



**Tomorrow Starts
with Creativity:**
South Australian
Youth Arts Today



The South Australian Youth Arts Collective



This report was developed by the Youth Arts Collective and includes information prepared by Jordan Gibbs, Kristine Royall, Shelley Timms and Jamie McCullough of Culture Counts, with graphic design by NATION.

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Cover image: Carclew Pom Pom workshop Photo: Dave Court

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Right: The Boy Who Talked To Dogs, Slingsby Photo: Andy Rasheed





Children are natural artists. They dream aloud, draw their emotions, sing and dance without inhibitions. This isn't a distraction from growing up, it is growing up. Creativity builds identity, connection, confidence, and wellbeing.

Introduction

South Australia is synonymous with arts, culture and creativity, and the South Australian government is known for its commitment to youth arts. For many years it has actively supported youth arts organisations, contributing to our state's reputation as a leader in arts and culture for young people.

To consolidate and further build on this strength, eight organisations have come together to form the South Australian Youth Arts Collective. Together, we share a commitment to ensure all young people, wherever they live and regardless of financial means, have the chance to express themselves, grow in confidence, and shape their futures. Because creativity is not a privilege, it's a right.

This report includes information from research commissioned by the Collective, by Culture Counts, and is a snapshot of the Collective's reach, potential and impact. It provides a vital baseline to build from, as we continue this work collaboratively. It shows what's already happening: more than 480,000 engagements, 886 jobs supported and a \$3.41 return on every dollar government invests.

The report also highlights some challenges. Growing up in a world of complexity and the proliferation of screen culture is causing disconnection and harm to our young people.

The nation-leading ban on social media under the age of 16 will soon come into effect. But when we take something away, we must offer something better in return. Youth arts is that return: a reconnection to imagination, expression and belonging.

The research findings show a generational drop in arts participation with today's children participating 5% less than their parents did as children. Additionally, those from lower-income households are less likely to engage and access remains a major challenge for individuals in remote areas.

We need help to expand school, community and professional arts partnerships; amplify First Nations and seldom heard voices; and fortify South Australia's role as a national and international leader for all young people.

A 2024 survey of 2,000 parents of Generation Alpha children found that 85% believe creativity is a crucial skill for future success, ranking it above problem-solving and social skills. 89% of South Australians believe access to the arts is important for children and young people.

Image: Sea of Light, Patch Theatre Photo: Andrew Beveridge



Tomorrow Starts with Creativity: South Australian Youth Arts Today.

Public support is overwhelming. Now, we need the investment to match these levels of support.

We welcome and endorse our state's Public Education Strategic Plan and A Place to Create, South Australia's new cultural policy that both champion the importance of culture and creativity for children.

Let's lead with imagination, equity and action to support art, culture and creativity for the young people of South Australia.

Tomorrow starts with creativity.

Introduction

South Australian Government funding

generated by the
SA Youth Arts Collective

in 2023 across the
Youth Arts Collective for
artists and arts workers

Total engagements in South Australia by the Youth Arts Collective

**of the SA population
believes youth arts access
is important**

Most children currently engage with arts and creative practice

Childhood engagement with arts and creative practice is declining

School programs are the most common arts engagement avenue for youth

South Australia is home to world-class theatre companies producing and touring work for children, young people and families, showcasing Australian creativity and artistic excellence on the world stage.*



The nation-leading ban on social media will soon take effect. When we take something away, we must offer something better in return. Youth arts is a reconnection to imagination, expression and belonging.

* Live Performance Australia SA Cultural Policy Submission 2024

** Total Engagements represents an aggregate figure across the cohort and are non-exclusive. They do not represent unique engagements. Carlewl estimates total unique engagements at approximately 175,000.



