

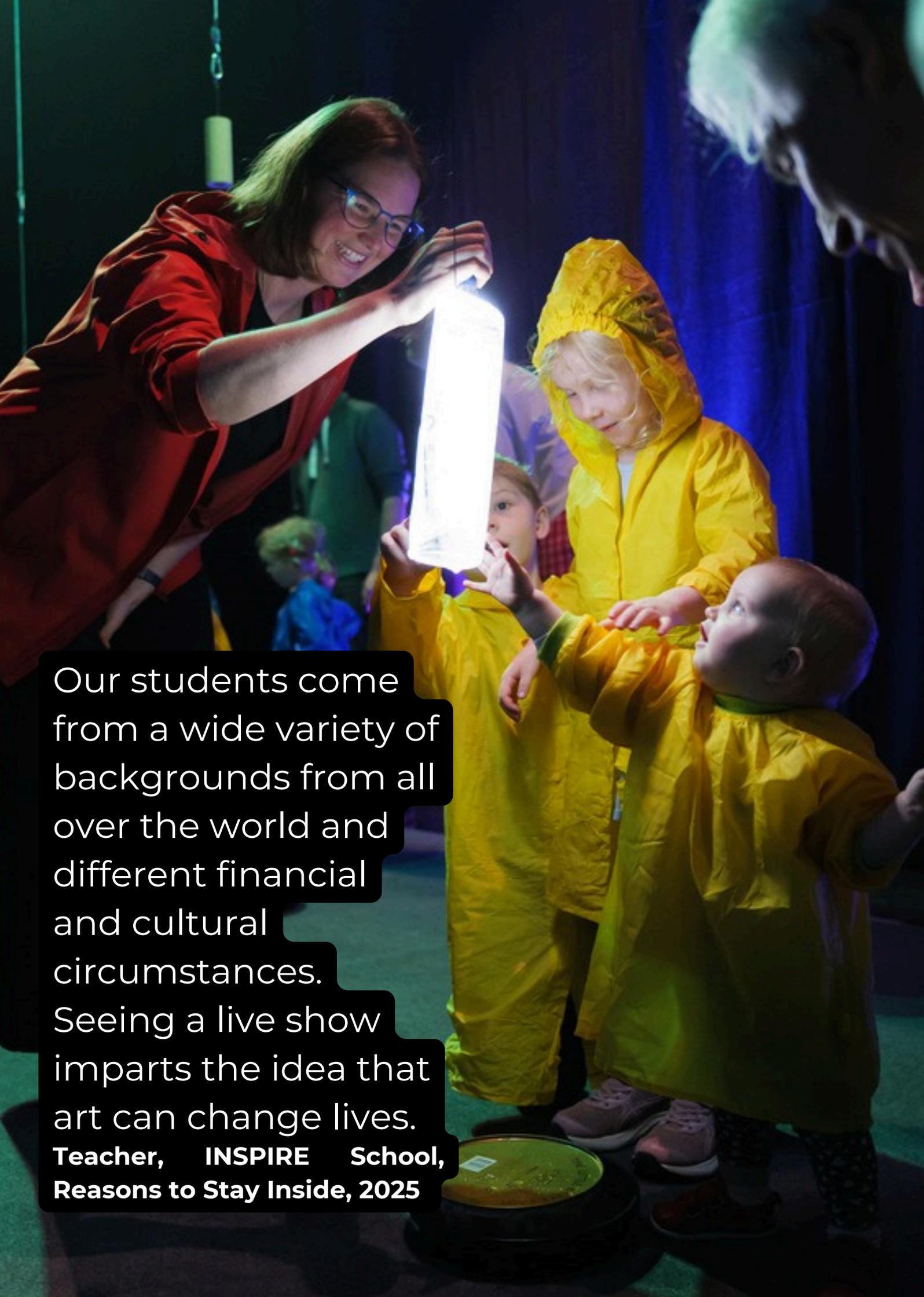
IMPACT REPORT

A year of reach and depth,
creative engagement across
Western Australia.



2025

www.barkinggecko.com.au
180 Hamersley Road, Subiaco WA
ABN: 23 052 424 683



Our students come from a wide variety of backgrounds from all over the world and different financial and cultural circumstances.

Seeing a live show imparts the idea that art can change lives.

Teacher, INSPIRE School, Reasons to Stay Inside, 2025

Barking Gecko Arts respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Western Australia, and Lands to which we travel nationally. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge their deep historical and spiritual connection to culture, country, waterways, rivers and seas. We are honoured to create our work on Whadjuk Boodja, the ancestral lands of the Noongar people.

Why it matters: Our impact in 2025

In 2025, Barking Gecko Arts delivered a simple promise: creativity should be accessible for children and young people, no matter where they live, or what barriers sit between them and participation.

Across theatre seasons, festivals, school programs, residencies and community partnerships, our work consistently produced four outcomes that matter in children's lives:

- Access – who gets to participate
- Belonging – who feels it's for them
- Wellbeing – how children feel about themselves and others
- Capability – future skills: creativity, collaboration, resilience and problem-solving

We saw evidence of these outcomes in the numbers, in quality signals, and, most importantly, in the language children and communities used to describe what changed. Children talked about being braver, more confident, more connected, and more able to name big feelings. Teachers and partners described engagement lift, improved collaboration and stronger classroom readiness. Families described joy, feeling welcome, safety, and the rare experience of being part of something made for them.

In a year defined by transition and growth, Barking Gecko Arts stayed anchored to what makes impact real: world-class creative experiences paired with the mechanisms that turn attendance into participation - subsidies, transport pathways, residencies, community partnerships, teacher development, and place-based delivery.



