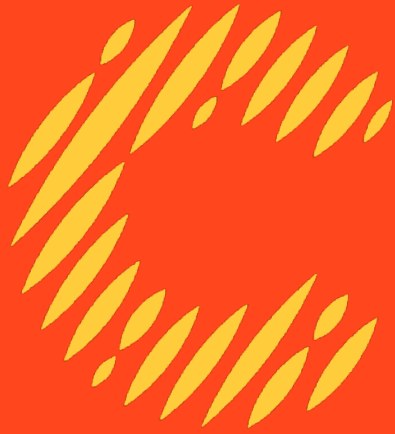


Welcome to the



Creative Change Project



We're investigating the role community music can
play in addressing social inequity in Australia



Australian Government
Australian Research Council



Griffith
UNIVERSITY

Creative Arts Research Institute

What is the Creative Change project seeking to do?

The Creative Change project is an ARC Future Fellowship led by Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet at the Creative Arts Research Institute, Griffith University. It aims to investigate the role community music can play in addressing social inequity in Australia. Social inequity is on the rise, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating problems of long-term disadvantage in communities across the country. There are growing calls for place-based approaches that bring together diverse stakeholders and sectors to work collectively on addressing this inequity. This research aims to advance our understanding of the role that community music can play in these tailored, community-based approaches. Building on a mounting evidence-base of research that documents the social, cultural, physiological, and economic benefits that can come from participating in music, it seeks to examine whether these positive outcomes can lead to the kinds of individual, community, and systemic changes needed for greater social equity to occur.

Reverse Anthem, Naarm (Melbourne),
Play it Forward & RISING, 2021



How do we define community music?

Community music can be broadly defined as participatory music making by, for, and/or with a community. At its heart, community music involves the creation of inclusive, locally-embedded, community-led opportunities for engagement in music. Rather than being characterised by a particular style, genre, medium or aesthetic, community music is distinctively reflective of its cultural context, and shaped by its participants and local setting. Given its focus on community agency, musical practices within this field customarily work to uphold values of inclusion, access, equity, justice, and self-determination.

How do we conceptualise community?

We understand community as a group of people who share a connection that binds them together. That connection may form around a shared geographical place, space, interest, value, identity, need or circumstance. A healthy community has agency, with members making an active choice to pursue this connection with others. Other times a community may be involuntary, and forced together by external factors, circumstances, and policies. As such, communities exist in many diverse forms, compositions, layers, and intersections. Communities exist across different timescales and intensities with varying degrees of regularity and continuity.

How do we understand social equity?

Social equity is about ensuring every person has the opportunities and resources to reach their fullest potential and live a fulfilled life. Inequity can be understood as differences in the resources, opportunities, rewards, and rights a person has based on their position within society, leading to disparities in health and wellbeing that are unjust and avoidable. Structural systems of power (the way our society is organised and operates) cause certain groups to thrive at the expense of others. Social inequity has multiple and intersecting causes and symptoms, and as such, to achieve equity we must work across individual, community, and systemic levels.

