



Department of Justice and Community Safety

Offender Services and Reintegration
Corrections Victoria

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13 January 2023

Australia Council for the Arts
Level 5, 60 Union Street
Pyrmont NSW 2009

Dear Assessment Panel Members,

Letter of Support – Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company

It is without hesitation that I offer support to Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company's application for a four-year investment grant. I have seen first-hand the power and lifechanging impact that Somebody's Daughter Theatre has had on people's lives. I have seen women find a voice, a sense of worth and purpose, be empowered to heal relationships and feel hope about their futures.

People in prison have opportunities to engage in a wide range of rehabilitation programs – but unless they feel empowered, safe and hopeful about their futures, any offence specific interventions will have very limited, if any, positive outcomes.

For over four decades, since 1980, women in Victorian prisons have benefited from the art and drama classes that Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company provides. These classes are so much more than learning technical skills – they are about finding a voice, telling your story, dealing with trauma and grief. Each art exhibition and performance I have seen over the years, and there has been many, has always been such a brave and personal reflection of the women's personal stories. Many women continue to volunteer their time to stay engaged following their release.

I am not aware of many other community organisations that have such long standing partnerships with corrections. It is a rarity and every justice system should have a Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company.

More recently, I have also been fortunate enough to attend performances involving young people who are working with Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company in the community. Many of the young people have grown up in foster care or institutions. The team's passion and the power that creative arts can have in both empowerment and advocating for social justice issues is just as evident here.

The Department is proud to support and fund Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company for the work they do for women in prison, and can vouch for the skill, experience, and collaborative approach they bring to the table. The value goes far beyond service delivery however, in unquantifiable avoided justice, social and health and wellbeing costs. Any grant funding they receive through this application will provide a similar return on investment.

Yours sincerely

Anna Henry

Director, Offender Services and Reintegration
Corrections Victoria

Thursday February 2nd, 2023

To Whom It May Concern

RE: Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company application to Australia Council for the Arts

This support letter for Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company (SDTC), is to verify that Newcomb Secondary College has been a proud partner of SDTC in the Nobody's Fool Theatre (NFT) Program since 2016. NFT students are all enrolled at our college. We are delighted to continue our involvement in the delivery of their unique arts-led program in 2023 and hopefully beyond.

Over seven years, we have developed an immense appreciation for the work the Company does in reengaging disadvantaged and at-risk young people with their NFT program in Geelong. Furthermore, the program also promotes broader wellbeing and engagement through its poignant and professional performances, all of which use humour and sincerity to shed light on matters affecting young people and our community. I know it has had significant impact on staff at our school who regularly attend their performances. It has brought a greater empathy and understanding of the emotional 'baggage' some of our students bring with them through the school gate, which in turn has a positive impact on their professional practice.

Nobody's Fool Theatre has enabled many students to reconnect with a learning pathway, within a vibrant, inclusive, caring and inspiring space. When considering the positive impact this program has upon young people – who are on the cusp of complete disengagement from school and wider society – there are many cases that come to mind. A recent example is a Year 8 male (14 years of age), who was steadily disengaging from school, feeling social and emotional isolation and was often involved with significant peer-based conflict. Being a part of this arts-led reengagement has enabled this young person to reconnect with his learning, and to rediscover a very real sense of himself and his aspirations. This was most evident in a recent performance, where the young person spoke proudly of his First Nations heritage, and openly about the difficulties he had recently overcome in order to reconnect with his learning. Without the NFT opportunity, this young man would have become just another statistic – another young person slipping through the cracks of the mainstream educational context.

However, the positive and imperative impact of this program is not limited to just those fortunate enough to secure a place within it. Through its compelling, considered and finely-tuned performances, the program is able to promote broader social awareness about matters affecting young people, including (but not limited to) cultural diversity, family violence, family breakdowns, gender issues, sexuality, substance addiction, mental health and homelessness. Through narratives portraying individual struggles with all of these challenges, informed by the personal experiences of the cast and all involved, Somebody's Daughter Theatre provides its audiences with inspiration, understanding and reassurance.

