



**IL  
BIJ  
ERRI**  
THEATRE COMPANY

# THE SCORE

Participatory theatre for  
sexual health education in  
First Nations communities

Sarah Woodland, Kamarra Bell-Wykes,  
and THE SCORE Ensemble

**Final report for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) project ‘THE SCORE: Developing Participatory Approaches to Sexual Health Education through Theatre.’**

This research was completed with ethical approval from the AIATSIS Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number EO284-20210726).

**Recommended citation:**

Woodland, S., Bell-Wykes, K., and THE SCORE Ensemble (2024). ‘THE SCORE: Participatory theatre for sexual health education in First Nations Communities. AIATSIS Report. University of Melbourne, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music and Ilbijerri Theatre Company.

**Funding acknowledgement:**

This research was funded through an Indigenous Research Exchange grant (IRE\_OG00098) from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and led by the University of Melbourne in partnership with ILBIJERRI Theatre Company.



THE SCORE was originally funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Creative Victoria as part of ILBIJERRI Theatre Company’s Social Impact program, with support from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and Thorne Harbour Health.



# Contents

<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>About the Artwork</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What is THE SCORE?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Summary of Outcomes to Date</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Why theatre?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Theatre approaches used</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Research Methodology</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Developing the Model</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>First creative development: February-March 2021</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Second creative development: August-September 2022</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Ensemble Capacity Building and     Final Creative Development: July-August 2023</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Delivering the Model</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Rollout to young people: Mallee District, September 2022</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Rollout to young people: Bunjilwarra, July 2023</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Capacity building and workforce development</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Ensemble</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Young people</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Community and stakeholders</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Conclusions &amp; Recommendations</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>74</b>

# Acknowledgement

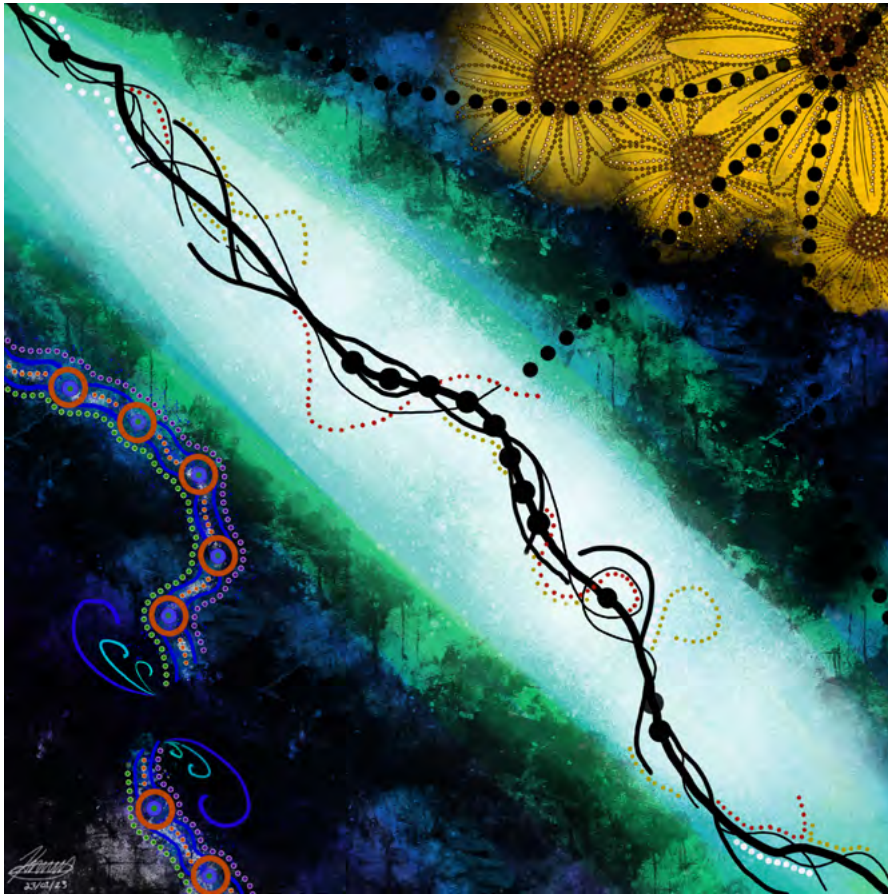
The research was conducted on the lands of the Boonwurrung, Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung, and Wadawurrung peoples of the Kulin Nations; the Wamba Wamba, Latje Latje, Tatti Tatti, Waddi Waddi, Barapa Barapa peoples of the region around Swan Hill; the Barkindji, Madi Madi, Dadi Dadi, Kureinji peoples of the region around Mildura; and the Jaggera and Turrbul peoples of South East Queensland where this report was prepared.

We acknowledge Elders past and present on those lands, and everywhere, in leading the way in this vital cultural work focused on education and wellbeing for First Nations communities, and the young people who this research is about and for. We thank all the community members, groups and organisations who made this work possible.

We would also like to acknowledge the Ensemble, creative team, and production team members who contributed to the development of THE SCORE since 2020: Miela Anich, Richard Barber, Della Bedford, Kim Bennett, Zach Blampied, Theo Cassady, Bayden Clayton, Nazaree Dickerson, Axel Garay, Monique Grbec, Laura Harris, Nicola Ingram, Zerene Jaadwa, Matisse Knight, Kimmie Lovegrove, Lisa Maza, Kalarni Murray, Stefo Nantsou, Bala Neba, Pongjit (Jon) Saphakhun, Corey Saylor-Brunskill, Jerrika Pevitt, Lauren Sheree, Taeg Twist, Zane Webster.

Finally, we acknowledge the invaluable support and guidance of our First Nations Advisors and knowledge holders in the design and delivery of the project: Dr Vicki Saunders, Tiriki Onus, Peter Waples-Crowe, and Dr Lyndon Ormond-Parker.

# About the Artwork



This piece represents the journey we went on during those five weeks of rehearsals and time in community. The middle part of the piece shows the journey, the ups and downs, the losses, and goodbyes; the path had a few bumps, but we knew what we were doing was important. The flowers were outside the theatre space we were using on the Swan Hill high school campus but were also scattered all over the countryside, drawn directly from pictures I took of the landscape. The other component in the lower left corner is the Murray and Darling River, while in Mildura we went on a short trip to the Murry Darling Confluence and saw where the Murray River and Darling River met. It was such an interesting moment where two currents drew a visible line of where two rivers met. Yet for me it was personal, it's on the land where my people come from, the Barkindji people, and it was the first time I had ever stepped foot there. This was a surreal experience, and I would never have given it up for anything.

**Kalarni Murray**, Artist and Research Assistant.

## Executive Summary

### What is THE SCORE?

THE SCORE is an innovative, inclusive, and flexible health promotion and education model that supports young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop respectful sexual relationships, consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others, and understand and protect their sexual health and reproductive rights. The model has been developed through robust community engagement, strong artistic leadership from Kamarra Bell-Wykes, and a partnership between ILBIJERRI Theatre Company and the University of Melbourne (through experienced applied theatre scholar, Dr Sarah Woodland). The model privileges First Nations knowledges and cultural approaches, community engagement, and capacity building. As such, THE SCORE adopts best practice principles in addressing health inequity among First Nations young people and communities that include developing holistic, strengths-based, place-based sexual health education that has lasting impact.



*THE SCORE is a short play with big energy about friends, dancing, hook-ups, and sexual health. Local teenagers, Billy, Sam, and the rest of their crew, are ready for the night of their lives. They're all heading to the local footy finals after-party to hang out and have fun - but after a couple of twists in the plot - what happens in the end is up to you, the audience!*

(<https://www.ilbijerri.com.au/event/thescore/>)





*Billy (Zach Blampied) and Sam (Miela Anich) on the dancefloor with Brotha-Boy (Zane Webster) in the background. Final creative development and rehearsal, University of Melbourne. Image: Erika Budiman, 2023.*

## THE SCORE four phase model:

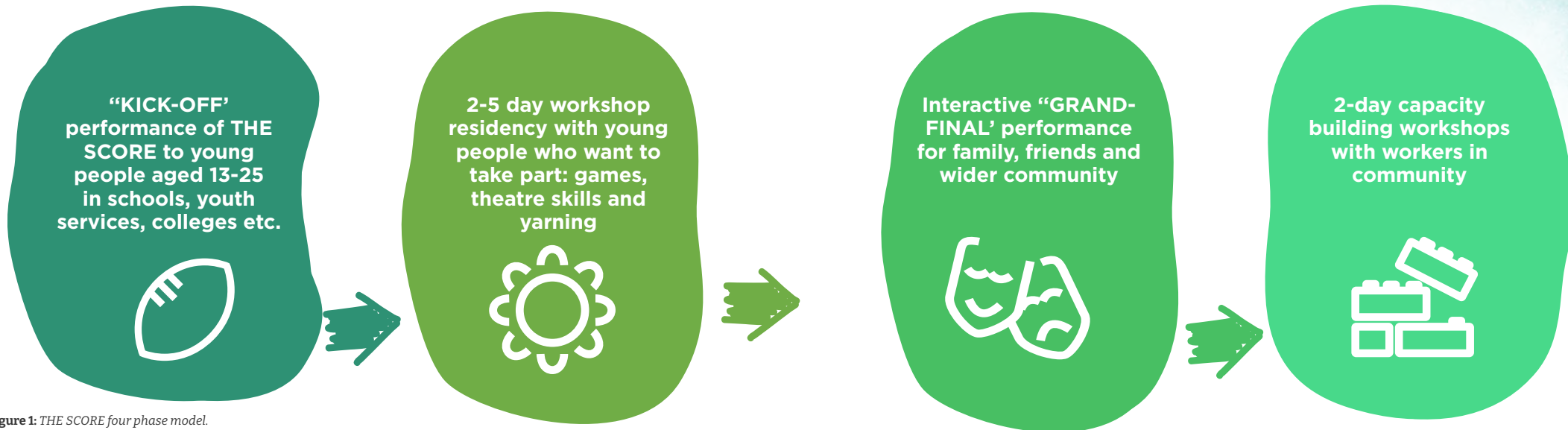


Figure 1: THE SCORE four phase model.

1. Ten-minute interactive ‘KICK-OFF’ performance that follows two young characters, Sam and Billy, over the course of a weekend footy carnival—including the wild after party and its aftermath—and how these young people navigate sex and relationships at this highly charged social event. THE SCORE presents several risky behaviours and internal dilemmas, surfacing issues of sexual health and STIs with energy and humour. Facilitating the action from the sidelines is ‘The Coach’, who interrupts the drama, inviting audience members to explore aspects such as Sam and Billy’s internal hopes and fears, and the influences of the people around the—Brotha-Boys, Sista-Gals, Aunties, Uncles. Using music and dance, the KICK-OFF (all caps) performance serves as a hook to draw in young people so that they then hopefully sign up for the residency that follows.
2. Following the performance, THE SCORE Ensemble leads a **two-to-five-day residency with young people in the community**, where the participants safely unpack the issues surfaced by the KICK-OFF performance through yarning, drama, and experiential games and methods. Through the residency, young people are also rehearsed into the THE SCORE and invited to contribute their own characters, perspectives, and approaches to the performance. Some of this work takes place through a culturally safe frame of gendered yarning circles, where men’s business, women’s business, and ‘rainbow’ (or gender diverse) business can be discussed in a closed circle before returning to the whole group.
3. A ‘GRAND-FINAL’ performance where the young participants perform their version of THE SCORE alongside the Ensemble to an audience of invited friends, family, and community members. This is again facilitated by The Coach, who invites responses from the audience around the barriers and enablers to sexual health in their community. This interactive process deepens exploration and discussion and promotes a sense of community accountability and responsibility for sexual health.
4. After delivering the model, THE SCORE team offers **capacity building workshops to workers and community leaders** who want to learn more about using and adapting the theatre-based and experiential methods featured in the model for yarning about important wellbeing issues in their communities. This is supported by an accessible e-resource or ‘toolkit’ developed for the project.

*\*All the games, exercises, and approaches used in THE SCORE and referred to in this report are detailed in the Toolkit (available as a resource on the ILBIJERRI website).*



## THE SCORE Ensemble

THE SCORE Ensemble is a team of young performer-facilitators who have been trained up in delivering the model. They bring a wealth of different skills and abilities, with backgrounds in theatre and performance, facilitation, stand-up comedy, music, health, and education. The Ensemble members are passionate community advocates and talented artists. As young people themselves, they contribute to raising aspirations and making peer connections with the young participants.

## Key sexual health messaging in THE SCORE

1. Get informed, use protection, get tested\*
2. Identify risk and protective factors for sexual health within the community
3. Identify peers, community heroes, or health advocates within the community
4. Sexual health is part of wellbeing
5. Self-worth and positive sexuality are essential to sexual health

*\*Working with the reality that not everyone uses protection and that if they don't, they need to get tested.*

”

***[It's] education but doing it blackfella way through storytelling ... you're teaching them how to speak to a health worker rather than just telling them to speak to a health worker – that comes from rehearsing them into the show and using their characters to learn.***

(Nazaree Dickerson, team debrief 2022)

“



## Key principles of THE SCORE

### Holistic

Sexual health is just one part of a holistic, First Nations approach to health and wellbeing for individuals and communities. Programs are integrated with health and social support services and providing referral pathways to services where necessary.

### Place-based

Sexual health promotion and education programs should be co-designed with and responsive to the particular Country and community where they are delivered.

### Sex positive and inclusive

Sex should be consenting, fun, and pleasurable for everyone involved. Everyone should be welcome to explore positive sexuality regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

### Peer-based

Peer relationships and learning are pivotal in successful sexual health promotion and education for young people.

### Self-determined

The whole community has a stake in young people's sexual health. First Nations Community Controlled Organisations should be empowered to take control of efforts towards education and promotion. Programs should feature active and meaningful engagement with community to co-design tailored information, community awareness and targeted prevention campaigns.

### Culturally safe

Sexual health promotion and education should be culturally safe, participant-centred, and free from judgement, shame, and stigma.

### Strengths-based

Sexual health promotion and education programs should centre strengths and knowledges of communities and challenge deficit discourses that position sexual health (and young people) as a 'problem'.

## Summary of Outcomes to Date

Oct 2020	Feb - Mar 2021	Aug - Sep 2021	May 2023	May 2023	July 2023	Oct 2023	Dec 2023	March 2024		
Planning and consultation (ongoing)	THE SCORE educational theatre toolkit development (ongoing)	First Ensemble training and creative development	Second ensemble training and creative development.	Pilot residency rollout in regional Victoria (Swan Hill & Mildura)	First Capacity building staff training (Bunjilwarra)	Third ensemble training and creative development.	Second residency rollout (Bunjilwarra)	Second residency rollout (Wyndham Vale)	Third capacity building staff training (Mildura)	'Healing Stories' symposium, University of Melbourne. Report and Toolkit launch

Figure 2: Summary of activities for THE SCORE, 2020-2023.

This report represents the culmination of the research project funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). The timeline (Figure 2) represents the key activities undertaken over the course of the project, with a summary of outcomes and impacts as follows:

### THE SCORE Ensemble (15 First Nations arts education workers)

- Reported increase in awareness of STIs and prevention and education strategies.
- Reported increase in skills and capacity in community engagement and performing arts-led approaches to sexual health and wellbeing.
- Reported increase in levels of confidence and self-determination in leading important conversations within their communities.

### Partner organisations and Stakeholders (including staff, stakeholders, Elders, Traditional Owners):

- Demonstrated increase in awareness of STIs and prevention and education strategies, including specific issues facing young people in their communities.
- Reported increase in skills and capacities in using arts- and theatre-based approaches to sexual health promotion and education.
- Demonstrated increased collaboration between organisations to address sexual health needs of young people in communities.
- Demonstrated increased capacity in research and evaluation of arts programs for social impact.

### Young people (≥108 audience and participants aged 13-25):

- Demonstrated high levels of engagement with the model and word-of-mouth recommendations to attend performances and workshops.
- Demonstrated engagement with sexual health topics and reduction of stigma in a culturally safe and empowering way.
- Demonstrated powerful peer learning between young people and THE SCORE Ensemble, and among young people themselves.
- Reported intention to act on information and advice regarding sexual health, e.g. getting tested, safe sex, educating others.
- Reported/demonstrated increase in confidence and self-determination in performing arts and exploring issues of sexual health.

### Developing the model:

- Development of a dynamic, culturally appropriate engagement with priority populations/target audiences.
- Theatre in education approach integrated with First Nations cultural practices works effectively to generate safe and dynamic space for yarning and education around sexual health.

### Sharing the model:

- Development of an online toolkit for communities to adapt approaches to their own needs.
- 'Healing Stories' symposium bringing together performing artists, community workers, and scholars for 2-days of energetic, joyful performance, poetry, and yarning (March 2024).
- Conference presentations at Creativity and Wellbeing Research Initiative (CAWRI) lunchtime webinar series (October 2022), SexRurality regional and rural sexual health conference (May 2023), and AIATSIS Summit (June 2023).
- Community report and scholarly publications (Woodland and Bell-Wykes in-press; Woodland, Bell-Wykes, and Godwin 2023).

# Background

The original purpose of THE SCORE was to create a **community-engaged, participatory model for theatre that will address sexual health for First Nations young people to be delivered in communities, schools, prisons, and community health settings in regional and metropolitan Victoria.**

The project was originally funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Creative Victoria as part of ILBIJERRI's Social Impact program, with support from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and Thorne Harbour Health. The University of Melbourne supported Dr Sarah Woodland with a small development grant to undertake pilot work with ILBIJERRI on their social impact program and develop the collaboration. In 2021, the project was funded through an Indigenous Research Exchange grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (IRE\_OG00098, \$164K). The grant supported an integrated process for developing, evaluating, and disseminating the model underpinned by a strengths-based, arts-led, participatory research methodology, and supported by a First Nations Advisory Group (Figure 3). This was led by Dr Woodland, in collaboration with Kamarra-Bell Wykes, one of the lead artists for ILBIJERRI's Social Impact works.

## Context

THE SCORE was created in response to the disproportionately high rates of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) among First Nations young people when compared to the broader population as identified by the Victorian Department of Health (2022). This disparity, along with an alarming resurgence of syphilis in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Hui et al. 2022), led the Victorian Department Health to commission ILBIJERRI to develop THE SCORE.

The Australian Federal Government (2018) recently identified a lack of culturally respectful health education and prevention services and the presence of shame and stigma as among many contributing factors

to the disproportionate risks and burden of blood borne viruses (BBV) and sexually transmissible infections (STI). The Victorian Department of Health's *Victorian Aboriginal Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan 2020-2030* (2022) also recognises factors such as racism, discrimination, and experiences of colonisation as contributing to poor outcomes. They suggest, "These systemic issues can be compounded by a lack of culturally respectful and inclusive health education and prevention services" (10). Strobel and Ward (2012) observe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced centuries of violence in relation to sexual health, including medical incarceration and experimentation. THE SCORE aims to address this by empowering communities to challenge stigma, take control of health education and messaging, and develop community-led responses to the issue.