I learnt how to trust myself
Creative Challenge Participant Age 7, Wiluna Remote
Community School, 2025

Why we exist

“My students felt so special and seen”

Teacher, Access School, Hoods, 2025

Children’s access to culture is not evenly distributed. Geography, cost, transport and confidence all shape who gets to participate and who misses out.

Barking Gecko Arts exists to change that. We create world-class theatre and experiences for young people, and we pair artistic excellence with access strategies, creative learning and partnerships that make participation possible, in metro Perth, outer-metro communities, regional towns and remote settings.

We are a creativity organisation for young people. That means we don’t just present work to audiences; we build the conditions for children to participate, express, collaborate, and see themselves as creators, because creativity is not an “extra.” It is a developmental asset: it strengthens belonging, wellbeing, and the capabilities young people need to thrive.

The problem

Too many children grow up without regular access to high-quality arts experiences. When creativity is treated as optional, the benefits are uneven: wellbeing support, a sense of belonging, and the future skills that come from making and collaborating are concentrated in the few places with resources.

In regional and remote WA, these gaps can be amplified by distance, limited specialist arts provision and fewer opportunities for cultural and community participation. The result is not only an arts gap; it’s an equity gap.

At the same time, schools and communities are reporting heightened wellbeing needs. Children need more opportunities for emotional expression, safe risk-taking, connection, and joy.

Our solution

Barking Gecko Arts responds with an integrated model:

- World-class experiences made for young people, children and families
- Removing barriers for families, schools and communities to attend and participate
- Creative learning residencies that build confidence, wellbeing, and future skills
- Festival and public programming that makes arts participation feel possible, joyful and welcoming
- Artist and teacher development, so more high-quality learning can happen in more places
- New work development, ensuring the pipeline stays bold, relevant, and West Australian

This model matters because it treats creativity as essential infrastructure: not a one-off event, but a connected system that can hold both scale and depth.



What we aim to change

We aim to shift:

- Access - who gets to participate
- Belonging - who feels it's for them
- Wellbeing - how children feel about themselves and others
- Capability - future skills: creativity, collaboration, resilience, problem-solving



Access

Access is the core purpose of programming at Barking Gecko Arts. In 2025, we transformed support into participation at scale across WA, with strong outer-metro reach and continued regional delivery. Access remained one of our strongest equity levers: subsidising tickets, enabling travel support, and ensuring creative learning is available to schools and communities who would otherwise miss out.



Belonging

Our work consistently created environments where children and families felt it was for them - with 94% reporting they felt connected to others and 97% describing they felt it was a safe space for people from different backgrounds. These are not "nice-to-haves": they are indicators of welcoming, inclusive, and socially safe experiences.



Wellbeing

Across all programs, the strongest theme in the feedback related to how young people felt. This is supported by high metrics for fun/engaging learning (96%) and children being encouraged to express themselves (85%) and leaving more confident (81%), alongside teacher-reported wellbeing outcomes in school settings.



Capability

2025 delivery built future skills through participation. Children practised creativity, collaboration, resilience and problem-solving, reflected in strong confidence indicators and program evidence showing growth in experimentation, persistence and teamwork.

I have a disability and I loved how easy it was for me to access everything. How I felt included in everything was just amazing!

AWESOME Festival Attendee Age 10, 2025



Key Performance Indicators



Access

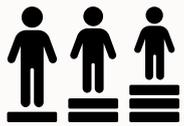
Strategy	KPI	Target	Result
Create opportunities for school children to attend productions	School matinees scheduled	8	58
Reduce cost barriers for schools	School students receiving ticket + transport subsidy	4,500	7,493
Strengthen transport support	Average subsidised students per matinee	250	220
Ensure productions can tour	Annual WA tours delivered	1	3
Ensure touring is resourced	Successful funding applications for WA touring	1	1
Ensure touring footprint	WA venues toured	5	12
Extend access via digital	Creative Learning online resources published	2	8
Extend access via digital	Digital access: resource suite completed	100%	100%



I felt good for contributing to an event that had such a positive impact on the community.

AWESOME Festival Volunteer, 2025

2025 Key Performance Indicators



Equity

Strategy	KPI	Target	Result
Prioritise children least likely to access arts	Priority cohort participation	55%	75%
Reach beyond inner metro	Regional + outer-metro share of engagement	40%	70%
Be in conversation with children across WA	Metro Gecko locations	6	14
Be in conversation with children across WA	Regional Gecko locations	4	12
Be in conversation with children across WA	Child voice participants (Gecko)	5,250	5,425
Deepen equity reach	Participants per Gecko location (depth)	200	285
Reduce cost as an equity barrier	Subsidy reliance (% of school attendees subsidised)	60	75%



Wellbeing

Strategy	KPI	Target	Result
Use theatre to support wellbeing & connection	Children report increased confidence/agency	65%	70%
Use theatre to support wellbeing & connection	Children report stronger empathy/connection	60%	65%
Use theatre to support wellbeing & connection	Teachers observe positive wellbeing shift	75%	80%
Embed wellbeing outcomes in evaluation	Wellbeing pulse survey implemented across season	100%	75%

2025 Key Performance Indicators



Reach

Strategy	KPI	Target	Result
Grow audiences and participation	Total attendance/participation	33,000	95,050
Build child voice as part of practice	Child voice reach	5,250	5,425
Grow participation through teacher programs	Teachers participating in PD	8	76
Increase engagement depth (not just reach)	% experiencing 2+ touchpoints (show + workshop/resource/residency)	25%	15%
Grow new audiences	% first-time schools / first-time attenders	30%	15%
Strengthen repeat engagement	% returning schools year-on-year	55%	45%



It was the first piece of live theatre I've ever seen and it makes me want to see more!
Attendee Age 14, Access School, Hoods, 2025

