



A Sketch of Perth's Youth Arts Hub

October 2011

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Foreward



This document presents a concept for a new youth initiative in metropolitan Perth.

The initiative is being developed by representatives of organisations and practitioners in key fields under the leadership of Committee for Perth and Propel Youth Arts WA. It follows on from recommendations made in the Committee for Perth's publication *A Cultural Compact for Western Australia – the 10 year challenge* (2008), in which it was identified that there was an enormous opportunity for Western Australia to be developed and marketed as an incubator for the arts, culture and creativity.

The motivating idea is that a new space for young people, one that defines and puts into action a strategy of cultural participation, inclusion and ownership, is key to long term gains in the day to day experience of our city - what it feels like to walk through, to work in, to visit on the weekend, to go out at night.

Research into best practice programs around the world points to a hybrid, mixed-use environment that becomes an entry way to broader opportunities in the city. This document unpacks what that means in practical terms and outlines a model tailored for Perth: the Youth Arts Hub.

The Youth Arts Hub (the Hub) is not a youth centre. Nor is it a traditional arts organisation. This model is built upon the knowledge that, for most people, cultural participation rides upon the back of day-to-day motivators - socialising, food, work, entertainment. The Hub is a social space at a crossroads. It is designed for young people, not by virtue of branding or its mission, but by practical means.

The heart of the Hub is an arts program that is dynamic and can engage a diverse range of young people on a personal level. Built around this heart is a body of activity and opportunities for participation as simple as eating there, hanging out with unlimited fastest possible wifi, and incidental opportunities to share music, performance and art with peers.

The Hub will develop new patterns of engagement in the City with people who are at the age when these patterns are formed. On behalf of the Committee for Perth Youth Arts Hub Steering Committee, I invite you to read, consider the possibilities and respond to this initiative.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marion Fulker', written in a cursive style.

Marion Fulker
CEO
Committee for Perth



Introduction - A Sketch of Perth's Youth Arts Hub

Introduction



A Sketch of Perth's Youth Arts Hub

The purpose of this bit of writing is to help generate ideas about what Perth's Youth Arts Hub could look and feel like. What it could offer to a broad range of young people and how it could be substantially innovative and beyond what is already available.

The ideas that follow do vaguely take into account what is possible in our City's cultural space without involving massive resources, though not so much that we can't be ambitious. I've tried to balance ambition with practicality without being limited by it. The main purpose is to get ideas for interesting creative experiences on the table. What actually goes on at the arts hub? Why do you want to go there? What opportunities does it present? What does it offer your everyday young person who isn't obsessed by art? How does it engage young people with special support needs or from culturally diverse backgrounds? What does it bring to the City?

Before we get into detail of the Hub, I want to introduce an idea that underpins this version of what it could be. It is a provocative idea for those of us who eat, breathe and dream culture. The idea is that art does not make the world go round. Art doesn't drive our day to day lives. It isn't what we need to survive. It is massively important and flows around and through everything we do and without it life would be incredibly dull and maybe entirely pointless. However, it isn't our primary concern, most of us don't really get up in the morning for art.

To be incredibly simplistic, we get up and we feel hungry; we need to eat; to eat we need to work; to work we need to learn. We also need to be around people we like and we want to enjoy doing things with them. In new art movements and art spaces there is a growing understanding that you need to provide a link between what people want and need in everyday life and the art experiences you are presenting.

A lot of these lessons have been reinforced by digital technology. We've seen people get excited about Google maps more than Google draw (and this is probably why Google draw is a terrible app), and sales of satellite navigation units far outnumber the sales of art specific technologies like graphics tablets or broadcast quality video cameras. The most popular video and sound and image formats are low res and designed for socialising (despite a high pixel count, what your phone calls HD does not come close to any industry standards of 'high' or 'definition'). And, of course, we've seen the simplicity of Facebook triumph over the surreal potential of virtual worlds like Second Life.