Respectful Relationships education is now a core component of the Victorian Curriculum from Foundation to Year 12 in all Victorian schools. This was a specific recommendation from the Royal Commission into Family Violence which has been implemented by the Victorian Department of Education and Training. It is all about embedding a culture of respect and equality across the entire school community.

The proposal in this application represents an exceptional opportunity for other regional Victorian school communities to access a new powerful, creative resource for Respectful Relationships education – that is the inspirational performances by Nobody's Fool Theatre. At Newcomb Secondary College, we have had first-hand experience of how these performances have had a positive impact on the school culture.

I feel privileged to have had involvement with Somebody's Daughter Theatre through the Nobody's Fool Theatre Program over recent years, and will take any opportunity to advocate for the work of those involved. More specifically, if I can offer a perspective that might support with the continued growth of this great initiative, and the funding required for this to occur, I would be more than happy to do so.

Sincerely,

James Murphy

James.Murphy@education.vic.gov.au

February 2023



To the Australia Council for the Arts Selection Panel,

I am writing in support of Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company's (SDT) application for Four Year Organisation funding. As an interdisciplinary artist who has dedicated my practice to working creatively with marginalised and very disadvantaged communities. I have followed their work over the last 30+ years. Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company is a leading Australian community arts company that continues to make groundbreaking, innovative work that results in both high quality theatre and deeply engaged, authentic community practice.

As a young artist, working in a social context just made sense to me especially when it opens up the arts and creative opportunities to those who are most often excluded. As a result, my work has developed in diverse environments from mental health institutions, refuges for homeless youth, rooming houses, public housing estates, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and isolated regional/remote communities. I am currently the Creative Director of Visionary Images, a Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) organisation that makes public art with young people and the communities in which they live. In 2009 I was the recipient of the Ros Bower Award; I have also been Chair of the National Gallery of Victoria Youth Advisory Committee, former Deputy Chair of the Community Cultural Development Board - Australia Council for the Arts and former member of the Yarra Arts Advisory Committee.

SDT has been at the forefront in the development of CACD practice where the ethos of - nothing about or for if not *with*, is at its heart. Australia was an early adopter of CACD and a recognised and celebrated world leader of genuine community practice. SDT led this work and helped forge this reputation and continues to do so today. There are few companies to have maintained an unwavering commitment to ensuring community participants have agency and ownership of their stories and are at the forefront of telling them.

An aspect that is particularly important is the evolution and progress of their work over the years. From early work in Fairlea Women's Prison with incarcerated women to extraordinary productions with women post release, moving to working within the private prison system and maintaining the ability to remain unconstrained to best serve the women, developing work with regional youth, touring shows within educational settings, performing at conferences and in front of politicians championing the community arts sector and its work, mentoring and training emerging artists, the list goes on. Over this time SDT continues to innovate its theatre making creating current, relevant and meaningful work that captures contemporary issues and experience in a way that is accessible to audiences. This forges, understanding, empathy, connection and acceptance.

With SDT participants gain vast experience in quality theatre making, including script writing and telling their stories, acting, singing, movement, song writing, production skills. There is also a strong visual arts program where the participants develop professional skills and publicly exhibit their work. With SDT and through their processes of deep long-term engagement in the arts participants build critical life skills and have the opportunity to positively contribute to the broader community. For many it's the first time they feel heard, listened to, respected, connected and valued; and they in turn learn to listen, communicate well, respect, value and connect.

A significant factor is SDT's depth of expertise when working with people who have experience of trauma and disadvantage. Their long-term commitment to people they work with is testament to their understanding that there is no quick fix and recovery and healing takes time. Also, that to create high quality artistic outcomes, where community is genuinely authors and actors in the work, takes a great deal of dedication and time.

SDT has made it possible for many thousands of people to have access to the arts, who would otherwise have no access, both as tellers and actors of their own stories and as audience members. This has opened up the opportunity for Australian stories, that would otherwise remain excluded, to be shared and valued.

With artists' lives often being one of lack of financial and work security not only does SDT employ artists in long term secure roles and support their professional development, they genuinely care for their well-being ensuring they are able to sustain their practice. As mentioned previously they also offer mentoring and training for many emerging artists wishing to enter the field. What a wonderful training ground for artists!