2025 Key Performance Indicators



Capability

Strategy	KPI	Target	Result
Build creativity & problem-solving through arts learning	Teachers report improved student creativity	70%	75%
Build collaboration & communication	Teachers report improved collaboration/communication	65%	70%
Build resilience & persistence	Teachers report improved resilience/persistence	60%	65%
Strengthen teacher capability	Teachers feel more confident delivering creative learning	80%	85%
Strengthen teacher capability at scale	Schools using at least one online resource	250	120
Strengthen WA theatre industry & artists	Weeks of PD for teaching artists	4	1



Governance

Strategy	KPI	Target	Result
Efficient and Effective Board	Policy Update	Annual	Y
Efficient and Effective Board	Gender Balance	At least 50% of board members identify as women	Female: 37% Male: 63% In another way: 0%
Efficient and Effective Board	50% Board Members diversity (culture, sexuality, ability)	50%	62.5%
Efficient and Effective Board	Annual Board Audit	Internal	Y
Efficient and Effective Board	External Financial Audit	External	Y
Efficient and Effective Board	Review of Company Constitution	External	N
Efficient and Effective Board	Appointment and induction of new board members	1	2

The Quadrangle

Whiskey & Boots and Barking Gecko Arts

Seasons: Fringe World (23 January - 1 February 2025),
AWESOME Festival (3-4 October 2025)

Venue: State Theatre Centre of WA

Performers:

- Georgia King
- Mark Storen
- Bridget Turner
- Claudia Tero

Production:

- Ben Nelson

We exist to ensure young people's experiences are not only represented, but respected - because voice is a pathway to belonging, wellbeing and civic empathy.

Too often, children and young people are spoken about rather than truly listened to. Their worries, hopes and everyday realities are filtered through adult interpretation - softened, reframed, or dismissed.

The Quadrangle created a public space where young people's voices were centred with dignity. Developed by Whiskey & Boots, the work used headphone verbatim theatre: performers listened to children and young people's recorded interviews through headphones and spoke their words exactly as they were said, accompanied by live music. This form deliberately reduces the "adult filter" and holds the texture of growing up as it is lived - humour, contradiction, earnestness, insight, and uncertainty.



Belonging

The Quadrangle strengthened belonging by sending an unmistakable message: your voice is legitimate; your experience counts.



Capability

It also built community capability: audiences weren't responding to a fictional character; they were responding to the reality of a young person speaking, which invited adults to listen without defensiveness and carry that listening back into classrooms, families and community conversations.



Wellbeing

That validation is protective - it supports wellbeing by making space for self-expression and emotional literacy. The deeper impact was a "long tail of empathy" - a shift in how communities relate to children's concerns, worries and dreams.



Access

Presenting The Quadrangle at the Fringe World Festival marked the first time our work was presented within the open-access fringe model, rather than at curated festivals. This explored a new pathway to reach audiences who engage with the fringe festival environment and expanded the contexts in which children's voices could be heard.



Hoods by Angela Betzien

Season: 17 May - January - 19 June 2025

Venues: Subiaco Arts Centre, Don Russell Performing Arts Centre, Koorliny Arts Centre, Kalamunda Performing Arts Centre, Red Earth Arts Precinct

Director:

- Andrea Gibbs

Lighting Designer:

- Peter Young

Cast:

- Joshua Everett
- Natasha Pearson

Set and Costume Designer:

- Sam Knox

Composer/Sound Designer:

- Tim Collins

Each night two hoods ride a train to a wrecking yard on the outskirts of the city. Here, in this cemetery of stories, they are storytellers with the power to fast forward, pause and rewind. Tonight, they tell the story of three kids left in a car.

Rewind. It's Friday, KFC night and the last day of school before Christmas. Kyle, Jessie and baby brother Troy are waiting in the car for their mum. As night approaches, the car park takes on a dark and sinister aspect, filled with strange and unfamiliar characters. The shopping centre closes, Mum still hasn't returned, and the baby won't stop crying. Exploring issues of poverty and family violence, Hoods is a suburban tale of survival and solidarity against the odds.

We exist to make theatre that respects young people's emotional intelligence, work that tells the truth about what it feels like to grow up, and that provides safe shared spaces for connection and learning.

Many young people are already living alongside complex social realities - poverty, instability, violence, shame, inequality - yet they are rarely given safe, high-quality spaces to name those realities, process big feelings, and talk about what they mean. When those conversations don't have a shared container, wellbeing can become private, isolating and hard to articulate, especially in school contexts.

Hoods was our response: a major remount of a contemporary reimagining of Hansel and Gretel, crafted as a safe artistic platform for big themes - poverty, family violence, resilience and moral choice - handled with care, artistry and truth. Access was non-negotiable: we deliberately removed barriers for schools with the most barriers.

Hoods became a case study of our access-and-impact model: when high-quality work is delivered with deliberate equity settings, young people respond with deeper connection, greater emotional literacy, heightened artistic engagement and stronger social awareness.



Access



- We reached **3,796 young people**
- across **62 schools**
- through **22 performances**,
- targeting free tickets to schools with ICSEA below 1,065.
- **52%** of tickets subsidised or free for schools and families who would not otherwise be able to attend.



Wellbeing

Students described empathy and new emotional language, consistent with the play's themes of hardship and resilience. This suggests strong emotional literacy development and social - emotional impact



Capability

Teachers used the production as a shared text for critical thinking across Drama and English—connecting artistic craft to social issues.



Belonging

The work travelled beyond the city centre:

- **70%** of audiences came from outer metro and regional WA, through hubs including Kwinana, Kalamunda, Gosnells and Karratha, requiring **3,270 kilometres** of travel to meet communities where they are.