ILBIJERRI has a longstanding reputation for creating health education focused theatre works through their Social Impact program, many of which have been led by leading theatre maker Kamarra Bell-Wykes. Works such as *Chopped Liver* (2006-2009; 2017), *Body Armour* (2010-2013), *North West of Nowhere* (2014-2016), and *Viral – Are You the Cure?* (2018/2019) addressed sexual health, blood borne viruses (BBV), and healthy relationships; and received wide acclaim for their engaging and effective messaging. Despite their success, these performances adopted a 'fly in-fly out' approach to health education and messaging through theatre. Based on her longstanding experience of leading these works, Kamarra identified a need to explore a more community-engaged, participatory approach that would build capacity in communities and generate lasting health and wellbeing outcomes

## Why theatre?

There is a growing body of evidence internationally that supports using theatre for health education, particularly in Global Majority Indigenous and First Nations contexts, where it is commonly focused on HIV/AIDS and sexual health and includes projects in India, the USA, Africa, First Nations Canada, and Asia Pacific (Brodzinski 2010, Cahill 2017, Goulet et al. 2011, Haseman et al. 2014, Jaganath et al. 2014, Low 2020, Van Hout et al. 2019, Wells 2013). These projects adopt a range of approaches to theatre and performance, target various groups as participants and audiences, and represent a diversity of models in terms of funding and structure. Benefits include promoting positive attitudes and behaviours, empowering people to explore complex emotional and social terrain through the artform, creating space for open dialogue and discussion, and reducing stigma in relation to sexual health (Goulet et al. 2011, Heard et al. 2019, Kauli 2018). Projects can also provide an opportunity for communities to discuss inequities in healthcare systems and other legacies of colonial power (Flicker et al. 2014, Linds et al. 2013).

The most effective programs are developed from the ground up with communities so that their own definitions of health and wellbeing, determined by cultural and social traditions, become the drivers for program goals and outputs (Low, 2017). Cultural understandings, material conditions, and emotion can contribute to a holistic model of what health 'is' at any one time, to any one community and individual (Low, 2017). Key strengths in these programs when done well include:

- engaging audiences in active learning as opposed to top-down messaging;
- audiences see themselves reflected in the performers, storylines, and cultural content;
- projects typically adopt a whole-of-community approach that draws together target groups, stakeholders, community-controlled health organisations, and community leaders/Elders;
- and the presence of peer mentoring and peer teaching is a key feature within programs

(Brodzinski 2010, Baxter and Low, 2017, Cahill, 2017).

Selman and Heather (2015) highlight how best practice in sexual health education incorporates a holistic approach that focuses not only on providing information (which many young people already possess), but more importantly on the constellation of skills, behaviours, and relationships that contribute to good sexual health. Salmon and colleagues (2019) support the idea that arts or theatre-based approaches can promote healing in the holistic sense and contribute to building on strengths that already exist in communities (35). They further add, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in cultural activities, including arts and crafts, music, dance or theatre, and writing or telling stories, are important elements of traditions and community sustainability, as well as spiritual and social wellbeing" (34). They are an "important means of passing on knowledge" and an important means for cultural healing (34).

## Culturally appropriate

For millennia, drama and the performing arts have been (and continue to be) fundamental to intergenerational teaching, learning, and cultural transmission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The theatre approaches developed in THE SCORE were successfully adapted and piloted with young people and adults in First Nations communities across Victoria. Drama games, experiential exercises and performance forms are supported by yarning, which deepens engagement with the creative process and the topics being explored. A key strength of the model is that it's not just about education around sexual health, but it is also about performance and cultural expression.

## Fun and energetic

For community members of all ages, these approaches provide an alternative to more traditional 'classroom' style education and training, which can be alienating (and boring). By alternating activities between dynamic action and reflective yarning, participants can have fun while also exploring deeper issues.

## Enables embodied, peer learning

Drama based approaches can be seen as 'rehearsal for life', engaging the whole body, mind, and emotions in ways that embed deeper learning and insights. By working in collaborative creative practice, group members learn from each other through their peer relationships, which creates a sense of community empowerment.

## Participants are experts in their experience

By centring participants' stories and experiences, these approaches give community members ownership over the material being explored, and agency in discovering culturally safe ways to reduce stigma and shame associated with difficult topics. It draws on the existing strengths and knowledge of community members.

## Enables safe exploration of challenging issues

The model is designed to work at the collective level, with participants encouraged to explore issues in general terms and through fiction (as opposed to focusing on their own individual/personal experiences).



*I never got taught this when I was younger, like theatre and stuff like that, so I feel like if I had got taught like this when I was younger, ... I probably would have listened more. ... So, it was a privilege.*

(Young participant, Bunjilwarra, 2023)



## Theatre approaches used

THE SCORE model is a hybrid of different practices and approaches brought to the project by the lead practitioners who made up the creative team. Ultimately, the model employs the following elements that are tried and tested in Theatre and Drama in Education (Baim, Brookes, and Mountford 2002, Boal 1985, Neelands and Goode 2015, O'Neill 1995, O'Toole 1992):

1. Forum Theatre: The KICK-OFF and GRAND-FINAL performances are structured as short plays that surface the issues without solving or resolving them. This style of theatre, pioneered by Augusto Boal (1985), is very simple, with no props, minimal costume and set, making use of whatever is to hand (e.g. chairs) to convey different locations. Forum Theatre presents key protagonists (in our case two—Sam and Billy) who represent the target community and through whom audiences and participants can explore actions and decisions. Boal originally used a 'Joker' to act as an intermediary between the action on stage and the audience, facilitating dialogue to interrogate what is happening. In THE SCORE, this role is taken by The Coach, who uses a whistle and a sporty energy to pump up the crowd and reflect the world of the play. The community audience becomes invested in exploring the issues together.

The KICK-OFF performance shows a fast, furious, frenzied moment in time and how decisions can be made in such situations, seemingly without any thought. The performance is then explored more deeply through The Coach's interactive dialogue and within the structure of the residency, to break down this heated moment and create a sense of understanding about how decisions and behaviours might contribute to risky outcomes for young people.

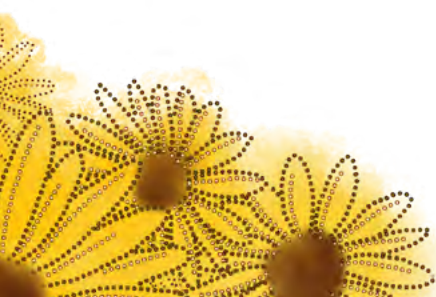
Examples of questions The Coach asks the audience include:

- ▶ Just as Sam and Billy join on the dancefloor and appear to be about to hook up, The Coach blows the whistle and turns to the audience with an effective and popular facilitating prompt, the three F's:
  - **FACTS** – What's happening? What have we seen tonight?
  - **FEELINGS** – How are Billy and Sam feeling?
  - **FUTURE** – What do we think will happen next (or down the track)?
- ▶ The Coach then asks other characters on stage what they think will happen and invites the audience to clap if they agree to gauge their objective response. Once this is done, The Coach asks Sam and Billy what each of them wants from the situation. The characters stay in role as The Coach delves more deeply into the situation with them, unpacking various issues with the audience regarding using protection, getting tested for STIs, and where to get help in their community. \*
- ▶ Once this has happened, an 'Advice Circle' is used, where The Coach replays the advice that characters have given Sam and Billy throughout the play, e.g. Brotha-Boy says, 'You better wrap it up tight' and another says, 'Don't get her pregnant!' Uncle says, 'Don't do anything I wouldn't do.' The Coach then enlists the audience to help the characters reframe their unhelpful advice into helpful advice before returning to the stage to share it back. Audience members are invited to join this Advice Circle if they feel game to share their improved advice themselves.

*\*The team finds out key information about local health services and places for referral that they feed through this part of the performance and refer to during the residency.*

2. Building the group and developing performance skills through targeted games and exercises that break the ice, build ensemble awareness, and develop voice, movement, focus, character development, and storytelling.
3. Using games and experiential exercises to generate discussion and yarning about the topic. These exercises allow facilitators to get a sense of who is in the room and what is their baseline knowledge and the range of opinions and attitudes towards the topic. These include:
  - a. Body Continuums: An imaginary line is drawn down the centre of the room between 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Strongly Agree'. Participants must place themselves on the line in response to a series of prompts, e.g. 'BILLY and SAM will use protection tonight.' This enables the facilitator to discuss different opinions and perspectives.
  - b. Bombs and Shields: Participants select a person in the group who is a 'bomb' and another who is a 'shield'. They must move around the room ensuring they are always behind their shield (away from their bomb). This is then discussed in terms of the risks (bombs) and protective factors (shields)\* for Sam and Billy in relation to having safe sex and healthy relationships.
4. Using specific conventions and structures from Drama in Education to bring participants into the play. This includes:
  - a. Filling in Character Cards that outline the key attributes and lines of dialogue for the Aunties, Uncles, Brotha-Boys and Sista-Gals that they will bring into the play, and their relationship to Sam and Billy
  - b. Creating 'insta-posts' or tableaux as an accessible way to create content for the play, e.g. 'Uncles at the footy' or 'Sista-Gals getting ready for the after party'. These can then be activated through methods such as Hot Seating or Interview-in-Role where facilitators talk to participants within the tableaux and invite them to respond. Tableaux can also be brought to life with sound, movement, or having a 'face off' with small teams performing to each other.
  - c. Developing dialogue lines for their own characters to be performed in specific moments in the GRAND-FINAL show, such as the 'Choice Points', advice to Sam and Billy in the Advice Circle, or group scenes on the dancefloor.
5. Using underlying principles from educational theatre and drama to facilitate active, embodied learning about the topic:
  - a. **Being in role** enables participants to explore different experiences and worldviews through taking on roles other than themselves – this develops qualities such as empathy and understanding and enables perspectives to widen.
  - b. **Liberatory pedagogy** positions young people, facilitators, health workers, and community members as equal partners in a learning journey. Knowledge is shared and constructed through collaboration rather than being imposed 'top-down' from a single source.

*\*Working with the participants to identify community-specific 'risk and protective factors' for optimal sexual health (Mmari and Blum 2009) empowers young people to take ownership of the issue, rather than imposing a generic message from mainstream health institutions and structures (see further below under 'Outcomes').*





- c. **Social learning** enables participants to learn together as a group or community, validating each other's experiences and knowledges, and enabling peer relationships to strengthen the collective body of knowledge around specific issues.
- d. **Working through fiction** enables participants to use the world and characters in the KICK-OFF performance as an anchor to explore sexual health, rather than disclosing their own sensitive personal experiences. Of course, individuals will no doubt bring their own stories and experiences to bear, but the games and exercises (and the way they are delivered) are designed to facilitate safe community yarning as opposed to individual 'therapy'.

As mentioned, the exercises and concepts used in THE SCORE (and referred to in this report) are shared in more detail in the Toolkit, a resource available on ILBIJERRI's website, for community groups to access and use for their own programs. For much of the development of these, the project owes a debt to Geese Theatre Company, with whom Sarah trained and worked for three-and-a-half years and whose approaches heavily influenced aspects of the model (see Baim, Brookes, and Mountford 2002, Geese Theatre Company n.d.). Other elements of THE SCORE model reflect the specific context of the work and were created in response to the realities for many young people in First Nations communities in Australia. The Brotha-Boys, Sista-Gals, Aunties and Uncles represented in the KICK-OFF performance are played as heightened archetypal characters, designed to present a comedic version of the intergenerational range of community members who have a stake in the issue.

All performers in the Ensemble and in the participant group play across gender, and the use of the terms Brotha-Boy and Sister-Gal is culturally relational and inclusive to those who are gender nonconforming (Bonson 2022). Similarly, the protagonists—Sam and Billy—have deliberately non-gender specific names so that should there be an interest

among the participants in pursuing a same-sex storyline, there is scope to do so. At the same time, it is emphasised the two protagonists about to 'hook up' are mutually consenting to 'conventional' sex to enable safe exploration of sexual health and healthy relationships whilst avoiding more complex areas such as sexual abuse and trauma, which would be unethical and problematic to explore in such a short engagement with community. If young participants come to the program with these experiences and it becomes evident that they need further support, then the mechanisms exist to refer them to appropriate adults in the community who can help. The way the program works in a gender inclusive way reflects a need among LGBTIAQ+ communities to be supported with sexual health education, particularly in regional areas where services are not as inclusive and there can be added shame and stigma. The recent Goanna Survey into sexual health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (Ward et al. 2020: 67) identified a higher risk for trans and gender diverse young people, a fact that was emphasised by our Advisory Group member Peter Waples-Crowe from Thorne Harbour Health.

Both the Goanna Survey and the young people we consulted identified the prevalence of drugs and alcohol as a factor in high-risk sexual behaviour for young people, which also forms a strong theme within the KICK-OFF performance, where some of the characters are depicted consuming cannabis and alcohol as a reflection of the realities of life in young people's social worlds.

The KICK-OFF performance is deliberately short, loud, and energetic, packed full of humour, music, dance, and movement. It does not shy away from the realities of life, but rather meets young people where they are. As such, it serves to engage the audience, encourage young people to participate in the residency, and is accessible and fun for young people to learn and be involved in.

## Research Methodology

THE SCORE adopted a participatory research design that privileged place-based Indigenous knowledges, arts-led inquiry, peer mentoring, capacity building, and cultural transmission. The project involved community co-design at every stage, emphasising cultural safety and drawing on established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to wellbeing (Dudgeon et al., 2020, Gee et al., 2014). This was overseen by an Advisory Group of Indigenous scholars and cultural leaders. The core research team was led by Sarah Woodland and co-researcher Kamarra Bell-Wykes, with support from research assistant Kalarni Murray.

Built into the methodology was a strong focus on developing capacity within the Ensemble, research team, and participating communities and organisations to ensure that research and practice skills and approaches were accessible, transferable, and sustainable. This was achieved through continuous peer mentoring and knowledge sharing amongst the project team (including the Ensemble) and community participants.

The research design was therefore an iterative, three-stage process, where each stage informed the other throughout the three-year duration of the project (Figure 3).

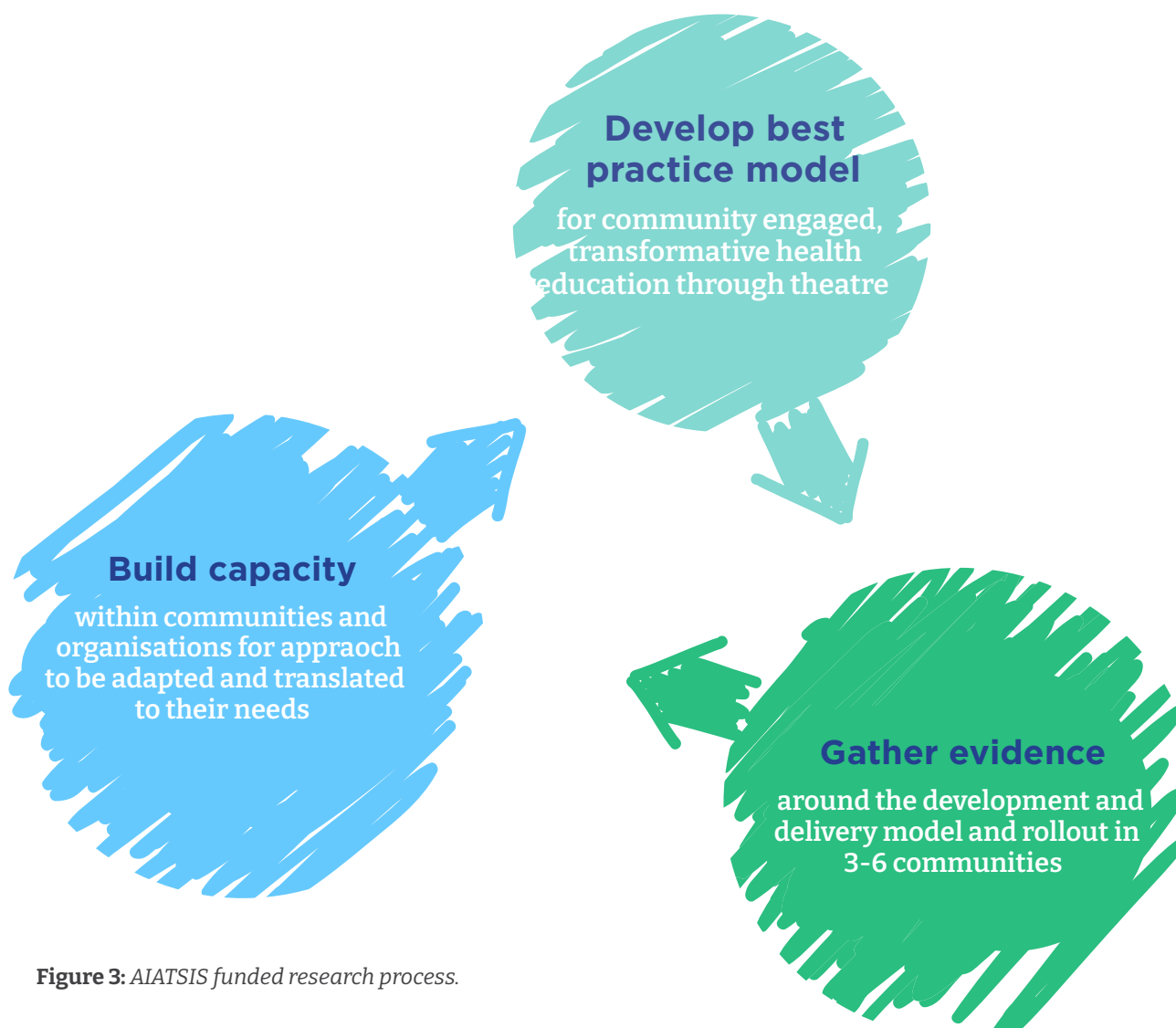


Figure 3: AIATSIS funded research process.

## Co-researchers/participants

Given the complexity of the relationship among the different research and creative team members, stakeholders, young people, and professionals in communities, there was a sense of blurriness between ‘co-researchers’ and ‘participants’ in the project, with high levels of collaboration among all these leading to the development of the model. There was also, however, a strong sense of specific ‘outcomes’ for different groups participating in the development and delivery of the model as discussed later in the report. These are presented in terms of outcomes for: Ensemble members, young people, and community members and stakeholders.

## Methods

Several different methods were used across all stages, with the findings gathered informing how THE SCORE model itself evolved and developed to the point it has reached at the time of writing, and the outcomes described later in this report.

### Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR)

The model was created using ILBIJERRI’s culturally informed artistic practice alongside the principles of Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR) (O’Connor and Anderson 2015). Aligned with Indigenous research methodologies (Dudgeon et al. 2020), ATAR recognises the creative processes and outcomes of theatre in communities as integral to research knowledge creation and translation.

