

Submission on a new cultural policy for South Australia

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251 Morphett Street, Adelaide, SA 5000

08 8226 3355 | commissionercyp@sa.gov.au

Creating for the Future – shaping the long-term vision for the arts, culture and creative sector in South Australia

Damien Walker, Chief Executive, Department for the Premier and Cabinet

Email: StateCulturalPolicy@sa.gov.au

I am pleased to provide input to South Australia's cultural policy in my role as Commissioner for Young People.

My role was established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* to promote and advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people living in South Australia, and to help bring about improvements to systems that impact on them. Since 2016, I have been actively engaging with the children and young people of SA to hear their thoughts and advocate on their behalf.

Under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* each State authority 'must, in carrying out its function or exercising its powers, protect, respect and seek to give effect to the rights set out from time to time in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'. Most relevantly, Article 31 states that all States must recognise the rights of children to participate freely in cultural life and the arts and that States must 'respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity'.ⁱ

We know that enabling children and young people to learn about, experiment in, and engage in arts, culture and creative activities can have a big impact. It boosts civic engagement, provides a platform to explore important ideas and ways to express them, can have a protective effect against mental illness and can be used therapeutically in relation to depression, anxiety and PTSD, is linked to better academic outcomes, and can improve student motivation, engagement, attendance and school enjoyment.ⁱⁱ In particular, we know that the stories, songs, dance and art of Indigenous Australians has been integral to the communication of knowledge and culture across thousands of generations.

This submission addresses the following:

1. My one big idea: engage children and young people in decision making.
2. What South Australian children and young people have told me they value about the arts, culture and the creative sector in South Australia.
 - What young South Australians think about the City of Adelaide.
 - What young people think about festivals.
3. Recommendations for improving arts, culture and creativity for children and young people in South Australia.
 - Improve access for the many South Australian children and young people currently missing out.
 - Improve opportunities for arts and cultural education.

- Improve funding for school excursions.
- Create free child and youth friendly creative places and activities.
- Invest in public libraries.
- Ensure everyone has affordable access to reliable Wi-Fi.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children and Young People
Adelaide, South Australia

1. My one big idea: Engage children and young people in decision making

Currently, children and young people have no voice in the development of most policies in South Australia despite those under 18 years of age forming 23 per cent of the population.ⁱⁱⁱ This is particularly true for groups such as children and young people with disability, who are LGBTQI+, and/or who are in the 'tween' age group (8-12 years old).

Under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) all States should respect the right of children and young people to have a say on the issues that affect them and for their views to be taken seriously.

I am disappointed to see that there is no mention of children and young people at all in the cultural policy discussion paper or in the consultation process for the cultural policy on YourSay.

While many local councils now have youth advisory groups to help them better understand their younger residents, and some youth arts groups focus on the interests of younger people, the State government is lagging in terms of engagement with children and young people in policy areas including the arts and culture.

If we are to have a State that genuinely encourages a thriving artistic, cultural and creative environment, as well as one that fully supports the rights of its younger residents, it must support the interests of children and young people as consumers and participants. To do this, it is vital that the Government involves children and young people in decisions about its cultural policies and strategies as the experts in their own lives. Understanding the nuances and complexity of young people's experiences will provide the Government and its agencies with insights into how best to focus their coordinated efforts to best uphold their rights.



Young South Australians have much to gain from, and contribute to, a renewed focus on the arts, culture, and creative sectors in the state.

This is the generation we need to thrive if SA is to prosper as a cultural and creative State today and in the future.

2. What South Australian children and young people value about the arts, culture and creative sector in South Australia

Children and young people have repeatedly raised with me the importance of arts and creativity to their lives. I have heard from over 50,000 8-12 year olds over the past five years in my annual Student Voice postcards.^{iv} and one of the things they say is most important to them is being creative and able to express themselves.

