

Western Edge Youth Arts Inc.

72 Buckley Street Footscray VIC 3011

+61 3 9091 4716

westernedge.org.au

info@westernedge.org.au

ABN: 72251184593

The logo for Western Edge Youth Arts is a red, stylized shape resembling a speech bubble or a banner, tilted upwards to the right. Inside the shape, the words "WESTERN EDGE YOUTH ARTS" are written in white, bold, uppercase letters, stacked vertically.

**WESTERN
EDGE
YOUTH
ARTS**

17/12/15

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Youth Arts the First Casualty of Changes to Arts Funding

#SaveYouthArts #FreeTheArts

**In 2007 there were 21 federally funded youth arts companies across Australia
by 2014 there were 14
In 2016 there will be 4**

This alarming decrease in numbers is not due to a sudden lack of interest in the performing arts by young people. Far from it, company reports reflect interest and participation amongst the youth theatre sector has never been stronger. The demise in support for some of our most established companies, many of whom operate in regional areas, is a direct result of changes to funding by the Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council for the Arts.

Though these companies receive small amounts of Government support (between \$40k and \$90k per annum) it is anticipated the withdrawal of funding will cause many to close over coming years. Losing these small businesses is a cause for concern for a number of reasons; not least that it denies young Australians access to the arts organisations most relevant to their lives and experience. In the long term, it will reduce the development and training opportunities for the cultural leaders of the future and reduce vital employment opportunities for professional artists across the country.

In recent years we have seen the closure of the national publication Lowdown Magazine and established companies Southern Youth Theatre Ensemble, Urban Myth Theatre, Youth Arts Queensland and Contact Inc and the defunding of peak body Young People in the Arts Australia. In 2014 and 2015 the youth arts sector repeatedly raised concerns with both the Federal Arts Minister George Brandis and the Australia Council for the Arts CEO Tony Grybowski regarding the potential implications of changes to arts funding. This situation was exacerbated when former Arts Minister George Brandis removed \$104M from the Australia Council.

The impact of this upheaval meant that the pool of funds from the Australia Council became significantly smaller and all the nation's 'small-to-medium' companies faced the fear of losing financial support. Companies previously supported through the 'Youth Programs Fund' were forced to compete with larger, better resourced main stage companies if they wished to secure funding for 2016 and beyond. The youth sector had argued that it would need strategic support to manage this transition, otherwise it feared it would be significantly disadvantaged in the new funding rounds.

In last week's announcements of Australia Council project funding, 10 of the remaining 13 youth arts companies that were previously funded through the 'Youth Program Fund' have been refused funding beyond 2015. This is a devastating blow that has left many companies struggling to work out how to keep their doors open.

Sally Farr from Western Edge Youth Arts in Victoria states, "This is going to destroy so much of what we've built over the last 4 years with Australia Council funds, particularly our emerging artists programs and after school ensembles. I can't say specifically what the company will need to cut as this is now the big question for our organisation to deal with in the next few months."

Sarah Parsons from Outback Theatre for Young People in Deniliquin, NSW is similarly affected, "The loss of our program funding from The Australia Council in 2016 (and beyond) creates a huge gap in our budget, a huge gap in the amount of projects we can deliver, a huge gap in our staff (we will lose our part time Development Manager, which puts even more pressure on our one full time Creative Producer), a huge gap in the amount of distance across rural and regional NSW our company can cover, and a huge gap in the amount of young people in rural areas getting opportunities to engage with art that is about them and for them. We cannot find these sorts of funds through philanthropy or fundraising - we simply don't live in an area that is conducive to this. We don't charge for our activities because the people we work with couldn't participate if we did. Quite frankly, we're stuck between a rock and a hard place out here."

Fraser Corfield, Artistic Director of Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) and a long time creative in the Youth Arts sector is gravely concerned for the future of, what he considers the most important training ground for our continued success on the international stage." "Unless something is done urgently by the Federal Government we are facing the end of a national youth arts sector in Australia. While the biggest companies might survive, it's the loss of the many passionate small youth theatre companies nationally that will be devastating for communities and professional artists alike. I wouldn't be at ATYP if it were not for Riverland Youth Theatre and Backbone Youth Arts. Youth theatres don't just change lives for young Australians, they offer vital and unique professional development opportunities for professional artists too. The loss of this sector will have a significant impact on the professional arts in Australia for years to come."

Enlisting the support of the wider arts community and the media, the sector has launched a campaign: #SaveYouthArts, to encourage the federal government and the Australia Council to step in and promise the assistance these small and important companies so desperately need. #SaveYouthArts is running in conjunction with the national #FreeTheArts campaign and we encourage everyone to use both hashtags.

We call on the government and the Australia Council to act immediately by:

- extending the Youth Program Fund in 2016 (as a short term transition measure).
- Working with the sector to restore 2007 levels of national investment in youth arts companies
- reinstating ArtStart program

The health and safety of Australia's cultural future is at stake and action is needed now. Raise your voice and support #SaveYouthArts by contacting:

Federal Arts Minister Mitch Fifield

<http://www.mitchfifield.com/Contact.aspx>

Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield

42 Florence Street

MENTONE VIC 3194

Phone: (03) 9584 8347

Phone Toll Free (Vic only): 1300 797 110

Fax: (03) 9584 2455

Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

Phone: (02) 6277 7480

Fax: (02) 6273 4138

CEO of the Australia Council for the Arts - Tony Grybowski:

t.grybowski@australiacouncil.gov.au

372 Elizabeth Street

Surry Hills NSW 2010

Ph: 02 9215 9000

PO Box 788

Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

For more information about how you can get involved in #SaveYouthArts contact:

Sally Farr

Western Edge Youth Arts

Sally@westernedge.org.au

Ph: 03 9091 4725

72 Buckley St

Footscray VIC 3011