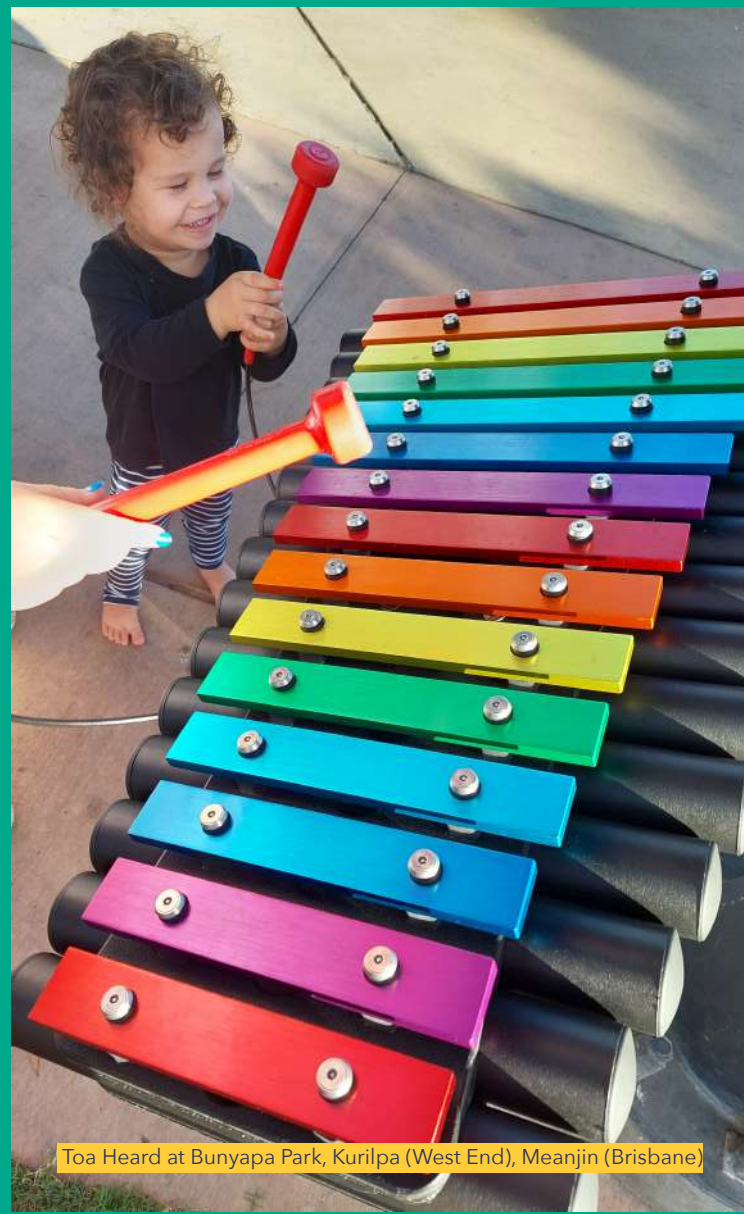


From top-left: Pearly Black, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Joel Spence, Matt Hsu, Flora Wong and Emma Heard.

Why is this research needed?

There are growing calls for place-based approaches to tackling social inequity that bring together diverse stakeholders and sectors to work collectively in ways that leverage the “assets” and strengths in communities. While sectors that provide essential services are routinely part of these collective, place-based efforts (e.g. human services, health, education), the music and broader arts sectors are rarely integrated into the backbone of these efforts. This is particularly striking considering the growing evidence base that documents the social, emotional, physiological, cognitive, cultural, and economic benefits that can come from participating in music, including the role it can play in building social capital, social inclusion, social cohesion, well-being and self-determination.

At present, these positive outcomes from music-making do not seem to be cutting through into considerations of broader collective, place-based efforts aimed at addressing social inequity in Australia. This may be due in part to a reluctance from intrinsically-motivated musicians to play into these larger efforts and social policy imperatives, or a lack of know-how about how to broach these non-arts-specific realms. Moreover, it may be due to the fact that there are still gaps in our understanding about how the positive outcomes documented in music research can translate into the kinds of individual, community, and systemic changes needed for greater social equity to occur. This research aims to fill some of these gaps, and lead a ‘creative turn’ in the social sector’s design and implementation of place-based efforts.



Toa Heard at Bunyapa Park, Kurilpa (West End), Meanjin (Brisbane)

If this 'creative turn' is to reach its full potential, and research aimed at filling these gaps in knowledge is to meaningfully connect with practice on the ground, community music needs to be understood as a creative activity that has both intrinsic and instrumental (e.g. social) value. People are not customarily drawn to participating in music for its instrumental benefits alone (e.g. its social outcomes), but rather because it can provide them with meaning and a distinctive type of pleasure and emotional stimulation. These intrinsic effects are satisfying in themselves; however, many of them can lead to individual capacities and social outcomes that do have instrumental benefits. Due to gaps in current understanding, these kinds of creative assets have rarely been integrated into the design of social systems work, despite their potential for providing innovative approaches to collective, place-based efforts aimed at addressing social inequity.



Young people in Ieramagadu (Roebourne) as Love Punks & Satellite Sisters shooting for a NEOMAD film, Big hART, 2012

What are the core aims of the Creative Change project?

1. To map current approaches to community music in Australian contexts where social inequity exists, and create a detailed picture of how these locally-embedded approaches to music-making operate.
2. To investigate what kinds of social outcomes can be fostered by community music in these settings, and examine whether these outcomes can assist in ameliorating the negative social consequences caused by inequity, and enhance the efficacy of place-based efforts seeking to mitigate this inequity.
3. To develop conceptual work and an evidence-base that can inform a 'creative turn' in the development of place-based policies and approaches aimed at addressing social inequity in Australian communities.