Their future 2025 -2028 program submitted to you in this EOI will enable the Company to further develop their artistic contribution and undertake this critically important work. Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company's ongoing exemplary contribution to Australian and international community arts and cultural development practice deserves to be commended and deserves to be supported. They need your support to continue, and I highly recommend them to you.

Kind regards,

Maria Filippow

January 30, 2023

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing this letter in the hope of gaining your attention regarding the importance, and the significance Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company application for four year funding to myself and women like me who have experienced incarceration.

Sometimes and more often than not most people do not understand that for those of us, who made terrible choices once upon a time and maybe time and time again, have only 'hope' for change and a positive productive future. And here lies the rub...my unfortunate torpor that was sure to be the death of me.

I was first introduced to SDTC way back when I was a teenager; I was offered a ticket to see a performance at the Malthouse Theatre. It was the tale of love, loss, hope and light. I was amazed - my story performed by women who had lived and knew what I knew. It was clever and I was inspired.

By the time I was 40 my life had amounted to nothing but disappointment and lots of tears and regrets, it was over. I dropped whatever I had left, and lost hope. I am 55 now. I was to become a hopeless heroin addict and over the years lost much, gained a bucket load of regrets but ultimately maybe those stints in prison saved me because here I am, living amongst a community. I am independent of any judicial pressure. I have many important stories of hope and living to offer. I am the classic, 'if I can you can' woman.

It was at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (Women's Prison) where I was encouraged by, and became enthralled with, the excitement, the joy and buzz that SDTC brought in with them through those gates. I became a member of the group we sat in a circle and swapped stories of self-harm, addiction, sexual abuse and pain. It was a story of lost children and loneliness. I was encouraged to write, to speak up and the women heard me and valued what I had to say when no one else ever had.

Had I have not gone to prison I would never have been introduced to the arts. Being in those couple of plays made me feel proud. The audience was seeing what I saw, feeling what I felt. I was able to express my fears, hopes, dreams, grief and remorse. I felt remorse for a very long time. It never goes away. And the audience listened with empathy and gratitude and thanked me with tears in their eyes.

Given council to follow my dreams (SDTC) when I asked whether I should continue writing, I successfully completed my Cert. 4 and now have a Diploma in Professional Writing and Editing with Swinburne University, and am currently chipping away at a B.A in Professional Writing. I am still being heard. I am happy, I am healthy and am admired. In this role I can and do offer my life stories, my words, on behalf of and in unity with those women who, like me, didn't find the world a place where they could become all that they could be.

Having been out of prison now for over 14 years, I have been invited by SDTC to work as an emerging artist and mentor to other women who have been through the system. This has been the most important project of all for me. A time in my life where I can say I've made it and although still have lots to do, I am where I should be.

I am one woman who managed the lifestyle of an addict and a mother and was a very isolated and desperate person. I can safely now say that without the opportunity, lessons and without having the confidence to express myself through the arts, with kindness and compassion urging me forward from SDTC, I don't know what would have become of me really. They say ignorance is bliss and I am not ignorant. I feel loss. Loss of possibility for me and women like me to be exposed to and express ourselves through the arts would be devastating.

I do not want to sound to giddy but I would have to say the regular Tuesdays that I now spend with SDTC, and being asked to not only tell my story, but to be involved further with the script writing process, has been priceless. We recently performed, *'She Swallowed That Lie'* at Chapel off Chapel. We are working on other projects. I have been granted a purpose. A reason to live, to express and be enlightened with the impact and revelations that the arts has to offer. To see words, transform into life onstage are very sincerely becoming the best times I have had since I was an emerging adult.

All I would like to see is equality and a chance for women, girls, children who come after me to be able to experience and engage with the arts and for them to have the best possible crack at the second chances of life.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours most sincerely,

Catherine Brigal.

4 January 2022

My name is Kiara Smith, I am 18 and I am a proud Gunditjmara woman.