### Yarning

A key research method used throughout the project was yarning (Barlo et al. 2021, Bessarab and Ng’andu 2010)—a culturally safe and relationally accountable way of conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and a crucial aspect of the participatory design of THE SCORE at every phase with both participants and team members. This included during planning and co-design, workshop delivery, focus groups, and reflection and debriefing.

## Field Observations

The research team conducted observations throughout each phase of the project and yarned with Ensemble members about their reflections and observations during creative development and rollout in communities.

## Surveys

Initially the team aimed to develop a post-program survey instrument with stakeholders and young people in communities, however, limitations of time and access meant that we needed to prioritise delivering the model. Nevertheless, the team adapted ILBIJERRI’s evaluation survey tool (created through Culture Counts) to administer with community members in the Mallee, also using the survey questions as prompts for post-program focus groups with the young people at Swan Hill (conducted by Ensemble members). This led the team to focus more on yarning with participants for gathering feedback in subsequent workshop deliveries.

## Interviews

In addition to group debrief yarns and reflections carried out during the development and delivery of the model, Sarah Woodland conducted one-to-one interviews with Ensemble members after each stage, gathering their reflections about the experience.

## Ethics

The project was conducted with ethical approval from the AIATSIS Human Research Ethics Committee (EO284-20210726), conforming to their guidelines for ethical research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (2020). The ethical landscape for this project was also informed by working at the ‘cultural interface’ (Nakata 2007)—in this case a meeting point between First Nations and non-Indigenous approaches to theatre, education, research, and health and wellbeing. This meant that the cross-cultural research team spent a great deal of time attending to ideas of relational accountability (Wilson 2008) and working towards de-centring non-Indigenous perspectives and voices (Woodland, Bell-Wykes, and Godwin 2023).

## Data interpretation and analysis

Interpretation and analysis of the data was conducted in an ongoing process of yarning and reflection throughout the project, and then drawn together by Sarah Woodland using NVivo data analysis software to identify key themes within all the written documentation collected. The data were also analysed in terms of how they responded to the original purpose of the project as well as cultural determinants of health and social and emotional wellbeing as identified by leading First Nations scholars in Australia (Gee et al. 2014, Verbunt et al. 2021, Salmon et al. 2019). The themes identified through this process are discussed in the 'Outcomes' section. They are grouped in terms of outcomes for the Ensemble members: cultural connection and identity, arts and community leadership; outcomes for young people: engagement in arts and culture, peer learning and relationships, sexual health learning and yarning, and leadership and self-determination; and outcomes in community engagement, including capacity building, and workforce development.

## Limitations

The literature on theatre-led and arts-led approaches to health education and promotion highlights how challenging it can be to 'measure' or evaluate impacts from programs such as these, with an acknowledgement that behaviour change and shifts in attitude typically occur over a long period of time and cannot be attributed to one 'intervention' or engagement (Low 2020, Selman and Heather 2015). This drove our commitment to focusing on holistic ideas of wellbeing and self-determination as recommended by best practice in First Nations health research, as opposed to the 'pointy end' of behaviour change and messaging. Nevertheless, our research design certainly had its own limitations, mostly to do with a lack of time and resourcing, and the fact that we were simultaneously creating, evaluating, and disseminating the model. There were also sometimes tensions in terms of meeting ILBIJERRI's evaluation needs as prescribed by the company through Culture Counts—which has an emphasis on gathering positive data points for promotion and future funding applications—and telling our own research story in all its complexity and nuance.



THE SCORE Ensemble as Sista-Gals, Final creative development and rehearsal, University of Melbourne. L-R: Zerene Jaadwa, Matisse Knight, Miela Anich, Zach Blampied, Zane Webster. Image: Erika Budiman, 2023.

# Developing the Model

Following extensive discussions and consultations that began as early as 2019, THE SCORE model was developed in an iterative process over three years beginning in early 2021. Led by the core creative research team, its development was informed by an interdisciplinary group consisting of the Ensemble members, guest artists, sexual health workers, young people in community, and ILBIJERRI staff, strengthening its performative outcomes and theoretical rigour. For this report, we have described how the model was developed as a separate section to the rollout in communities, but in reality, the rollout to Swan Hill and Mildura (following the second creative development in July 2023) was a critical part of developing and refining the model that exists now.

## First creative development: February-March 2021

THE SCORE commenced development in February 2021 with an Ensemble of six performers: Bayden Clayton, Axel Garay, Zerene Jaadwa, Lisa Maza, Bala Neba, and Jerrika Pevitt. The creative team was led by Kamarra Bell-Wykes, and included Stefo Nantsou from Zeal Theatre, Pongjit (Jon) Saphakhun and Richard Barber from Free Theatre, and Sarah Woodland from University of Melbourne. Monique Grbec supported with researching the content, and Peter Waples-Crowe from Thorne Harbour Health and Anne Roseman from VACCHO delivered a 'Deadly Sexy Training' session in week two.

Members of the team also visited Bunjilwarra Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service for three sessions over the three-week development to consult with young people about the developing content (see Bunjilwarra n.d.). Kamarra and Sarah initially (ambitiously) hoped that this first creative development would encompass creating the KICK-OFF performance, developing the interactive and workshop 'yarning' processes, and skilling up the Ensemble in facilitation. In the end, we were able to create a solid draft of the KICK-OFF performance and begin discussions about how the workshop residencies might work in communities.

## Zeal Theatre

In the first two weeks, the Ensemble worked with experienced youth theatre maker Stefo Nantsou from Zeal Theatre Australia (Zeal Theatre Australia 2020) to devise a high energy

performance that would surface the issues for a young audience (the KICK-OFF performance). His unique style infused the work with heightened, comedic characters, dynamic and sharp transitions between different scenes and characters, tons of energy, and a pumping soundtrack. Music drove the energy of the scenes from the beginning, initially with Stefo on guitar but later with a strong soundtrack of intergenerational after party favourites. The style also evolved to include several dance and movement sequences propelling the work forward. The involvement of first Ensemble member Bala Neba, an experienced dancer and choreographer, was critical to developing these sequences.

## Bunjilwarra

For the first visit to Bunjilwarra in week 1, we brought the world of the footy carnival to a small group of young people who created 'postcards' (tableaux) and scenes and came up with the idea of the after party. This was then workshopped with Stefo back at base. Here, the archetypal characters started to be developed: Brotha-Boy footy star, Aunty health worker, Sista-Gal party animal etc.

In the second visit, we asked them to create the key scenes that had been workshopped back at base and would become integral to the KICK-OFF performance: Separate groups of Sista-Gals and Broth-Boys (a) getting ready for the party, (b) in the car on the way, (c) arriving, (d) getting drinks at the bar, (e) scoping out the dancefloor and dancing, (f) meeting in the toilet (girls) and for a smoke outside (boys).

In our third and final visit to Bunjilwarra, we connected with Elder in residence, Uncle Pat Farrant, who reminded us of the intergenerational aspect of the project—he told us all about ‘courting’ in his day. Ensemble member Bayden Clayton also discovered through Uncle Pat that he was connected to that community, which strengthened the links to the project. On this visit, we developed further scenes and generated more dialogue with the participants there. We also piloted using the game Bombs and Shields to have a frank discussion with the young group about barriers and enablers to sexual health. This further informed the content of the KICK-OFF performance, for example, one participant highlighted how his young women friends were more concerned with getting pregnant than getting STIs, a strong theme of peer pressure emerged, and the team were reminded of the strong gender expectations and norms that can drive behaviour (for example, bragging rights among the Brotha-Boys). All these elements made their way into the performance.

### ‘Deadly Sexy’ training

In week two, VACCHO led their ‘Deadly Sexy Training’ input with the team, sharing sexual health information and education strategies. The workers facilitated important discussions around the origins of shame, the breakdown in culturally safe sexual health education (due to colonisation and the Stolen Generations), media influence and more. The training reflected a commitment to holistic, strengths-based approaches, a community-wide sense of responsibility/accountability, and a focus on pleasure, joy, and fun in challenging stigma and shame. They delivered some of this session in gendered yarning circles, which we took forward into the workshop model.

### Free Theatre

In the third week, Pongjit (Jon) Saphakhun and Richard Barber from Free Theatre contributed their insights from delivering their brand of ‘dialogue theatre’ in communities in Australia, Thailand, and Myanmar (Free Theatre 2023). Free Theatre shared games and exercises from their Forum Theatre toolbox that explored power relations and relationships between characters and interrogated institutions and wider social power structures that inform health, wellbeing, and education in Australia. These exercises supported the Ensemble to think more deeply about the material and gave them additional approaches to use in facilitating the workshop content.

### Developing the workshop content

Throughout the development of the KICK-OFF performance, Kamarra and Sarah continued to think through how conventions and structures from applied theatre could be used to unpack the issues in the play and form strategies for interaction. By the end of the first creative development, we had begun to explore how and where incursions might be made into this mad, fast, frenzied story. This included trialling a ‘STI Circle’ (later the Advice Circle) around Sam and Billy, where different community members gave their opinions and advice, using the game Bombs and Shields to identify risk and protective factors, and identifying the pivotal Choice Points for characters (which we called ‘YOLO’ or ‘Fu\*k-it’ moments) where they might make different or better-informed choices. Nazaree Dickerson, a highly experienced theatre maker and ILBIJERRI’s Youth Ensemble leader, arrived in week three, bringing strong skills in facilitation and ideas for the character of The Coach, or joker for the performance. By the end of the first creative development, Kamarra was also starting to think through how the community could be brought into the performance, for example, forming teams of Brotha-Boys and Sista-Gals around the central protagonists, and offering different scenarios for the after party.



## Conclusion

On the final day of the first creative development, we had a showing for ILBIJERRI staff, friends of the creative team and Ensemble, and representatives from VACCHO and Thorne Harbour Health. This was a chance to road test the draft version of the KICK-OFF performance and some of the interactive elements that would ultimately be led by The Coach. We received highly positive feedback from this session, with critical input from Peter Waples-Crowe, who reminded us of the need to embed LGBTIAQ+ inclusivity into the model. This final showing also demonstrated the strength of the team and the flexibility of the model, where one of the Ensemble members felt unable to perform in the role of Sam (due to a range of personal reasons), others stepped in and supported each other to deliver the performance, demonstrating the strength of the model.

The experience over this three-week development led to a strong sense of how the model might work in communities. Stefo, Rachael Maza, and ILBIJERRI Producer Kim Bennett had prior experience of working with The Torch in the 1980s and '90s, and shared their recollections of how that company would

go into community, do a show, run workshops, and then recruit people to be part of a new/ adapted version of the show at the end. We also discussed the need to ensure that young people who only saw the first KICK-OFF performance and did not participate in the residency would still be able to take away positive sexual health messaging. The experience at Bunjilwarra was also critical to this stage of the development. The Bunjilwarra group often took their performances much further than the Ensemble – they were more authentic, less censored, and at times more extreme. Kamarra took notes and was getting a lot of dialogue 'gold' that made it into the final version of the KICK-OFF performance. Working with Uncle Pat and the young people at Bunjilwarra strengthened our belief in the approach and our sense that we were on the right path. By the end of the three weeks, with a strong draft script for the KICK-OFF performance and a strong sense emerging of how the model might work in communities, we were ready for the next stage.

## Second creative development: August-September 2022

The second creative development happened 18-months after the first, as a result of delays imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns. Due to the length of time elapsed and the team's conflicting schedules, we recruited an Ensemble that consisted of only two members from the first creative development. The original Social Impact production team had moved on from ILBIJERRI, with new Social Impact Producer, Laura Harris, coordinating this next phase (supported by Theo Cassady as Associate Producer). This creative development was planned for three weeks and would be followed by a tour to Swan Hill and Mildura for the first rollout of the project. For this phase, we also brought back Jon and Richard from Free Theatre to support and advise and enlisted a cohort of around 20-25 third year theatre students from Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) as a test group to trial the model in the third week. Kalarni Murray also joined us in this phase as a research assistant, taking field notes, keeping the script up-to-date, and documenting the developing workshop/dialogue processes for the toolkit. In preparation for this phase, Kamarra and Sarah had begun to develop the toolkit document, which contained a background to the project, the fundamentals of culturally safe facilitation, and a draft version of the drama-based processes that could be implemented to explore the issues in the KICK-OFF performance.

Kamarra and Sarah initially planned to model the approach for the Ensemble step-by-step, first teaching them (and refining) the KICK-OFF performance, then immersing them in the workshop and dialogue process activities, then modelling how to bring community members into the play before handing the reins to the Ensemble in the third week to hone their skills and learn the model explicitly. Again, this plan was thrown out as we were met with an almost entirely new Ensemble and began to see the complexity of the model evolve.

## Week One

The first week was focused on building trust and rapport in the Ensemble, teaching them the play (using video from the first creative development) and beginning to model the drama-based workshop/dialogue processes. During this week, we were able to see where refinements in the KICK-OFF performance needed to be made and continue to think through how The Coach would function. Key decisions included leaving the ending of the play open-ended in terms of whether Sam and Billy would use protection, so that conclusions could be drawn with the community audience.

We also worked on character development for Sam, Billy and their surrounding community members/peers using the Character Cards that we had made for community members to fill in as part of the workshop process. The Ensemble used these cards to further develop relationships and characteristics, for example the 'sex positive' Sista-Gal, the health worker Aunty, and the Brotha-Boy who encourages Billy with unhelpful advice.

Through testing some of the workshop/dialogue processes, the Ensemble also developed some of the 'inner voices' that supported their Choice Point (YOLO/Fu\*ck-it) moments.

## Week Two

In the second week, we were joined by a new Ensemble member, Zane Webster, who acted as a kind of 'test participant', working through the logistics of bringing him into the show. In this week we continued to refine the KICK-OFF performance and workshop/dialogue processes, focusing on Sam and Billy's peer group and the different kinds of advice they would offer in the lead up to them hooking up on the dancefloor.

Kamarra also worked with the Ensemble to fineness the transitions of the performance and firm up the dance sequences; and we worked with Nazaree to further develop the interactive framework for The Coach to use at the end of the performance. Here we also



allocated specific drama games and exercises to individual Ensemble members for them to try out with each other and refine in the safe setting of the development space.

Towards the end of the week, we began preparing for the test delivery with VCA students, planning the three-day workshop sequence with the Ensemble and preparing them to facilitate their sections.

### Week Three

For the third week, we programmed the VCA Theatre students to attend in the afternoons for four out of the five days. The mornings were focused on preparing the Ensemble to deliver the model each day and undertaking the Deadly Sexy Training from VACCHO (for the first time for most of the Ensemble).

Given that they were not our ultimate target group, we worked to adapt certain elements of the model for the VCA students. We were clear with them from the outset that they did not need to 'pretend' to be First Nations community members and to just bring themselves to the process. They were quick to pick up the key elements of the KICK-OFF performance and brought their own unique experiences and styles to the community characters that they created, and the workshop exercises and yarning processes used. They also proved to be very supportive and willing to participate and gave constructive feedback at the close of each session.

The Deadly Sexy training was like the previous year, but unfortunately, we had less time (due to the other demands of the week) and there were some issues in the Sista-Gals' yarning circle that arose due to the non-Indigenous facilitator's style of delivery, which felt unsafe for some group members. This strengthened our resolve that such training inputs needed to be facilitated by First Nations facilitators whenever possible.

On Thursday, we presented the GRAND-FINAL performance to an audience of invited guests, stakeholders and supporters. The audience was highly engaged and activated

by the performance, responding well to The Coach's invitations for dialogue at the end. The VCA cohort gave very positive feedback about their experience, stating that it gave them an insight into how theatre can work for education and positive social change. Members of the reference group were pleased to see the audience empowered to give advice to the characters on stage, however, they were keen for more health-specific content to be worked into the performance. This highlighted an ongoing tension for Kamarra in creating this work, where she maintains a focus on creating an engaging performance that can open space for yarning, rather than what she describes as a 'performed pamphlet' that might contain all the facts. This reinforced the continued importance of having health practitioners on hand on tour, and resources readily available to young people about where they can get additional information.

The involvement of the VCA students in this phase was very helpful, with the First Nations students among them excited about what this work could bring to their communities. One of the VCA students had experience as a facilitator and shared a framework for inquiry that we distilled down to The Coach's 'Facts, Feelings, Future' audience prompts. Feedback at the end of each day and the end of the four days informed our thinking, where we asked what worked, what didn't, and how to strengthen some of the facilitation e.g. not to 'go fishing' for the answers we want to hear.

The final day (Friday) was given over to debriefing, learnings from the test with VCA, and planning for the tour the following week.

## Conclusion

While the process had been very complex and intricate throughout the three-week development, we felt as ready as possible to take the model into community and see how it would work. The draft script and toolkit that Kamarra and Sarah had prepared prior to this phase became a sort of ‘bible’ that the creative team and Ensemble could refer to in evolving the work further. In retrospect, however, this document was perhaps too detailed—Kamarra and Sarah had done a great deal of advance thinking about potential process exercises for each scene and Sarah had written these out in step-by-step, scene-by-scene sequence.

”

*About the biggest challenge for us was working out the process while training the Ensemble in the skills at the same time. That was a real challenge in trying to figure out how to keep the Ensemble engaged and activated while we were having to do very tedious fine tuning.*

(Kamarra Bell-Wykes, 2022)

“

Despite this, by the end of the second creative development, we did achieve a great deal—creating a close-to-final version of the KICK-OFF performance with an interactive dialogue process led by The Coach; a series of workshop activities that would form the basis of the residencies in community; and a clear sense that community members (in this case VCA students) could be brought into the process and performance to great effect.





*THE SCORE Ensemble as Uncles, Second creative development, Malthouse Theatre. L-R: Miela Anich, Zane Webster, Nicola Ingram, with students from the VCA Undergraduate Theatre cohort. Image: James Henry, 2022.*

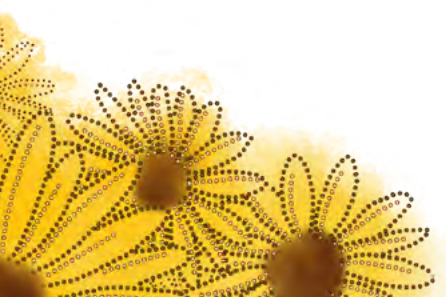
## Ensemble Capacity Building and Final Creative Development: July-August 2023

The second creative development was followed immediately by a tour to the Mallee District (Swan Hill and Mildura) in Victoria, which we describe in the next section. During the Mallee tour, we could see that the Ensemble was only just beginning to really hone their facilitation skills through using the approaches in community, and the model was being tested in a way that it had not been previously. We therefore shifted the initial project plan, diverting additional funds towards further capacity building with the Ensemble and a third stage of creative development over two-and-a-half weeks, as opposed to moving straight into capacity building with workers in communities. This would then be followed by a mini tour to Wyndham Vale and Bunjilwarra in the second half of the third week. Rachael Maza strongly supported this approach, recognising a broader need to build capacity and skills among First Nations facilitators so that artistic and community leadership did not always fall to the same few people. We also recognised this Ensemble as a very special group, whom we could see had the passion and potential to take things further. We identified the fact that we needed dedicated time without the intense pressure of all the other factors to bed down training with the Ensemble and refining the workshop process. It also enabled us to get a stronger sense of what aspects of the model could be handed on during the capacity building with staff/professionals in communities. This phase was undertaken almost a year after the first, again due to the challenges of coordinating people's availabilities and uncertainty for ILBIJERRI around project funding.