Image: War of the Worlds, Riverland Youth Theatre Photo: Sam Wannan



The Youth Arts Collective's purpose is:

- 1/ Advancing Youth Arts Investment
- 2/ Connecting the Youth Arts Sector
- 3/ Enhancing South Australia's Reputation



Image: Grug, Windmill Theatre Company Photo: Thomas McCammon



The Youth Arts Collective

South Australia's Youth Arts Collective (the Collective) is a group of eight youth arts organisations, artists working with young people, and other youth arts stakeholders.

Carclew: is the home of youth arts and creativity. It connects all children and young people to a world of creative possibilities, as artists, learners and audiences. With an over 50 year legacy and as Australia's largest multi-artform cultural institution dedicated to children and young people, Carclew exists to amplify and elevate the youth arts sector in Adelaide, South Australia and nationally.

Slingsby: was founded in 2007 and is internationally renowned for its memorable storytelling that captivates intergenerational audiences aged eight and up. The company creates award-winning, magical immersive experiences through exceptional stagecraft and tours these works regionally, nationally and internationally.

South Australian Circus Centre - Home of Cirkidz: is a not-for-profit training, community development and professional circus organisation based in Bowden, Tarntanya/Adelaide. Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2025 it is the largest youth circus company in Australia, with over 90,000 participant visits annually.

Patch Theatre: creates world-class arts experiences that explore the way that children see the world, acknowledging the relevance of their thinking with stories that promote imagination, wonder and discovery. Patch has been making and touring theatre for 4–8 year old children and their families from our home on Kurna Yerta, in SA since 1972. To date, we have performed to over 2 million children around the world. Each year, to more than 50,000, including many from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Adelaide Youth Orchestras (AdYO): is South Australia's leading orchestral music organisation for young people. Formed in 2001, the company recruit, train, and support young musicians from diverse backgrounds to achieve the highest standards of musical excellence. AdYO delivers empowering leadership, personal and professional development opportunities that enable young people to build career and life success, within and outside of the music industry.

Windmill: creates original stage and screen productions for children, teenagers and families. Each year, the company deliver a theatre season on Kurna Yerta, and tours extensively to major and regional venues across the world. Windmill also has a dedicated screen arm producing film and television, including adaptations from its live theatre repertoire. The company delivers comprehensive education and access programs including providing 15% of all SA tickets free to disadvantaged schools.

Riverland Youth Theatre: is a youth arts organisation based in the Riverland in regional South Australia. Reaching within the Riverland, across the region, state and nation Riverland Youth Theatre has been delivering classes, workshops, programs and events for children, young people and adults. We focus on connecting youth to the community through the arts.

D'Faces: has more than 30 years of history making great regional art with young people in Whyalla and surrounds. D'faces facilitates arts experiences, with a mission to support and empower young people and create quality original work inspired and driven by the community who pass through its doors. D'faces provides workshops and special programs in theatre, film, dance and visual arts.



Our Research

In 2023, the Youth Arts Collective commissioned Culture Counts to conduct research into the South Australian youth arts sector. This research has generated insights into current engagement levels, summarised the current state of the sector and informed how it can continue to grow and thrive.

Research was collected in two parts: Desktop Research to create a snapshot of current sector activity alongside a Population Poll to capture arts and cultural participation statistics from the general South Australian population.

The second part of the research was a Population Poll, a representative sample from the South Australian population was asked about their own engagement with youth arts programs, engagement from others in their household, perceived importance of these programs and which organisations specifically they had experience with.



Image: Carclew POM POM 10th Birthday Party Photo: Daniel Marks

Insights from our Research

Insight One: A strong consensus on the importance of Youth Arts

All respondents to the survey, regardless of whether they engaged with youth arts activities, were asked about their perceptions in respect to the importance of youth arts access. This question helps understand how the population thinks about arts and creative programs, and whether it is important for children and young people to access arts and cultural programs.

How important do you think it is for children and young people to have access to arts and cultural programs to support their learning and development?

n = 600.