If everything in Second Life is unreal and for the sake of the imagination, and there is no reward for playing like there is in a game, why would you go there? We have learnt that unreal is irrelevant. The triumphant technologies tap into day to day parts of life and tie culture into it - being social, keeping up with news, getting places, searching for things. Art isn't the engine for these technologies, it rides on their backs; it gives colour and life to these technologies. Art makes them alive and interesting and human - which is still a big thing. And so, what does this line of thinking suggest for the Youth Arts Hub?

Compared to other age groups, young people are often particularly good at voting with their feet. If what you are presenting is not giving them what they need and want, they won't show up. You see this in the less successful youth centres and hang out spaces. These spaces often sit outside the rest of life - not within broader cultural or commercial precincts. They can be like dead ends, not connected to anything else.

Often issues arise when spaces aim at engaging 'at risk' young people. The young people who fall under that banner know very well that they are the kids being targeted and why. And they don't like being singled out. It happens to them all the time. Other young people know it too and often don't want to go there because they don't think it is for them.

There are some real limitations to the traditional youth centre model. Many youth centres have started to morph into entities like galleries and music venues. Others have begun to leave the single building model behind and operate in spaces across the entire community with programs and festivals. There is no one model for success, but it is clear that to be out of the way or single faceted is death when working with young people.

On the following pages are some ideas for the Hub that try to address the needs and desires of a broad range of young people, not just those that already eat and breath art. All of these ideas already exist in various models and spaces around the world.

Because of what I've written above, I've put non-art specific things first. Granted, it's a bit of a wonderland. The ideas are presented as a dot point list of elements written in the second person narrative so you have the space to imagine and experience the Hub differently to me.

In the final section I've written a couple of outlines of the kinds of a spaces I think many of these ideas might be achievable within - to bring it back to earth.

Sam Fox
Director
Hydra Poesis





Why you would go to the hub

Elements that generate a culture around culture

The Hub is at a crossroads - you can meet people there

There are lots of other places to go to nearby and you might just pop in on the way to something else or stop by after school/Tafe/Uni on your way home. The Hub can become a default 'before and after' venue. The Hub negotiates opportunities at the surrounding spaces for you. It becomes your gateway to opportunities in the greater City.

You can get cheap food at the Hub

While you eat, you see and hear and experience art. Because the young people working there have a lower award rate than adults (at Tafe Cafes for example) and because this venture is not-for-profit, student concession holders can eat at almost cost price, adults at full price. The Hub makes no bones about undercutting competition for students. Why would you go anywhere else?

You can work at the Hub - paid work

You might work in the kitchen, make coffee, wait tables or work in a micro-art store. You get paid and then do some art, or even your cooking and/or your working becomes art. Working there is supportive and way better than anywhere else. Being a worker there means you are a valued contributor to the entire space; you are involved in other programs and have a say and a feeling of collective ownership.

Workers are celebrated and made up of a diverse group of people - from all backgrounds. It is perhaps hard to get a job there. You are mentored and you make money. You are likely to get great references too for future. Work is flexible to your needs more than other jobs because that is part of the deal. You might not have great English but that is supported. You might need to have something to eat yourself before you start your shift because you haven't eaten all day. You don't have to buy your own uniform. Perhaps it gets washed at work. Maybe you need a support worker alongside you. All that is supported. You can't count it for credit at school or Tafe or Uni because you are getting paid. But that would be something else anyway.

You can learn there

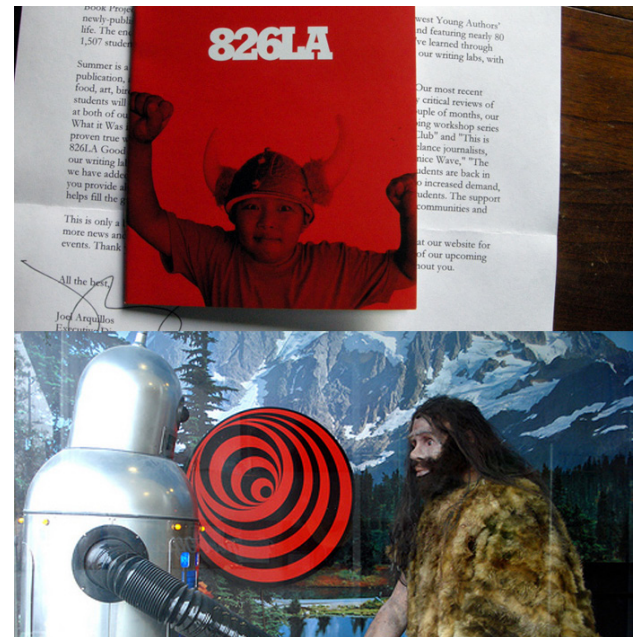
You can get practical help like free one-on-one tutoring perhaps two afternoons a week (this isn't necessarily as mind numbingly dull as it sounds - see note). You'll probably find that great educators that also find school environments difficult &/or boring, would cut off their second leg to work in a space like this - particularly with young people who want to learn.