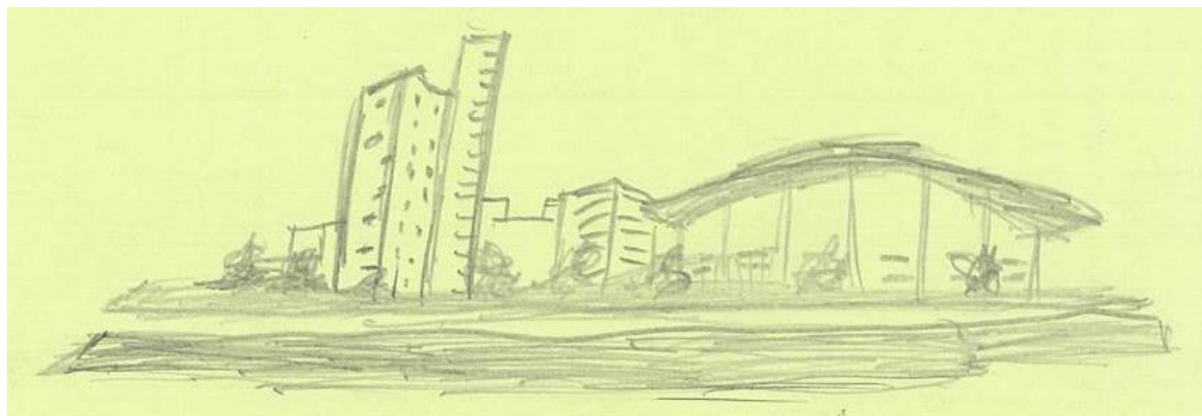
In their postcards, 8-12 year olds draw pictures and write about how much they enjoy taking part in all sorts of creative activities including drawing, singing, playing music, and dancing (some of their responses are featured in this submission). When asked what sort of job they would like to do when they are older, jobs in art, design, and creativity were high on the list, including being an artist, actor, singer or YouTuber.

Children form an important part of the cultural economy and are highly engaged in arts, cultural and creative activities. In a poll I undertook in 2017, of the 331 children and young people:

- 46% spent time playing or listening to music;
- 28% spent time creating art; and
- 9% spent time dancing.

What young South Australians think about the City of Adelaide

We know that young people are critical to future economic and social growth in the State and in its capital city. If we can understand the perspectives of children and young people now, the City of Adelaide and South Australia as a whole can adapt to be the liveable, smart and innovative place our younger residents crave. Young people have unique perspectives on how to attract and retain young talent, be innovative and resilient, and be inclusive.



In 2018, I met with 130 young people aged between 12 and 22 years to ask them what they thought would make the City of Adelaide a more youthful place. They identified three distinct features of a youthful place: that it should support young people to be connected, creative and confident.^v

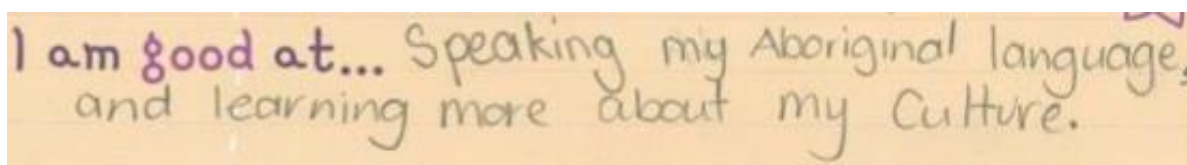
They told me that they want dedicated spaces that support their need to connect, build relationships, participate in community, and have positive experiences which are open, inclusive, welcoming and well-connected.

“It’s hard for youth to consume/share their music because a lot of music is shared in places that only adults can attend. Young artists can’t share their art because the consumerism is targeted towards adults, with 18+ age limits. This makes it hard for young people to express their [music and] art.” – 16 year old

Young people want the City of Adelaide to be confident of its place in the world. They want to celebrate its cultural foundations, acknowledge its historical context, and look to its youthful future.

They envision a city that recognises fresh ideas, perspectives, and skills, where the creative arts are more valued and accessible, and careers in the arts are sustainable. They highlight that music, arts, festivals and events are central to a vibrant youth scene.

They want a city that celebrates Aboriginal culture, preserves old buildings, and builds new smart ones. They want a city which better utilises our precious green spaces, celebrates the diversity of our international students and incorporates these longer-term visitors into a new vibe.