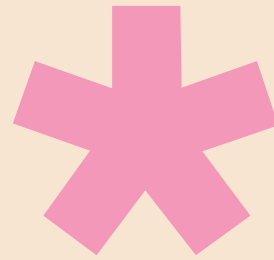


Population data indicates a strong consensus among South Australians regarding the importance of youth access to arts and cultural programs. An overwhelming 89% of respondents believe it is “important” or “very important” for children and young people to have such access. This suggests that the general population sees a clear value in arts programs, recognising their role in supporting learning and development for youth.

These findings provide the Youth Arts Collective with a strong mandate to continue advocating for and expanding youth arts access. The high level of support across the population highlights a favourable environment for arts programs and suggests a strong foundation for future funding and development initiatives.



89% of the South Australian population agree it’s important for children and young people to have access to arts and cultural programs to support learning and development.



Insight Two: A generational decline in participation in Youth Arts Activities

When asked about participation in youth arts activities, adults reflecting on their past experience were somewhat more likely to have participated (83%) compared to the children currently living in their household (78%).

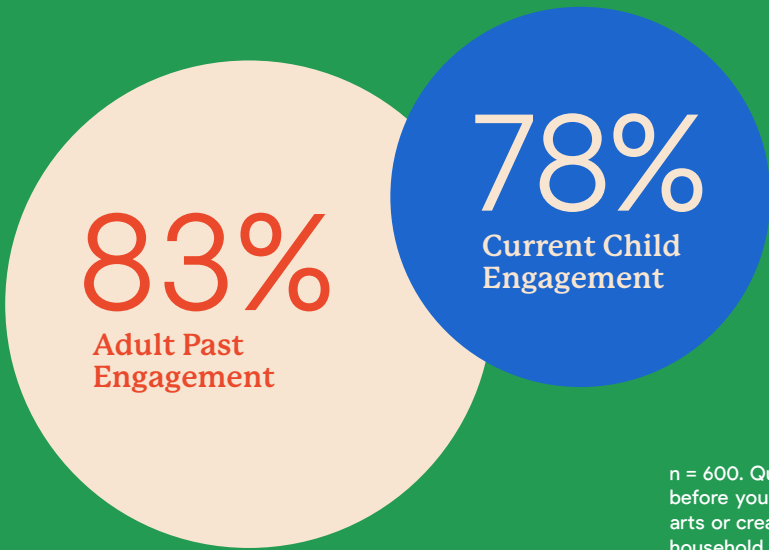
The findings show that most young people participate in arts and cultural activities. However, they also highlight a generational shift, with fewer children involved in these activities today compared to in the past.

Specific forms of engagement show notable trends. Key areas of decline include creative writing, theatre, and visual arts. While participation in music and dance has remained relatively steady.

These figures establish a benchmark for the Youth Arts Collective to reference when measuring access and engagement in the future. It also suggests that more resources could be made available to these organisations to assist their efforts in reaching more children and young people across the state.

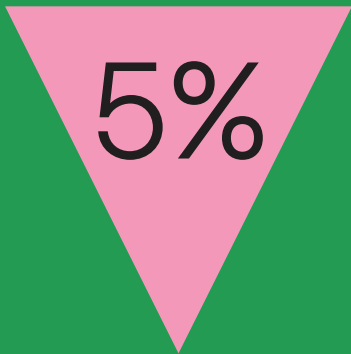
Change in Generational Engagement

Reflecting on your childhood, before you turned 17, did you participate in any of the following arts or creative activities?

