the MCT community



71% feel people listen to their ideas

“The workshop is helping me to become more active and sociable.” – Collaborative Artist

OUTCOMES

CREATIVE & LIFE SKILLS



90% feel able to try new things

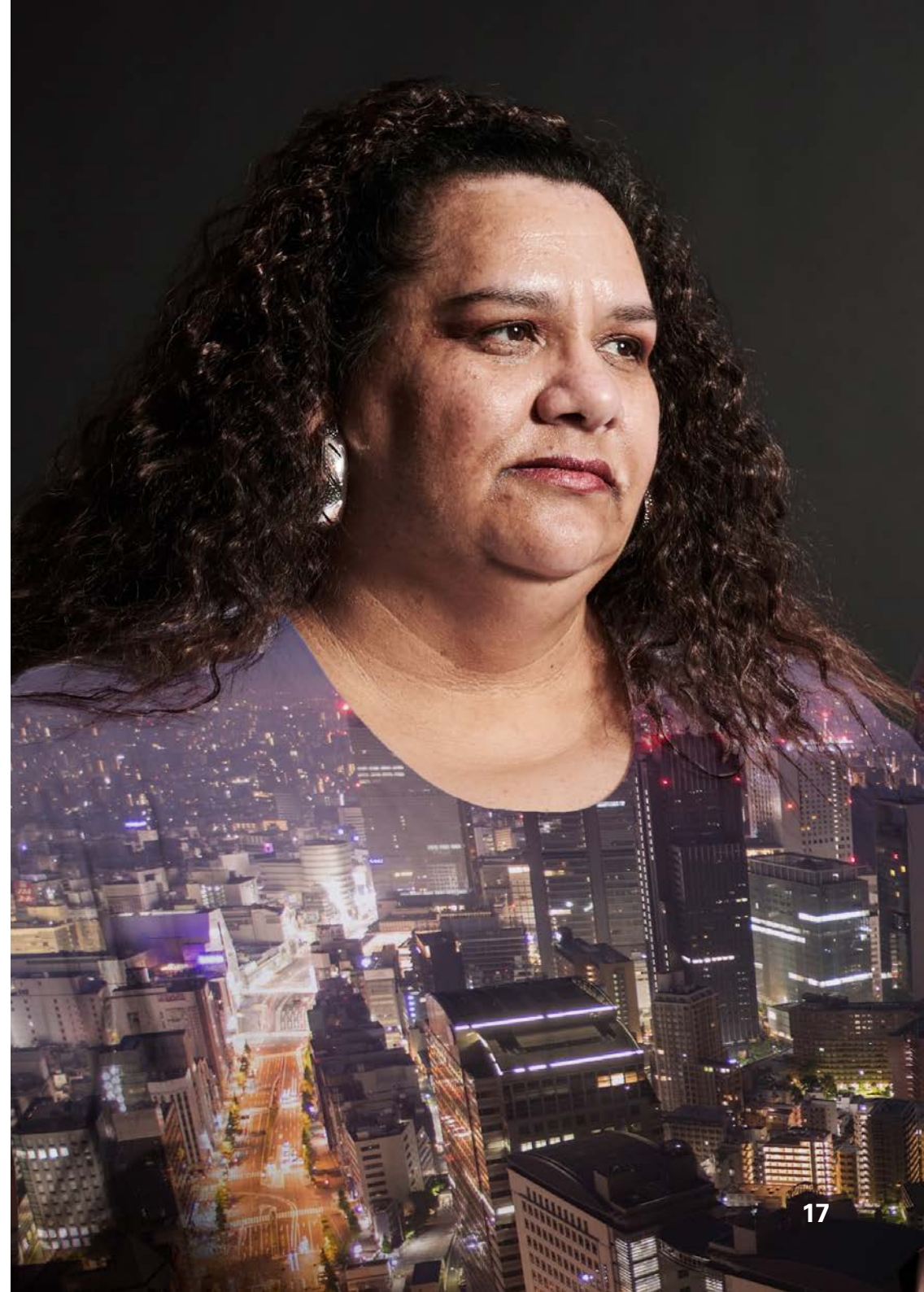


85% have learned new skills

"Milk Crate were there for me when no one else was. Milk Crate have helped me feel less culturally isolated, more included in society, and I'm starting to heal."

