



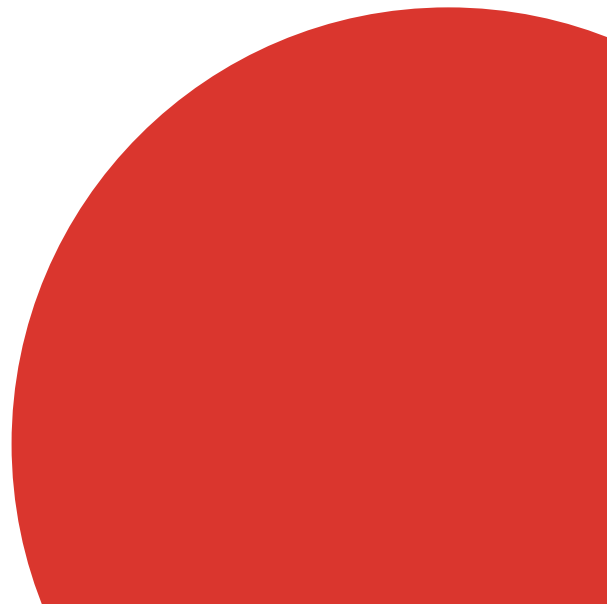
MILK CRATE THEATRE

# IMPACT REPORT

July 2022

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## Our Mission

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

We provide opportunities for people whose voices are under-represented (including those with lived experience of homelessness, mental health issues, and/or disability) to engage in artistic practice to build confidence, skills and connections; and then share their bold and resonant stories to build empathy and break down barriers.

## Our Goals

- **Artistic Impact:** To create regular and resonant artistic program that offers Collaborative Artists platforms for expression and inclusion.
- **Personal Transformation:** To grow the impact for Collaborative Artists, both increasing the number of participants and deepening engagement through a clear development path which support people to make positive life changes.
- **Influencing Change:** To build our audience reach and influence; bringing communities together to leverage and share our work in innovative and engaging ways.
- **Sustainability:** To grow and diversify income streams and to ensure our structure, culture and operations support scaling of programs and impact in an efficient and sustainable way.

# The need

Milk Crate Theatre provides creative opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness, mental health issues and/or disability.

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. The National Homelessness Monitor from 2020 stated that nationally, in the four years to 2018–19, it was areas classified as 'inner regional' that tended to witness disproportionately rapid increases in homelessness, with such areas collectively recording a 30% increase in service users assisted during this period. People living with disability or mental health issues are more likely to live in disadvantage or become homeless.

People living with disadvantage are often excluded from mainstream society - facing significant barriers to accessing the support, services and opportunities they need to realise their life potential. Government funding to support these people are largely reactive and focused on delivering basic needs at the point of crisis without addressing the root causes. Furthermore, stigma and exclusion associated with low economic status perpetuates discrimination and further limits access to genuine opportunities that enable a person to thrive.



# How are we addressing the need?

The arts is known to be a strong vehicle for boosting social capital and improving the wellbeing of participants. There is increasing evidence around the positive impact of the arts and creativity on wellbeing as well as being to help meet major challenges such as ageing, loneliness, chronic conditions and mental health. The arts make our individual lives better and build stronger and more cohesive communities.

A similar program 'Arts on Prescription' demonstrates the power of the arts on improving wellbeing:

**"...it was clear that the act of creating something tangible had a transformative effect on people. Whether through visual art, music, artistic movement, photography – all art forms provided people with tools to express emotion, experience or thought in a way that they may not have had access to before" (HammondCare, 2017).**

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.

Using Community Arts and Cultural Development best practice, everything we perform is created by and with our community of Collaborative Artists (participants). Practising artists and technicians facilitate sessions, fostering new skills development around storytelling as well as the technical aspects of theatre production.

**"I love Milk Crate. Facilitators are patient and kind. Give us new skills expand our horizons in so many ways. Give us a shining light through all the good and bad things that come our way. I learned more about myself and others."**

**- Sandy, Collaborative Artist**



# Our Impact

Milk Crate Theatre in its 23 years has demonstrated the power of the arts in improving wellbeing of individuals and amplifying under-represented voices. In 2021, we explored how we could further enhance and prove our unique and important impact on collaborative artists (community), audiences and the Australian arts sector.

## **Milk Crate Theatre harnesses the power of the arts to drive social impact a both a person and societal level.**

At a person level, we provide opportunities for people with lived experience 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 - with the belief that equipped with these tools, people will be able to pursue their aspirations.

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



# Impact Framework

In 2022, an Impact Framework was piloted which is used to measure and evaluate Milk Crate Theatre's impacts regularly and consistently. This framework identifies our metrics across three areas and their outcomes (right hand side):

## For Individuals (Collaborative Artists)

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 high expectations and a more positive outlook on life.

## Outcomes

- Confidence
- Gain creative and life skills
- More connected socially and to community
- Improved agency
- Better able to access services and supports
- Higher expectations and outlook on life

## For Audiences (Societal Change)

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.