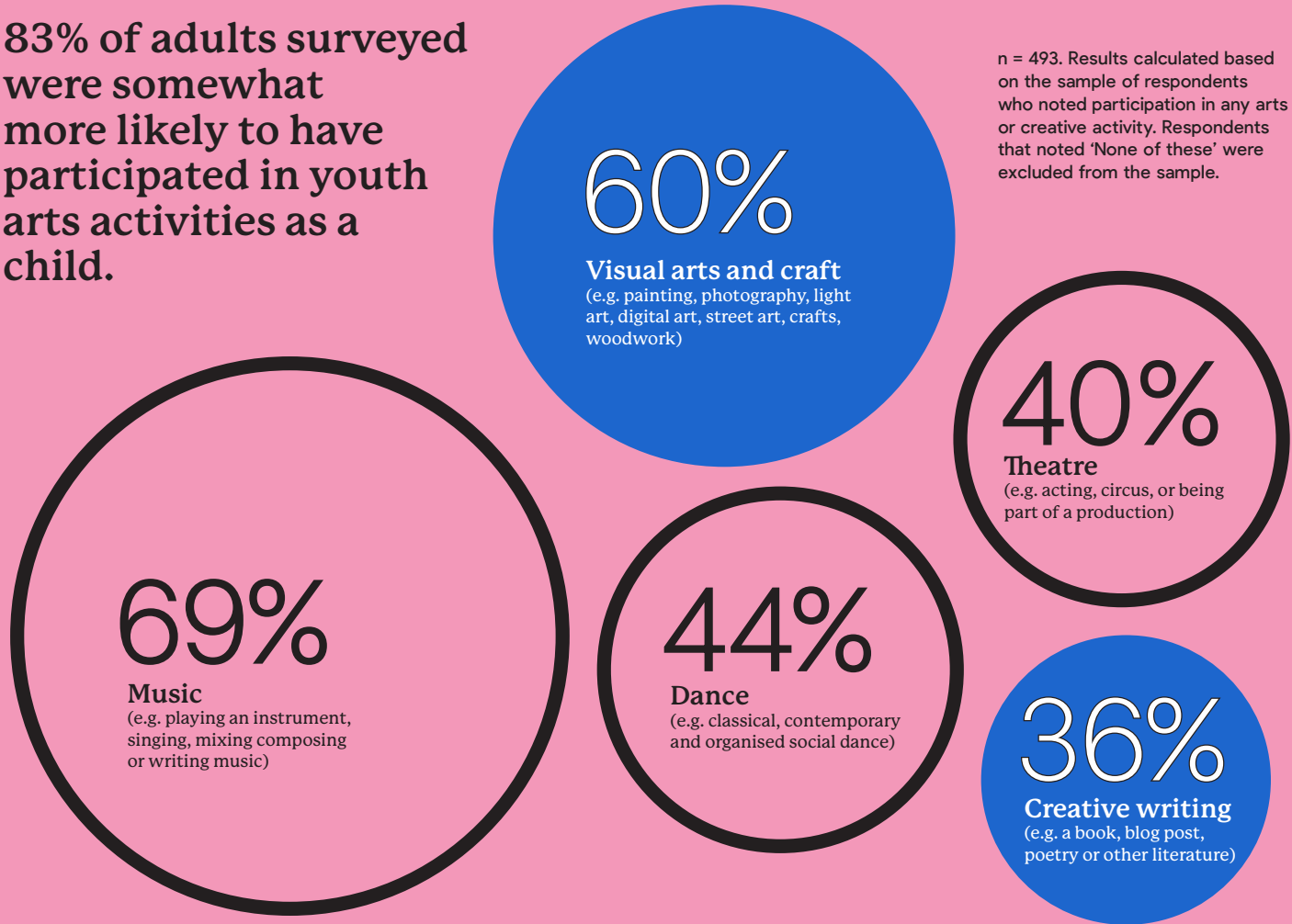


n = 600. Questions asked were Reflecting on your childhood, before you turned 17, did you participate in any of the following arts or creative activities? and Have any of the children in your household (under the age of 17) ever participated in any of the following arts and creative activities.

Generational change in children arts engagement:



83% of adults surveyed were somewhat more likely to have participated in youth arts activities as a child.



n = 493. Results calculated based on the sample of respondents who noted participation in any arts or creative activity. Respondents that noted 'None of these' were excluded from the sample.

78% of children currently living in the household are somewhat more likely to participate in youth arts activities.



n = 177. Results calculated based on the sample of respondents who noted participation in any arts or creative activity. Respondents that noted 'None of these' or 'Unsure' were therefore excluded.