What are we doing to reach our aims?

The Creative Change Project is taking a place-based approach to research design. We value the collective ethos of collective wisdom, creativity, dynamism, and ingenuity inherent in communities. Our approach to working with communities is centred around co-design and participation. Our research design aligns with asset-based community development approaches that seek to mobilise community strengths, skills, and capacities, and link these “micro-assets” to the macro-environment. The project will involve three phases:

1

Project establishment, sector mapping, and theoretical development.

2

Case studies, including a program of Big hART's Songs for Freedom program (WA), a program of QMF's Outback Trail (QLD), and programs of Play it Forward (VIC), in addition to music initiatives in West End/Kurilpa with partner Micah Projects.

3

Co-analysis of the results with communities and communication of the findings

National map of music initiatives



We want to capture the breadth and depth of community music practice working to make positive social change across our country. We currently lack a national picture of the contributions these music initiatives make to Australian communities. This information will play a vital role in developing our understanding about the collective impact these music practices are making.



All Good Project team in the Northern Territory.



Girls Rock! Canberra's young participants performing.

Our case studies

Bh



Big hART is Australia's leading arts and social change organisation, set up in 1992 to find new ways of dealing with disadvantage, including the **Songs for Peace**, a series of music and songwriting workshops in the community and prison, and ends in a large outdoor annual concert featuring nationally celebrated artists from a range of cultural backgrounds, collaborating with local musicians.

This case study is led by PhD candidate **Joel Spence**, whose research has seen him spending time in Western Australia's Pilbara region, witnessing the Songs for Peace showcase of rich stories and strong culture, learning from performers, staff and volunteers about their experiences, and joining songwriting initiatives alongside community members. Joel has been exploring the potential of music for community healing and driving policy change.



Kurilpa (West End) has a long and deep history of drawing on community arts to advance social justice, and has a strong place-based identity as home to an engaged, diverse and resilient community. Over the past two decades, the area has experienced rapid gentrification, which has contributed to growing inequity, and remains a hub of social service provision and employment bringing people from all walks of life into the community.

West End resident **Dr Emma Heard** leads this case study and is working closely with West End's community and social sector organisations to explore the relationship between community music making and social equity from a place-based perspective. Partnering with social sector organisation **Micah Projects**, this case study aims to capture a breadth of community music practice happening in the area, and consider upstream implications of this practice to inform both arts and social sector development.

QMF:



The **Outback Music Trail** is a driveable series of place-based music events delivered in five communities along the Warrego Highway, run by **QMF** (formerly Queensland Music Festival) as part of a diverse range of music programs that respond to Queensland's social, cultural and economic challenges, with innovative cultural tourism initiatives.

Leading this case study is PhD candidate **Flora Wong** who has embedded herself in regional communities that host the Outback Music Trail such as Cunnamulla, making a series of month long stays as part of her artist-in-residence research method. During these trips, Flora immerses herself in local music and culture, spending time with local musicians and community members, running music workshops, visiting schools and community hubs, learning about how music (in particular country music) is intrinsically threaded into local stories, histories, identity and sense of place.



Play It Forward provides a unique range of tailored inclusive arts programs, events and projects for all Australians, and have been recognised amongst the most outstanding social inclusion models of the past decade for re-connecting isolated, vulnerable and marginalised members of their community.

PhD candidate **Pearly Black**, brings her experience and passion for singing into her Play It Forward case study, exploring the community bonds within and beyond the organisation's program of community choirs, which collectively address and support a range of social and cultural issues. Pearly's research explores the themes of communal singing to create social bonds and address social inequity. Most recently she spent time in Naarm (Melbourne) with Play It Forward's Peace Choir Project, an initiative bringing together culturally diverse members and celebrating inclusivity.

What are the potential benefits of this research?

Social and cultural benefits for Australian communities

This research aims to benefit Australian communities where social inequity exists, by harnessing their creative assets to drive positive social change. By leveraging the strong presence that music and the arts have in communities, it seeks to examine the potential role it can play in counteracting the negative social consequences of inequity in communities. As evidenced in research from *A New Approach* cultural and creative activities that focus on fostering social cohesion can help to build community, belonging, and trust, enhance empathy and inclusion, and help combat the growing issues of loneliness and isolation.