– Collaborative Artist

We consider confidence, connection and skills as our short term outcomes. Short term refers to outcomes that generally occur within a workshop program or development, usually 8-10 weeks. In this time there is usually an artistic outcome of a performance, short film and generally when a lot of these short term impacts occur. These short term outcomes can be fleeting, however are still valuable in the overall positive wellbeing of collaborative artists. The results demonstrate a very positive response to the work of Milk Crate Theatre and provide a great trajectory into medium and long term outcomes.



LONGER TERM OUTCOMES

IMPROVED AGENCY



86% I can let people know what I need



90% know how to consider different options in making a decision

76% have considered other opportunities such as volunteering, courses, further education, or employment

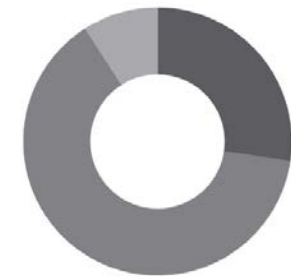
"It's good to be in that world, to have a dressing room, the dressing room world. With the lights as well and the stage - that world. That's a good title, the Dressing Room World! It feels kind of like a long lost friend. Sentimental, intuition world. I've got confidence to make choices."

MCT Collaborative Artist

EXPECTATIONS & OUTLOOK



90% feel proud of their achievement with MCT



95% feel happy



90% are working towards new goals

The medium to long term outcomes are looking at 6 months - 2 years. Many of our collaborative artists have been with us for a number of years. The results show positive impacts that Milk Crate Theatre's work is having on its community. The aim of the new impact framework is to illustrate changes over a 5 year trajectory to see change over time and development of our collaborative artists.

AUDIENCE IMPACT

Milk Crate Theatre has a diverse audience of individuals and groups from the arts sector, social services sector, government, funding partners and communities across Sydney.

As diverse as our programs, Milk Crate Theatre's aim is to diversify, challenge and grow our audience both online and on the ground.

The medium to long term outcomes for Milk Crate Theatre:

- To challenge audience perceptions
- To ensure work is seen by communities and people of influence
- To increase audience reach

Milk Crate Theatre audiences range from members of community that we work with across our workshops, previous or historic collaborative artists, arts community, funders, government members and many more. One of our biggest goals is to further diversify our audience through marketing collateral and partnerships.

Reaching those who don't usually attend theatre is our greatest asset. We make a concentrated effort to engage this community through a variety of ways: email, phone calls, text messages.

This year, COVID had an impact on our ability to reach live audiences. In the second half of 2021, we focused on sharing content digitally.

From our audience:

"I thought it was great. I especially loved the true inclusivity of the cast - the way everyone was treated as equals without pointing out their differences should be applauded. I work in advocacy for vulnerable people and I could not fault how it was presented and performed"

"The stories were raw yet beautiful. You could tell that each actor was connected to it through a modified version of their own reality."

"It was completely engrossing. The scripting was incredibly well done, creating a flow between the authentic stories and drawing you in to each person's world. The balance of humour and lightness, with the vulnerability and poignancy made it accessible and really enjoyable, whilst also getting you to pause and think and be present. I felt uplifted and grateful and touched by the whole experience."

"I thought it was a beautiful collaboration of love and hardships that united us all as humans despite our differences."