### Weeks one-two

For this phase, we decided to bring on board three additional Ensemble members (over and above the core touring party of 6 performer-facilitators) so that there could be a pool of skilled up performer-facilitators to choose from for future tours. For the first 2 weeks, the Ensemble refamiliarised themselves with the KICK-OFF performance and brought in the new performers; worked on training two new Coaches, while also strengthening The Coach's dialogue script; and continued to hone the residency workshop processes and deepen the Ensemble's facilitation skills. For Kamarra and Sarah, having time to work deeply in this way on strengthening the model was a gift, which was supported by the Ensemble's existing facilitation skills and experience.

At the start of the third week, the Ensemble again worked with a new cohort of third year undergraduate theatre students from VCA. This was less successful than the previous VCA engagement had been, largely because it was a different cohort, who had not been briefed adequately on the program or their role prior to attending. This phase also included a session with Lou Mapelston, a facilitator with expertise in relationships and consent education. While the session was not focused specifically on sexual health, it prompted an important reflection for the team about the broader context of sex and relationships for young people today. We concluded the second week with a KICK-OFF performance to ILBIJERRI staff and friends, and then again concluded the VCA engagement with a GRAND-FINAL performance to VCA staff, peers, and invited guests. The feedback from both performances was highly positive and gave the Ensemble and new Coaches a chance to rehearse the various interactive dialogue processes in depth.



## Learning from the Mallee tour

A key strength of this final phase of Ensemble training/capacity building and creative development was that we had all learned so much from the experiences of the Mallee tour in 2022, and while the 2023 Ensemble had some new members, there remained four of those who had been with us the previous year who had invaluable insights and experiences to bring into the final phase.

One of the most important lessons from the Mallee tour was how flexible and adaptable the model could be, for example, how it could be compressed into a delivery of four afternoons, and that it contained multiple points of entry for participants who could not be present all the time (or who came late in the process). This became integral to how we thought about and adapted the model for our final community delivery in Bunjilwarra.

The first roll out at Swan Hill and Mildura also highlighted the need for some of the changes in the KICK-OFF performance script, for example, audience members in community were highly focused on the peer pressure from Sam and Billy's friends as a driving factor in them hooking up, so we worked to make Sam and Billy appear more confident and joyful about this and emphasised that the relationship was consenting on both sides. Also, the intricacies of The Coach's script and interactions were refined, for example, moving the Advice Circle from the middle of the process to the end; and adapting Sam and Billy's interactions around condom use to draw out more reasons why they might elect not to use protection.

The Mallee tour also enabled us to make informed decisions about the dialogue/yarning processes used during the workshop residencies. This included developing a list of appropriate prompts for the Ensemble members to use during the gendered yarning circles; and working with them to recognise other opportunities for yarning with young people about attitudes and behaviours relating to sexual health, for example, using the character cards to develop lines of advice. We also refined specific yarning exercises like

the Body Continuum and Bombs and Shields, where we elected to focus more on the fictional frame of the play (for example, 'Will Sam and Billy use protection?' and 'What bombs and shields did you see in the play?') This came about after seeing how young people had struggled a little responding to generalised questions about sexual health and did not necessarily have the language to express their views confidently. We also learned that identifying 'bombs' and 'shields' (or risk and protective factors) with the young people as a whole group did not feel appropriate or effective, therefore we decided to structure the yarning stage of this exercise in gendered groups.

Another important learning from the Mallee tour came from 2022 Ensemble member Nicola Ingram (who was unavailable for the 2023 team). Nicola had highlighted the need to support neurodivergent participants and Ensemble members, drawing diagrams of the play and process. This led Stage Manager Jenny Le to create a script that included diagrams, and directly influenced how the leadership team began to illustrate the program to stakeholders, Ensemble, and young people in ways that were more accessible.

Finally, our experience in Swan Hill highlighted the need to set up a firm process and lines of communication to address challenging behaviours and critical incidents that may occur among the young participants. A particular incident of disclosure from one participant to an Ensemble member was handled effectively but left the Ensemble member feeling vulnerable and disempowered. It was important to have space to talk through this and other incidents that had occurred on the tour so that we could discuss strategies to respond.

## Conclusion

By the end of the two-and-a-half-week capacity building and development phase, we once again had an extremely strong Ensemble and a sense that the model was finally in a shape that was both rigorous and highly flexible. This drew on the strengths of the Ensemble members, whose skills in performance and facilitation, although already very strong, became much more developed—particularly in terms of having the confidence to hold space for yarning and dialogue around sexual health and using the scenarios and characters in the play to ground discussion. In this phase, we also incorporated the talents of comedian Kimmie Lovegrove to develop a stand-up routine to open the residencies and warm up the participants. On the Wednesday of the final week, we were due to do a one-day residency in at the Aboriginal Wellness Foundation in Wyndham Vale, but unfortunately due to sorry

business in that community, we were only able to present the KICK-OFF performance to a few young people before closing the day. This again reminded us of the need to be responsive and adapt to the needs of communities. However, we were able to deliver a 3-day residency at Bunjilwarra, where it was clear that the additional creative development and capacity building with the Ensemble had paid off. We were able to integrate the sexual health content with the performance-making more effectively, and the team were confident and strong in their abilities.





THE SCORE Ensemble as Brotha-Boys, final creative development and rehearsal, University of Melbourne.  
L-R: Matisse Knight, Zerene Jaadwa, Zach Blampied, Zane Webster, Miela Anich. Image: Erika Budiman, 2023.

# Delivering the Model

The model was delivered successfully in four community sites, albeit with some major adjustments to our initial plans. This comprised:

- Two-week tour in the Mallee District in September 2022, where the KICK-OFF performance and residency for young people were successfully delivered over five days in Swan Hill as well as spontaneous deliveries of the KICK-OFF performance to schools, colleges, and health services in Mildura.
- Two-day residency in Bunjilwarra Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service in July 2023,
- Capacity building workshops for community health and youth workers in Mildura, Bunjilwarra, and Wyndham Vale across 2023.

We undertook several engagement activities aside from the above, which were not included in the formal research process but nevertheless informed the model. We offered two taster deliveries of the KICK-OFF performance and workshops to around 20 young people at Casey Aboriginal Gathering Place, Melbourne (2022-2023) and delivered a taster KICK-OFF performance and workshop at the Aboriginal Wellness Foundation in Wyndham Vale in July 2023.\* In addition, we presented the KICK-OFF performance to around 150 delegates at the annual SexRurality Conference hosted by the University of Melbourne’s Centre for Excellence in Rural and Sexual Health (CERSH) (Creswick, May 2023).

*\*The Aboriginal Wellness Foundation came on board as a research partner after our taster delivery, but the residency (due for September 2023) was cancelled on the first day after the KICK-OFF performance due to sorry business, hence the lack of data around young people’s engagement at that site.*

This section of the report offers a brief account of delivery in each site that partnered in the research, with discussion about the outcomes and findings from the program delivery in the following section (‘Outcomes’).

	Swan Hill	Mildura	Bunjilwarra	Wyndham Vale
KICK-OFF Performance (workers)	1 performance ≤30 audience members	2 performances ≤30 audience members	–	–
KICK-OFF Performance (young people)	7 performances ≤40 audience members	3 performances ≤45 audience members	2 performances ≤8 audience members	2 performances ≥20 audience members
Residency (young people)	5-day delivery ≤15 participants	–	2-day delivery ≤8 participants	(cancelled due to sorry business)
Capacity building/training (staff)	–	2-day delivery ≤10 participants	2-day delivery 3 participants	2-day delivery 4 participants
GRAND-FINAL Performance (community)	1 performance ≤20 audience members	–	–	–

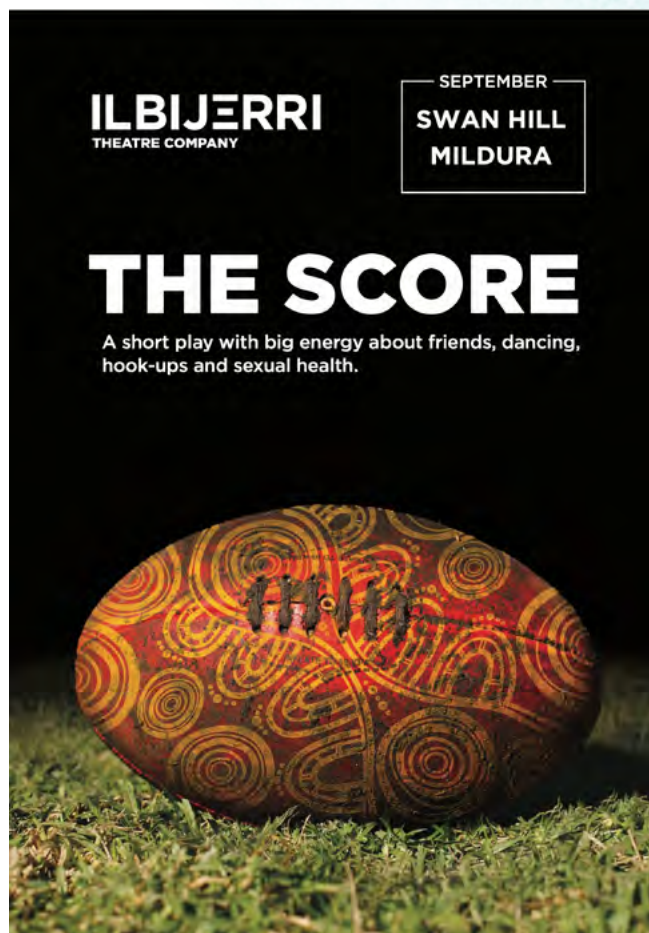
Figure 4: Performances, audiences, and participants for THE SCORE delivery (2022-2023).



## Rollout to young people: Mallee District, September 2022

First rollout of the model to young people was in the Mallee District— in Wamba Wamba, Latje Latje, Tatti Tatti, Waddi Waddi, Barapa Barapa Country in the Swan Hill area (week one) and Barkindji, Madi Madi, Dadi Dadi, Kureinji Country in the Mildura area (week two). This delivery immediately followed the second creative development process, so as discussed above, provided some continuity for the team to first learn and develop, and then put the model into action.

The ILBIJERRI production team had worked to develop connections with key organisations in the Mallee, conducting numerous phone calls and visits prior to our arrival. The organisations that were consulted included: Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS), Swan Hill College, Chaffey Secondary College, Mildura Senior College, Sunraysia Institute of Technical and Further Education (SuniTAFE). Through this process, Swan Hill College and MDAS in Mildura were selected as the two sites where we would deliver the residency, targeting young people after school/college between 3-6pm. In the end, the residency was only delivered in Swan Hill, with several factors contributing to difficulties recruiting young people in Mildura. Instead, we took the opportunity to build stronger connections there, conducting versions of the KICK-OFF performance (which we called POP-UP performances) in several community organisations and sites to try and raise awareness of the program.



*ILBIJERRI Flyer for the Mallee Tour, 2022.*

## Swan Hill: 5-9 September 2022

The Swan Hill College residency was strongly supported by Assistant Principal Kristen Le Gassick and delivered to 15 young people\* aged approximately 13-17. The venue was Harrison Hall, a community hall with a large stage, lighting rig, raked seating and kitchen facilities that was attached to the school but also accessible to the wider community. This was beneficial because it allowed school students to have easy access, but non-attending young people to join in as well. During the residency, we had a visit from a local sexual health worker who was able to share information with the Ensemble and team

about services available in the area, and we had a sexual health nurse (recommended by VACCHO) who joined us from Melbourne for some of the residency. Bayden Clayton, who had been in the original Ensemble and was a community worker and youth leader in the Mallee district also joined us for much of the residency, offering support and advice, advocating for the program in his community, and bringing people to the GRAND-FINAL performance.

*\*Numbers of participating young people fluctuated between around eight-15 depending on the day.*



KICK-OFF performance, Swan Hill. L-R: Nazaree Dickerson, Zerene Jaadwa, Zane Webster, Miela Anich, Corey Saylor-Brunskill, Nicola Ingram. Image: Laura Harris, 2022.

**Starting on the Monday**, we took up residency in the space for five-days, set up a table with sexual health information and resources, and began by delivering two KICK-OFF performances at lunchtime and 6.30pm on the Monday. Very few people attended these performances, mainly teachers and alumni from the college, but the people who did attend were highly engaged and supportive, spreading the word among their students and colleagues.

**On the second day (Tuesday)**, the team delivered three more KICK-OFF performances at lunchtime, with progressively larger audiences each day word-of-mouth spread, and earlier-attending students brought their friends along until we finally had an audience of around 20. This demonstrated the power of the show as an engagement tool and the beauty of having a highly energetic ten-minute performance that could be played multiple times and the young people wanted to see again and again. The reaction from audience members was highly engaged and positive with

cheering and clapping. Audience members were happy to give their opinions and ideas during The Coach's interactive dialogue process. The young people demonstrated strong literacy around sexual health and were giving positive advice to Sam and Billy, for example, "Make sure he wears a condom," "Seek advice," and "Be smart, go at your own pace."

After the third performance, we went into the workshop delivery with around 15 young people running games, exercises, and yarning. The young people appeared shy at first but enjoyed playing the games. These progressed from ice-breakers, group building games, and the Body Continuum (gauging opinions and knowledge in relation to various sexual health prompts including asking participants where they can access information about sexual health in their region). This was followed by the gendered yarning circles. This first workshop delivery was successful, and the young people said they were keen to come back the next day.

”

*It's great to see ... more male participation in it, because usually a lot of these projects, a lot of the theatre stuff is female dominated in Swan Hill because I guess seeing the stigma that comes with theatre.*

(Bayden Clayton, youth leader, interview, 2022)

“

**On the third day (Wednesday)**, several participants from the previous day returned and a local Elder and staff member from MDAS brought three older boys from her family along to check out the program. This Aunty spent a couple of hours with us, contributing to discussions and talking to the team members, which was an important factor in building connections within the community. By the end, she appeared to have given the program her endorsement, and her boys (who were aged 15-17) ended up staying with the residency through to the end, bringing strong leadership and performance skills, and additional boys, the majority of whom performed in the GRAND-FINAL performance.

In this session, we shared the KICK-OFF performance again and moved into the process of bringing the young people into the play. Most of the young people were enthusiastic about this part of the process, with a couple of girls observing first and then slowly joining the rehearsal. Many had seen the KICK-OFF performance several times, and so they were very quick to pick up the scenes and choreography. They appeared to really enjoy creating the archetypal characters of Brotha-Boys, Sista-Gals, Aunties and Uncles. There were high levels of enthusiasm and energy in the room by the end of the session. During our check-out (closing yarn), several participants said they were feeling 'good' or 'buzzing.'

**The fourth day (Thursday)**, continued in this vein. We had around 10 participants, some from the previous sessions, plus three-four newcomers. We shared the KICK-OFF performance again for the new people, and the established group members (especially the boys) brought them onboard, helping teach them the performance. Again, by the end of the day, we observed that the participants were engaged and energised.

**By Friday (the fourth day)**, we had 10 participants (four boys and six girls). We continued to rehearse the performance and led the exercise Bombs and Shields as a large group, hoping to initiate discussion about risk and protective factors for the characters in

the play and young people more broadly. We quickly recognised that people were reluctant to talk openly, which led us to decide that we would do this exercise in gendered yarning circles in the future, which proved much more effective.

After a couple of hours' rehearsal and finalising the performance, around 20 community members arrived for the GRAND-FINAL performance. This gathering was a mix of friends, relatives, youth workers, and teachers from Swan Hill College. Almost all the young people who had been involved through the afternoon performed, apart from one boy who elected to sit out. The audience members were highly engaged and laughed and clapped throughout the performance. Their responses during The Coach's interactive dialogue at the end were reserved at first but they quickly warmed up and shared their perspectives on the issues raised. At the end of the performance, the young people gathered on stage for a celebratory dance circle, before moving into the foyer to share food and yarn with the audience about the performance. The sexual health nurse who had joined the tour from Melbourne had set up a table to share resources and information, and the participants, Ensemble, and team members mingled and distributed the audience survey.

In addition to the residency, at Harrison Hall, we conducted some community engagement activities around Swan Hill. Some of our team attended an International Women's Day morning tea at MDAS where they were invited to speak about the program, and we also delivered a POP-UP version of the KICK-OFF performance to around 30 staff members from Swan Hill MDAS. The latter was very well received, with audience members enthusiastically clapping, cheering, and responding to The Coach's prompts.

”

*Because we got an Elder on side ... and then that word of mouth, [young people] started bringing their mates and that's how we ended up with such a great outcome in Swan Hill.*

(Kamarra Bell-Wykes, team debrief, 2022)

“



Table of sexual health resources and information, Swan Hill. Image: Kalarni Murray, 2022

## Mildura: 12-16 September 2022

The initial goal for Mildura was to hold the performance residency with young people at the MDAS Community space. We shared the KICK-OFF performance with students at Chaffey Secondary College, Mildura Senior College, and Sunraysia Institute of Technical and Further Education (SuniTAFE) with the hope of recruiting them to the residency. At these sites, we had audiences of between 10-30 students, most of whom reacted vocally and enthusiastically to the performance. After these performances, the Ensemble invited the students to play some games to give them an idea of what to expect. At SuniTAFE this happened on the third day, where the Ensemble worked with eight-nine young people after school and then shared KFC. The games had mixed results. At Mildura Senior College, the Ensemble reported that the young people were quite resistant, which may have been due to factors such as the presence of teachers, a couple of 'cooler' students who were actively disinterested, and the fact that there hadn't been an opportunity to casually build rapport with the young people. It is worth also noting that this was a mixed culture group. The games at SuniTAFE were met with more enthusiasm from participants, but the group experienced some difficulty with the location—being in a foyer/lobby style area of the campus with high levels of passing foot traffic and a complaint from a staff member whose office was nearby.

The Ensemble returned on the last day to do this again, but the students were more interested in playing basketball (which some of the Ensemble members joined them for).

For a range of reasons discussed further in the next section, we were not able to recruit a group of young people for a residency at Mildura, but we did deliver two POP-UP versions of the KICK-OFF performance at MDAS to audiences of staff, local Elders, and one or two young people (who came with them). On the third day, for example, after a casual conversation with a staff member at MDAS, this person was able to round up around 20 staff members to watch a morning KICK-OFF performance. Through all these small showings, we got a very positive response from audience members, who seemed to really enjoy the show. But we did take the opportunity to try and engage with different community orgs and build relationships for the future with local stakeholders.