Reasons to Stay Inside

Season: 20 September - 31 October 2025

Venues: Koorliny Arts Centre, State Theatre Centre of WA (AWESOME Festival), Don Russell Performing Arts Centre, Kalamunda Performing Arts Centre, Red Earth Arts Precinct

Playwrite:

- Katy Warner

Set and Costume Designer:

- Bryan Woltjen

Composer/Sound Designer:

- Rebecca Riggs-Bennett

Cast:

- Dan Buckle
- Tamara Creasey

Director:

- Sam Longley

Lighting Designer:

- Lucy Birkinshaw

Stage Manager:

- Emily Stokoe

Pegacorns, pillow forts, and the power of friendship. Some battles you don't have to fight alone. Pedro used to run, skateboard, play soccer, and go to school... Not anymore. Pedro stays inside now. His best friend Flora thinks that's boring and kind of freaky. But Pedro doesn't care. He's building a pillow fort (he would prefer you call it 'The Death Star'), and it's getting bigger. Every day, it's getting harder for Flora to reach him. Pedro has the best reasons to stay inside, but Flora knows what he's missing. She will do whatever it takes to get her best friend to come outside. You can't stay inside your fort forever, can you?

A show about best friends, a dancing pegacorn, pillow forts, and that weird anxious feeling.

We exist to give children safe, joyful and meaningful ways to practise being human together, especially when anxiety, big feelings and uncertainty are part of daily life.

Many children are navigating anxiety and the push-pull between safety and growth, yet they don't always have the language, permission, or shared spaces to talk about it. Without shared prompts, wellbeing becomes private and isolating, and schools can lack the confidence or time to hold these conversations consistently.

Reasons to Stay Inside addressed these challenges: a high-quality theatre experience designed as a wellbeing and belonging prompt, wrapped in humour, imagination and theatrical magic. The story - friendship, anxiety, a dancing pegacorn, and Pedro's pillow fort - gave children and teachers an engaging shared text that made it safer to talk about feelings.



Access

- We reached **3,977 young people**
- across **45 schools**
- through **29 performances**,
- targeting free tickets to schools with ICSEA below 1,065.
- **90%** of tickets subsidised or free for schools and families who would not otherwise be able to attend.



Belonging

"I enjoyed it because I learned I was not the only one with these big feelings" **INSPIRE Attendee, Don Russell Performing Arts Centre, Age 8 ½**



Capability

What changed was clear in what audiences remembered and how they described it. They referenced social support and help-seeking - talking to someone, asking for help, supporting friends.



Wellbeing

Educators identified outcomes including self-awareness, mindfulness/sensory awareness, empathy and compassion, opportunities to express emotions, and learning from mistakes. Students named feelings, fear, anxiety, sadness, alongside joy and humour, and they described normalising emotions ("it's ok to cry," "fine to be scared," "not the only one").

This is the shift we aim for: reducing stigma around big feelings, strengthening emotional literacy, and reinforcing supportive relationships. Importantly, the outcomes were not confined to already-resourced schools; access mechanisms enabled participation, meaning wellbeing learning reached the students most likely to miss out.

AWESOME International Arts Festival for Bright Young Things

Season: 20 September - 14 October 2025

Locations: Kwinana, Perth, Esperance, Beverley, Hopetoun

We exist to create an open door into culture - one that requires only curiosity, not prior confidence or money - so children and families can experience the arts as something that belongs to them.

For many families, barriers to cultural participation include cost, transport, confidence, and the sense that the arts “aren’t for people like us.” For diverse communities there can be additional barriers around safety and belonging. Families who don’t live in city centres face geographic barriers with nothing happening in regional and outer metro centres in the school holidays. The result is an equity gap: the children and families who may benefit most from creative experiences are often least likely to access them consistently.

AWESOME Festival is our solution at scale: a deliberately child, family and community-centred model that designs participation to feel possible, welcoming and joyful. It offers multiple “ways in” and transforms public spaces into places of play, possibility and belonging—holding many kinds of participation at once.

The evidence is unambiguous. In 2025, AWESOME Festival reached people who say they wouldn’t normally participate:



Access

- Attended by approximately 65,310 attendees across 2,840 kms
- **70%** agreed they wouldn’t normally get to experience something like this,
- **94%** said it made the arts more accessible,
- **96%** said it was easy to attend,
- and **97%** said it was valuable to have in their area.



Belonging

- Belonging and social safety were extraordinary:
- **94%** felt connected to others
 - and **97%** described a safe space for people from different backgrounds.



Capability

- Capability outcomes were also strong:
- **91%** learned something,
 - **96%** said learning was fun/engaging,
 - **74%** developed new skills,
 - **81%** felt more confident,
 - and **87%** said it encouraged collaboration and problem-solving.



Quality

- Crucially, quality sustained impact:
- **97%** said it was an important addition to cultural life and provided access to high quality arts experiences—building trust, return intention and advocacy over time.

Such a joyful, inclusive space!
AWESOME Festival Attendee, 2025



The Blank Page

Artist Development Pilot

Writer/Blank Page Recipient:

- *Natasha Pearson*

Performers (Industry Reading):

- *Andrea Gibbs*
- *Kim Walsh*
- *Sam Longley*
- *Tara Booth*

We exist to ensure children and young people have access to stories that reflect their world - told with artistic excellence, emotional truth and local authenticity. The pipeline of new work depends on sustained support for writers, yet emerging WA playwrights rarely have structured time, mentorship, and investment to develop full-length work for young audiences. Without this, the field narrows and children miss out on diverse voices and stories that help them feel seen.

The Blank Page is a direct investment in WA writers and future repertoire. In 2025 we launched the program with financial support and structured mentorship from the Artistic Director and production team. The successful writer, *Natasha Pearson*, developed her first full-length children's script, *Hearts & Robot Parts*, culminating in a public reading.