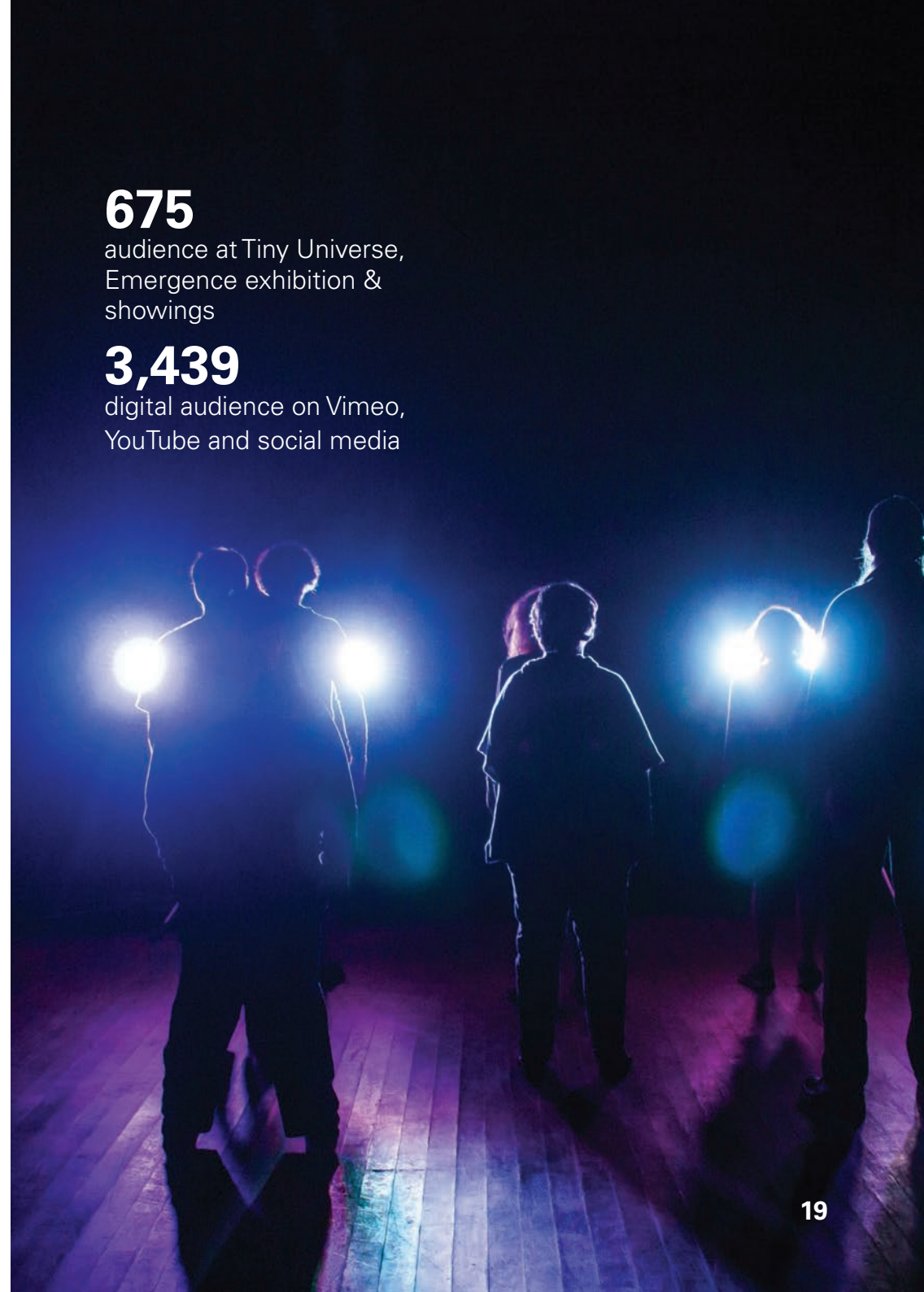
"Touching, funny, relatable - would recommend to anyone!"

675

audience at Tiny Universe, Emergence exhibition & showings

3,439

digital audience on Vimeo, YouTube and social media



OUR STAFF



JODIE WAINWRIGHT
CEO

Jodie joined Milk Crate in 2019 in opening week for Natural Order. She brings 20+ years of experience working in the not for profit sector for organisations such as Cancer Council, Sydney Opera House and the Red Cross. Having started her career as a Marketer, Jodie brings a wealth of marketing, business development and leadership skills to the position. Jodie is a passionate believer in the power of stories and their ability to bring communities together, bridge differences and most of all, connect with audiences and create change.