I am writing so that you can make sure Somebody's Daughter Theatre gets the funding they need to continue their work with me and others like me, at Nobody's Fool Theatre in Geelong. We need them to continue. We don't know what we'd do if Nobody's Fool stops. This is such a BIG thing for us people. I'd feel lost if it wasn't here. It's been so important to me and it is something I love.

This year I have been asked to work as a trainee artist with Somebody's Daughter Theatre and continue my work with Nobody's Fool Theatre as well. This gives me big purpose.

My life wasn't always like this. The Kiara before I came was lost and sad. I would just sit in my bedroom with my cat for company, because I had no one. For 2 years I did that as well as looking after my brothers. Because of their drug use my mum and dad would leave us for weeks at a time. I was a 12 year old looking after my brothers.

Being home alone with my two younger siblings sucked, I used to cry myself to sleep all the time and not know what to do with them and myself. There was a lot of fights between my brothers and I when we were left alone, about food, clothing, phones and the Xbox. At night when I had finally gotten my brothers to bed I'd just sit in bed crying and wondering what I what I done for my parents to up and leave me, it was so very stressful having to look after two young boys. Often we didn't have power or water, which was crazy because it was just double the stress. It was way harder looking after them without power or water and I didn't know how to get it put back on. We went for months without power or hot water - it was hell.

I would send them off to school. I didn't want them to be like me so I made them go. They would fight – and say, 'you don't go to school so I'm not going' – but I forced them to go. I had to put on my 'mum' pants and get them to go – they had to go, they were too young to not go. Then when they did go to school, I'd sit in my room with my cat. Then he passed away. So I sat in my room by myself.

A year went by and then it became 2 years and my Nan got hold of my Aboriginal worker who introduced me to Nobody's Fool. It had been a terrible two years. I first came when I was 12, I hadn't been to school for 2 years because I was bullied. I just can't do mainstream school.

At first I was scared of the drama. I was in my own shell and didn't really want to come out of it. But they have been so caring and supportive. I thought I'm not going to be able to do this but I got so much encouragement. Other people believed in me so I started to believe in myself. Now I LOVE the drama. If you've got dramas at home, dramas anywhere – you can come here and do drama with SDT and get your stories out. As the years have gone by, my voice has got stronger and I've taken on bigger parts. I can say that I now feel comfortable on stage. That's pretty amazing

I've found my voice and I've found my culture. At NFT, it was the first time I was able to say I am Aboriginal and be proud of it. When I was younger, I was told not to tell anyone because my dad was severely bullied when he was a kid for being Aboriginal and he didn't want that to happen to me.

I have now finished my year 12 VCAL and graduated. I'm the first one in my family to get year 12. My father dropped out Year 9 and my mum dropped out year 11.

I love the performing. It's very important because we show other people that we are just like them – that they are not alone – not by themselves, like we did on tour to the schools up north in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla. Just like the shows we do in Geelong or for conferences like we did for ACSO (Australian Community Support Organisation) at the MCG in 2019 - we are showing the audience that they are not by themselves. There are other people who go through the exact things that they are going through.

What stands out from the performances in North East Victoria is the people who were really shy at the beginning and then after we performed for them and then worked with them – they came out of their shell. They were singing and joking and smiling. That was me four years ago.

Without Somebody's Daughter Theatre (SDT) I could not be doing what I am doing or through performances reaching out to others so that change for all of us can happen.

So I am asking that you can find a way to fund SDT. It is the only thing that has worked for me and I know it will be the only thing that will get through to so many others.

I am happy if you would like to contact me on my email or mobile 0487 978 001

Yours sincerely

Kiara Smith

10/02/2023

To the Assessment Panel,

My name is Kgshak Akec and I'm a South-Sudanese writer, performing artist, storyteller, and a lover of words. I am writing this letter to you in support of Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company.

Since the moment I learned how to write in English at the age of six, I have been compelled to write out the stories that live inside my mind. It is my continued work with Somebody's Daughter Theatre (SDT) as an artist in the community, forming meaningful connections with the people we work with and creating meaningful art; that has empowered my voice in the arts and honed my offerings in all these years.