There are many examples of art-eating spaces that are more than just cafes tacked onto venues. There have been many Banquet movements in art and 'community feasts' are very big right now. In Japan and elsewhere 'micro-cultural facilities' are proliferating.

Check out the 'social kitchen' www.hanareproject.net. This ties in to the next element too. In Hanare Project all artists have to work in the kitchen as well as be creative.

Check out 826LA. This is a combined creative writing and literacy tutoring program that started in Los Angeles. It has now spread all over the US and there is a centre being opened in Sydney. Many of the tutors are professional writers in the fields of journalism, fiction, nonfiction who volunteer their time and get a lot out of it.
www.826LA.org





What you can do at the Hub

Creative experiences and opportunities

Now the art ...

You can enjoy watching, listening, being audience

There are regular performances, exhibitions and events at the Hub. They overlap. Some are highly produced while others are raw and immediate. There is always something to engage with.

You can participate in workshops and group experiences

If you want to you can make art and learn and work with professional artists in many disciplines. The space is versatile and 'strip programmed' so that a lot of activities occur there each afternoon and evening. School groups go there during the school hours. To do this properly workshops are conducted in small groups.

If there is this whole inter-related culture life around the space, the actual art programs won't have to involve a million young people at a time. The City, the funding bodies, the sponsors are happy with the culture that the broad experience generates and therefore the Hub doesn't need to report big numbers of young people doing their art workshops. That isn't to say there can't be lots of young people getting involved, but art programs designed to fulfil quotas are often complete train wreck experiences. In these projects you often make something quick and fast and the facilitator might not even ask you your name the whole time. This doesn't happen at the Hub.

You can take over a space

You can take over a space and do what you want with it - make art, organise events, use it as a meeting space. It is easy to open up and lockup. It doesn't require many staff to be around if what you are doing is simple, so it doesn't require much money to rehearse there at night etc.

You can present your work

You can present the work you have made at the Hub or elsewhere in the space. You can present to a big group of people or smaller groups of people. There is a simple way to open the space to the general public (like a big shed door), you might be able to safely perform on the rooftop to people below, you might want to make a small intimate space. The way the Hub maximises space makes Ikea look bad.

You can bring your work to market

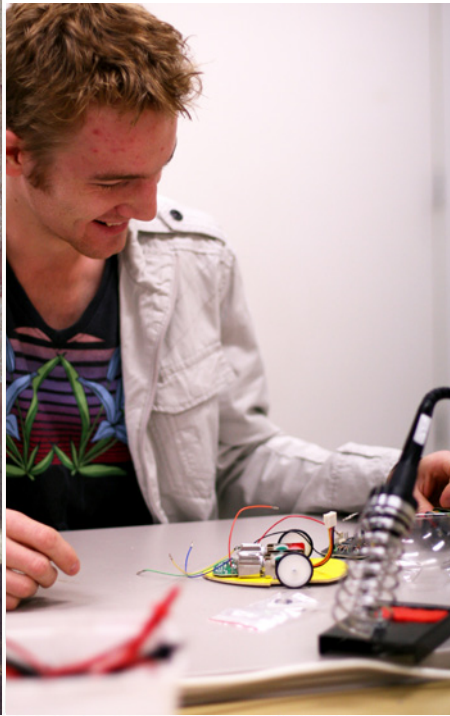
You can bring your artwork, CD, zine, DIY figurine to the space and you or other young people will sell it for you. You can experiment with how much you charge for something and figure out if you can actually make money doing this, or how you might make producing things more efficient. You might be anti-profit and just love getting your work out there and the price you set pays for the materials. You'll probably make a name for yourself if you are prolific at making things that people want to take home/read/listen to/wear. There are perhaps workshops about this stuff.