Insight Three: Schools are an important method of engagement

Population engagement data shows that schools are the primary avenue for youth arts and creative engagement in South Australia, with 69% of respondents identifying in-school programs and classes as their main method of participation. This high percentage underscores the critical role that schools play in introducing and sustaining arts engagement for young people.

Although schools are the most common means of engaging with youth arts, only 13% of people engage exclusively through school-based programs. This means 87% participate through other methods, either alongside school programs or independently. However, this pattern varies significantly by household income. Among families earning \$60k–\$100k, 21% report engaging exclusively through schools, compared to just 7% of those with household incomes between \$100k–\$140k.

One-on-one private lessons, or participation in amateur or community groups or community centre programs were the other major significant avenues of engagement, as well as attendance at shows by professional organisations outside of school. These forms of engagement suggest that beyond school, youth arts participation is often supported by family or community resources.

The Youth Arts Collective actively collaborates with schools including; heavily subsidised schools’ performances, giving away free tickets to disadvantaged schools, in-school workshops with professional artists, touring to regional South Australian theatres and providing transport for schools to get to workshop and theatre venues. The Youth Arts Collective companies also create extensive educational resources aligned to the curriculum for teachers to use in class, and run teacher professional learning programs. These programs augment school cultural curriculum activities and enhance access to arts within the education system, ensuring that more students benefit from early and consistent exposure to creative activities.



Image: Beep and Mort S2, Windmill Pictures Photo: Claudio Raschella

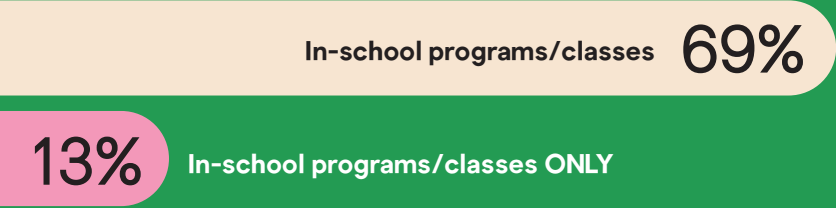


Families in the bottom 50% of household incomes were twice as likely to engage with youth arts exclusively through in-school programs, compared to families in the top 50%.

Methods of Youth Arts and Creative Engagement

Through which of the following have you and/or the people in your household typically engaged in these arts and creative activities?

Those that engaged with youth arts and creative activities were asked about the mechanisms in which they engaged. This question serves as a proxy for understanding how young people in South Australia predominately engages with arts and creative activities.



n = 513. Results calculated based on the sample of respondents who noted participation in any arts or creative activity. Respondents that noted ‘None of these’ or ‘Unsure’ were therefore excluded.