- Audience perceptions are challenged
- Work that is seen by communities and people of influence

## Artistic Impact

By utilising innovative Community Arts and Cultural Development 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

- Innovation in Artistic Practice
- More diverse stories shared with audiences
- Arts and culture sector champion that embodies social perspective



The **Impact Framework** shows how we will measure and evaluate our impact through regular and consistent surveying and interviewing of collaborative artists, facilitating artists, community partners, arts community and audiences. It also captures when data will be collected, analysed and reported and how we will use this data to evaluate and improve programs, marketing collateral and understand our position in the arts and social sector. Furthermore, our aim is to then benchmark our results against other similar social sector and arts organisations.

Beside the Impact Framework is the **Outputs Framework** which incorporates the data collected weekly through Intake Forms (demographic collection), weekly engagement rates (how many people are attending sessions), peer engagement and our artistic contributions to the sector (articles, interviews).

# Our Impact on Collaborative Artists

In 2022, Milk Crate Theatre are collecting data and proving our impact for Collaborative Artists in the areas of:

- confidence
- gaining new creative and life skills
- agency - better able to voice their needs and supports
- an improved outlook on life and the future
- Reduced barriers and improved wellbeing

## Our Collaborative Artists

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 are from First Nations and/or culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

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.



# Case Study 1: a Collaborative Artist

Phong engaged in our Waterloo Creative Ensemble in 2021. Phong joined shortly after he was housed in the Waterloo Housing Estate and was encouraged to join by his neighbour who was involved in the workshop.

Phong recalls of that time: **'My past experience of trauma, I was surrounded by people who weren't able to relax, if I was shining, it meant that they couldn't shine, and they projected that onto me, I realised I was in a really toxic and judgemental surrounding but joining MCT it showed me that you can just be ok where you are. You can be small and that's ok, and then you can participate as much or as a little as you want. Wow I never heard that perspective!... I was learning again that it was ok to just be where you are, take all the time you need but we are here to support you, guide you to where you need to be.'**

Phong's final product from the workshop - a short film, resembled his creativity that had been lying dormant:

**'I was very shy and quiet, really stuck in my head.'** The short film was about a fashion designer, making beautiful garments out of nothing - even, creating a beautiful Chinese cloud out of cut out watermelon pieces on a blazer.

Looking forward Phong has described his experience since being involved in the Waterloo Creative Ensemble: **'After Milk Crate Theatre, I started to do a lot more creative things. I just finished a creative paper flower wall. Continuing on with my creative process, I also started baking, just trying different things to improve my skills. I wouldn't have done that [before], I still would have been stuck in my head. On the weekend they had a fair day, I signed up for food and safety course, first aid and also a white card. So definitely continuing that education and to help me get closer to getting a job.'**

**73% feel positive  
about the future**



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**87% have made new  
friends**



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**90% are ready to take on  
new opportunities like  
volunteering, further  
education and  
employment**



**67% have gained skills  
to help them manage  
their life needs**



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**93% feel more  
confident**



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**77% have a more  
positive outlook on  
their life**



# Snapshot:

## Our Collaborative Artists

We gather demographic data through our intake form when Collaborative Artists first join Milk Crate Theatre. Our community are not required to complete all parts of the form, as for many the process of filling out forms can be triggering and serve as a reminder for systemic process that many have exposed to through the likes of Centrelink and Department of Housing. We have generated the following data from a total of 75 adults. Young people we work with are not included in this data.



### Identify with Lived Experience of

- Mental Illness - 35%
- Homelessness - 25%
- Survivor of Trauma - 27%
- Alcohol and/or Drug Misuse - 15%
- Domestic and Family - 13%
- Physical or Neurological/Learning Disability - 45%
- Other - 16%

**\*individuals have the choice to select more than one option for this question**



### Culture

- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse - 20%
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - 8% (not including young people we engaged with Weave Family and Community Services)



### Current Living Situation

- Housing NSW, Supported or Community House - 36%
- Homeowner, With Friends/Family or Renting - 20%
- Other - 45% **(have not disclosed their living situation)**

### New vs Returning

New - 75%

Returning - 25%

**\*higher percentage in new Collaborative Artists is due to engaging 5 new community partners. These stats are based on total CAs (including young people)**

### Centrelink as main income

40%

### Gender

Female - 50%

Male - 41%

Gender Non-Specific - 8%



**'Love Milk Crate. Facilitators are patient and kind. Give us new skills expand our horizons in so many ways. Give us a shining light through all the good and bad things that come our way. I learned more about myself and others'  
(Collaborative Artist, 2022).**

Surveys and interviews have proven to be successful tools in understanding that our outcomes, are achievable and in fact, are very much already being met in the workshop rooms, rehearsals and other collaborative spaces within the organisation.



# Inside a workshop:

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"It was a really stunning session. We did warm-up in movement & improvisation, and then worked with [a Collaborative Artist's] speaking a piece based on a haiku he sent... [we] expanded a bit about how everyone's walking around with stories they want to tell, and finding how to tell them is hard, and sometimes people don't want to hear them. That, with various improvisation movement scores from other Collaborative Artists, and [the musician] improvising on cello, and [a Collaborative Artist] improvising on the drums - it was absolutely stunning, so moving, and a really powerful encapsulation of the themes and vibes of this workshop series."

- Facilitator & Community Producer, Lucy  
Watson

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