Immediately, one writer moved from aspiration to a completed draft and clearer pathway into professional production. Long-term, the change is "repertoire impact": not only one script, but a stronger ecosystem that will generate multiple future works. In 2026, the program expands to support two writers, increasing volume and diversity of future stories for young audiences.

Capability



"One of my big goals for 2025 was simply to write a full script, let alone have the chance to read it for people, so this has been incredibly special. Having input from all areas of the Gecko team was so valuable. Hearing perspectives from all sides of production gave me a real sense of both the limitations and the possibilities beyond what's on the page, which was exactly what I needed."

Natasha Pearson, Blank Page Recipient



AWESOME Ballet Tour

Regional Tour: Little Red Riding Hood & The Lost Little Llama

Season: 11 - 16 April 2025 & 7 June - 6 July 2025

Venues: Esperance Civic Centre, Goldfields Arts Centre, Broome Civic Centre, Red Earth Arts Precinct, Hopetoun Community Centre, Narrogin & District Senior Citizens Centre, Harvey Recreational & Cultural Centre, Pemberton Mill Hall, Moora Performing Arts Centre

Choreographer:

- Andries Weidemann

Production Technician

- Luke Salfinger

Lighting Technician & Stage Manager

- Reev Coonan
- Lucy Birkinshaw

Performers

- Amelia Oddy
- Elliot Dunn
- Jerome Jordan
- Leilani Connolly
- Lincoln Conroy
- Meg Rafinian
- Molly Ashleigh
- Ruby Brazzalotto

We exist to ensure children and families living in regional Western Australia can access high quality performing arts experiences in their own communities, because geography should not determine a child's cultural life.

The AWESOME Ballet Regional Tour travelled 8,070 kilometres to nine regional venues, engaging 1,309 audience members and, for many children, providing a first experience of live classical ballet. In regional communities where access to professional dance is limited and families must often travel long distances for cultural experiences, bringing work of this calibre locally strengthens connection, pride and participation. Shared arts experiences create moments of joy and togetherness for families, while signalling to children that world class performance belongs in their town, and belongs to them.

Importantly, the tour was also designed to build sector capacity. By partnering with regional presenters through CircuitWest's Playing WA network, the project supported venues to confidently program high-quality children's work, strengthening local pathways for future family programming and contributing to a more sustainable regional arts ecology.

The AWESOME Ballet Tour demonstrates what is possible when strong artistic partnerships and strategic touring align to make culture reachable for every child, wherever they live.



Capability

Built regional sector capability by supporting under resourced venues to confidently deliver and expand family programming, sharing practical tools, mentorship and wrap around activity models to strengthen long term children's arts provision.



Wellbeing

Shared family experiences filled with humour, music and imagination.



Belonging

Stories designed specifically for children, presented in welcoming civic and community venues.



Access

High-quality classical ballet delivered locally across 8,070 kilometres of regional WA.

All at Sea

Starlight Children's Foundation Partnership

Captain Starlight Staff:

- Jono Brand
- Katie O'Hallaran
- Meg Strickland
- With Thanks to the Starlight Captains

Designer

- Sam Knox

Audio Designer

- Bridget Turner

Performer

- St John Cowcher

We exist to bring creativity to children in the contexts where belonging, wellbeing and agency are hardest to access.

In hospital environments, children are not choosing their setting; hospital is something happening to them. Treatment, waiting and uncertainty can shrink agency and the sense of self. Families carry constant emotional load; staff must keep care clinical even when needs are bigger than medicine.

All at Sea is a high-quality creative experience designed specifically for hospital settings—safe, flexible, emotionally intelligent, responsive to children where they are. Using play, music and imaginative storytelling, it creates moments of joy, connection and control in a place that can feel dominated by restriction.

In 2025, early feedback showed a consistent lift in mood and connection for children, families and staff. When a child's emotional state shifts, the whole room shifts—parents exhale, siblings engage, and staff see children more as themselves than as patients. Across the year, we refined a portable, trauma-informed, deeply playful form—setting a foundation for scaling delivery in 2026 so more children can access creativity as genuine wellbeing support.

Beau's "Rocket Ship"

Beau is 9 years old, full of energy, and lives with limited verbal communication. Ahead of the experience, he named his boat "Rocket Ship" and made one rule: "Beau is in charge and all treasure goes to Beau." When the ocean explorers arrived, Beau's hospital bed transformed into a vessel—waves and seabirds filled the room, shanties were sung, and Beau led the journey as "Admiral Beau."

What changed was immediate and lasting—and maps directly to our pillars:

Access



- Beau could participate fully without leaving the ward; creativity came to him.



Wellbeing

- Visible uplift—joy, relief, engagement, emotional ease.

Belonging



- Beau's ideas shaped the entire room; his communication (verbal and non-verbal) was treated as central and meaningful.



Capability

- Leadership, imaginative agency, and communication in a new context.



Later that day, Beau continued the adventure into therapy. In speech therapy, he was so excited to talk about it that clinicians used the experience to support communication. In a ward where children can feel defined by treatment, Beau's "Rocket Ship" shows what this work makes possible: a child regaining agency, imagination and connection so powerfully it becomes a bridge back into care—and back into themselves.

The Master Collector

Creative Learning Program

We exist to help children build belonging, wellbeing and capability through high-quality creative experiences - especially in classrooms where deep imaginative learning can be limited. Many students don't get consistent access to drama-rich learning that invites creative risk, collaboration and confident expression. When creative learning is intermittent or overly outcome-driven, it can leave less confident students on the sidelines and limit teachers' ability to embed imagination and storytelling as everyday practice.

The Master Collector is an immersive, participatory theatre-in-education residency delivered across nine WA primary schools using a five-week model. Students stepped inside a magical world and became active participants shaping it through improvisation and storytelling. The structure blended live performance, puppetry and participatory learning with curriculum-aligned practice, with reflection and between-session activities to deepen impact.