You can be part of the decision making committee

You can be on the committee. People from different aspects of the life of the Hub do a turn on the committee. It is not hard to get young people to rock up for committee meetings because they are already involved. This is a deep aspect of the space. The professional facilitators of the space respect the committee and engage with them on an equal basis. Ultimately, the facilitators have to make the hard decisions like asking someone to leave for a period if they disrespect the space or someone else, but the creative decisions are in your hands.

Artplay and Signal in Melbourne are becoming known to people in Perth. However, in case you haven't heard of these spaces, they are 'best practice' art venues for young people. They have young people on their programming committees with significant monies to spend (funded by the City of Melbourne). They refuse to report on numbers. Signal is also good at being visible. www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/signal





How the Hub uses technology

Digital culture exchange

Where you go to exchange digital culture

In an age where the 'window to the arts has been exploded' by digital technology and we have unparalleled access, how do you choose what to look at? Who makes sense of it? What's good, what's not? Where do you start? And, why would you go somewhere to engage with digital culture if you can just do it from home or on your phone/laptop/tablet? Many young people don't have these tools themselves but increasingly schools and community spaces are providing basic access to hardware. So, aside from maybe having a bank of decent laptops - and without spending a fortune on a fully fledged editing suite, what can the Hub offer?

No download limit at the Hub

The Hub is generous with internet. Because of the no-download restriction this place becomes a serious hive for programmers and hackers and bloggers who want to get out of their bedrooms and see daylight for a few hours. It may be hard to get a seat. Perhaps the unrestricted download network is only for members (young people who sign up). Policy to be reviewed at a later date. Creative solutions surely possible.

The Hub hosts unusual librarians and their collections

In addition to art making workshops and programs, the Hub plays host to people who collect digitized art or know where to find it online. There are so many of these people around - artists/producers/post-grad students/serious collectors et cetera.

Film geek librarians might show you clips of films and be fascinated by what you are into and you might need to have an exit strategy prepared to get out of the seemingly endless conversation. You might listen to music with your friends at an analogue station and the old music librarian hanging out there desperately wants to extend your music knowledge. They say 'you've gotta listen to this' at rapid intervals. Then you can export a list of what you listened to, found or viewed (email yourself or something from the media station) and on your own phone or laptop or tablet - download that music or ebook or film. Whether you pay for it is your own moral dilemma. Chances are you'll just add it to some kind of free cloud-based playlist app anyway so you don't need to download it and can listen free legally all the time.

Tech laboratories / digital art / gaming at the Hub

The thing about tech development and art and gaming - like the award winning Second Life world at the top of this page (RMB City by Chinese artist Cao Fei), is that you don't need a Hub to engage with it. You do need gear and internet access and the Hub may be able to provide a little of this. But what the Hub can provide is a space for sessions to meet and undertake collectivised digital work or play. With an adaptable space and a smart set up, a network for a tech lab, render farm or gaming party is a simple event at the Hub.



Google's answer to Apple's iTunes, Soundcloud, seems to be a move towards a legal way to listen to your own unbridled choice of music for free or at very low cost. There are already old platforms like Myspace or Last.fm where you can legally listen to almost anything for free. If you want to own it at high resolution, then you can buy it.





Broader support for the Hub

What you bring to the cultural life of the city

Along with your artwork, your presence is creating a culture

Because, as young people, you do generally have more social time than people of other ages (and you are perhaps more motivated socially) your presence is a consistent and major contribution to the space the Hub exists within. These cultural spaces need people to be around all the time or they don't feel very cultural. Culture is inevitably social.