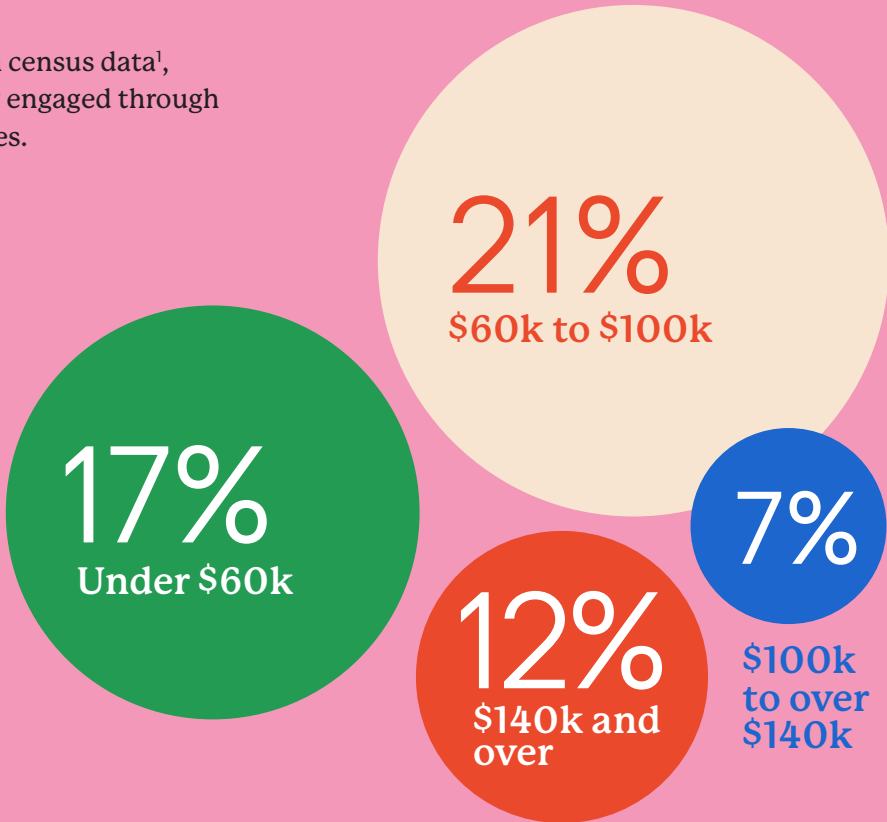
Using household income thresholds from census data¹, respondents who said their children only engaged through school were compared by income quartiles.

‘School Only’ Engagement by Household Income

‘In-school programs / classes ONLY’ engagement as the percentage of respondents by household income.

n = 143. Percentages represent the proportion of all in-scope respondents in that income range. Results calculated based on the sample of respondents who noted participation in any arts or creative activity, said their youngest child living at home was over four-years old indicated what their household income was.

¹ ABS, 2020. Household Income and Wealth Australia.