Wellbeing



- Teachers reported exceptionally high engagement and meaningful improvements in confidence, imagination and willingness to participate, especially for students who typically struggle with focus

Access



- The Master Collector was designed to bring high quality immersive theatre into the classroom removing the barrier of requiring a theatre or the costs of an excursion.
- The five-week continuity mattered: it allowed trust to build, creative risks to increase, and participation to broaden week-to-week.

Capability



Teachers also reported strengthened practice and confidence through observing highly skilled teaching artists. Results included:

- **100%** agreement the program supported creative expression;
- **100%** that students enjoyed drama/storytelling;
- **100%** that it had long-term classroom value;
- **89%** wanting more experiences like it.

It brought out imagination I did not know some of my students had.
Teacher, The Master Collector, 2025



Regional Teacher Artist Training

Dates: 12-16 May 2025

We exist to make creativity possible everywhere children live - not only by touring shows, but by building capability so arts learning can be delivered by skilled, local practitioners within their own communities. In many parts of WA, arts learning relies on fly-in delivery or one-off opportunities, while regional artists face major PD barriers - cost, travel, isolation and a lack of pathways close to home. When regional teaching capacity isn't supported, access becomes fragile and inconsistent.

A five-day intensive training program led by experienced teaching artists, removing financial barriers through fully subsidised travel, accommodation and per diems. The program combined experiential learning, peer collaboration and reflective practice to strengthen confidence and inclusive facilitation. Beyond skills, the program-built peer connection—reducing isolation and strengthening quality practice locally.

Participants reported major confidence growth across key areas:

- 58% felt they improved confidence facilitating workshops with young people,
- 100% felt they improved confidence facilitating storytelling and play,
- 60% felt growth adapting to learning needs,
- 96% felt confidence creating inclusive and accessible environments.

Zoe's Story

Zoe Waterstrom Muller shows what this shift looks like in real life. After completing the Regional Teaching Artist Training, Zoe was engaged as a Teaching Artist Assistant on the Woodside Arts Access Initiative Residency in Karratha, supporting drama-based workshops for local young people.

This work matters: it creates local artists, local pathways and local delivery—so young people in places like Karratha can access high-quality creative learning from people who understand the community from the inside.



It means the world to me because I get to give others the opportunities we currently do not offer within my community.

Zoe Waterstrom Muller, Regional Teacher Artist Training Participant, 2025



Access

the training created a practical pathway for a local artist to step into paid arts facilitation work in her own region. Expanding who can deliver arts experiences locally, not just who can travel to receive them.



Belonging

Zoe's work strengthens cultural participation from the inside out—young people experience the arts with someone who knows the community, and Zoe experiences the arts sector as something she can meaningfully belong to and contribute to from where she lives.



Wellbeing

the workshops create spaces where young people can express themselves, take safe creative risks, and be met with care—while Zoe's own professional confidence and purpose are strengthened through meaningful work in her community.



Capability

the program-built Zoe's facilitation skills, inclusive practice, and adaptive teaching strategies—capabilities that directly translate into higher-quality experiences for young people and stronger local delivery over time

AWESOME Schools

Creative Learning Program

We exist to ensure children and young people, especially those most likely to miss out, can access high-quality creative experiences that build belonging, wellbeing and capability. In disadvantaged school communities, students often have fewer opportunities for sustained arts learning and fewer platforms where their voices are amplified. Short-term incursions can be enjoyable but rarely create the depth required for lasting change, particularly for students navigating disadvantage, disrupted learning or low confidence.

AWESOME Schools is a ten-week, co-designed residency model with Strategic Partnership Plans—school leaders identified students and goals allowing teaching artists to shape delivery to community strengths.



Access

In 2025, the program worked with

- **3 Low ICSEA Schools,**
- **124 students** (35% First Nations, 81% CALD)
- and supported the creation of **332 artworks**, often incorporating Noongar language and traditional art forms.



Belonging

Students reported powerful belonging shifts

- **100%** said it felt good when everyone worked together.

Cultural connection strengthened

- **96%** liked learning about land/nature around their school;
- **96%** liked learning new Noongar words.

Crucially, exhibiting at AWESOME Festival shifted identity and recognition: students experienced public validation as young artists.



Wellbeing

Wellbeing was visible in help-seeking signals

- **71%** felt it was okay to talk to a friend/teacher when sad, and student comments about arts practice being calming.
- **100%** of Strategic Partnership Plans mapped specific wellbeing goals for each project



Capability

Capability and resilience indicators were strong.

- **87%** liked experimenting with objects for sound;
- **87%** thought it was okay to make mistakes.



I feel proud of my art because it shows who I am.

AWESOME Schools Participant, age 8

STEAMED UP!

Creative Learning Program

(Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics, Enterprise/Entrepreneurship, Design)

We exist to strengthen children's belonging, wellbeing and capability by embedding creativity into everyday learning, especially where young people most benefit from confidence-building and connection. Early primary learning can become narrow, compliance-based or disconnected from identity and curiosity. Some children - particularly those who are shy, anxious, selectively mute, or who have additional learning needs - can become less willing to take risks, less confident, and less likely to see themselves as capable learners and collaborators.

A 12-month intensive creative learning partnership integrating STEAMED into classroom life through 7 weeks of residencies, culminating in a family celebration. Across three terms, six teaching artists engaged students and staff in collaborative projects and created 300+ works (collages, puppets, sculptures, and original children's books, including four completed audiobooks). Teachers observed meaningful breakthroughs, including a selectively mute student participating verbally by the end of residencies, an important wellbeing and capability signal.