One Elder, Uncle Peter Peterson (Barkindji) saw the first KICK-OFF performance and became enthusiastically supportive, trying to assist the team with recruiting young people and bringing friends and family to the community hall on most days. During breaks, he told us funny stories about his own sexual health education efforts with boys and young men in the region, and shared traditional



KICK-OFF performance (POP-UP) for staff at MDAS Mildura. Image: Sarah Woodland, 2022.

stories about his Country. He encouraged the Ensemble members to visit the confluence of the Murray and Darling rivers (a significant site), which they did during some spare time, and suggested taking them on a proper trip on Country next time we returned. ILBIJERRI contracted him to conduct a Smoking Ceremony with the team on the fifth day which, amid some frustration and disappointment about this leg of the tour, provided us with a strong sense of grounding.

### **Rollout to young people: Bunjilwarra, July 2023**

Having established a strong connection with Bunjilwarra Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service in 2021 through our first creative development, we were excited to be able to deliver a two-day residency (28-29 July 2023) as part of a planned mini-tour that followed on from the final creative development. This was an important stage in the process, enabling us to return to the site where we had gathered such powerful insights for the performance in our initial workshops and share the developing model with the current cohort of young people.

In some ways, this delivery demonstrated the power of the model at its best, where several factors contributed to its success: the beautiful site on a rural block near Hastings, where young people aged 16-25 are resident for up to six-months at a time—this place felt peaceful, contained, and culturally safe; the existing structure at the Service, where young people engage in extensive group work and one-to-one support for addiction—this enabled us to build on existing strengths such as the group’s capacity for open yarning; the fact that the Ensemble members had just come out of the final intensive training and development period with high levels of skills and confidence to deliver the material; and strong support and advocacy from staff at the Service, who joined in with the program and encouraged young people to do the same. ILBIJERRI’s

community outreach coordinator, Della Bedford was our Coach for the first day. She also happened to work casually at Bunjilwarra, which greatly supported the Ensemble’s ability to build rapport with the young people. All of these factors enabled us to deliver a short but intensive version of the model, effectively integrating the performance elements with sexual health yarning and learning.

The sessions took place in Bunjilwarra’s communal recreational space, where group/community meetings are held, and the young residents have their meals, watch TV, play pool, and hang out. The atmosphere in this space was relaxed, with bean bags, couches, and cushions and large sliding doors overlooking the outside. Although it was very welcoming, it was a small space to perform in, but the Ensemble adapted well. This, combined with the fact that we had only a total of eight participants, five young men and three young women, meant that we decided to deliver a lower key version of the model—turning down the volume on the KICK-OFF performance and the overall energy of the Ensemble’s facilitation. The basketball court outside provided larger space and change of scenery for some of the more active games (and for some Ensemble members and participants to shoot hoops at lunch time).

”

*I love this program because you have to be really present for this.*

*(Young participant,  
Bunjilwarra, 2023)*

“



**On the first morning**, we began with the KICK-OFF performance and went straight into introductory games for group building and breaking the ice. Participants were enthusiastic during the performance, laughing and offering responses to The Coach's dialogue prompts. At the start of the games, they were a little quiet, but soon warmed up. Adhering to our new structure for the residencies, we followed the first few games with a yarning circle, introducing the project and the process for 'Check In' (giving a number out of 10 for how we

feel). There was great feedback from the outset, with one participant saying, 'I started as a five but I'd probably be an eight now,' and another saying, 'I'm looking forward to the rest of the project. I thought it wasn't going to be good but I'm looking forward to it.' At the end of the morning, we shared lunch with the young people (which was provided by Bunjilwarra in the community kitchen), and this presented an opportunity for the Ensemble to build relationships and rapport.





*KICK-OFF performance at Bunjilwarra.*

*L-R: Matisse Knight, Zerene Jaadwa, Zane Webster, Zach Blampied, Della Bedford. Image: Laura Harris, 2023.*

**In the first afternoon**, two new participants joined who had been at work that morning, so we showed the KICK-OFF performance again for them and then worked through some more games, the Body Continuum exercise, focusing on the likelihood of Sam and Billy having sex and/or using protection; and the first gendered yarning circles focusing on sex related slang words, as well as perspectives on sexual health in the play and in real life. By the end of the session, the group was extremely responsive and gave high numbers out of 10 (eight and nine across the board) in the Check Out.

**On the second morning**, we met to plan the session and decided that based on the size of the group, the time we had available, and the general atmosphere of the first day, it was unlikely we would be doing a GRAND-FINAL performance at the end of the second day. We asked the group about this during Check In on the second morning, and if there were any parts of the play they would like to learn anyway (even if not for a shared performance). The group members all identified the dance sequences, so we made this the performance goal for the day. We also worked through more of the gendered yarning exercises such as Bombs and Shields, during which we invited participants to create a line of advice for Sam and Billy, which they performed back to each other as a whole group.

**After lunch in the afternoon**, the Ensemble taught the group the dance sequences and integrated the advice scenes. While the group had dwindled to about three participants, they appeared to really enjoy this process (which we videoed several times for them to watch back). A staff member also joined in for this part. Our final activity was to break into gender yarning groups again so that the Ensemble members could have a reflective yarn with the participants about their experience of the program, before coming back together as a whole group to do the Check Out, where the feedback was uniformly positive.

## Capacity building and workforce development

As discussed, a significant part of THE SCORE model (and the AIATSIS funded research) was to build capacity in communities to use drama-based and experiential methods so that the approaches can be taken up and adapted by workers for different issues and wellbeing needs. Originally, we planned to deliver these two-day workshop deliveries directly following on from (and as a compliment to) the residencies with young people in communities, but timing and logistics meant that this was not possible. Instead, we offered these separately to partner organisations, and they were delivered to the following:

1. Bunjilwarra, 24-25 May 2023, delivered to three staff members.
2. Aboriginal Wellness Foundation (Wyndham Vale), 30-31 November 2023, delivered to four staff members.
3. Kiilalaana Foundation (Mildura), 11-12 December 2023, delivered to ten staff members and youth leaders who joined mostly from Kiilalaana, but also two visiting participants from other organisations in the region.

Sarah took the lead in developing the training sessions, which she co-led with Kamarra and/or two-three Ensemble members in each site depending on availabilities. This formed part of the continued capacity building for the Ensemble, who helped in planning and led many of the activities.

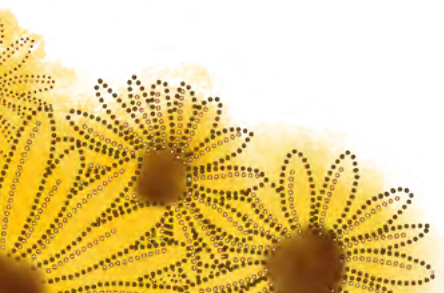
Rather than teaching participants THE SCORE program and focusing on sexual health for young people, the workshops centred the experiences of participants as youth or health workers/leaders in their community, thereby acting as a professional development where they could:

- Explore the systems, cultures, barriers, and enablers within their practice.
- Strengthen their relationships and connections with each other.
- Learn the drama-based approaches as experientially as they progressed.
- Workshop together how they might use these with their own client groups.

”

*It's broken the ice with all of us in area, it's made us more fun to be around. It shows us different ways to be with our clients.*  
(Community worker, Mildura)

“



Again, using a strengths-based approach, the workshops were designed to build on the existing skills and knowledges within the group, and draw these out in a peer-learning environment. They included exercises from THE SCORE such as Body Continuums and Bombs and Shields, where the issues explored were centred on the experience of delivering community services. In addition, we ran an exercise in each site—‘Create a Character’—where we created a fictional worker with a name and a backstory, through whom the group could explore their experiences from a safe distance, without disclosing personal experiences or compromising their professional standing by speaking about their own organisations or communities. The workshops culminated in Forum Theatre style scenes involving these fictional characters in different ‘problem’ situations that the group would then collectively solve together.

While attendance levels in Bunjilwarra and Wyndham Vale were very low—these organisations only have a small number of total staff—the levels of engagement were high and feedback from participants was extremely positive. We nevertheless faced challenges recruiting people for this free delivery, most likely due to the lack of capacity and resources in the sector (which became evident through our workshops), as well as competing demands for staff to deliver their core business—on several occasions staff members were called away to deal with an issue or crisis. In Mildura, we also faced a heat wave where temperatures reached 43 degrees. This meant that we needed to adapt our approach and move very gently, with the group there still maintaining high levels of engagement and enthusiasm.



*THE SCORE Ensemble and Team, final creative development, University of Melbourne. L-R from front row: Taeg Twist, Kamarra Bell-Wykes, Corey Saylor-Brunskill, Zerene Jaadwa, Miela Anich, Kimmie Lovegrove, Matisse Knight, Laura Harris, Sarah Woodland, Zane Webster, Zach Blampied, Della Bedford, Jenny Le. Image: Erika Budiman, 2023.*

# Outcomes

Through the integrated research approach described earlier (Figure 3), this project resulted in multiple outcomes for multiple stakeholders. Outcomes were identified through ongoing reflective yarning among the team members and analysing multiple sources of data as outlined in the ‘Background’ of this report. They are reported below in terms of outcomes for the members of THE SCORE Ensemble, the young people who participated in the development and residencies at Swan Hill and Bunjilwarra, and the participating community members and stakeholders. Different themes have emerged across these groups that are discussed in detail throughout this section.

## Ensemble

Over the life of the project, a cohort of 15 First Nations performer-facilitators worked on the project as part of THE SCORE Ensemble, some participating only in the creative development and others seeing this through to rollout in communities. As discussed, the Ensemble members came to the project with varying degrees of experience delivering this kind of work. They also came with varying degrees of sexual health literacy and different lived experiences in relation to sex, relationships, culture, community, and identity. This meant that the project leaders had to ensure that the space was held safely for all members to participate and contribute their strengths to the process—something that we achieved to varying degrees across the project.

Most of the Ensemble were themselves under 30 years of age, several in their early 20s and therefore close to the age of the young participants we were targeting, which became a great asset in terms of peer teaching as discussed later. Yarning and one-to-one interviews were conducted with Ensemble members over the course of the project, and while we were unable to capture formal interviews from all members involved, a cross section of respondents is represented in the outcomes discussed here. The outcomes for Ensemble members were complex and interrelated, however, for the clarity, we have grouped them into the two overarching themes of ‘Cultural Connection and Identity’, and ‘Arts and Community Leadership.’

## Cultural connection and identity

ILBIJERRI recruited the Ensemble members for each stage of the project using their established networks and usual processes. Due to the specialised nature of the project, prospective applicants were sought who had a broad range of relevant skills and experience in performance, community engagement, education, facilitation, health and more. Some had prior associations with ILBIJERRI through performing on their mainstage productions or being part of the Youth Ensemble, and others had never engaged with the company. The Ensemble members recruited to the project were also at different stages in their cultural identity journey—some with already strong connections to their communities, others who were only just embarking on the path of discovery, and others who were at different points along this spectrum.

**Several Ensemble members who were only just beginning to learn about their cultural heritage reported on how affirming it was to be part of the project and it evidently built their confidence in connecting with their cultural identity.** In reflecting on her experience of joining for the final creative development and delivering the model in Bunjilwarra, Matisse Knight (Wiradjuri) said that this was the first time she had ever been welcomed into an exclusively First Nations cultural space. By participating in this project, led by one of Australia’s longest running Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts organisations and leading First Nations theatre maker Kamarra Bell-Wykes, Ensemble members were immersed in a supportive community with culturally safe creative

practice at its core. Across each of the creative development phases, despite some turnover of personnel, many Ensemble members talked about how they had built a strong rapport and trust with each other, going “from a group of strangers to a family” (Axel Garay, group debrief, 2021); by the third development, Kimmie Lovegrove echoed this sentiment: “I think that’s why we work so well together because I consider you all like a part of my big family now and that’s purely based on like not holding back” (group debrief, 2023). This contributed to strengthening cultural identity and a sense of belonging for those members who were newly coming to their culture, while also reinforcing the cultural strengths and capacities of the whole Ensemble.

During our final group debrief of Swan Hill and Mildura, both Nicola and Nazaree spoke about the potential to strengthen the culturally informed way of working within the Ensemble. They suggested creating more culturally safe ways to transfer knowledge between Ensemble members (with their varying levels of experience and cultural connection); intentionally facilitating trips on Country and connections with Elders (as opposed to the more spontaneous way this occurred in Mildura); creating more culturally informed ways of building groups (beyond ‘just fun drama games’); and embedding more opportunities to connect with participants’ families (e.g., over food). This last happened in an informal, unplanned way, but the team acknowledged that these processes could be more intentional, thereby deepening the Ensemble members’ sense of cultural connection and identity.

*The project was a really good place for me ... to understand where my space is, in this cultural journey.*

(Zane Webster, group interview, 2022)

## Arts and community leadership

As discussed, ILBIJERRI Artistic Director and Co-CEO, Rachael Maza, highlighted how important it was to build leadership capacity in the arts community, a view supported by established leaders Kamarra Bell-Wykes and Nazaree Dickerson. THE SCORE aimed to build this capacity among the Ensemble members, raising their confidence and skill levels as community engaged artists, facilitators, and leaders so that these capacities would be transferable to other projects and contexts.

Several Ensemble members reported that the model’s unique approach was **developing their skills in performance, drama, and facilitating yarning** around specific issues. In our final interview after delivering the program at Bunjilwarra, both Miela Anich and Zane Webster discussed how the experience had developed their confidence as facilitators to trust themselves, be genuine, and ‘meet people where they are.’

*It was like the best of both worlds for me, it was like I got to perform and then also I got to pick up skills in terms of facilitation for things that I want to do in the future, so it was really beneficial.*

(Zane Webster, one-one interview, 2022)

Further, the opportunity to deliver the model in communities developed Ensemble members' **skills and experience in community engaged practices**, sometimes learning the hard way (through first-hand experience) what works and what doesn't. This was evident in the daily planning and debriefs during our delivery in communities, where Ensemble members progressively contributed more ideas and knowledge from their rapidly growing experience.

The Ensemble's role as co-researchers—collaboratively developing, trialling, and testing the model—gave them co-ownership over the project, and enabled them to contribute their different strengths and expertise through detailed studio practice and reflective yarning. This also enabled Ensemble members, who themselves had different levels of sexual health and wellbeing literacy, to learn and explore throughout the process, thereby enhancing their own issue-related self-reflection and knowledge. Inputs such as those from Free Theatre and the consent education sessions deepened Ensemble members' knowledge about the wider structural issues that contribute to poor sexual health outcomes in communities, thereby strengthening their capacities for advocacy and activism in their work. On the flipside to this, as discussed earlier, the Ensemble identified a need for more First Nations sexual health workers to have input into their training, which would enhance cultural safety and strengthen their relationship to the content and issues being explored.



*It's a powerful structure that allows for learning to occur on both sides*

(Zerene Jaadwa,  
one-one interview, 2021)



A challenge for the leadership team, especially in the first creative development, was that we weren't always attuned to the needs and experiences of specific Ensemble members, and we were under pressure to deliver on multiple fronts in a short space of time. This impacted the Ensemble in different ways across the different phases of the project. For the first stage, miscommunication between the creative and production teams at ILBIJERRI meant that the Ensemble were expecting in-depth facilitator training (as opposed to a strong focus on performance and theatre making). This caused some confusion and discomfort for one prospective Ensemble member who felt that their skillset did not meet the needs of the project. Another Ensemble member had to step out of the final showing due to the competing stresses on them outside the project and the pressure of being in one of the main character roles. In the second creative development, the decision to immerse Ensemble members in the model before doing too much explanation about the project caused confusion for some, who weren't sure what the project was about until they started delivering it in communities. During our residency in Swan Hill, one young participant disclosed to an Ensemble member about a serious incident, and another was demonstrating very challenging and disruptive behaviours. These matters were dealt with in the moment, but not necessarily in the best possible ways—some Ensemble members who had been involved were left feeling a little out of their depth. These and other issues reinforced the need for the Ensemble and team to clearly articulate their expectations; hold space for a range of different lived experiences among the team; and allow time to troubleshoot and develop strategies and processes to handle disclosures and deal with challenging scenarios in delivering the model in community. These processes were put more firmly in place for the final creative development, thanks in part to having more time and space.

There were times when the pressure of community engagement and leadership was perhaps too strong. Nazaree Dickerson, an experienced facilitator, had a great deal on her shoulders during the second creative development, having to balance her own extensive experience and way of working with the new model, and a constantly shifting

script and set of parameters for *The Coach*. She also highlighted that during the rollout in the Mallee District, our tendency to jump on opportunities for POP-UP performances and ad hoc community engagements was taxing for the group, who also had to preserve energy for the programmed performances and residency. This reinforced the need to find a balance on tours between keeping schedules as fixed as possible, but also allowing for spontaneous engagements and plenty of downtime for people to recharge. Nevertheless, while morale was quite low among the Ensemble in the Mildura leg of the Mallee tour (due to a lack of young people participating in the program), our final debrief enabled the group to identify the positive outcomes that had been achieved in terms of strengthened relationships in the region and important learning about how best to 'do' in community engagement (see further below).

Despite these challenges, the opportunity to play a key role in community engaged practices operated on a deeper level, **strengthening Ensemble members' connections to First Nations communities**, and enabling them to feel that they were 'giving back' and building positive peer relationships. During the first creative development, Bala Neba reflected that the trip to Bunjilwarra was a highlight for him, enabling him to connect with other LGBTIAQ+ young people there recognising fact that his own pathway could inspire others.

As demonstrated above, there were multiple intersecting outcomes for the Ensemble members. While there were some challenges along the way due to pressure of time and resources on the leadership and productions teams, the feedback from most Ensemble members was positive, with a sense that we had created a culturally safe and dynamic learning environment for them, and a strong pool of capable facilitators for future iterations of the program.

”

*When you're there and you're building those relationships, and the smiles and laughs are happening ... you do feel like sort of one big mob. ... I feel like that's the most rewarding part of the program as someone who's working on it. I don't know what the participants are feeling. But that sense of connection and that building relationships.*

(Corey Saylor-Brunskill, 2023)

“



*THE SCORE Ensemble as Aunties, final creative development, University of Melbourne. L-R: Zerene Jaadwa, Miela Anich, Matisse Knight, Zach Blampied, Zane Webster. Image: Erika Budiman, 2023.*

## Young people

The model was ultimately delivered to young people in its intended format (i.e., as a KICK-OFF performance plus workshop residency) in two communities: Swan Hill and Bunjilwarra, where we worked with a total of 23 young people aged approximately 13-20. The data that informs the outcomes described for this cohort include team observations and reflections on the workshop process, written recorded yarns with young people both during and at the close of the residencies, and performance and workshop materials gathered as part of the applied theatre processes used. From this data we identify outcomes for young people gathered under four themes: 'Engagement in Arts and Culture', 'Peer Learning and Relationships', 'Sexual Health Learning and Yarning,' and 'Leadership and Self-Determination'. As discussed, this widens the scope of the project to address sexual health promotion and education with young people in a holistic way that emphasises cultural determinants, builds on existing strengths and knowledges, and includes social and emotional wellbeing.