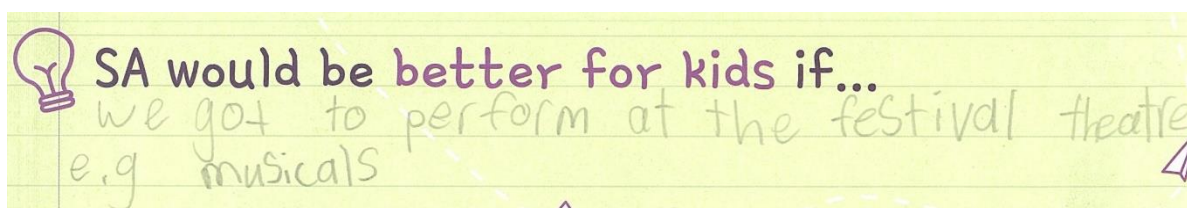


I am good at... Speaking my Aboriginal language,
and learning more about my Culture.

Affordability is a key concern for many young people so combining arts, music and film with public spaces and transport is essential for a youthful and vibrant city. They raised concerns about the lack of unlicensed venues and low levels of promotion of local young talent through small scale festivals, venues and/or competitions.

Many young people commented that when 'passions are showcased', when they can 'see young people succeeding and excelling', when 'something is created that is Instagramable', that's when you have a youthful city.

"Employ local artists to create pieces for landscape architecture in new spaces, have shelters for rain and shine, seating on the ground and benches, under 18 events around the city to bring together with bands and other groups performing in this space." – 17 year old



SA would be better for kids if...
we got to perform at the festival theatre
e.g musicals

What young people think about festivals

South Australia considers itself to be a world leader in festivals, but this is not necessarily the experience of the children and young people who live here. While there is some pride amongst young people for the festivals and events for which SA is known, they have raised concerns that many of these events are primarily aimed at adults or families with young children.

As the 'Festival State', young people think it is time to give more prominence to events that feature young South Australians. They have called on the State to reflect the diversity and creativity of the whole population. Their motto is "if you see it you can be it".

It is through festivals in their various forms that young people engage with their peers, neighbourhoods, cities, towns, and with the world around them. Young people want to be able to do their favourite things in their own local communities, and say they feel happiest when they are doing the things they like to do in the ways they want to where they want to.

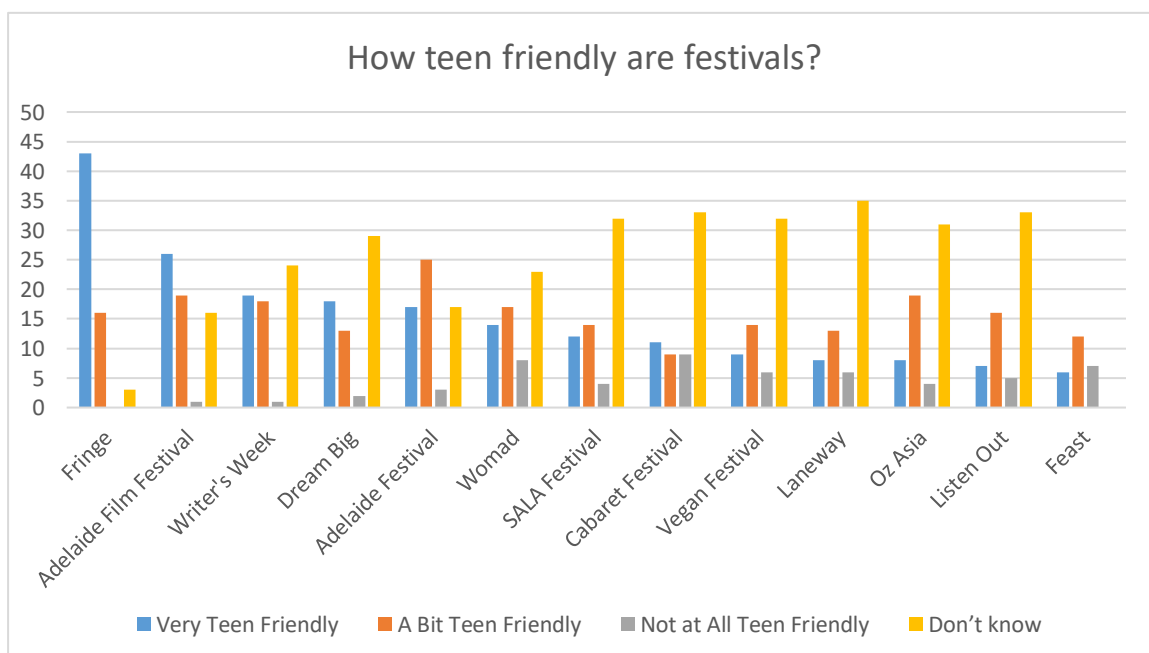
In May 2022, I undertook an in-person festival survey at the NEO Teen Takeover event. A total of 62 young people between the ages of 13 to 17 participated responding to three questions.