Access



In 2025, the program worked with

- **1 Regional School,**
- **33 students** (24% First Nations, 42% CALD, 12% Learning and Support needs)

Parents confirmed the impact beyond school: 100% said their child enjoyed it, spoke about it at home, and benefitted.

Belonging



Strong results across identity and belonging

- **86%** recognised special things about themselves;
- **89%** felt happy being themselves even if different)

Wellbeing



Program designed to explore wellbeing factors of

- Positive Peer Comparison
- Listening
- Empathising
- Working in groups

Strong results across empathy and relationships

- **94%** enjoyed play and working together,

Capability



Strong results across imagination, curiosity and problem solving

- **89%** liked trying new things;
- **93%** liked hearing new ideas,
- **77%** enjoyed solving problems on their own



It feels like I'm creative, and feels like I want to be an artist!

STEAMED Up Participant, age 5

Creative Challenge

Creative Learning Program

We exist to make creativity possible for children wherever they live, because imagination is a pathway to belonging, wellbeing and capability. In many regional and remote communities, children have limited access to specialist arts learning and fewer opportunities to work with practising artists. Over time, that access gap narrows confidence, voice and learning experiences that build resilience and connection.

Creative Challenge is an artist-in-residency model that places professional teaching artists in regional and remote schools and communities to co-create powerful arts experiences with children. It is intentionally child-led and process-driven, building agency, collaboration and pride.

Where access barriers were real, schools reported the residency filled an arts education gap, especially in communities with no arts specialist teachers. Teachers observed strengthened social and emotional wellbeing as students learned from mistakes, collaborated, listened and took creative risks safely. Impacts extended beyond the arts into communication, teamwork, critical thinking, literacy and social-emotional wellbeing. Community celebrations amplified outcomes through public witnessing, meaning, children being seen and valued as creators.

- 759 participants across 10 schools
- Creative Challenge travelled over 16,430 kilometres across the state

Case Study: Condingup Primary School (Esperance region)

At Condingup Primary School, Creative Challenge operated as a full "access-to-impact" model.



Access

The residency brought practising professional artists and specialist creative learning into a regional community where opportunities can be limited. Students were able to work with high-quality artists without leaving their town, gaining exposure that would otherwise be rare and resource dependent.



Belonging

Teachers reported that the residency created meaningful opportunities for students to share strengths, explore local identity, and feel that their ideas mattered. The child-led approach gave students a sense of ownership—making creativity feel like something that belongs to them, not something imported from elsewhere.



Wellbeing

The process-driven design invited students to step outside their comfort zones, safely take creative risks, and experience mistakes as part of learning rather than failure. Teachers observed growth in confidence, connection and emotional safety—protective factors for wellbeing. The school also reported that the program increased attendance rates, signalling heightened engagement and positive school connection.



Capability

Teachers observed practical skills that extend beyond the arts—resilience, problem-solving, collaboration and communication—describing the impacts of experimentation and imagination as "profound" and explicitly noting these capabilities transfer into wider learning.



The concluding community celebration strengthened these outcomes further: the school described it as creating "a powerful sense of connection and pride," giving students the chance to showcase achievements with families and the wider community. In a regional setting, that public witnessing matters—it reinforces identity, motivates continued participation, and helps a whole community see children not only as students, but as capable makers and leaders of culture.

INSPIRE Karratha & Exmouth

Creative Learning & Community Engagement Program

We exist to ensure young people across WA can access creativity as a pathway to belonging, wellbeing and capability, especially in regional and remote communities where opportunity is too often shaped by postcode. Regional young people often have fewer chances to experience high-quality performing arts, fewer sustained creative learning opportunities, and fewer safe spaces that build confidence, connection and voice.

INSPIRE is a layered engagement model: live performance + deep school residencies + free/accessible community workshops—so participation doesn't rely on travel, budget or prior confidence. In 2025:



Access

- **Karratha:** HOODS + Reasons to Stay Inside performances, three weeks of deep school residencies, four community workshops
- **Exmouth:** two weeks of deep school residencies, four community workshops

The program changed access conditions through local delivery, free/no-barrier entry points, and partnerships that connected young people across schools and settings (including the KREI Student Leadership Alliance across five schools).



Wellbeing

Teaching artists and partners observed clear lifts in confidence, connection and pro-social behaviour - encouragement, sportsmanship, peer support, shy young people becoming increasingly vocal and stepping into leadership.



Capability

Capability outcomes transferred beyond the arts: communication, collaboration, creative thinking, public speaking confidence, consent-based play and respectful interaction—skills that strengthen participation in any context.



I've noticed a real confidence boost among the kids who attended. They proudly stood up when the workshop was mentioned at our assembly and have already volunteered for speaking roles in next week's interschool debating tournament!

Teacher, INSPIRE Karratha

In Development

New works

We exist to give children experiences that build belonging, wellbeing and capability through world-class storytelling, made for young people, tested with care, and responsive to childhood as it is now. Childhood is changing: the world is louder, faster, more digital, and for many children more anxious and fragmented. If theatre is made quickly, adapted down from adult work, or not deeply tested, it can miss the mark - asking schools and families to invest time and trust into work that may not be age-perfect, inclusive or genuinely meaningful.

Creative development is the engine room. It is where we test artistic ideas safely, prototype new forms (interactivity, digital play, non-verbal storytelling), build inclusion and engagement into the work from the start, and protect the standards that make impact possible - emotional truth, humour, rigour and care. It allows a portfolio approach: a slate of works at different stages of maturity, ensuring relevance and resilience.

In 2025, multiple projects progressed decisively in form and readiness, widening what children's theatre can be. Development advanced interactive participation (Game On working title), major new works such as Stellarphant (differences, resilience, persistence) and Walk of the Whales (wonder, social tension, environmental urgency, collective action) and expanded theatrical languages through non-verbal and meta-theatrical investigations (Quiet, The Play's the Thing). The measurable change is practice-based: projects moved from idea to tested form, inclusion was designed-in, and new relationships with young audiences were built with children as co-authors, voters, players and collaborators.

