

Case study

Together We Stand

Together We Stand, a collaborative art project developed by First Nations creatives from the Regional Arts Services Network (RASN) South East Queensland North (SEQN) region to keep connected and creating during COVID19.

What

The Together We Stand project was the result of COVID-19 restrictions when artist and printmaker [Cholena Drew Hughes](#) pitched the idea to then [Creative Arts Alliance's](#) Katie Edmiston, Manager, SEQN Regional Arts Services Network (RASN), for a collaborative visual artwork.

Ten artists from South East Queensland region were involved in creating the collaborative work during Queensland's lockdown in 2020.

Cholena made a foundation cyanotype print, which was then dissected with the parts distributed by post to the other artists. They responded with their own original artworks which also included an original music score and lyrics contained within a video of the process and works. Together We Stand enabled the artists to connect with each other, improving their emotional wellbeing during a time of uncertainty and isolation.

The project built upon the trust and respect between Creative Arts Alliance, the First Nations Arts Collective and partners [Access Arts](#) and [Moreton Bay Regional Council](#). Together they showed the resilience, drive and flexibility needed to take positive action to support First Nations artists during the pandemic.

This project resulted in a tangible community outcome from this important new collective of First Nations artists which was developed and supported by Creative Arts Alliance.

Where and when

2019

- Artist Cholena Hughes first pitched a mentoring and residency project at the First Nations Artist Camp on Minjerribah

May 2020

- Due to COVID, the project was repurposed as a two-month online collaborative project which started on Sorry Day (May 2020).

July 2020

- The art-making phase of the project concluded in NAIDOC Week (July 2020) with an online 'artists talk' facilitated by BlakLash Creative where the artists presenting their work to the group.
- The completed works were exhibited at the Cooroy Butter Factory for NAIDOC Week drawing an audience of 1500 following a one-month residency of Project Lead Cholena Hughes and artist Melissa Stannard.

October - November 2020

- Cholena Hughes arranged for the artwork to be exhibited again in the Mooloolaba TAFE Library where it was seen by 100 viewers per day over 6 weeks



Together We stand (almost complete) before framing. Photo Credit: Cholena Drew HUGHES

Outcomes

- **Elevate First Nations:** the project captured the experience of First Australians artists during COVID and engaged them in a productive creative process.
- **Increased wellbeing:** Taking part in the project increased the wellbeing of the artists, through connecting to each other.
- **Generated employment:** The project also generated creative employment when other opportunities were no longer available
- **Skills development:** The project developed new artistic skills and the prospect of future career opportunities for some of the artists involved.

Reflections and learnings



Easy to be part of the project

“It was super easy to participate in the project – it was low cost and easy to do at home. The combination of online and physical gave access to those who were most at risk or disadvantaged by COVID.” Katie Edmiston, Manager, SEQN RASN



Quick response

“The quick response was part of what was important about it – it was more highly valued because of the heightened stress of the lockdown...” Katie Edmiston, Manager, SEQN RASN



Wellbeing

“Thank you for seeing the value in such projects for the wellbeing of us First Nation artists emotionally mentally physically and spiritually.” Artist participant



Employment:

“The employment of artists is important to their social and emotional wellbeing – as evidenced through the testimonials of participants.” Pat Swell, CEO Access Arts



Professional Development:

“The push (it gave me) to create in medium I’ve neglected a little and connecting to an online supportive community. Learning and practicing new skills and feeling welcomed and supported through the entire process.” Artist participant



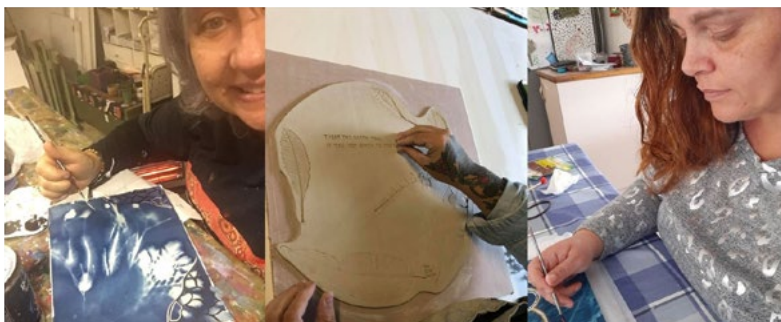
Collaboration + Networks

“Collaborating with other First Nation creatives at a time which had been very challenging for so many to do and or maintain this throughout the shutdown of so many opportunities.” Artist participant

“The way it was facilitated created the perfect environment for us to get to know each other and go on to create work together.” Cholena Drew Hughes, Artistic Director



Cholena collecting ochre from Lake Weyba. Photo Credit: Melissa Stannard



From L to R: Wendy Rix starting work on her piece. Photo Credit: Wendy Rix; Julieanne Laidlaw working on her piece. Photo Credit: Cholena Drew HUGHES; Anita Moreena working on her piece. Photo Credit: Anita Moreena

Arts Queensland Investment

Three partners – Creative Arts Alliance (RASN Provider), Access Arts and Moreton Bay Regional Council – each contributed a total of \$8,000 cash to fund the project.

RASN is an initiative of the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland. The Queensland Government committed \$6.5 million to RASN from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to build capacity, support collaboration, and leverage the value of the arts to achieve social and economic outcomes.

Access Arts is funded by Arts Queensland through the Organisations Fund (2017-2020 - extended to 31 December 2021). The Organisations Fund provides multi-year funding for the core operations of Queensland small to medium organisations.

Access Arts also receives funding for First Nations to enable wellbeing through arts projects from the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Their core requirements were that the project comes out of the community and was ideally led by First Nations people.

Tips for others

The project worked well over a necessary 2-week timeline, but three to four weeks would have been ideal.

The model would be enhanced with collaborative face-to-face workshops.

What next

The project built close connections between the artists, with some attending the SEQN First Nations Artist Camp at Woodfordia in February 2021.

Many of the artists continue to collaborate and support each other in new projects, including Melissa Stannard's co-curation of the 2021 NAIDOC week exhibition at the Cooroy Butter Factory which included more than half of the Together We Stand participants.


The cyanotype process employed in Together We Stand was also featured in workshops in the subsequent Woodfordia Artist Camp. It was the first time many of the artists were exposed to the cyanotype process which has helped to develop the practice of artists such as Jason Murphy and Bianca Beetson.







Uncle Kev Starkey working on the Musical Score. Photo Credit: Uncle Kevin Starkey

Key stats

Employment

-  10 First Nations artists were employed
-  one Artistic Director
-  nine Visual Artists
-  one Musician

Employment

-  18 people attended the online artists discussion final event
-  1500 attended the Cooroy Butter Factory Art Centre NAIDOC exhibition attendance
-  3000 people viewed the Library display at the Mooloolaba TAFE
-  Online reach of 4,800

Find out more

A link to the video with original lyrics and score by Uncle Kev Starkey (Darkwood Studios) is here:



Together We Stand: QR Code. Photo Credit: Uncle Kev Starkey