### Engagement in arts and culture (fun and joy!)

As highlighted earlier in this report, engagement and participation in the arts and culture are seen as a critical determinant of health and wellbeing in First Nations communities (Salmon et al. 2019). THE SCORE was designed specifically to engage young people in theatre and performance, drawing on both traditional and contemporary approaches through dance, humour, and archetypal characters. **The performance was not only a 'hook' to draw young people in, but also the central mode through which they could express themselves and represent their communities and join a stigma free space to yarn safely about sexual health and relationships** (as discussed further later).

It cannot be overstated how important the role of fun and joy was in this mix, which the participants experienced through playing games, building positive and joyous peer relationships (with the Ensemble and each other), creating funny characters and scenes, and joining dynamic, energetic dance sequences. The KICK-OFF performance was a key factor in this. In the first couple of KICK-OFF performances at Swan Hill, we observed from the student audiences an instant rapport with the Ensemble members on stage—particularly from a group of boys who cheered and clapped enthusiastically, imitated the moves that were happening on stage, and yelled out in response to the action. There were cheers and whistles at the slow-motion moment where Sam and Billy first see each other on the dance floor, with someone yelling out, "Make your move!" This joyful, fun atmosphere with lots of laughter set the tone for what was to follow and offered a compelling invitation to participate.

In our introductory yarn at the Bunjilwarra residency, Uncle Pat said that he hoped the residency would allow the young people to "lift themselves up, have a bit of fun, and get active." Our observations and post-residency discussions with the young people demonstrated that we succeeded in this aim. As one young man at Bunjilwarra observed, 'We were all having a laugh. We all just...you know, the atmosphere youse brought—it was the atmosphere – like youse brought a good vibe' (2023). This was demonstrated at both Bunjilwarra and Swan Hill, where young people consistently gave higher numbers out of 10 during Check-Out than they had at Check-In, and using words like "deadly", and "buzzing" to describe how they felt.



”

***It changed me, this program ... back in the day I probably wouldn't have even bothered joining in, like me a couple of years younger, I would have probably just sat in the dorm. As soon as I heard "theatre" or something I would have just walked off and been like, "I'm not joining that, no way, I'm not going to sit there and watch them and waste my time." But since I got up and had a go, I found it's funny to just give it a go. And it's good fun, yeah.***

“

The model was designed to progress participants incrementally through from basic games to high level performance skills, scaffolding their learning and confidence through each stage. One of the young men at Bunjilwarra noted how effective this had been:

*These are all games that we've never played before and they were really outside of the box games to get everyone involved so I reckon it was really good to get people's attention, when you're just sitting outside of it, and then you get everyone involved into the group, so it's really good to see you get people involved into the actual play. (Debrief yarn, 2023)*

This was further evidenced by the fact that in both Swan Hill and Bunjilwarra, young people responded that they didn't really expect much when they were told about the program, but then were extremely engaged as it progressed. One of the young women at Bunjilwarra shared in her debrief yarn, "At first, I was like, 'Oh, I don't want to do this... And then I was like, 'Well this is actually good.' By the end of it, you're kind of glad that it happened." (2023).

As discussed earlier, the flexibility of the approach also offered multiple entry points for participants who came later in the process, couldn't attend the whole thing, or were reluctant to throw themselves into it immediately; with the KICK-OFF performance framework allowing participants to learn the moves and experience success quickly. The presence of a team of skilled facilitators meant that, at any given time, someone could operate on the periphery, gently supporting participants who appeared more reserved or reluctant to take part. In one notable case at Bunjilwarra, this meant giving the ILBIJERRI camera to a young woman who was keen to get involved, but unable to see a way in—until she began documenting the process through photography. This young woman spent time on the outskirts, but was able to engage on her terms, talking to individual team members, and getting involved in games and performance when she felt confident to do so. As one staff member observed of this young person, "I think yesterday was the longest she actually stayed and participated" (staff interview, Bunjilwarra, 2023).

The model's emphasis on meeting young people where they are and presenting an authentic, true-to-life, culturally informed series of scenarios through the KICK-OFF performance also proved effective. One young man at Bunjilwarra shared in the debrief yarn, "It wasn't like we couldn't relate to any of it, like it was really based on culture, which was really good too, so we could relate to it more." Other young participants described the program as "fun", "true", "real" and "relatable", with some emphasising how this made it different from other approaches to sexual health learning (see further below).

When it came to bringing young people into the performance, learning the dance moves, creating their own versions of the archetypal Brotha-Boy, Sista-Gal, Aunty, and Uncle characters, and coming up with their own lines of advice, most of the young people were highly engaged (see responses in Figure 5). At Swan Hill, the group members came up with lines of both helpful unhelpful advice for Sam and Billy:

**Brotha-Boy: Don't pull out!**

**Brotha-Boy: It'll be the best 10 second of her life!**

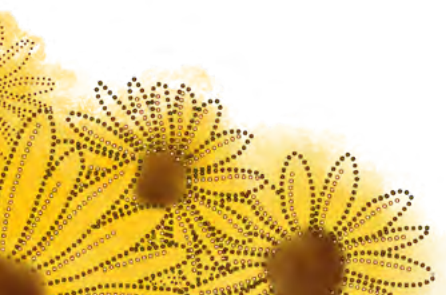
**Brotha-Boy: Don't leave her brah, she a good one!**

**Sista-Gal: Have fun, but not too much fun!**

**Sista-Gal: Take your time, don't rush it!**

During the yarning circles at Swan Hill, the boys had discussed local 'hook up' places, for example the Giant Murray Cod—a landmark in a nearby park. This was then brought into the final performance when one of the Brotha-Boys advised Billy, 'You gonna take her into the cod's mouth!'

Meeting the young people where they were, and valuing their contributions without judgement was critical in keeping them engaged. The relative merits of these pieces of advice would be explored with the community audience later, all ideas were welcome. The breakneck pace and larger group at Swan Hill meant that this part of the creative process happened very quickly. At Bunjilwarra, with a slower process and a smaller (older) group, the advice lines were worked out in gendered yarning groups as part of the Bombs and Shields exercise where the Sista-Gals created lines such as "Don't go, you don't know her," 'Don't be afraid to use your voice, and 'I'll call your Mum". Later, one young woman reflected that this process "reminded me to speak up about those things, and now I can keep that in my mind" when in situations with peers (debrief yarn, Bunjilwarra, 2023). One of the Bunjilwarra young men highlighted how much he enjoyed this process: "Where we got into the actual remake of the play youse done, and we chucked our own lines in it. I found that worked well." When Zane asked him why, he responded, "Because it's like roleplaying. It's like we're at that situation again, where we relate to it, we're at a club, one of our friends are gonna get with a girl, what would we say to him? We say what we're gonna say to him" (debrief yarn, 2023). This demonstrates a key principle in drama education, drawing from Augusto Boal's (1985) work and others who have followed, where the drama workshop can be seen as 'rehearsal for life.'



The dance and movement sequences were extremely popular in both sites, with the young people at Swan Hill showing great attention to detail, creating moments in the slow-motion dancefloor scene such as high-fives, and selfies; or throwing a hat to the ground in the losing team supporters' scene. At Bunjilwarra, despite only having three participants involved at the end, they chose to focus on the dance sequences and practiced these several times with discipline and commitment. All the participants responded in the debrief yarn that this had been a highlight for them. Indeed, it was a testament to the power of the program to engage young people at Bunjilwarra when one staff member observed that the young people would prefer to participate than go shopping—their usual favourite activity on a Saturday morning. The dance sequences at Bunjilwarra formed a celebratory, uplifting end to the program. Similarly, for the GRAND-FINAL performance at Swan Hill, the **young performers appeared to be having great fun on stage and the positive audience reaction generated an atmosphere of support, enthusiasm, and love for the young people, further reinforcing the joy and fun of participating in the program.**



***It was the best part of being in here, to be honest, like we haven't done anything better than this.***

(Young participant,  
Bunjilwarra, 2023)

***It was probably the best fun we've had since we arrived here.***

(Young participant,  
Bunjilwarra, 2023)

***We have struggled with that sort of stuff in the past, getting them to participate, to engage, but they've been completely engaged.***

(Staff member, Bunjilwarra, 2023)



## Peer learning and relationships

In line with best practice in programs such as these (McPhail-Bell et al. 2015), we found that a critical factor in young people's engagement in the program was the power of peer relationships and learning between young participants and the Ensemble members, and among the young participants themselves. A topic such as sexual health, with all the potential shame, stigma that may be associated, is most effectively explored laterally, and in ways that privilege the knowledges, behaviours, and social dynamics of young people in their own communities. As Bayden Clayton, a member of the first Ensemble and youth leader in Swan Hill pointed out, seeing the young people engage so deeply was "really odd because it's actually about sex and it's a very taboo subject still. For young people they still have that shame factor where it's like – but this group is different. ... They seem to be pushing through and having fun and engaging, which I haven't seen in a while." He went on to talk about how he could see the program developing confidence in some of the young people in ways that he had not seen before (interview, 2022).

At the residencies in Swan Hill and Bunjilwarra, there was strong evidence that the young people were benefiting from working together and learning from each other through the structure of the program, as evidenced by three-four older boys demonstrating strong sexual health literacy in their gendered yarning groups, with other group members quietly listening. At Bunjilwarra, there was a strong sense that the young women and men were learning new things about members of the other gender through the process, potentially widening their sense of empathy and understanding. These elements are discussed further in the next section but point to the power of social learning as a critical factor in programs such as these (Selman and Heather 2015).

In both sites, the peer support and learning were made most clear through the performance making stage of the process,

where at Bunjilwarra, the Brotha-Boys surprised the Sista-Gals by encouraging them and giving positive reinforcement during the dance sequence. As one young woman said, "[The boys] were really encouraging with the group. They were like, 'Oh you can dance!' and I was like, ... 'Cool, they're not like putting me down ... they were pretty good. Everyone was really good.'" At Swan Hill, when new people joined the group, the established group members took the lead in teaching them the scenes and choreography.

**The conditions where young people felt confident to share their knowledge and support each other were arguably created by the presence of strong peer role models in the Ensemble**, who modelled this behaviour. In yarning groups, they also demonstrated how to conduct respectful topic-related conversations and created a judgement-free atmosphere. In their debrief yarn at Bunjilwarra, two of the young men discussed the value of this to them:

- A. *Yeah, it was really non-judgemental, like we were all doing our silly little dances and we're all cheering on. Everyone's on the same level you know?*
- B. *No-one's right, no-one's wrong, like youse even said, "No put downs," like we can't judge people, put them down, at the start remember yesterday, not to put anyone down, anyone's words down if someone writes something wrong – I think I heard youse say that.*
- A. *Yeah, it made me feel really safe to express myself, you know?*
- B. *It was a safe place, yeah. (Debrief yarn, Bunjilwarra, 2023)*

By implicitly instilling respect in the young participants and moving through the different yarning topics without censoring responses, the young people were arguably more inclined to open up than they would have been with older ‘workers’ or ‘teachers.’ As one of the Bunjilwarra staff members observed, “It’s amazing what knowledge they have and it just comes out in the yarns like that and having the sort of same age group with the crew, they feel so comfortable” (2023).

**Participants at both sites demonstrated how much they valued forming relationships with the Ensemble members** (and vice versa as discussed earlier). In Swan Hill, this was visible when the three-four older boys were drawn to Ensemble member Corey, literally following him around and watching his every move (see responses in Figure 5). This extended to playing roles across gender, where research assistant Kalarni Murray observed, “I think because the boys see Corey and Zane being silly and girly, they feel like they can be as well. It doesn’t seem mocking, just them having some fun.” She likened Corey to a ‘big brother’ character who could engage in humour and banter but also act as a role model (research journal, 2022). At Bunjilwarra, the participants talked openly about how valuable it had been to form connections with the Ensemble members: “You guys were all fun. You had fun personalities, you weren’t moody or, like ‘workers,’ you weren’t trying to, like...work...I mean you were working but like you weren’t serious, you were like all fun” (young woman participant, Bunjilwarra, 2023).

As Nazaree Dickerson observed in our debrief of the Mallee tour, the Ensemble being First Nations was critical: “It makes a really big difference because straight away they can feel like, they, I can be safe to be themselves” (2022). This was supported by some of the participants’ feedback (see quotes below). This also extended beyond the delivery of the program and into the breaks and downtime that Ensemble members shared with participants—shooting hoops, sharing food, yarning casually one-to-one or in small groups—all these casual moments served to strengthen the relationship between the young participants and the Ensemble.

”

*It’s valuable for the ensemble to be young and [the participants] have that peer-to-peer learning but also for them to learn for each other.*

(Nicola Ingram, Mallee tour debrief, 2022).

*Having other young people that are really great role models, that’s how our young people learn and change and grow, much more than from us. It’s peer led and I think that’s where really great shifts and changes can happen.*

(Staff member, Bunjilwarra, 2023)

*Because it was Blackfullas that came in also and we knew how to talk [to you] and that, we could have fun with you guys, we’d have a giggle, a laugh, and there was no disrespect.*

(Young participant, Bunjilwarra, 2023)

“

**Young participants Swan Hill – (n=10) \***

R1 (age 15)	R2 (age unknown)	R3 (age 14)	R4 (age 14)	R5 (age 14)	R6 (age 14)	R7 (age 15)	R8 (age 16)	R9 (age 17)	R10 (age 17)
-------------	------------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	--------------

**What did you think of the workshops?**

Fun and good for socialising.	Amazing.		I like it. The people is good. They were nice.	I think it is so cool and I love all of it, it is so fun.	It's a good and fun little thing.	Helpful to talk about your worries.	Helpful.	Helpful.	Helpful – makes it comfortable to talk about it.
-------------------------------	----------	--	--	---	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------	----------	----------	--

**What did you think of the performance?**

Funny and highlights sexual health.	It's fun - run around, jump around, be loud, can be myself.	Pretty good	It was good. I like.	Great, loved it.	It was weird and a bit different.	Fun. Different.	Good.	Fun.	Liked it. Fun. Something different.
-------------------------------------	---	-------------	----------------------	------------------	-----------------------------------	-----------------	-------	------	-------------------------------------

**What were the best/worst bits? How could the project be made better?**

Dancing was the best and I don't know any bad bits.	Best - When we learn the dance. Worst – none of it. It's already good.	Liked all of it.	Nothing was bad, it was all good.	Nothing was bad, my favourite bits was the Sista-Gals and the Brotha-Boys	Corey's face, joining in with the others, and got to meet new people.	Face/Corey. Eating. Joining.	It was all good. Worst: nothing.	Nothing.	Corey's face. Joining in. Meeting the team.
---	--	------------------	-----------------------------------	---	---	------------------------------	----------------------------------	----------	---

**If you had to tell someone else about the project, how would you describe it?**

Funny and interesting.	We can be ourselves, dance, be loud, play games, check in Everyone allowed to be different in their own way..	--	Tell them about what u do and stuff.	Hey guys there is this really fun workshop going on and youse should come.	It's a comedy performance	Fun, funny.	Yeah was fun.	It's a fun thing for the Mob to get around with each other and yarn.	It's fun. Mention Corey's faces. Different to anything we've done.
------------------------	---	----	--------------------------------------	--	---------------------------	-------------	---------------	--	--

**Figure 5:** Swan Hill focus group responses (responses to the program), 2022.

*\*Respondents were all aged 14-17, gender was not specified in the questionnaire. Not all respondents answered all questions. Respondents are assigned numbers (R1, R2...) as above*

## Sexual health learning and yarning

As discussed above, creating a fun, engaging, judgement-free, and peer-led space was critical to enable yarning, knowledge sharing and learning around sexual health and healthy relationships. Several young participants indicated that they already knew the facts, but the process built on their existing knowledge and strengths by exploring the topic in a different and fun way. It also gave them an opportunity to be reminded of their agency in relationships and/or to share their knowledge with their peers. Two of the young women at Bunjilwarra indicated that while they didn't learn a great deal that was new, it was good to be reminded. Corey Saylor-Brunskill reflected that during one of the yarning exercises with the boys at Swan Hill it was clear they were aware and educated, with the youngest among them not feeling under pressure as they had good support systems and knew where to go: 'They're all really tight, a proper community' (group debrief, 2023). He went on to recall how one of the boys said that he thought this generation know more about sexual health and are more aware of keeping safe. This yarning circle brought out conversations about respect and a discussion about 'stealth' (which some of the boys had not heard about). One boy admitted to never using condoms, which enabled the Ensemble members to highlight the need for regular testing.

Nazaree Dickerson felt at Swan Hill that the young people appeared to have awareness around sexual health and the need practice safe sex, but the gap was where to go to get help. The Body Continuum exercise at Swan Hill gathered opinions from young people about (a) talking to people about sexual health, and (b) where to go for information. The group demonstrated a variety of opinions, for example, they don't get taught enough at school; and talking to trusted friends and older family members can be helpful. For one participant, accessing local services such as Headspace felt safe and comfortable, but another said she wasn't sure where to go; and still others said they knew where to go, but didn't necessarily trust the service, or know who to trust.

”

*They're having fun while learning the information. ... You're not sitting there just in the classroom looking at a whiteboard, or a projection, or a video, or whatever, learning about it. That's so boring because it won't stick with you, but they're literally performing on the stage and learning about certain things as they go along.*

(Bayden Clayton, Swan Hill youth leader, interview, 2022)

“

The extent to which young people shared and explored these topics safely with each other demonstrated the power of social and peer-learning. And their responses reinforced the importance of linking in with local health services, referring to these through the residency, and providing resources and information on the table in the space—throughout the residency, young people were observed taking pamphlets and condoms. In addition, the local Elder who had brought some of her family members to the program invited young people to speak to her if they needed to, highlighting the importance of adding value to and supporting the existing resources and relationships.

Further, while the extent of young people's knowledge was varied, the **data from our focus groups at Swan Hill indicated that there was some potential that the process might prompt young people to exercise their agency in help seeking and decision making** (see responses in Figure 5).

The drama-based processes enabled discussion about attitudes and beliefs in relation to sex and relationships. At Swan Hill, the Ensemble replayed the YOLO/Fu\*k-it moments to the group and then explored in more depth what might be happening for each of the characters 'behind their mask' \* or underneath their outward behaviour as they entered the after party.

When one Sista-Gal said her line, 'Is my skirt too tight?' The Coach facilitated a conversation about why she may be worried about this. Responses included that she may be afraid of being called a 'slut' or being taken advantage of because she was dressed this way. When The Coach asked, 'Does that mean she should be worried about these things?' One of the boys called out emphatically, 'No!'

When Billy said his line, 'I'm not going to be a player,' the group entered a conversation about gender norms and expectations, where boys of this generation think it's a good thing to 'get with lots of girls.' When asked where these attitudes come from, members of the group responded, from the older generations, society, movies, music, video clips, media, and websites. But a couple of the boys observed that maybe Billy doesn't want to conform to this anymore.

Again, this reflected a moment of social/peer-learning, establishing their attitudes, strengths, and beliefs among each other, and establishing a shared understanding of the issue.