Your activity, participation and presence helps other institutions

There is an obvious exchange potential for the other arts organisations close by. Art galleries (PICA, AGWA), the Museum, the State Theatre and surrounding arts organisations need you. Libraries need you. The library is a good example as everything goes digital. If people stop going the Library will die. But the value of the library in a digital age is a large quiet, comfortable space in the centre of things to work and learn. Books become artifacts but the building itself becomes a sanctuary, perhaps that sits outside of time? A 24/7 beacon of light and learning? Similar things can be said for art galleries and theatres, they provide a different kind of experience and environment to engage than screen culture. And this should become more important in the digital age rather than less. But you aren't going to go there and realise how good this experience is without an invitation. The Youth Arts Hub provides this invitation by being an active space that is amongst these institutions.

Space possibilities and requirements

I don't want to get into proposing exact spaces with any accountability. Finding appropriate space is always hard and requires investment and considerable will and support. It is also important that space isn't the only thing that gets supported otherwise the space will just be a husk. What I'll try to do here is outline how some of the ideas above might work in particular types of spaces.

Basic Requirements

The workshop is the heart of the Hub, but the heart could be quite small... To conduct an art workshop there needs to be one decent room with a good floor and a reasonably high ceiling. You can work in a space as small as 6m x 8m. A bigger space would be better and would accommodate greater numbers but the Japanese examples prove that it isn't absolutely necessary. If there is going to be dance it can't be uncovered concrete but there are a number of ways to treat a concrete floor. Visual arts requires taps and sinks for washing up. There needs to be some smart storage for materials, same for chairs and trestles. There needs to be fast internet and a basic sound system and a projector. The space must be able to be cleared easily. Toilets, disability access and a small place to prepare food are must haves. A crossroads location is essential.

This is the heart and without it there is no Hub. In a building with one room this size and smaller offshoots much could be achieved to build the Hub around the heart. DADAA Fremantle is a good example of a small space that has achieved a great presence for a particular community. Using a similar model would mean that a number of leasable spaces in or around the Cultural Centre could work. The big limitations come in terms of public presentation and events, and the potential for the broader cultural life and economy of the space - food, jobs, store, library... If the space is truly central then presentation needs can be brokered through other institutions.

Similarly, the culture of the area provides in part for some of the other economies. However... If it is possible to construct a space, or to significantly adapt one, then building in a kitchen and food space for young people could yield huge rewards. This isn't an appropriation of the phenomena of having coffee as a substitute for cultural activity. Perth's food prices are astronomical. Young people don't have much money and they need to eat. Many youth centres provide food because many young people aren't eating much. Meeting this need, in this space, creates an audience. Audience development is top of the cultural to do list. Being audience is the first step towards cultural participation. Providing employment to young artists, particularly to those who need work to meet basic needs, is a major support and inclusion strategy. Potentials abound.





Acknowledgements

Profile - Sam Fox

This paper has been prepared for the Committee for Perth by Sam Fox.

Sam is a director and choreographer working across contemporary performance and community development contexts.

He is the director of Hydra Poesis based out of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Arts Studios, West Perth.

He regularly works with young people within a range of projects and environments and has previously worked as artistic director STEPS Youth Dance Company and festival associate producer ARTRAGE.

Profile - Committee for Perth Youth Arts Hub Steering Committee

The Youth Arts Hub Steering Committee is a sub-committee of the Revitalising Working Group. We acknowledge and thank all members of the steering committee for their input.

Barry Strickland	Freelancer
Carole Winfield	Youth Development Officer, City of Perth
Diane Johnson	Project Officer, Young People and the Arts, Department of Culture and the Arts
Sam Fox	Director, Hydra Poesis
Pamela-Jayne Kinder	Principal, PJ Kinder Consulting
Emiko Kinoshita	Project Development Officer, Propel Youth Arts
Monique Douglas	Executive Director, Propel Youth Arts WA

Profile - Committee for Perth Membership

All work commissioned by the Committee for Perth is funded entirely through the contribution of our members. Our foundation members are:

Alcoa
ANZ
Bankwest
BHP Billiton
Ernst & Young
Freehills
Rio Tinto
The West Australian
Wesfarmers
Westrac
Woodside

A full list of Committee for Perth members is available at www.committeeforperth.com.au.