Economic benefits for Australian communities

According to the Centre for Social Impact, in Australia we spend \$510 billion per annum on social purpose programs and initiatives. Estimates suggest that Australia's spend on addressing social inequity and disadvantage (particularly in place) has increased approximately 18% per annum over the past 5 years. In spite of this increasing government spend, problems of long-term social inequity and disadvantage persist in Australian communities. There is recognition of the need for new approaches to tackling these issues. The Creative Change Project case studies will examine the value that community music programs can contribute to communities, and the ways in which they can potentially deliver a cost-effective, social-return-on-investment.

Sector development

A growing number of community musicians and arts organisations are attempting to leverage the social outcomes of music to address the growing social inequity in Australian society. Many are opportunistically writing social agendas into their music programs and funding strategies with little understanding of the complex processes that need to occur for them to achieve their stated social outcomes. As a result, much of this practice continues to be under-evidenced, studied in a siloed manner, and somewhat disconnected from collective, place-based efforts to address this social inequity. This research has a strong sector engagement dimension to ensure it strengthens the research-practice nexus in this field and delivers outputs that can inform and enhance broader sector development on the ground.

Contribution towards government priorities

The Creative Change project will contribute towards the government's priority of tackling inequity in disadvantaged locations through tailored, community-based approaches. Given the way in which locally-embedded community musicians work, this research has the potential to inform new approaches (e.g. through creativity) that the government could use to collaborate and engage with different places, build on learnings from place-based approaches already underway, and increase employment, professional development and the profile of musicians working in these contexts across metropolitan, regional, and remote Australia.

Advancement of knowledge

The Creative Change outcomes will advance knowledge of the kinds of positive social outcomes that can be fostered through community music making and the extent to which these outcomes can assist in ameliorating the social consequences of inequity. The research will shed light on how the creative process of engaging in community music can interact with larger efforts aimed at addressing social inequity in communities (e.g. by working with the creative strengths of a community to change the deficit narrative frequently used in social efforts, and reimagining different approaches to the provision of support).

How are we approaching the ethics of this research?

The nature of this research raises important ethical considerations. The notion of changing lives is frequently evoked in the rhetoric of efforts to address social inequity, and manifests in welfare-like narratives about helping “at risk” communities. These kinds of “salvationist narratives” have the potential to promulgate dominant cultural ideologies and conceal power dynamics, and tend to work on the faulty assumption that people who suffer from social inequity also lack music and culture. The Creative Change Project, in contrast, situates its understandings in more critical theories of difference, power and privilege, that resist such “damage-centred” models. This involves focusing on people’s strengths, cultural assets, and resources, rather than their lacks and problems, and acknowledges a community’s right to control their music making. This shifts the emphasis from community musicians “fixing” social problems, to a strengths-based approach where musicians can work with the cultural assets that exist within communities.

This project involves focusing on people’s strengths, cultural assets, and resources, rather than their lacks and problems, and acknowledges a community’s right to control their music.



Song for Peace concert at Ngurin Cultural Centre, Ieramagudu (Roebourne), Western Australia, 2022

How will we share what we find?

We understand the need to reach wider audiences, connect with community, and make meaningful input into conversations about arts and social equity across sectors. The Creative Change project will communicate its findings to academia, sectors, practitioners, and policy-makers. Academic outputs will include journal articles, doctoral submissions, a monograph, presentations at leading conferences in Australia and internationally, and knowledge translation visit to two leading research organisations in the UK. Practice-focused outputs will include social media resources and stories, a podcast, illustrative fact sheets, case study reports for the host organisations, a broader sector-focused report, and features in industry magazines. Sector-building initiatives will include the establishment of The Creative Change Lab, local knowledge translation in communities, national knowledge translation, and presentations at social sector conferences. These collective outputs are available on our website's [resources page](#).



From left: Emma Heard, Uncle Glenn Barry, Marilyn Trad, and Matt Hsu

Who are we?

We are a team of researchers and creative practitioners interested in the intersection of arts and social change. Informed by our respective arts practices and diverse lived experiences, we work hand-in-hand with arts and community organisations to explore how the positive outcomes of community music can lead to systemic changes needed for greater social equity.