A New Creative Company

Barking Gecko Arts

The merger that formed Barking Gecko Arts was driven by a simple impact logic: children's outcomes improve when creativity is not delivered as a one-off, but as a connected system - performance, experience, learning, festivals and place-based partnerships working together. When access is uneven, brilliance alone is not enough. Without the mechanisms that convert excellence into participation, the children who most need creativity will still miss out.

A purpose-led creativity organisation—one that listens closely to children, schools and communities and responds with experiences that are bold, relevant and made with care.

In its first full year, Barking Gecko Arts strengthened the ability to deliver scale and depth together: bigger reach, deeper learning, and clearer evidence of what works, anchored to Access, Belonging, Wellbeing and Capability.



Our People

Patron

Hon. David Templeman

Ambassadors

- Jodi Cant – Ambassador for Strategic Innovation and Public Value
- James Foley – Ambassador for Creativity and Curiosity
- Dr Kate Raynes-Goldie – Ambassador for Play and Innovation

Staff and Board

Board

- Tony Chong - Chair
- Guy Boyce - Company Secretary
- Kaylene Gulich PSM- Board Member
- Andries Weidemann - Board Member
- Kamal Thurairajah - Board Member
- Dane O'Callaghan - Board Member
- Dr. Emma Jayakumar - Board Member (until August 2025)
- Amanda Morrison - Board Member (until October 2025)

Staff

- Ryan Taaffe - CEO
- Sam Longley - Artistic Director
- Jenny Simpson - Festival Director
- Stewart Campbell - Production Manager
- Natalie Di Risio - Senior Producer
- Brianna Wotzko - Operations & Philanthropy Manager
- Carla Nirella - Creative Lead, Learning and Engagement (Maternity Leave)
- Kim Walsh - Coordinator, Learning and Engagement
- Heather Bongiovanni - Learning and Engagement Admin Officer
- Alman Ridzuan- Morley - Marketing & Audience Development Manager
- Sam Bennett - Marketing Coordinator
- Nadia Bischof - Admin, Logistics & Volunteer Coordinator
- Kristy Cheng - Finance Manager
- Celine Fitzpatrick - Finance Coordinator

AWESOME Festival Technical Crew

Declan Barber, Ellick Higson, Ffion Nutter, Luke Salfinger, Niki Davison, Paul Rowe, Richard Woodley, Shannon O'Neill, Tristan Glover,

Barking Gecko Arts Teaching Artists

Abbey Lentjes; Annick Akanni; Ariana Paganetti; Arron Yarran; Asha Cornelia Cluer; Ayo Busari; Caitlin McFeat; CJ Hampson; David Dare Parker; David Williams; Ellie Glen; Hannah Davidson; Isaac Diamond; Jessica Russell; Jo Morris; Joanna Schapel; Jordan Fyfe; Kaitlin Okely; Kim Walsh; Lea Simic; Leith Alexander; Lucy Wong; Luke Joseph Ryan; Mace Francis; Mariah O'Dea; Martine Perret; Matt Aitken; Melanie Maclou; Michèle Lainé; Michelle Hall; Rae Cottam; Sally Stoneman; Sam Nerida; Shelby McKenzie; Sherrise Todd; Stuart McMillan; Teresa Jakovich; Wren Richards; Zoe Waterstrom Muller

Donors

Tony Chong; Jim & Freda Irenic; Adept Turnkey; Sue Hansen; The JEM Foundation; Bev East; Jane Morrison; Henry Boston; Caroline Wood; Andrew Chubb; Jenny Simpson; Kathryn Teale; Geoff & Marie Wotzko; Barry Green; Deidre Robb & Guy Boyce; Carol Lam; Kerry Revell; Michael Ioannidis; Michael Robertson; Clare Carney; Steve Scudamore; Ryan Taaffe; James Kelly; Sue Stepatschuk; Steve Haimes; Susan Harwood; Alex Biddle; Céline Fitzpatrick; Stanley Khoo; Amy Welsh; Joan Klinger; Brianna Wotzko; Aisling Chan; Aiman Ridzuan-Morley; Anonymous (6)

Thank you to our Partners

Festival: Lotterywest; Creative Australia; City of Perth; Arts and Culture Trust; Telethon; Minderoo Foundation; 7West; Perth Happenings; Digital Loop; RTR FM; Strange Animals; Pretzel Communications; State Library of WA; State Theatre Centre of WA; Perth Cultural Centre; Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts; Koorliny Arts Centre; City of Kwinana; Beverley Station Arts; RAVE about Arts; Esperance Civic Centre; Shire of Esperance.

Creative Learning Programs: Department of Local Government, Sport, and Cultural Industries; Woodside Energy; Horizon Power; Keystart; Stan Perron Charitable Foundation; Quercus Group; Healthway; Go for 2&5; Hertz; The Kids Research Institute Australia; SEW Arts. **HOODS:** Department of Local Government, Sport, and Cultural Industries; Lotterywest; Minderoo Foundation; Woodside Energy; Wright Burt Foundation; Quercus Group; Stan Perron Charitable Foundation; Keystart; City of Subiaco; Horizon Power; Telethon; Peter & Elizabeth Moore Family Foundation; No Place for Poverty; Youth Focus. **Reasons to Stay Inside:** Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries; Keystart; Creative Australia; Quercus Group; Peter & Elizabeth Moore Family Foundation; Minderoo Foundation; Telethon; Horizon Power; Wright Burt Foundation; Woodside Energy; Stan Perron Charitable Foundation. **Barking Gecko Arts:** Otherside Brewing; Concetti