My relationship formed with the company in 2018, I was 21 and an emerging artist in the regional Geelong scene. I attended the play: ***What Will It Take***, at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre devised by the women in prison in collaboration with SDT. I was so moved by the performance, by the women and their stories, their heart and bravery. So much so that it became something that I wanted to be involved in. I was then invited by a friend in the program to attend the drama workshops held by SDT and Nobody's Fool Theatre (NFT) open to young people in the Geelong and wider community. Through various artistic and collaborative processes that were both challenging and invigorating in these drama sessions, we devised a play entitled: ***Unapologetically Myself***. That was my first time on stage telling my story, and though it was nerve-wracking and challenging, when the lights went out, all I knew was that I didn't want it to be my last. The following year, I became employed by SDT as a trainee artist through the Australia Council Professional Development grant and I consider it a privilege to still be working with the company today.

As a young Sudanese woman in the arts, I often had trouble finding spaces in which I felt emboldened to make meaningful art. My time working with SDT has been just that and so much more. As the years have passed, my time working with Somebody's Daughter Theatre, I have grown in confidence and in the ability to delve deeper into parts of myself and tell stories that don't usually get told. One of our most recent productions, ***She Swallowed That Lie*** in August 2022, was written and devised by women in the community and/or have been through the prison system. I played a character called *Alek*, who much like myself, was struggling to find belonging when she moves away from home and is plagued by racism. *Alek's* monologue, written from my own personal experiences, sheds a light on what it is *still* like in Australia, to just exist as the only black face amongst a sea of white. In the audience whilst I performed the 10-minute piece, were my parents and my two younger sisters, each with tears in their eyes as I was voicing not only my struggles and my stories, but theirs too.

When I first began my journey working with SDT, I didn't envision myself on stage and doing the work that I'm doing now. I saw myself as only a writer. I felt safe within the confines of that title because I never needed to worry about the colour of my skin and foreignness of my name. As a writer, I found solace in the anonymity of it. However, you cannot be anonymous on stage in this work, and it's a beautiful power for people who are usually unseen or over-seen, to see parts of themselves in the stories we tell.

My work with SDT nurtured my very first steps into the arts. Here I am, nearly five years later, feeling empowered and excited to step off into my own artistic ventures, telling my own stories. Building on top of solid foundations and eventually passing the torch.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully,



Kgshak Akec



To whom it may concern,

I'm writing to you on behalf of the production team at The FINCH Company to extend our congratulations on your fantastic show *She Swallowed That Lie* and to express our offer of pro-bono professional development.

Four members of the production team saw the show at Chapel off Chapel and we were all bowled over by the strength and power of the performances. The work you do is simply extraordinary and invaluable both to the people you work with and to the community.

We are all, of course, aware of the severe limitations that have been pressing over the last few years and imagine that Somebody's Daughter experience is no exception. As such, we would like to assist Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company in developing professional expertise with filming, post production and mentorships within the industry.

The work we have witnessed has lived on long after the performances.

Kind Regards,

Corey Esse

Managing Director / Executive Producer

FINCH

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Australia Council for the Arts

January 30, 2023

RE: Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company

Dear Members of the Australia Council of the Arts,

For more than fifteen years, I have been studying prison arts programming around the world, and without a doubt Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company is making some of the best quality performance and visual arts work behind prison walls anywhere on the planet. You should fund them to your utmost capacity in order to keep this vital work alive.

As a theatre scholar and professor at the University of Michigan in the United States, I wrote a book about prison theatre programs around the globe called *Prison Theatre and the Global Crisis of Incarceration* (Bloomsbury 2020). In conducting research for the book, I traveled to over forty cities in ten countries to see performances, observe rehearsals, interview prison arts practitioners, and conduct archival research. No group has impressed me more than Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company, which makes its home in the Melbourne area. To the best of my knowledge, Somebody's Daughter, founded in 1980, is the oldest continuously producing prison theatre company in the world, and its work proves far more sophisticated than most performances which take place in carceral settings. Because the artists working at Somebody's Daughter have developed such strong ties to the Australian prison system and youth detention centers, they are able to stage full productions with sets, costumes, original music, and accompanying art exhibitions—all created inside the walls of the facility. This reflects an extraordinary level of trust on the part of the prisons and youth facilities to allow outsiders to bring in many materials which would otherwise be considered contraband, to approve long and regularly occurring rehearsal times, and to provide space for rehearsals and performances, when space is always at a premium in correctional facilities. The depth of the theatre company's relationships with multiple carceral institutions could only have occurred over many years through the use of responsible and respectful practices in the daily encounters between members of the theatre company, incarcerated youth and adults, and the administrators and correctional officers who run each facility. Because of all of this an analysis of Somebody's Daughter's work fills a significant part of the chapter in my book about how prison theatre enables incarcerated people to maintain enough hope to stay alive through long prison sentences.