*\*Sarah had learned this approach from Geese Theatre Company, which uses actual masks as a metaphor for the behaviours we present outwardly to the world, despite what we might really be thinking and feeling inside (Baim, Brookes, and Mountford 2002).*



## Sexual health ‘Bombs and Shields’

The workshop exercise Bombs and Shields was extremely successful in eliciting responses from young people about the risk and protective factors for sexual health, both in the play, and in their own communities (see ‘Background’ for details about this exercise). After playing the game, which is usually energetic and a lot of fun, participants are asked to identify the ‘bombs’—or barriers and risks—that might stop Sam and Billy from having safe sex and healthy relationships. The ‘shields’—or protective factors and supports—are then discussed (obviously moving beyond

the ‘shield’ of the condom and into other more social and behavioural elements). To elicit broader responses from outside the play, the prompt was given ‘What about bombs and shields that we didn’t see in the play? What did we miss?’ As mentioned, this activity was conducted somewhat less successfully as a whole group discussion in Swan Hill, after which we moved into gendered yarning circles at Bunjilwarra. Figure 6 represents word clouds illustrating the responses given in both sites (approximately 20 young people), with larger words indicating higher frequencies of the same response.



### ‘BOMBS’

Identified risk factors, challenges, barriers to sexual health and healthy relationships:



### ‘SHIELDS’

Identified protective factors and supports to sexual health and healthy relationships:



Figure 6: Combined responses to Bombs and Shields exercise, Swan Hill and Bunjilwarra, 2022-2023.

We found that there were few notable differences in responses between gender. Within the exercise, there was also discussion about the nuance between these two categories, e.g., that sometimes a ‘shield’ (e.g., a friend) can also be a Bomb. There were extensive discussions around the role of peers or friends in the play (and in real life), “where ‘toxic’ friends could ‘stab you in the back—if you don’t have sex with one person and a friend knew, they could tell other people” (Swan Hill response, 2022). Young people were also able to explore the difficulty of making informed choices in such a heightened moment—where “your brain is telling you, ‘Don’t do it,’ but sometimes we make the wrong decision” (Swan Hill response, 2022). This exercise also provided an opportunity to talk about where to get support and resources such as counselling, testing, and free condoms.

”

***It’s good to talk about sex, like you can never learn enough about relationships and that, and to appreciate the female partners and that.***

(Young participant, Bunjilwarra 2023)

“

The authenticity and relevance of the performance to young people as described earlier was supported by the workshop activities, for example, the gendered yarning circles where participants were invited to brainstorm all the slang words associated with sex that they could think of and then share these with the other group(s). This simple activity early in the residency acted as a circuit breaker, giving the young people an opportunity to respectfully engage in ‘real talk’

as opposed to being censored or constrained by medical/clinical terminology. This technique also reduced shame and stigma and quickly established a bond and shared language between the participants and the facilitators whilst creating a culturally responsive space where the local contexts and terminology are named and unpacked. When asked in the debrief yarn about whether the program challenged participants to think about things differently in terms of STIs and sexual health, one of the young men at Bunjilwarra replied,

*Yeah, it’s made me think more like in that party, in the scenario which you done, that there’s not a scenario—that’s real-world stuff, so that happens all the time, what youse done today, yesterday as well. ... So you’re at a party, drinking, so it’s always good to have that safe sex boundary—so it’s always good that message come along to me. Like to always practice that, always use it. (2023)*

Two young women at Bunjilwarra also discussed how the program connected with them through the Ensemble being “more real... not just going by the books” (debrief yarn, 2023). This comment reflects how the program does not adopt a didactic stance, but rather enables participants to connect to the topic through realistic scenarios and authentic relationships with the Ensemble.

”

***[THE SCORE] was just more like reality. You know, I’ve done a few safe sex classes before in school and it’s more ... strict. This is like reality. Like youse were actually showing how young people act.***

(Young participant, Bunjilwarra, 2023)

“

Young participants Swan Hill – (n=10) *									
R1 (age 15)	R2 (age unknown)	R3 (age 14)	R4 (age 14)	R5 (age 14)	R6 (age 14)	R7 (age 15)	R8 (age 16)	R9 (age 17)	R10 (age 17)
<b>What did you learn about yourself?</b>									
not much (I wasn't here for much?)	That I can be myself.	To take care of myself	That I can dance.	That I could be more open with my good mates.	That I can act.	Got a lot of knowledge.	--	I could act.	That I enjoyed this when I wasn't sure I would.
<b>What did you learn about wellbeing or sexual health?</b>									
Same as above	Always wear protection.	--	Don't listen to your mate if they peer pressure you.	I don't know.	That you should always have safe sex.	Being safe.	Go at your own pace.	Always have safe sex.	It's okay to talk about it.
<b>Has this project changed any of your thinking about sexual health? If yes, how?</b>									
Same as above	--	--	Yes, because it's your body and you chose to do what you do with your body.	Not really.	No.	Safer sex.	Yes.	Have safe sex.	It's helped consolidate it.
<b>Has this project changed how you might act in relation to your sexual health? If yes, how?</b>									
Same as above.	More game to get tested. More comfortable to test and ask for help.	--	I don't know.	Yes, and I could talk to a wellbeing person, I guess.	Yes.	It's not shame to get tested.	Yes.	Always show them the right affection	--

**Figure 7:** Swan Hill focus group responses (what was learned), 2022.

\* Respondents were all aged 14-17, gender was not specified in the questionnaire. Not all respondents answered all questions. Respondents are assigned numbers (R1, R2...) as above



*It's good to talk about a topic like sex and sexual relationships and like what we wrote down, slang and all that, and the good advice and the bad advice – it's good to talk about all of that. And it really makes you think and stop before you do anything, you know. It makes you think you should do that.*

(Young participant, Bunjilwarra, 2023)

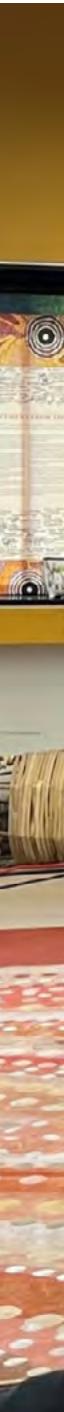


## Leadership and self-determination

As discussed throughout this section, a significant factor in young people's engagement in the model is that they were 'invited' rather than forced to participate, that they were empowered to meet the topic on their own terms, contribute their own knowledge and perspectives, and supported to make their own decisions about the extent to which they contributed and participated. **The sequencing and scaffolding of activities to develop confidence, progressively moving towards deeper conversations and greater performance outcomes** (e.g., the dances or the GRAND-FINAL performance) was also an important factor. A young man at Bunjilwarra highlighted how this had made him feel 'respected' and treated like an adult.

As discussed, **the residency also created space for participants to explore their agency in different situations**, whether in supporting their peers to make informed choices, or seeking support and information for themselves. At Swan Hill, this was demonstrated clearly by a participant who disclosed to an Ensemble member about a prior sexualised bullying incident that had led her to not attending school. Over the course of the residency, this participant indicated how much she valued the sense of inclusion and belonging she felt and decided to return to school.

Through the peer teaching framework, **young people taught the performance to newcomers, demonstrated a sense of ownership over the process, and took the mantle of leadership from the Ensemble**. This was further evidenced by the fact that several young people at both sites were inspired by the Ensemble—a strong and diverse group of potential role models—to become performers and leaders within their communities. The particularly reserved young woman participant at Bunjilwarra who spent most of her time documenting the workshop process with a camera approached Sarah at the residency's conclusion and said, "So do you think I could get a job with you?" When asked what they wanted to get out of the program, one boy at Swan Hill said, "To go out there and let people know about sexual health and to let people know that it isn't something to be ashamed of." For him to identify this at the start of the residency demonstrates the potential for a model such as this to build on the strengths and leadership capacities that already exist within a community.





KICK-OFF performance at Bunjilwarra. L-R: Zerene Jaadwa, Matisse Knight, Zach Blampied, Zane Webster, Miela Anich., Image: Laura Harris, 2023.

## Community and stakeholders

The holistic, integrated approach to the model resulted in outcomes for communities and stakeholders, through community consultation and engagement activities (e.g. POP-UP performances) during the rollout to young people (Mallee District, Bunjilwarra); community participation in the GRAND-FINAL performance at Swan Hill; and participation in the capacity building workshops for community workers (in Mildura, Bunjilwarra, and Wyndham Vale). The involvement of community members and stakeholders throughout these stages also informed (and continue to inform) the development of the model and the logistics of delivering it.

This engagement has formed a critical stage for ILBIJERRI, whose leadership have recognised a need to continue developing stronger links with regional communities in Victoria to not only strengthen their dedicated Social Impact programs and the social impact of their mainstage productions while building capacity for regionally diverse arts leaders to contribute to the sector.

### Community consultation engagement

ILBIJERRI has developed relationships with over 15 collaborating community partners who provided positive feedback on the project and spoken on the benefit it had (and could continue to have) in their communities (see responses in Figure 7). Several organisations have asked ILBIJERRI to return to their communities with THE SCORE in the future and are interested in other forms of collaboration with ILBIJERRI. As discussed, after the Mallee tour, we made the decision to deepen and sustain the relationship with the Mallee District rather than widen the net further to other regional communities in Victoria. As Social Impact Producer, Laura Harris pointed out, “The groundwork we put in [and] the value of having been there would be squandered to me if we were not just

reinvesting back into those two places [Swan Hill and Mildura]” (team debrief, 2023). While at the time of writing we have not returned to the Mallee to deliver the residency to young people a second time, this commitment ensured that we were able to conduct the workforce development training with a large group hosted by Kiilalaana Foundation in 2023 and deepen the relationships that might lead to future deliveries.

Despite ILBIJERRI’s best efforts to consult with communities in advance, there remained some questions around the timing of the Mallee tour, with Uncle Peter, Bayden Clayton and others suggesting that the difficulty in recruiting young people may have been in part due to the tour coinciding with the lead up to the football finals. We discussed with them the possibility of delivering the program at a different time of year, potentially as part of existing youth camps, and even doing POP-UP performances at the actual football carnivals to publicise the program and recruit participants. In Mildura, the ILBIJERRI team had some conversations with a local football coach about the potential to perform at practice, but this did not eventuate. In hindsight, it appeared that the community space at MDAS was perhaps not the best location for the residency, being a space where young people may not wish to hang out after school. The team reflected that stronger engagement with the community beforehand may have uncovered more appropriate venue for the program, and more effective strategies for recruiting participants. The fact that ILBIJERRI had done significant groundwork prior to the tour, and then found this information out later, points to a challenge in this work to find the ‘right’ people in community and/or respond appropriately to sometimes differing opinions among community organisations and leaders.

Nevertheless, there were many positive outcomes from the community engagement process that have been discussed already, for example, Elders and other community health leaders in the Mallee District supporting and

advocating for the program, in some cases bringing young people and other services on board, further strengthening pre-existing connections and relationships. Uncle Peter Peterson fed back to us that the KICK-OFF performance was extremely relevant to young people, commenting that the world of the football carnival was “true-to-life” for people in his community. Our spontaneous POP-UP performances in Swan Hill and Mildura, were highly engaging for workers in those communities, most of whom supported the approach being used and said that they would recommend the program to others (Figure 7).

### GRAND-FINAL Performance

For the GRAND-FINAL performance, as discussed, there were high levels of audience engagement with loud clapping and cheering at the start, laughter at the comedic moments, and responses to The Coach’s dialogue prompts. Audience members identified that Sam and Billy were feeling “emotional”, “excited”, and “pressured”. When the performers went into the audience to obtain helpful advice (and reframe unhelpful advice) for Sam and Billy, offers included: “Be a respectful man,” “Make sure you’re both into it,” and “Don’t drink too much.” In response to the question, “What Sam and Billy do have sex but they don’t use protection?” The audience suggested, “Get the morning after pill,” and “Book a doctor’s appointment to see if they have an STI.” Collective responses to prompts like these—shared in the context of a community event—further supports and reinforces social/peer/intergenerational learning and builds on the strengths, knowledges, capacities within the community. By working together to understand how complex and layered situations can be for young people, and how many feelings can feed into a single moment, generates a sense of understanding, empathy, and collective responsibility for young people’s wellbeing. **Our survey data indicated that the community audience at Swan Hill learned about sexual health through the performance and recognised the value of this approach** (Figure 7).

”

*It’s not just about the issues or the theatre building, but it’s actually getting to create a larger support network with Mob from our town, [that] is a really big thing as well.*

(Nazaree Dickerson,  
team debrief, 2022)

*100% I’ll be using some of the stuff we’ve learned here in the past two days. I see the games side of things being able to engage the young people on a level that I don’t think we get with some of the other stuff we do.*

(Staff member, Bunjilwarra, 2023)

“

Health workers Swan Hill and Mildura (n=25)	Community Audience Swan Hill (n=9)
<p><b>96%</b> Agree or strongly agree they would <b>recommend THE SCORE</b> to others.</p>	<p><b>100%</b> Likely or very likely to <b>seek support and treatment.</b></p>
<p><b>96%</b> Agree or strongly agree <b>performance is a good way to explore issues</b> like sexual health.</p>	<p><b>100%</b> Likely or very likely to <b>recommend</b> treatment and support to family and friends.</p>
<p><b>100%</b> Agree or strongly agree THE SCORE will <b>help Community understand issues</b> around sexual health for young people.</p>	<p><b>89%</b> Agree or strongly agree THE SCORE helped <b>understanding of where</b> to get sexual health information.</p>
<p><b>100%</b> Agree or strongly agree THE SCORE will help Community understand <b>where to get sexual health information and support.</b></p>	<p><b>100%</b> Agree or strongly agree <b>performance is a good way to explore issues</b> like sexual health.</p>
<p><b>96%</b> Agree or strongly agree THE SCORE will <b>help Community understand barriers for young people</b> getting help with sexual health.</p>	<p><b>89%</b> Strongly agree they would <b>recommend THE SCORE</b> to others.</p>

Figure 8: Swan Hill community survey responses, 2022.



## Capacity building and workforce development in communities

The capacity building training workshops, delivered in Bunjilwarra, Mildura, and Wyndham Vale across 2023, appeared to be very well received by those  $\geq 17$  staff members who attended. In our post-program group debrief yarns at all three sites, participants fed back that the workshops were engaging, fun, and well structured, with the sequencing of activities—flowing from playing games towards more complex performance work and yarning—effective in building confidence and participation. A staff member at Bunjilwarra reflected, “It was really engaging, we learned a lot at the same time as having fun. It was clear, easy to follow, that we can implement that with some of these kids who have never done a drama game” (2023). Maureen Smith, CEO of the Aboriginal Wellness Foundation (Wyndham Vale), was a highly experienced community facilitator and she recognised the value of working in this way, “breaking it up, and not getting too entrenched in it.” Several others at both Wyndham Vale and Mildura echoed this feedback, observing that the training didn’t feel too “heavy”, despite that we were exploring some complex topics. As one participant in Mildura stated, “It was good to do something [that] wasn’t so heavy. Because our training’s been very heavy. It’s just good to be able to have fun and enjoy it, but also have serious topics as well as having those calm situations where we’re all running around and laughing or joking” (2023).

The centrepiece of the workshop was to collectively explore the experience of working in community and youth work through experiential exercises fictional characters and scenarios. This was delivered in the following sequence:

**1. Bombs and Shields:** an extended version where, in the first part, trying to stay an equal distance between two other players and then in the second, staying away from your ‘bomb’ and behind your ‘shield.’ From this, we facilitated a discussion around what community workers need to keep ‘equal distance’ or ‘in balance’ in their work, which drew responses such as:

- ▶ Being in friendly relationships while maintaining boundaries.
- ▶ Working within cultural frameworks while maintaining professional expectations.
- ▶ Being flexible but maintaining structure/routine.
- ▶ Leading young people but also allowing them to make their own decisions.

We then explored the ‘bombs’ and ‘shields’ for workers, being things that might be difficult or challenging or barriers to their work, and those things that might support or enable them to do their job. Selected responses were as follows:

- ▶ Bombs: Burnout, bad management, funding and community expectations, (whitefella) rules and red tape, community ‘gatekeepers’, media perceptions, conflict/fighting among young people.
- ▶ Shields: self-care, organisational and structural support, boundaries, transparency and co-design, bending (or sometimes breaking) the rules, reward of ‘giving back’, standing strong/brave/bold.

**2. Create-a-Character:** Collectively create a realistic but fictional worker who might feasibly be part of our group, giving them a name, age, gender, and backstory.

**3. Insta Posts:** Drawing on the character's story and in small groups, create Instagram posts or tableaux of that character 'at work', 'at home', and 'with friends.'

**4. Forum Theatre:** In the same groups, create scenes of 'bombs' or challenges (drawing from the Bombs and Shields exercise) that the character might face in their work. Groups then played back these scenes to their peers and roleplayed different solutions or ways to address the challenges.

Forum Theatre scenarios that were created included:

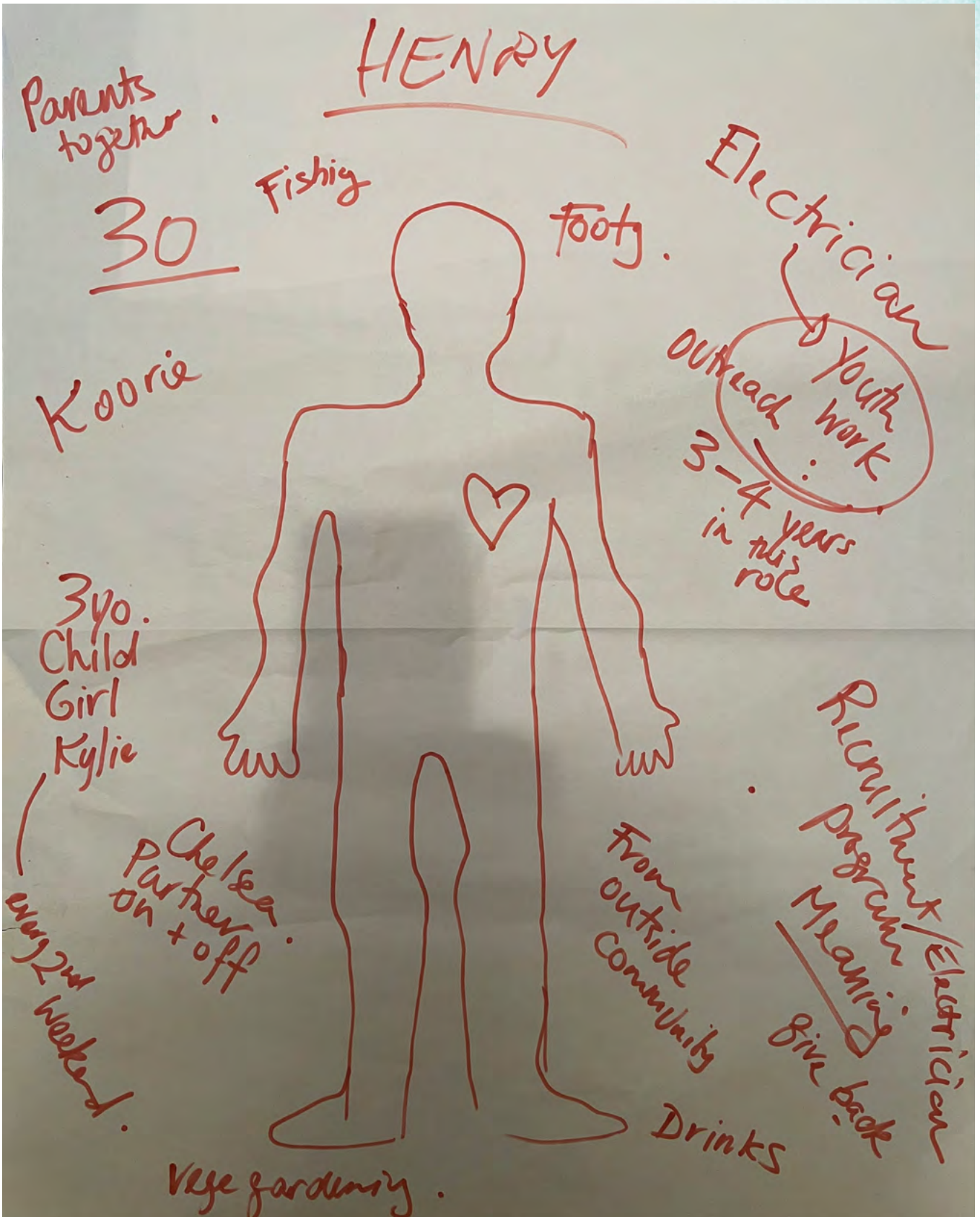
- ▶ The worker overhears a member of the media sensationalising youth crime and bad behaviour in the community. How can they intervene?
- ▶ The worker must approach a Traditional Owners' group in the community for additional resources, but they are reluctant to agree. How can the worker get what they need?
- ▶ Conflict occurring between two young people at the youth service. How is this resolved effectively?