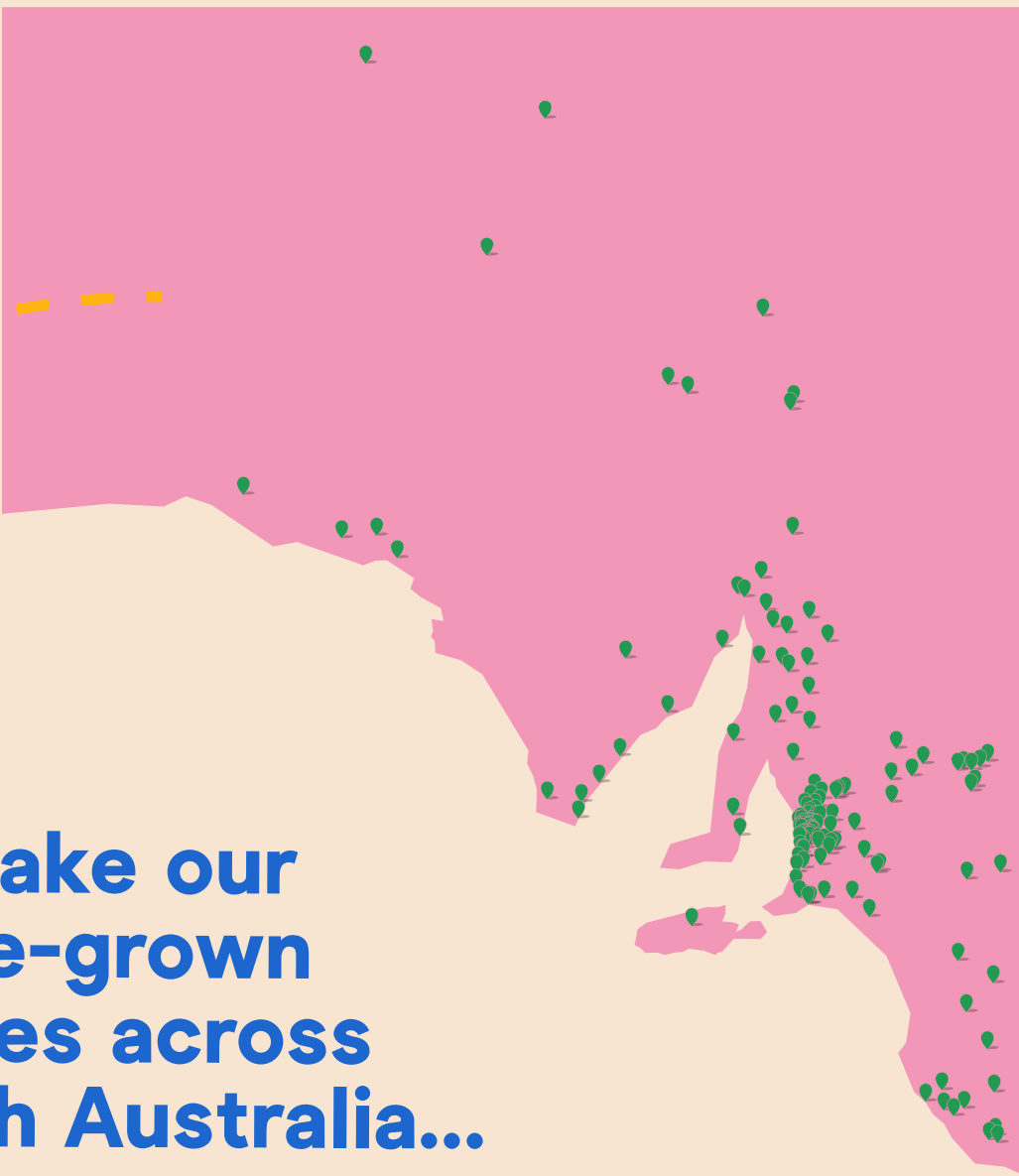


Insight Four: The Youth Arts Collective has a significant reach

With a combined 479,998 total engagements in South Australia over a 12-month period, the Youth Arts Collective is prolific in generating opportunities for young people to engage in creativity and imagination. The Collective has a strong commitment to the regions and many arts activities are low cost or free, ensuring access to participation regardless of location or income. Here's a snapshot of where we visited in SA in 2023:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Aberfoyle Park | Curramulka | Kingswood | Naracoorte | Seaview |
| Adelaide | Daveron Park | Koonibba | Noarlunga | Smithfield Plains |
| Aldinga | Eden Hills | Lameroo | North Adelaide | Snowtown |
| Andamooka | Elizabeth | Laura | Oodnadatta | Somerton Park |
| Angaston | Elizabeth Park | Leigh Creek | Orroroo | Spalding |
| Angle Vale | Felixstow | Lobethal | Padthaway | St Clair |
| Balaklava | Fleurieu Peninsula | Loxton | Palmer | Stansbury |
| Barmera | Gawler | Loxton North | Parkside | Stirling North |
| Barossa Valley | Gepps Cross | Magill | Pennington | Stonyfell |
| Beachport | Gilles Plains | Marree | Penola | Swan Reach |
| Berri | Gladstone | Mclaren Vale | Penong | Tailem Bend |
| Blackwood | Glenburnie | Meadows | Peterborough | Tanunda |
| Blanchetown | Glenunga | Melrose | Pinnaroo | Tumby Bay |
| Booleroo | Glossop | Meningie | Poonindie | Victor Harbor |
| Bowden | Gumeracha | Mile End | Port Augusta | Waikerie |
| Brinkworth | Hawker | Millicent | Port Lincoln | Wangary |
| Burton | High gate | Mitchell Park | Port Neill | Wasleys |
| Ceduna | Hyde Park | Modbury Heights | Port Noarlunga | Whyalla |
| Christie Downs | Indulkana (APY) | Monash | Port Pirie | Wilmington |
| Clare | Jamestown | Morgan | Quorn | Woodcroft |
| Cobdogla | Jervois | Morphett Vale | Raukkan | Woorolong |
| Coober Pedy | Kadina | Mount Barker | Rendelsham | Yalata |
| Copley | Kangaroo Inn | Mount Burr | Renmark | |
| Cowell | Kangaroo Island | Mount Gambier | Riverland | |
| Craigmore | Kensington Park | Murray Bridge | Salisbury Downs | |
| Cumberland Park | Kimba | Myponga | Salisbury Plains | |

We take our home-grown stories across South Australia...