My favourite thing about being a kid is...
 going to festivals

SA would be better for kids if...
 we had more festivals for kids.

SA would be better for kids if...
 There were more festivals like the Adelaide show and the Christmas pageant.

How teen friendly are festivals?



Young people have told me that the majority of festivals held in South Australia are not teen friendly or at least not marketed or costed for young people. Whilst some of them are sure of what the festivals are, some are not aware that there are events for young people.

Young people have highlighted the importance of being able to attend events or cultural festivals as a means of social engagement, of making connections, building relationships and participating in their community, thereby fostering their sense of belonging, as well as their overall health and wellbeing.

If you could create/bring one festival to Adelaide, what would it be?

Food, music, performing arts, pride, sports, theme parks and Disney themed festivals are the kind of festivals young people want to see here in South Australia. Specific examples provided by them were queer fest, vegan food festivals, a medieval fair, vidcon and a gaming and technology festival.

It is important that festivals curated for young people are mindful of the age limit set and that the content is relevant to young people:

“I would make an all-age festival” – 14 year old

“[We want] something with more popular music amongst the teens” – 14 year old

What would put Adelaide on the world map for teenagers?

“More inclusive festivals” featured in different places around the State and expanding existing events such as Adelaide Film Festival, WOMAD and NEO Teen Takeover are seen as integral to putting South Australia and Adelaide on the world map for teenagers.

“[We need] a festival that is known to unite and bring together teens from all over adelaide” – 14 year old

3. Recommendations for improving arts, culture and creativity for children and young people in South Australia

Improve access for the many South Australian children and young people currently missing out

In South Australia, those in rural and regional areas, and those who are less well off have limited access to arts and cultural activities.

In South Australia, over 200,000 adults and children struggle to survive on income payments that are well below the poverty line, that’s 1 in 8 people living in SA – including over 75,000 children (nearly 1 in 4) who are growing up in the poorest families.^{vi} Children living in poverty are likely to attend school less frequently and have difficulties learning at home, experience deprivation in terms of their relationship with friends, and have less involvement in extracurricular activities like music and art.

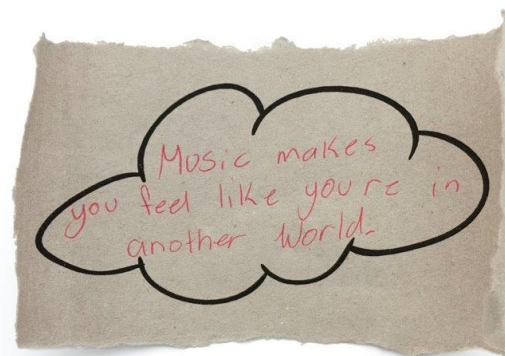
We know that this situation is getting worse under the current cost of living crisis. Families in financial stress focus their resources on essentials rather than “extras” such as cultural excursions, drawing apps, or music lessons.

Younger people are very aware that this is an issue, even if they are not the ones who are affected, and regularly say how important it is that everyone should have access to education and activities no matter how poor they may be.

"[The world would be better if...] Everyone could join the same activities no matter what. Trips and activities wouldnt be so expensive so everyone could participate and have fun in all sorts of things." - 11 year old

Young people in regional communities want adults to support them to feel they belong and are valued members of the community. They describe the tension between not necessarily wanting to leave their regional community, but also feeling that they would have more access to opportunities if they did.

Regional students I spoke with during my 2017 Listening Tour highlighted the need for better access to teachers and classes in art, music and drama to help them to develop their talents in these areas.^{vii}



Improve opportunities for arts and cultural education

Despite the proven importance of the arts, music and other creative activities on the health, wellbeing, cultural identity, education and employability of children and young people,^{viii} arts education is strongly linked to socio-economic advantage.^{ix} While wealthier schools can afford to provide opportunities for students to learn and engage in a range of arts, music and other cultural and creative education and activities, children in poorer schools and those in rural and regional areas are missing out.



