

Creative Practice for Youth Wellbeing in Aotearoa | New Zealand

Mapping the ecosystem in Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Critical Research Unit in Applied Theatre

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EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL WORK



THE
CREATIVE
THINKING
PROJECT

This report was prepared by staff of the Critical Research Unit in Applied Theatre at the University of Auckland. The research team of Amber Walls, Dr Molly Mullen, Dr Stephen McTaggart and Professor Peter O'Connor are particularly grateful to the Creative Thinking Project at the University of Auckland and the Research Committee of the School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, for their financial support of the project. We acknowledge our participants for the time and care that went into their responses to our survey.

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Executive Summary

Research Context

This report examines organisations supporting the wellbeing of young people through participation in the arts. The research focuses, in particular, on organisations in the Auckland region. It scopes the ways in which these organisations understand, carry out and resource their work. It identifies key challenges for sector sustainability, growth and positive impact across Aotearoa New Zealand. A review of international literature places this local work in the wider national and international context.

Key Findings

This research shows:

- The arts for wellbeing in New Zealand exist in an unfavourable environment. It is fragmented, siloed and lacking visibility and a substantial local research base.
- Government investment and funding in arts and wellbeing is relatively low considering the many policy-aligned outcomes.
- The current policy and funding context presents significant, deep-seated challenges which impact on growth, sustainability and positive impact for artists engaging with young people on major wellbeing issues.
- Inappropriate funding models as well as poor funding levels impacts on the quality of service provision by artists and arts organisations.
- A failure by local and national government to recognise the capacity for the arts to bring about significant individual and community change in wellbeing hampers the field.
- The significant interrelationship between the arts, health and wellbeing is now well-established internationally and, in some countries, including the UK and Australia, deeply informs regional and national government policy. That is not the case in New Zealand.

YOUTH WELLBEING IN AOTEAROA

- There is a rapidly growing, significant evidence base internationally demonstrating wide ranging health and wellbeing benefits for young people from participation in the arts.
- The literature demonstrates a close alignment between wellbeing and the distinct nature and experience of a creative process
- There is a limited local research and evidence base and lack of appropriate evaluation methods.
- There are potential synergies between holistic understandings of wellbeing, Māori and Pasifika theories or models and arts practice.
- There is a diverse, significant and rich body of arts and wellbeing practice for youth in the Auckland region.
- This area of practice is noticeably cross-sector and cross-disciplinary and can be found in organisations working within and across the arts, youth, health, education, cultural and community contexts.
- Organisations understand wellbeing in many different ways, but the dominant understanding of the relationship between the arts and wellbeing is an individualised, instrumental one.
- Practice is currently informed by an eclectic knowledge base including Positive Youth Development, Arts Education, Community Cultural Development, Community Arts and Socially Engaged Arts, Participatory Arts, Applied Theatre and Arts Therapies.
- People doing this work are often qualified and experienced in relevant areas of practice, but the workforce overall suffers from lack of sustainable employment opportunities and pathways for specialised study and professional development.

Key recommendations for the government:

- To recognise the significant role of the arts in maximising the potential for individual, community, social health and wellbeing.
- To invest in national strategic leadership and resourcing to resolve the deep-seated, significant challenges to the growth and sustainability of this sector.
- To develop a national arts strategy to embed the arts across all government policy areas.
- To adequately resource Te Ora Auaha Creative Wellbeing Alliance Aotearoa and Arts Access Aotearoa as national bodies representing the sector.
- To invest in high-quality professional development, evaluation and research to strengthen quality practice.
- To fund similar mapping/scoping research at a national level and extend it beyond the exclusive focus on youth.