... and to the world!

South Australia has global reputation for creating work specifically for young audiences. We regularly tour these original South Australian shows internationally, generating significant cultural export and sharing our unique Australian humour, heart and sensibility with children and families all over the world.





Insight Five: The Youth Arts Collective generates significant return on investment and employment

This section highlights the financial dynamics of the Youth Arts Collective organisations by examining the ratio of South Australian government funding to other revenue sources. It provides an overview of how effectively the collective leverages government investment to attract additional funding and sustain their operations.

The following statistics include the total SA government funding received, other revenue generated, and the calculated leverage multiplier, offering insights into the economic efficiency and sustainability of the Collective’s funding model.

The Youth Arts Collective demonstrates strong leverage, with each dollar from the South Australian government helping to attract additional revenue from other sources, including the federal government, at a multiplier of 3.4 overall.

With an average subsidy of just \$3.41 per engagement, government funding is highly efficient across the Collective, reflecting the substantial reach and economic impact these organisations achieve with minimal per-participant investment. For policymakers and funders, these figures illustrate the significant economic return generated by South Australia’s youth arts sector and support the case for continued or increased investment. A low subsidy cost per engagement, coupled with a high leverage ratio, highlights the sector’s effectiveness in stretching public funds to maximise arts access and impact across South Australia.

The Youth Arts Collective has also proven extremely effective in jobs creation for artists and arts workers. The Collective has a total pool of 52 (FTE) core staff across the eight organisations that together generated an additional 834 employment engagements for artists and arts workers over a 12-month period. Our Youth Arts Companies maintain vital employment and ensure that local talent remains in South Australia.

Youth Arts Collective Employment in 2023

Core Staff (FTE)	Artist Employment
52	834

Youth Arts Collective Engagement in 2023

Events / Activities	SA Engagements
2,136	479,998

Youth Arts Collective Finances in 2023

SA Gov Funding	Other Revenue	Leverage Multiplier
\$5,358,126	\$12,924,734	3.41

Note: Activity report results for organisation differ between calendar year and financial year. Results presented here are based on annual reporting information for each organisation. Total engagements when including interstate and international activity was 1,241,844. Engagements are non-exclusive and therefore do not represent unique engagements.





Summary

Our research shows there is strong public support for Youth Arts and a clear understanding of the benefits of creativity, empathy and imagination for our young people in an increasingly complex and disconnected world.

Despite overwhelming public support for the importance of Youth arts, research shows the likelihood of young people participating has declined by 5% over the past generation. The Youth Arts Collective applauds the South Australian government on its ban of social media for children. We look forward to an increase in demand on live experiences including the arts and sport following this ban, and we are here for it.

Together, The Youth Arts Collective created a total of 479,998 engagements for young people in South Australia alone, over a 12-month period. Over the same period, the Collective generated 886 jobs for artists and arts workers and reported a funding multiplier of 3.41. This means that for every \$1 of South Australian Government Funding, the Collective was able to greatly increase their overall revenue, impact, reach and return to South Australia. This return on investment provides outstanding value for money in being able to grow the engagement profile of youth arts organisations with a comparatively smaller financial investment from the state government.

South Australia has long been known for its arts and culture, and the state government has supported the youth sector over many decades. Our Youth Arts Collective is well-established and poised to lead the nation in increasing engagement with our children in diverse, fun and enriching alternatives to social media.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the State Government to increase participation in Youth Arts to the levels of past generations, and to ensure our children can grow their imaginations, express themselves, build confidence, understand the world around them, and develop a strong sense of connection and belonging.