The team of artists at Somebody's Daughter display remarkable artistic ability alongside a strict ethical code and a profound respect for incarcerated people. Their very name—my favorite name of all the prison arts companies in the world—reminds artists, prisoners, and audiences that every woman who lives inside a prison is indeed somebody's daughter. This is one of the highest forms of service that artists working in prisons can do—to remind the world that the incarcerated are people who are worthy of the dignity and respect owed to all humanity and that art is a human right.

Australia, as a nation, holds a unique place in the global community of nations with prison arts programs because it offers federal funding to support professional quality arts work in prisons. My own country lies far behind in its ability to support quality arts programming inside prisons because no such government funding exists in a form that artists working in these difficult settings can access. For six and a half years, I served as the Director of the Prison Creative Arts Project—the largest prison arts organization in the world—and all of our funding comes private donations and from the University of Michigan where we are housed as a curricular

program which trains students to facilitate arts workshops in prisons. The majority of our fundraising has to be focused on how we educate university students through their exposure to the arts in prisons, which is a rather roundabout way to fund prison arts programming and which means that we must concentrate on cycling large numbers of student volunteers through arts workshops, rather than on prolonged, sustained work on a given play, as Somebody's Daughter does. Whereas the theatre work that my program produces is all based in improvisation, Somebody's Daughter stages fully produced, full length original plays. This is only possible because of the Australia Council's historic and generous financial support. My students can only spend two hours once a week inside prisons for ten to twelve weeks at a time, while Somebody's Daughter spends months producing each of its plays, sending three or four professional artists into the prison for six or eight hours a day, four or five days a week. The qualitative difference that this amount of rehearsal time and the care of paid, professional artists enables Somebody's Daughter to create world class theatre that could compete with productions I have paid hundreds of U.S. dollars to witness on stages in New York.

Somebody's Daughter has influenced and inspired a great many other prison arts makers throughout Australia and other parts of the world, but no one has yet rivaled the quality or consistency of their work. They are, and should be, a model for a great many others, yet this excellent work cannot continue without your financial support. If you fail to continue your support for this work, you will have failed a great many people—the artists of this company, the incarcerated youth and adults who create this remarkable work, and countless other theatre makers like myself who humbly learn from the example that Somebody's Daughter sets. If you continue to support them, you strengthen the legacy of your own impact in the world, as well as that of this great theatre company.

Somebody's Daughter also works with women who have been released from prison—a far more difficult task than working with people inside institutions. After leaving prison, formerly incarcerated people face myriad difficulties in finding housing and jobs, reconnecting with their families, making decisions, and navigating everyday life. The work of Somebody's Daughter's post-release program, called the *Tipping Point*, helps give women stability in their life after prison. It gives them access to members of a theatre company that helped them to feel productive and valued during their incarceration and shows them and their families and communities that they have something to offer society. The work of post-release arts programming is truly the work of social reintegration, helping people who have been institutionalized in ways that are counterproductive in the free world to interact with others, work in teams, find self-confidence, and articulate and demonstrate their own strengths and abilities. This is vital work. Please support Somebody's Daughter in doing it.

I would be very happy to discuss with you in further detail the work that I observed Somebody's Daughter doing in a women's prison when I visited them in July 2015 and what I have known of the further development of the troupe's work in the years since. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I could be of service to you: lucasash@umich.edu.

All my best,



Ashley Lucas

Former Director of the Prison Creative Arts Project

Associate Professor of Theatre & Drama and the Residential College

Co-Principal Investigator for the Carceral State Project