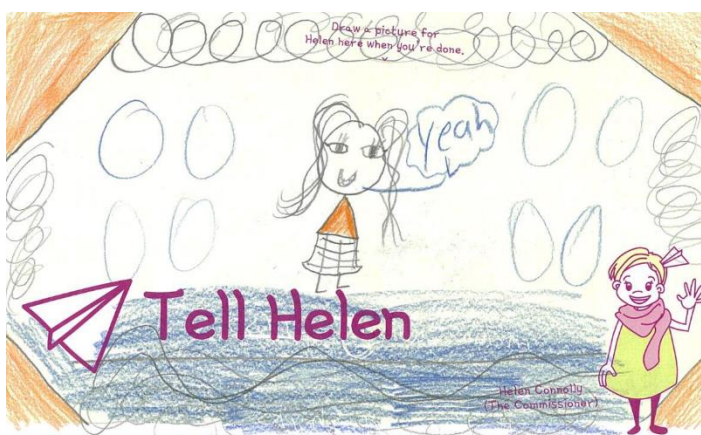
At the same time, the majority of the Australian population (74 per cent) believe that arts and creativity play an important role in the lives of children and young people's learning and development that is worthy of investment.^x

It is essential that investment is made not only in delivery of the arts curriculum but also in extra-curricular opportunities, such as music lessons, bands, school plays, choirs, digital art clubs, and dance performances. In addition, the creation of a scheme similar to the sports voucher program could help to enable poorer students to access artistic, cultural and creative opportunities.

Improve funding for school excursions

We know that hands on learning opportunities provided on field trips or excursions improve outcomes for students in a range of ways, including higher test scores, better attendance and better performance in class.^{xi} However, I have heard from many schools in disadvantaged and regional communities across South Australia that they find it hard to offer their students the same opportunities as other schools. This means that students in these schools miss out on camps and excursions. This is a particular issue in rural and remote areas where costs of travel can be prohibitive.

We know that many children and young people learn more effectively in environments beyond the classroom. Camps and other personal development opportunities can help young people to build their range of experiences, confidence, resilience and personal skills in a more holistic way. These opportunities can be particularly beneficial for those students with diverse learning needs.



At the same time, young people in regional areas are crying out for better access to the arts, culture and creative activities.

Cost of living pressures mean that the cost of transport is increasing at a time when family finances are under pressure. As a result, many students are not able to visit educational destinations other than those in their immediate vicinity. Nevertheless, we know that hands-on experiences have a rich and long-lasting impact compared to classroom learning which should be an opportunity for all students no matter where they live or what their family background is.

Free public transport is available to primary school students on excursions in metropolitan Adelaide, however, this is only available within normal school hours which limits the time that students can spend at their destination.

Providing more disadvantaged and distant schools with improved funding to enable their students to undertake cultural visits would help to reduce the current inequities facing some SA students.

I recommend that the government invests in a school fund to ensure that all students have access to cultural excursions.

Create free child and youth friendly creative places and activities

In my conversations and interactions with thousands of children and young people during my time in office they have raised a number of concerns with me about where they live and how it impacts their lives. They have also told me what they need and would like access to in order to live better, more connected, healthier and happier lives.

Committing to providing child friendly and child safe environments for children and young people is not merely something that is 'nice to do'. It is a requirement under international conventions that are embedded in State legislation. Also, if we want the next generation to feel invested in South Australia, we need them to feel that they are welcome and valued here.

New developments and infill rarely take these needs into account, and this shows. In 2020, the Australian Urban Observatory found that liveability is poor beyond Adelaide's inner suburbs, in terms of access to libraries, GPs, museums, cinemas and theatres.^{xii} This must change if we are to reverse the State's brain – and cultural – drain in future generations.



SA would be better for kids if...

more events that engage kids



SA would be better for kids if... + here where more kid friendly events.

Invest in public libraries

Public libraries have unique value to children and young people, both to inspire them to read and to provide them with a safe and inclusive place to be at the heart of their community. This role should not be undervalued. It is providing vital support to improving the literacy of our community and I urge the Government to invest in public libraries for the future of South Australian children as part of its cultural policy.

Encouraging children and young people, and their parents and families, into libraries provides a great opportunity to inspire more reading. From the early years, libraries help to engage parents in fostering a love of reading with, to, and by their children. They also provide multiple opportunities to re-engage young people to read at a later age.