The participants appeared to be highly engaged in this sequence of exercises, coming up with ideas and stepping in to roleplay solutions. Younger or newer workers highlighted how they learned new ideas and skills, while older workers valued the opportunity to consolidate their skills and have space to unpack some of these challenging situations. Throughout

this process, we also explicitly explained the activities we were leading, and discussed how the participants might adapt these in their own contexts.

**Almost all participants said they could see themselves using the approaches in the future**, especially the games. They saw these as an alternative and accessible way to communicate and connect with the young people accessing their services. One participant in Mildura expressed some doubt that they would be able to lead the more complex drama exercises such as Forum Theatre, but we talked together about how the Toolkit would hopefully support this, and that it was a matter of trying things out, being transparent with the young people, and not being afraid to refer the instructions or make a mistake.

**Staff in all three sites recognised the value of the delivery in developing their confidence in their own knowledge and abilities**, a result of the 'meet people where they are' ethos of the model. One staff member at Wyndham Vale said that she valued how the program enabled her to "get out of my comfort zone. It's okay to put yourself in a position where you get to learn more about yourself and about the abilities you are capable of." This was also reflected in Mildura, where we had to deal with 43-degree heat and delivering the workshop in mid-December when most people were winding down. A participant there said she was grateful that the facilitator team recognised how people were feeling and adapted the approach to meet the energy levels of the group, who nevertheless participated with high levels of commitment and contribution.



Fictional community worker 'Henry' created by staff at Bunjilwarra capacity building workshop. Image: Sarah Woodland, 2023.

# Conclusions & Recommendations

This report hopefully represents a rich account of THE SCORE and the complexity of this integrated model. Such an approach moves beyond established mainstream notions of 'impact' and 'outcomes' in health promotion and education to encompass holistic determinants of wellbeing in First Nations communities. Across the three-years, engaging in multiple iterative stages of development and delivery, we have been able to determine several key conclusions and recommendations for future deliveries that will hopefully inform others in creating similar programs and approaches.

- 1. Rigorous, culturally informed, and evidence-based approaches to theatre and health education:** The level of success achieved with participants in communities reflected not only on the skills of the Ensemble and team leaders, but also on the integrity achieved through continuous co-design. The theoretical and cultural underpinnings of the model integrated long-established best practice in applied theatre and First Nations knowledges and practices of performance, healing, and cultural transmission. Again, this requires time and resources, and it is hoped that the capacity building elements of the project will assist in widening the impacts of these approaches.
- 2. Strong, on-going community engagement and relationship building:** Funding bodies must recognise and resource appropriately the required deep and sustained engagement in communities to enable effective co-design and work through the timing and logistics of delivery. An ideal scenario would be to establish a reference group of community members in each target region well in advance of delivering the program. This level of engagement will also ensure stronger buy in from community organisations and leaders, enabling young people to access a range of resources and services. It must be acknowledged however, that the lack of culturally safe, community-owned sites for sexual health checks, testing, and treatment is a recognised barrier (State of Victoria 2022). Also, in a small, close-knit regional community, even if such resources exist, there can be shame attached to accessing them. Programs must take this into account and work towards strengthening advocacy and activism in this space.
- 3. Continued, culturally safe specialist training and capacity building for Ensemble members and facilitators:** To achieve the impacts described here required specialist intensive development and training for the Ensemble, which included multiple opportunities to test their skills in a controlled environment (e.g., with undergraduate theatre students) and then deliver the work in communities with continued support from the leadership team. As discussed, lessons were learned along the way to not 'overload' trainee Ensemble members with the competing demands of the program (e.g., performance development, facilitation, sexual health learning, community engagement); and to create space for deeper, culturally informed approaches to the training and delivery. Our time with Bunjilwarra highlighted how important it was to engage with participants who had lived experience of the target issues, and reinforced that the ideal version of the model would offer pathways for these young people to become members of the Ensemble. Proper time and resourcing (in the form of funding) are required to ensure this can be achieved, developing the next generation of community engaged arts leaders.

#### 4. Ethical, integrated, relationally accountable research and evaluation:

One of THE SCORE's key strengths has been the capacity to integrate an ethical research design within the development of the model itself, a rare occurrence in arts organisations and programs. By establishing a research partnership with a university and obtaining additional funding for the purpose, we were able to undertake a deep research process that moved beyond impact evaluation. As highlighted, this approach had some limitations, where due to constraints of time and attendance, our delivery in communities prioritised supporting the Ensemble to run the program, as opposed to in-depth local community co-design of data collection instruments (e.g. interview questions, yarning topics, measures of success etc.) A contributing factor in this was the limited capacity within communities, whose workers are routinely stretched and are rightly focused on delivering their own services and meeting clients' needs. The research team therefore had to work as openly, responsively, and transparently as possible, adapting research activities as the situation unfolded. Nevertheless, through this partnership, the research team was able to build capacity among the Ensemble members and research assistant to undertake research in their communities. Having members of the Ensemble leading debrief yarns with the young people (as opposed to 'post program surveys') arguably enabled a more relaxed and open discussion about the strengths and areas of improvement for the program and provided more in-depth 'data' for the research story.

”

*What's core to all of this is our safe relationships and the way that we continually are negotiating our relationships with each other, our relationships with the model [and] the relationships with the participants.*

*(Kamarra, group debrief, 2023).*

“

This report highlights several significant achievements and outcomes for a project that was supported by relatively minimal funding. This is a testament to the dedication and passion of all the team members and community organisations who created, delivered, and supported the work. We faced significant unavoidable challenges, due in part to the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which exacerbated the challenges that already existed in communities and led to wide economic and social impacts that are only now being acknowledged. The lead up to and fallout from the Voice Referendum also took a toll, highlighting the continued struggle for First Nations communities to achieve self-determination in the face of structurally racist colonial systems. In addition, where previous Social Impact works produced by ILBIJERRI had a touring life of three years, enabling momentum and community buy-in to build over time, THE SCORE was only funded for a touring period of one-and-a-half years. All these factors contributed to the limited uptake of the program (compared to what we initially hoped).

Despite these challenges, we are now equipped with a strong model that can be replicated and adapted for future applications. THE SCORE achieved demonstrable outcomes for young people, who were highly engaged in both the performance making, and stigma-free peer-based sexual health learning and yarning. We have developed a set of resources (this report, an online Toolkit, and other publications) that we hope will enable ILBIJERRI and others to continue the work. We believe that more widespread uptake of the program could result in advocacy for more culturally safe sexual health programs to be made available in regional areas, where there is currently a shortage. We also see potential for this model to (with permission) support ethical and empowering data collection around sexual behaviours and norms among First Nations young people, so that health program delivery can be better informed—recent studies identified this as a limitation of the current state of data (Bell et al. 2017, McPhail-Bell et al. 2015, Martin et al. 2020). The delivery of the model in communities, albeit limited, demonstrated both its strength and flexibility, being able to accommodate the needs of different organisations, support services, and participant groups. The approach reflects growing calls across the sector to place sexual health education and promotion in the hands of communities, using strengths-based, co-designed approaches that promote social and emotional wellbeing, self-determination, and build leadership capacity among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.





*Taeg Twist (The Coach) and Matisse Knight (Aunty), final creative development, University of Melbourne. Image: Erika Budiman, 2023.*

## References

- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). 2020. AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. Canberra: AIATSIS. Accessed February 25, 2024. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/code-ethics>.
- Baim, Clark, Sally Brookes, and Alun Mountford. 2002. *The Geese Theatre Handbook: Drama with Offenders and People at Risk*. Winchester: Waterside Press.
- Barlo, Stuart, William (Bill) Edgar Boyd, Margaret Hughes, Shawn Wilson, & Alessandro Pelizzon. 2021. "Yarning as protected space: Relational accountability in research." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 17, no. 1: 40-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1177180120986151>.
- Baxter, Veronica, and Katharine E. Low, eds. 2017. *Applied Theatre: Performing Health and Wellbeing*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama. doi: 10.5040/9781472584601.
- Bell, Stephen, Peter Aggleton, James Ward & Lisa Maher. 2017. "Sexual Agency, Risk and Vulnerability: A Scoping Review of Young Indigenous Australians' Sexual Health." *Journal of Youth Studies* 20, no.9: 1208-1224. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2017.1317088.
- Bessarab Dawn, & Bridget Ng'andu. 2010. "Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method in indigenous research." *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 3: 37-50. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11937/37083>.
- Boal, Augusto. 1985. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Translated by A. Charles, and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group.
- Bonson, Dameyon. 2022. "Voices from the Black Rainbow: The Inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQI Sistergirl and Brotha-Boys People in Health, Well-Being, and Suicide Prevention Strategies." In *Suicide Risk Assessment and Prevention*, 1-17. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Brodzinski, Emma. 2010. *Theatre in Health and Care*. Springer International Publishing.
- Bunjilwarra Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service. n.d. Bunjilwarra Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service. Accessed February 24, 2024. <http://bunjilwarra.org.au/>.
- Cahill, Helen. 2017. "Performing the solution: Cautions and Possibilities when using Theatre Conventions within HIV Prevention Programs." In *Applied Theatre: Performing Health and Wellbeing*, edited by Veronica Baxter and Katharine Low, 145-166. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama. doi: 10.5040/9781472584601.ch-006.
- Dudgeon, Patricia, Abigail Bray, Dawn Darlaston-Jones, Roz Walker. 2020. "Aboriginal Participatory Action Research: An Indigenous research methodology strengthening decolonisation and social and emotional wellbeing, Discussion Paper." Melbourne: The Lowitja Institute. <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/10779440/aboriginal-participatory-action-research/11657560/>
- Flicker, Sarah, Jessica Yee Danforth, Ciann Wilson, Vanessa Oliver, June Larkin, Jean-Paul Restoule, Claudia Mitchell, Erin Konsmo, Randy Jackson, and Tracey Prentice. 2014. "'Because we have Really Unique Art': Decolonizing Research with Indigenous Youth Using the Arts." *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 1, no. 1: 16-34. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijih.101201513271>.
- Free Theatre. 2023. Free Theatre. Accessed February 24, 2024. <https://www.freetheatre.com.au/>.
- Gee, Graham, Pat Dudgeon, Clinton Schultz, Amanda Hart, and Kerrie Kelly. 2014. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing." Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice 2: 55-68.
- Geese Theatre Company. n.d. Geese Theatre Company. Accessed February 24, 2024. <https://www.geese.co.uk/>.
- Goulet, Linda, Warren Linds, Jo-Ann Episkenew, and Karen Schmidt. 2011. "Creating a Space for Decolonization: Health Through Theatre with Indigenous Youth." *Native Studies Review* 20, no. 1: 89-116. <http://publications.usask.ca/nativestudiesreview/>.
- Haseman, Brad, Andrea Baldwin, and Hayley Linthwaite. 2014. "Folk Opera: Stories Crossing Borders in Papua New Guinea." *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 19, no. 1: 98-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2013.872430>.



- Hui, Ben B., James S. Ward, Rebecca Guy, Matthew G. Law, Richard T. Gray, and David G. Regan. 2022. "Impact of Testing Strategies to Combat a Major Syphilis Outbreak Among Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: A Mathematical Modeling Study." *Open Forum Infectious Diseases* 9, no. 5, ofac119: 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ofid/ofac119>.
- ILBIJERRI Theatre Company. n.d. THE SCORE. Accessed October 31, 2023. <https://www.ilbijerri.com.au/event/thescore/>.
- Jaganath, D., C. Mulenga, R.M. Hoffman, J. Hamilton, G. Boneh. 2014. "This is My Story: Participatory Performance for HIV and AIDS Education at the University of Malawi." *Health Education Research* 29 (4): 554-565. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyt074>.
- Kauli, Jacqueline. 2018. "Awareness Community Theatre: A Local Response to HIV and AIDS in Papua New Guinea." In *Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Alyson Campbell and Dirk Gindt. Springer International Publishing.
- Linds, Warren, Heather Ritenburg, Linda Goulet, Jo-Ann Episkenew, Karen Schmidt, Nuno Ribeiro, and Allison Whiteman. 2013. "Layering Theatre's Potential for Change: Drama, Education, and Community in Aboriginal Health Research." *Canadian Theatre Review* 154: 37-43. <https://doi.org/10.3138/CTR.154.007>.
- Low, Katharine E. 2020. *Applied Theatre and Sexual Health Communication: Apertures of Possibility*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McPhail-Bell, Karen, Chelsea Bond, Mark Brough, and Bronwyn Fredericks. 2015. "We Don't Tell People What to Do': Ethical Practice and Indigenous Health Promotion." *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* 26, no. 3: 195-199. <https://doi.org/10.1071/HE15048>
- Martin, Kacey, Kristy Gardner, Joanne Bryant, Reuben Bolt, Michael Doyle, Dean Murphy, Simon Graham, and Mitchell Beadman. "What we do well': strengths-based research about Aboriginal young people's sexual wellbeing in Western Sydney." *HIV Australia*. Accessed February 25, 2024. <https://healthequitymatters.org.au/article/what-we-do-well-strengths-based-research-about-aboriginal-young-peoples-sexual-wellbeing-in-western-sydney/>.
- Mmari, Kristin, and Robert W. Blum. 2009. "Risk and Protective Factors that Affect Adolescent Reproductive Health in Developing Countries: A Structured Literature Review." *Global Public Health* 4, no. 4: 350-66. doi: 10.1080/17441690701664418. PMID: 19462269.
- Neelands, Jonothan, and Tony Goode. 2015. *Structuring Drama Work*. Cambridge University Press.
- O'Connor, Peter, and Michael Anderson. 2015. *Applied Theatre: Research: Radical Departures*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- O'Neill, Cecily. 1995. *Drama worlds: Framework for Process Drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- O'Toole, John. 1992. *The Process of Drama: Negotiating Art and Meaning*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Salmon, Minette, Kate Doery, Phyll Dance, Jan Chapman, Ruth Gilbert, Rob Williams, & Raymond Lovett. 2019. "Defining the Indefinable: Descriptors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Cultures and Their Links to Health and Wellbeing." Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Team, Research School of Population Health, The Australian National University, Canberra. [https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148406/8/Defining\\_the\\_Indefinable\\_WEB2\\_FINAL.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148406/8/Defining_the_Indefinable_WEB2_FINAL.pdf)
- Selman, Jan, and Jane Heather. 2015. *Theatre, Teens, Sex Ed: Are We There Yet? (The Play)*. University of Alberta Press.
- State of Victoria. 2022. *Victorian Aboriginal Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan 2020-2030*. Department of Health. Accessed February 25, 2024. <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/victorian-sexual-reproductive-health-viral-hepatitis-strategy-2022-30>.
- Strobel, Natalie A., and James Ward. 2012. "Education Programs for Indigenous Australians about Sexually Transmitted Infections and Blood-borne Viruses. Resource sheet no. 14." Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/00250e14-7b83-4da8-994e-723a25d96ab7/ctgc-rs14.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

- Van Hout, Marie Claire, Rosemary Mhlanga-Gunda, and Stephanie Kewley. 2020. "Using Performance and Theatre Arts in HIV Interventions and HIV Programming in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Scoping Review of Extant Literature." *Journal of Sustainable Development Africa* 21, no. 4: 178-213. <https://jsd-africa.com/Jsda/2019%20V21%20No4%20Winter/article21-04.html>.
- Verbunt, Ebony, Joanne Luke, Yin Paradies, Murial Bamblett, Connie Salamone, Amanda Jones, and Margaret Kelaher. 2021. "Cultural determinants of health for aboriginal and torres strait islander people – a narrative overview of reviews." *International Journal for Equity in Health* 20, no. 1: 1-181. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01514-2>.
- Ward, James, Salenna Elliott, Joanne Bryant, Basil Donovan, Marian Pitts, Handan Wand, and John Kaldor. 2020. *The Goanna Survey 2. Results of the second Australian Survey of Knowledge, Relationships, Behaviour and Health Service Access Relating to Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs) and Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People*. Adelaide: South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI). <https://youngdeadlyfree.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GoannaSurvey2-FINAL-date.pdf>
- Wells, Trish. 2013. "Insights into Approaching Sexual Health Education Through Applied Theatre Methodology." *Applied Theatre Research* 1, no. 2: 203-215. [https://doi.org/10.1386/atr.1.2.203\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/atr.1.2.203_1).
- Wilson, Shawn. 2008. *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood.
- Woodland, Sarah. And Kamarra Bell-Wykes. In press. *First Nations Theatre for Health Equity: Stigma Stories*. Springer.
- Woodland, Sarah, Kamarra Bell-Wykes, and Carissa Lee Godwin. 2023. "Yarning Up Relations: Enacting a Relational Ethics in Cross-Cultural Research-Based Theater." *Qualitative Inquiry* 29 (2): 393-402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221099561>.
- Zeal Theatre Australia. 2020. Zeal Theatre Australia. Accessed February 24, 2024. <https://www.zealtheatre.com.au/>







IL  
BIJ  
ERRI  
THEATRE COMPANY