Jodie holds a Bachelor of Commerce with majors in Marketing & Finance from the University of Sydney.



JESSICA SARAS **Artistic Program Manager**

Jess is a professionally trained and working actress with over 15 years of experience in this field, holding a BA in Acting for Screen and Stage from CSU Wagga. Jess has been a part of the Milk Crate Community in various roles since 2016, currently serving as Artistic Program Manager, managing workshop programs and providing key support for productions.



MARGOT POLITIS
Artistic Director

With over 18 years of practice, Margot has become a recognised leader in NSW inclusive arts practice as a performer, choreographer, film director, and deviser of new performance work. Margot was appointed Artistic Director of Milk Crate Theatre in 2018, after two years serving as Associate Director, and designed and directed the company's 2019 primary production, Natural Order and in 2021 co-directed Tiny Universe with Nat Rose from Shopfront Arts Co-op. Prior to joining MCT, she spent 2009-2016 as the Accessibility Director at Shopfront Arts Co-op, where she established the Accessibility Program, directing the Bodylines and Harness Ensembles of young people with disability in various performances and films began her career performing with Restless Dance Theatre as a mentee to Kat Worth in 2004, after graduating from the Flinders University Drama Centre 2003.



JESSICA PANTANO **Impact Manager**

Jess joined MCT in 2021 in the role of Impact Manager. Historically a producer, Jess has produced shows for Griffin, Belvoir and Redline Productions to name a few. Exposed to the power the arts can have in people's lives, Jess went on to complete post graduate studies with Sydney University in Human and Community Services and now works across the creative and social sectors.



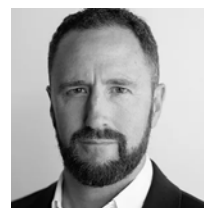
LUCY WATSON **Key Support Artist**

Lucy has worked as a MCT facilitating/support artist since 2019 and over the last two years has stepped into the Key Support Artist position. Lucy is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work spans and often combines writing, visual art and performance informed by acting, clowning, dance and storytelling. Lucy holds Bachelor of Arts with honours from Australian National University, and a Master of Arts from UNSW.



LIZ RALEIGH **Fundraising & Grants Manager**

Liz has worked in the arts (publishing, theatre, live music and festivals) since 2002 including marketing roles at the City Recital Hall and Monkey Baa Theatre Company. Following the birth of her son, Cormac, she switched career paths and worked in fundraising for the Irish Film Festival and Survivors & Mates Support Network.



DALE HOLLINGSWORTH **Finance Manager**

For over 17 years, Dale has worked with some of the most ambitious arts companies in Australia. He founded ARTSANDBUSINESS to share his unique understanding of arts and not-for-profit organisations' financial and organisational requirements. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce, a Bachelor of Psychology and has studied Social Impact at UNSW.



LAURA HURSTFIELD **Social Worker**

Laura is a Social Worker with over 15 years of experience. She has been working as a Consultant in Social Work and Welfare projects since January 2017. In 2013 Laura was voted International Triple P Practitioner of the Year. She is trained in Teen Triple P, Triple P standard, Incredible Years, Circle of Security, 1-2-3 Magic and Engaging Adolescents programs.

OUR BOARD



Michael Sirmai (Chair)

Michael is the COO and a co-founder of 2Be, an Australian fintech. Previously Michael spent almost two decades in banking, finance and law. He is involved with a range of arts and philanthropic bodies and regularly advises the social sector. Michael holds Bachelors degrees in Arts & Law from UNSW and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Richard Levine (Treasurer)

Richard has worked in a wide variety of financial, operation and general management roles, from start-ups to large corporates. He spent many years with Metcash (IGA, Mitre 10, Campells Cash and Carry) before owning and operating independent supermarkets, focusing on turnaround opportunities. He also runs an operational consulting and outsourcing business assisting medium size businesses with their financial and operational processes.