The Committee for Perth

The Committee for Perth

The Committee for Perth is a member-based think tank that exists to promote and enable change that improves the cultural diversity, economic prosperity, sustainability and world-class amenity of Perth. We have a vision of a future Perth that is vibrant, dynamic and inclusive and that capitalises on the advantages given to us by our natural landscape and abundant resources.

We are a forward-looking organisation whose work focuses on reshaping, reforming and revitalising Perth so that we can compete on the global stage as a highly liveable and attractive city. We believe that a thriving and celebrated arts and culture sector are fundamental to the success of the city's revitalisation and that greater investment by both government and private sectors must be made into this area if this is to be achieved.

In 2008 we published *A Cultural Compact for Western Australia - the 10 year challenge* (The Compact). This document outlines a vision for the future of arts and culture in our city and calls for all levels of government, private and philanthropic sectors as well as the arts and culture sector itself to commit to the active progression of the recommendations made within the document.

As we look to the future of our city, it is clear that we need to act now to support, encourage and promote young West Australian artists and their work so that they are able to develop a career as an artist without needing to leave the State.

Excerpt from The Compact relating to Youth Arts

'Although artists emerge at many different stages of life, an incubator approach should focus on all emerging artists and there is a critical need to pay special attention to young people. The capacity to assert a bold future is dependent on the engagement of young artists in all aspects of the making and presenting of arts and culture for and with communities. A bold move forward would be the engagement of young people in all appropriate levels of decision-making.'

Excerpt from A Cultural Compact for Western Australia – the 10 year challenge

In support of this notion, the Compact, invited arts and cultural organisations to commit to involving young people as an integral part of decision-making, and to consider ways to support the incubator approach to further the development of the arts in Western Australia.

The Compact also identified that young people are a vital part of our communities, and effectively engaging all young people is a societal challenge. Our communities will become enthusiastic supporters of art and culture as we demonstrate that engaging with arts and cultural activities is a way for marginalised young people to make positive changes to their lives and a meaningful contribution to the community.

In cities and towns across Western Australia there is a need to engage these young people, to give them a sense of a positive future and to give the community a sense of safety and security. This sector has the capacity to tackle antisocial behaviour through inclusion and arts practice rather than law and order processes and there are significant examples to support this.

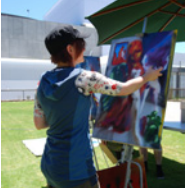
The Compact proposed that there be a new focus on the inclusion of marginalised young people through arts and culture activities, for example:

- the development of a youth arts/community centre in Northbridge;
- the creation of significant projects that engage young people in the identification and expression of their identity; and
- the establishment of arts projects that encourage young people in decision-making roles and engage them in significant responsibilities with the potential to impact visibly on the public environment.



Photography

The following photographs are reproduced with the kind permission of Propel Youth Arts:



AGWA



Jarrad Seng
Arts Camp



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NYW Kick Start



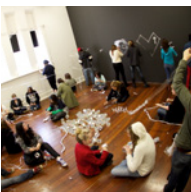
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NRW



Poppy Van Oorde-Grainger
AGWA



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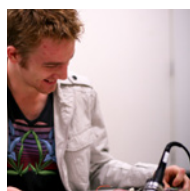
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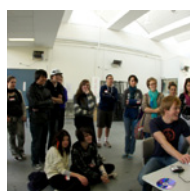
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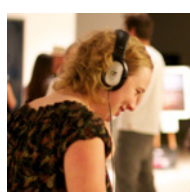
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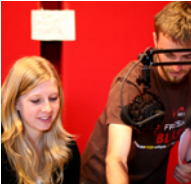
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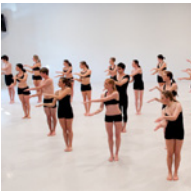
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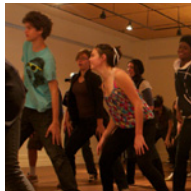
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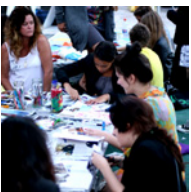
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