

29 February 2024

Dear Creative Australia Assessment Panel,

Re: Arts Projects for Organisations Round 2024

I write this letter in support of Arts & Cultural Exchange's (ACE) application for the *Capabilities and Leadership Skills in Community Arts and Cultural Development for Emerging Producers in Western Sydney*.

Arts & Cultural Exchange (ACE) is a cultural organisation working on Dharug Country in Western Sydney. ACE has a longstanding reputation being committed to social justice, using creativity to reverse disadvantage and produce ground breaking interdisciplinary, intergenerational collaborative projects co-devised with diverse communities. ACE is passionately committed to Western Sydney and its diversity, uniqueness and spirit, and the opportunities to unleash its creative capacities.

Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) is a practice that involves artists working collaboratively with communities for the purpose of social change through art and culture. This practice is embedded in ACE's core programs by engaging diverse communities to express themselves and share their stories on their terms while deepening their cultural understanding and artistic skills.

This application comes at a timely moment for Western Sydney where there is a shortage of CACD trained producers, working in an ethical and meaningful way with diverse communities. Western Sydney is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia and home to the largest population of new arrivals. There is a demand for community and cultural development programs to assist new communities in transitioning into their new homes; there is a demand for new Australian stories that can only be told through honest, inclusive and transparent CACD processes. This opportunity will provide much needed professional skills development and increase the capacity building of young people from Western Sydney to lead this new phase of Australian arts and culture. As a result, I believe this will in turn revitalise the arts sector in Western Sydney especially, as the training will be inclusive and involve leading arts organisations in Western Sydney that have a history and present of CACD practice. ACE sees this project as a whole sector development opportunity and I am supportive of this vision.

I am fully supportive of ACE's application as I believe ACE is a key arts and cultural organisation in Western Sydney and beyond. Since the early 2000's I have been involved with ACE through projects, most recently I was working with Barry Gamba and two emerging artists on a new film project that supports artists living with a disability in western Sydney.

As an arts worker and cultural practitioner, with twenty-three years of my practice I am thrilled to be part of this project by sharing my knowledge and expertise in CACD by presenting a Master Class to the emerging producers.

I hope you look favourably to this application.

Sincerely,



Claudia Chidiac
Arts Worker/Creative Producer
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BIO

[Claudia Chidiac](#), is a creative producer and arts worker. For twenty years, she has worked with diverse communities creating intimate and large scale experiences across Greater Sydney. She is the founder and curator of the Way Out West (WOW) Festival for Children (2011-2013 and 2017-2020) Chidiac is the creator and producer of The Village by The Kids, a series of geo-located audio walks and tours of neighbourhoods, co-created by children for an intergenerational audience. The Village by The Kids has taken place in Erskineville, North Bondi (Bondi Festival) and in Lalor Park, presented by Blacktown Arts. Its premise is to centre children as producers of their own narratives and to support and encourage children to present their perspective of their community, by introducing the audience to local stories both real and imagined.

In 2020 Claudia collaborated with artist educator Paula Abood and the Children's Parliament, Liverpool to create *Creation Station* an art resource made by children from four primary schools.

In 2017, Claudia was assistant director to Eva Di Cesare's (Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People) stage adaptation of Randa Abdel Fattah's *Where The Streets Had a Name* and in 2016 assistant director to Paula Abood's *The Cartographers Curse* at Riverside Theatres Parramatta. From 2005 – 2010 she was the Artistic Director and Executive Officer of PYT Fairfield.

In 2008 Claudia was one of the Australian delegates selected to participate in the inaugural Next Generation Symposium as part of the 16th ASSITEJ World Congress and Performing Arts Festival. In 2006, she was awarded the Australia Council for the Arts Community Cultural Development Young Leaders Award.

How I work. My philosophy.

I was born and raised on the land of the Dharug People and I now live on the land of the Gadigal People. Sovereignty never ceded. I pay my respects to elders past and present.

I am the daughter and granddaughter of migrants from Lebanon. Their stories of (be)longing and resilience made me understand what it means to survive and to belong. Our home was filled with the aroma of garlic, onions and olive oil; our television screen glared with SBS news, Arabic films and Sale of the Century; tape recorders played cassettes from the homeland and the radio played Arabic music - sometimes whilst the television was on. Our home was always filled with people who had a story to tell; something to say and give. This was my starting place. This was my inspiration to become a storyteller.

At the heart of my work lies a steadfast commitment to an experimental approach, enriched by a rigorous process of engaging with communities. This commitment is underpinned by a profound respect for and dedication to centering the voices of children, recognizing them

not just as participants but as leaders and artists in their own right.

Inspired by the innovative practices of play-based and child-centered performance makers, such as the ground breaking work of Mammalian Diving Reflex from Canada and the visionary Italian children's theatre director Chiara Guidi (Societas Raffaello Sanzio), my philosophy embraces the transformative power of play and imagination. It is my belief that through this lens, we can unlock unparalleled creativity and insights, fostering an environment where children are empowered to express their thoughts, ideas, and visions with confidence and freedom.

In my work, I prioritize the creation of spaces that are not only safe and inclusive but also vibrant arenas for exploration, learning, and growth. Here, every child is viewed as an artist and a leader, capable of contributing uniquely and significantly to the tapestry of our shared experiences. This perspective challenges traditional hierarchies and dynamics, encouraging a collective journey of discovery where all voices are valued and heard.

Embracing this philosophy means continually striving to innovate and adapt, ensuring that the methodologies and practices I employ are both responsive to the needs of the children and reflective of the broader community's aspirations. It is a philosophy of action, driven by the conviction that through embracing the experimental and foregrounding the voices of our youngest members, we can not only imagine but actively construct a more inclusive, creative, and joyful world.

My work is a celebration of the potential that lies within every child to inspire, create, and lead. It is a commitment to nurturing this potential, guided by the principles of play, imagination, and rigorous community engagement, to forge meaningful, lasting connections and experiences that resonate far beyond the immediacy of performance.