Victoria Turner (Chair of Audit & Risk Committee)

Victoria is a senior executive with over 20 years' experience in strategic marketing, distribution, operations and general business management in the financial services, media and performing arts industries in Australia and internationally for companies including Macquarie Bank, AMP, Perpetual and News Corp Australia. Victoria has an MBA from AGSM UNSW and is a GAICD from the Australian Institute of Company Directors



Lauren O'Shaughnessy (Chair of Board Nominations Committee)

Lauren is passionate about philanthropy and has spent the last 15 years working in the philanthropic sector for corporate foundations at Macquarie Group, Clayton Utz and AMP; and in the non-profit sector at MS Research Australia. Lauren is currently Grants Director for the Macquarie Group Foundation and is responsible for the Foundation's grant portfolio in Australia. Lauren completed a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Social Inquiry at UTS.



Paige Rattray (Chair of Artistic Advocates)

Currently the Associate Director at Sydney Theatre Company, Paige was previously the Associate Artistic Director at Queensland Theatre and was chosen as Sydney Theatre Company's Richard Wherrett Fellow for a consecutive two years (2015, 2016). She is a co-founder of award-winning, independent theatre company ARTHUR, and a graduate of NIDA.



Kevin Lee (Chair of Social Impact Committee)

Kevin is deeply passionate about supporting people and communities to thrive. He is currently a Consulting Manager at Social Ventures Australia, focused on both consulting to social purpose organisations and impact investing. In that role, he works closely with the social purpose sector to address the underlying drivers of disadvantage. He holds a Bachelor of Electrical Engineering (First Class Honours) from UNSW.



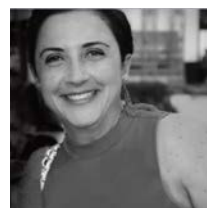
Digby Hughes

Digby is currently the Senior Policy and Research Officer for Homelessness NSW, a peak not for profit organisation that works with its members to prevent and reduce homelessness across NSW. He has worked in the community sector for over 20 years in a range of roles including service delivery, advocacy, and management. Digby has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) with a double major in Political Science.



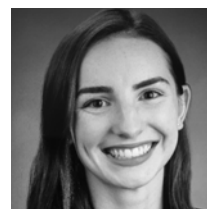
Lenore Robertson

Lenore is a passionate philanthropist and lover of performing arts. Previously a secondary teacher, Lenore has been a performer, a director, and a producer, as well as the Artistic Director of Epicentre Theatre Company. She is presently a co-producer on a new Children's show, Just Live on Stage! (Based on the books of Andy Griffiths) with Red Line Productions. Lenore is a board director of Griffin Theatre Company and is the Chair of the Robertson Foundation.



Katina Velkou

Katina is passionate about social justice and believes it is a privilege to have spent the past 20 years working alongside Sydneysiders, empowering and supporting them to achieve their personal goals. Katina is currently the Manager Casework – Multicultural Child & Family Program at Settlement Services International and brings in-depth experience across a range of sectors including disability, refugees, people seeking asylum, humanitarian entrants and more recently the child protection sector.



Grace Logvyn (Company Secretary)

Grace currently works in Structured Finance with Bank of America. In addition to her role with Milk Crate Theatre, Grace is engaged as a pro bono business consultant, providing consultancy services to domestic arts organisations, and is a passionate advocate for the local arts sector. Grace holds a Bachelor of Economics (Economics and Politics, with Distinction) from UNSW Sydney.

ARTISTIC ADVOCATES

Milk Crate Theatre Artistic Advocates are a group of experienced professionals from across the sector who volunteer their time to work collaboratively with our Artistic Director to promote, support and elevate our works by connecting us with artists and organisations across the sector, provide feedback on our program and works and collaborate on projects. We sincerely thank our Artist Advocates for all their dedication and support for Milk Crate Theatre.