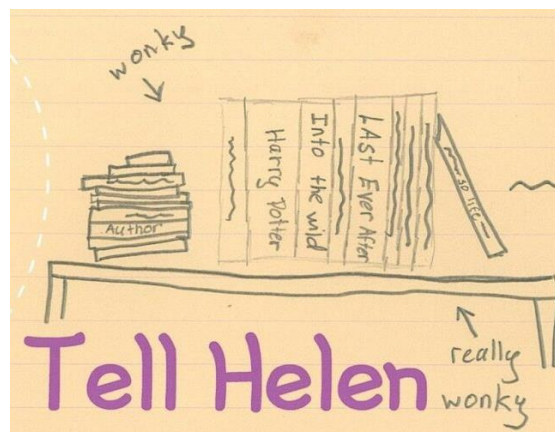
My favourite thing about being a kid is...

going to the library and reading.

Libraries are one of the few places at the centre of local communities where children and young people are welcomed, and which are free to access. They offer a safe space with clean toilet facilities and Wi-Fi access at no charge – things that young people really value. There are often comfortable places inside and outside libraries where parents are comfortable for their older kids to ‘hang out’.

I have heard from children and young people across South Australia how libraries are important safe places for them to go. They provide somewhere they can catch up with friends, read, play games, listen to music, charge their phones, access free Wi-Fi, and generally know they will be comfortable, whatever the weather.

Having a safe place to ‘hang’ is particularly important to teenagers, who may be nervous to meet friends in public places. The unobtrusive presence of library staff and other library users provides them with a reassuring safety net.



Libraries offer a range of onsite and online services. They provide access to technology and run programs and classes for free, or a small fee, that increase skills. Some offer outdoor games to their members, enabling them to enjoy the outside spaces around their library, as well as the facilities inside. There are homework clubs and school holiday programs which often incorporate fun activities such as art, Lego, and 3D printing.

Ensure everyone has affordable access to reliable Wi-Fi

Increasingly children and young people are involved in their cultural and artistic activities online. From streaming music and movies to creating worlds on Minecraft or videos on TikTok, digital access is increasingly essential to their artistic and creative lives on their own and with their peers.



Apps like Gacha Life enable children to design and edit characters, Ibis Paint and similar art apps provide digital art spaces, while music apps like Figure enable musicians to create and record their own music. Many of these apps provide access to communities of other artists so that children and young people can learn from and even compete with their friends.

Children and young people have complained to me that their digital access is unreliable and described having internet connections that ‘can disconnect regularly’. Although they may not speak about the ‘Internet’ per se, they highlight their frustration at the barrier and

negative effects of not being able to fully participate online. Access to high-quality free Wi-Fi and a personal device are now essential to South Australian artistic culture.

Access to a device, particularly a tablet for younger children, is vital, as is the ability to download apps, and, where relevant, maintain internet connectivity through which one can work on and save multiple designs, for example.

ⁱ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org.au/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>

ⁱⁱ The Power of Youth Arts: Summary, ATYP/Patternmakers, 2022, https://atyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The_Power_Of_Youth_Arts_Summary.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, South Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/4>

^{iv} Student Voice Postcards Project, Commissioner for Children and Young People, <https://commissionerspostcards.com.au/>

^v Youthful Adelaide: What young people have said will make Adelaide more youthful, 2019, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Youthful-Adelaide.pdf>

^{vi} References from Anti-Poverty Week, Child and Family Poverty in Australia Fast Facts, 2021, <https://antipovertyweek.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/5.-Child-Poverty-2021-d1.pdf>

^{vii} Growing confident, connected, creative regional kids, Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2022, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Growing-Confident-Connected-Creative-Regional-Kids.pdf>

^{viii} <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/>

^{ix} <https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/documents/document-file/2020-12/national-advocates-for-arts-education-naae.pdf>

^x <https://creative.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Creating-Our-Future-Results-of-the-National-Arts-Participation-Survey-PDF-1-2.pdf>

^{xi} Want student to do better in class? Send them on culturally enriching field trips, Science News, 2022: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/02/220222125106.htm>

^{xii} Liveability Report for Adelaide, Australian Urban Observatory, 2020, https://auo.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AUO_Scorecard_Adelaide.pdf