Prof. Brydie-Leigh Bartleet *(she/her)*
ARC Future Fellow

Brydie is a dynamic research leader, award-winning educator, respected community collaborator, and arts sector advocate. Over the past 20 years, her research has advanced our understanding of the cultural, social, educational and economic benefits of participating in music and the arts. She has worked on fifteen major research projects in remote Central Australia, Western Australia and South East Arnhem Land, prisons, public health contexts, and post-conflict settings. She is a first-generation migrant from South Africa, with European heritage. As the Leader of the Creative Change Project, she oversees all aspects of the project's design and implementation. She set up all the project's partnerships, and is working closely with the team on each of their case studies, liaising with the Advisory Group, and working on the national mapping exercise, conceptual and theoretical aspects, and translation of the results.



Pearly Black *(she/her)*
PhD Candidate

Pearly is a singer, performance creative, master of vocal pedagogy and researcher with rich and varied career over the last three decades. With her musical roots in the wilds of indie rock and community music on the margins, she also has a long association with cabaret, world music and contemporary art music in Meanjin/Brisbane, Naarm/Mebourne and nipaluna/Hobart. Pearly's research interests as a PhD candidate are centred on voice and the wonderful capacities of singing to connect us to ourselves and each other for growth, healing and a more equitable society. To explore these themes Pearly is leading case studies on an array of choirs within Dr Jonathon Welch's *Play It Forward* organisation, as well as her own vocal arts project, *The West End Singing Circle*.



Dr Emma Heard (she/her)
Research Fellow

Emma is a health and arts-based researcher with a passion for social equity. Emma's research experience has focused on sexual violence prevention, and as a health promotion practitioner she has worked with a range of communities implementing strengths-based approaches to health and wellbeing. Emma is interested in understanding and shifting the social power structures that create inequity within our society. As the Research Fellow on this project, she's exploring the overarching outcomes across each of the case studies, as well as mapping community music in Australia. Born in Meanjin, Emma is a life-long resident of West End, and is leading the West End case study. Emma is excited to be connecting with her community to investigate the role that community-centred music making plays in shaping the Kurilpa peninsula as a place and its diverse community.

Matt is a 2022 and 2020 Queensland Music Awards winning composer, orchestra director and anti-racism activist of Indigenous-Taiwanese (Paiwan/Rukai) heritage. His project *Matt Hsu's Obscure Orchestra* is a 22-piece radically-inclusive ensemble comprising of BIPOC, First Nations, disabled, non-binary and trans artists. Matt's PhD research explored indie-folk music's anachronistic expression of 'old-timey' cottagecore adjacent sensibilities and its race, gender and class dynamics. His communications role for the Creative Change Project combines his passion for community-centred arts and social equity with his experience in research and media.



Dr Matt Hsu (he/him)
Communications Officer



Joel Spence (he/him)
PhD Candidate

Joel is a singer-songwriter, social worker, and music educator (secondary education) from Gippsland (Buneroong and Kurnai Country), Victoria. He completed a social work honours at Griffith University with original arts health led research. His dissertation produced an exploratory study into enablers and barriers to ballet as a dance movement therapy for traumatic brain injury survivors and carers post injury. Joel is currently a PhD candidate studying community music and social inequity in Australia - following the specific journey of case study *Songs For Freedom*, presented by the Ieramugadu/ Roebourne community facilitated by Big hART.

Flora is a musician and researcher with a background as a performer, collaborator, creative producer and educator. A versatile violinist or fiddle player (depending on the day of the week), she has a passion for storytelling through music and the exploration of culture and identity through the arts. She performs with Nonsemble, Obscure Orchestra, and Tango Enigmático, and is the Co-Director of Dots+Loops. Born in Hong Kong, she has lived and worked in Meanjin/Brisbane for most of her life, but her work as a musician, teacher and facilitator has taken her all over Australia and the world. As a PhD candidate, her case study partners with QMF and their Queensland Music Trails initiative to investigate the role of community music in fostering social equity in the South West Queensland towns of Charleville and Cunnamulla.



Flora Wong (she/her)
PhD Candidate

Contact us



Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet

ARC Future Fellow
Queensland Conservatorium
Griffith University
Phone: (07) 3735 6249
Email: b.bartleet@griffith.edu.au



Dr Emma Heard

Research Fellow
Queensland Conservatorium
Griffith University
Phone: (07) 3735 6201
Email: e.heard@griffith.edu.au

We'd love to talk to you about our project and hear more about your work! Please feel free to reach out and follow us on socials.



Australian Government
Australian Research Council



Griffith
UNIVERSITY
Creative Arts Research Institute

creativechange.org.au