LENORE ROBERTSON

Joined 2017

Chair to Nov 21



PAIGE RATTRAY

Joined 2021

Chair from Nov 21



DONNA ABELA

Joined 2017



GRAEME RHODES

Joined 2017

Milk Crate Theatre
founding Artist



JONATHAN BOLLEN

Joined 2017



NATALIE ROSE

Joined 2020



DINO DIMITRIADIS

They/them

Joined 2020



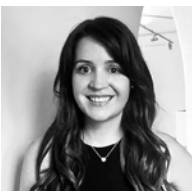
KRISTINA TITO

Joined 2017



LEX MARINOS OAM

Joined 2017



RHIANNA WALCOTT

Joined 2020





FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

Milk Crate Theatre and Board have prudently managed budgets over the last two years given the impact of COVID on our ability to deliver programs as originally intended. We are in a strong financial position and look to scale our impact and operations to meet increased demand for programs to reconnect and build resilience in communities post COVID.

REVENUE (\$000s)	2020	2021
Govt (Comm/State/Local)	103.5	283
Corporate	45.6	42
Donations & Fundraising	138.1	209.8
Performance & Workshop Fees	2.7	0.8
Other Income	1.1	1
COVID Support	181.9	70.3
Total Income	472.7	606.9
EXPENSES (\$000s)	2020	2021
People	350	512.6
Production	1.7	17.5
Marketing	3.6	25.1
Other	44.2	52.5
Total Expenses	399.5	607.7
PROFIT/(LOSS)	73.2	(0.7)
ASSETS		
Current Assets	616.4	772.2
Non-Current Assets	6.7	2.3
Total Assets	774.5	623.1
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities	320.9	463.6
Non-Current Liabilities	0	9.4
Total Liabilities	320.9	473
NET ASSETS	302.2	301.5
EQUITY	302.2	301.5

The above figures provide a summary of our 2021 financials and should be read in conjunction with the audited Financial Reports (produced separately).

Image Credit: Claymore Youth Workshops
Photo by Kay Armstrong

THANK YOU

We acknowledge the generous and going support of the following funders who have generously supported our program and projects across 2021. Many of these organisations have provided funding to Milk Crate Theatre for many years and we sincerely thank them for their ongoing support.



We gratefully acknowledge all of our supporters who have helped Milk Crate Theatre make a real difference in the lives of the communities in which we work. We would not have been able to deliver many of our programs without the help of the following community members. We also thank the many other individuals who have contributed smaller amounts, donated anonymously, or supported our fundraising throughout the year. We greatly appreciate your generosity.

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Aarin Starkey | James Hamilton | Paul Hine |
| Alana Pienkosz | Jodie Wainwright | Rhonda Wainwright |
| Allan Whitehead | Kaija Talviharju | Rhonda Vassallo |
| Amy Abbott | Karen Loblay | Richard Levine |
| Angus White | Karen Muller | Robyn Ewing |
| Belinda Farr-Jones | Katherine Sivieng | Rosemary Thorburn |
| Brad Sutton | Katina Velkou | Ruth Oslington |
| C & P Timbrell | Kevin Lee | S Phillips |
| Clare Grant | Keziah Knight | Sally White |
| Cynthia Nadai | Kristen Moon | Sally Crawford |
| Dale Hollingsworth | Kristina Tito | Sam Thorp |
| David Sharp | Lauren O'Shaughnessy | Sandra Eldridge |
| Digby Hughes | Lenore Robertson | Sharyn Broomhead |
| Edward C Dunn | Madison McKoy | Sonia Byrnes |
| Fanghao Wang | Marcus Annett | Victoria Turner |
| Eugenia Langley | Marie-Louise Harvey | Vivienne Skinner |
| Fran Egan | Meg Mumford | William Cook |
| Hannah Strout | Michael Sirmai | Yana Taylor |
| Helen Bauer | Pamela Amores | |
| Helen Lynch AM | Paul Dwyer | |

We also recognise the following Trusts:
 Linnel Hughes Trust
 The Norman H Johns Trust



Milk Crate Theatre

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