

CREATIVE RESPONDERS

TRANSCRIPT

SEASON 2 / EPISODE 4: WORKING SUSTAINABLY IN COMMUNITY PRACTICE

Scotia: This is Shelagh Magadza, kicking off a session at the Community Arts Network's Day of Demonstration in Perth.

Shelagh: These two organisations, and particularly Creative Recovery Network identified the fact that whilst other sectors like the emergency services etc, they have support for their frontline people and they have peer networks etc debriefing and mentoring to sustain wellbeing of practitioners in those areas

Scotia: The Community Arts Network is known as CAN.

Together, CAN and our team at Creative Recovery Network have been exploring what a model of professional supervision could look like for artists working in community arts and cultural development.

CACD practitioners in Australia face unique challenges - and are often sent in to complex situations without adequate preparation or support.

Lack of access to professional supervision, and limited competency when it comes to self-care strategies are some of the reasons for high worker turnover in the industry, as well as burnout, stress and conflict.

Scotia (at conference): I'm here in Meanjin, in Brisbane.

Scotia: COVID-19 meant I couldn't be there in the room but I presented the findings from our professional supervision pilot, with some of the artists involved joining in person.

Scotia (at conference): I'm just wondering, Who is in the room? Are you a creative? Are you a practitioner?

Scotia: The pilot was the culmination of several years of conversations and research between Creative Recovery Network and CAN.

The aim was to draw on the experience and wisdom of leading community arts and cultural development practitioners to grow a deeper understanding of their specific support needs and how they can be addressed at a structural level.

We looked to best practice models of professional supervision in the health and social services sectors for inspiration and to investigate whether these models could be adopted into the arts.

Scotia (at conference): This is a call to arms ... to try and take the recommendations we're about to present to you into practical application.

Scotia: I'm Scotia Monkivitch... and this is Creative Responders, a podcast from the Creative Recovery Network that explores how creativity and the Arts have a unique role to play in disaster management.

This episode, we revisit self care in the arts, a topic we first explored in Season One of the podcast.

At the end of the pilot program, we've learnt a lot about how the arts could change to better support practitioners in complex settings and high performance work environments.

Doctor Shona Erskine worked with us on the project. She's a registered psychologist and consultant who also has a background as a dance artist.

Shona: There is a line of dialogue in the community that says if you as an artist just manage your self care better you'll be better off. And of course I can't manage your self care for you because self-care is for you to do ... it's really easy to put the responsibility of personal self care onto someone and be naive about the context in which they are operating. So how do we prepare artists for that, what structures do we put in place for them, and then what acknowledgement do we give them self care is actually a really intensely challenging thing during a project that you want to execute well. And so then how do we help you recover afterwards.

Scotia: We're going to explore what those structures could be, and what changes need to take place to embed them into a framework of best practice for community arts and cultural development.

We'll come back to the CAN Day of Demonstration later, but first, I want you to meet Silvano Giordano.

Silvano is one of the artists who was involved in the pilot project, and he's a director at Wilurarra Creative.

Silvano: Wilurarra Creative is in Mirlirrjarra or Warburton community and Warburton community or Mirlirrjarra is one of the most remote inland communities in Australia. So our closest towns of Kalgoorlie and Alice Springs are both about a thousand kilometres away from us. And yes, so it's a very remote place, which is like which at first was quite I felt was quite daunting to me. But now I feel like Warburton is actually the centre of my universe, just like people do here so yeah.

Scotia: Silvano started working at Wilurarra Creative in 2010.

Silvano: I just like, absolutely loved it and was really drawn to the country out here and, the sort of challenge but also, you know, the joy and the challenge of a remote life. And there's something very real about it that I love.

Scotia: Wilurarra Creative started as an art project.

Silvano: So they recognised that Ngaanyatjarra young adults wanted to learn about different ways or new ways of making art work, whether that was through digital means or that type of stuff. And new technologies. They wanted to learn about all that stuff, and it was stuff that

the community couldn't teach. So some of the older members of the community couldn't teach.

Scotia: Since then it's grown. It's still a project for Ngaanyatjarra young adults, 16 to 30 year olds, but they have a broader range of activities than arts.

Silvano: So we do everything creative. We have a music recording studio, we have a digital archive that provides access to all our past projects over the last 16 years. We have the only public Internet in town, we do fashion and hairdressing projects. We have Wilurarra Salon, which is another community driven salon project that sort of trains people social enterprise type programme that trains people to do hairdressing styles and cuts and colours. And, you know, in that sort of way, self care and health as well. We do metalwork projects. We make traditional items out of like car bodies. So we do one of the things we do is like make wiras, which is making traditional digging bowls out of car bonnets. We do like Bush trips. We do photography, basically anything that Ngaanyatjarra young people are interested in doing is what we do.

Scotia: A lot of what Silvano does is every day engagement.

Silvano: And so usually that is access to the Wilurarra studio. That's instruments for practise.

If people want to do put on a small scale, like, you know, community concerts. We've got the recording studio. We've got an acoustic guitar. We've got an old piano. So we've got that sort of daily engagement, we've got the computers, which has a digital archive and Internet and music that's recorded at the studio, and any videos that we've made in the past, all that sort of stuff. So we've got that daily engagement and service to the community. We also do things like funeral booklets.

Scotia: This daily engagement builds to projects, like the Alanya project.

Silvano: So Alanya is a project that is if there is design, culture, art, photography, fashion, health stories kind of book that is entirely made by none other people here in Warburton community.

So, you know that that is kind of like digital collage and design is a really big part of that project. And it's really about any way that non-literary it's really about giving Ngaanyatjarra young people, platforms and resources in order that they can, experiment, practise, arts, practise, whatever they're interested in and really, I guess, explore their own identity and express contemporary Ngaanyatjarra culture in whatever way that looks like.

It's very much grounded in community arts and culture development and in a long term approach that provides access to resources but doesn't define an outcome, you know, or doesn't define what is arts practice or what is not or what, you know, it's very much community driven.

Scotia: When he first came to Warburton, Silvano wasn't sure of his role in the community.

Silvano: So when I first came out here, I felt like, well, what with this, you know, queer vegetarian, like coming from Melbourne have to actually offer a place. Like surely someone

from the community can actually do the director position and can actually, you know, like, that's probably what we're working towards. But that's not actually the case. Unlike some of some other communities, Ngaanyatjarra people really want to work with non, Ngaanyatjarra people ... Self-determination for them, you know, looks like having non, Ngaanyatjarra people involved to work alongside them.

Scotia: Silvano works closely with BJ, his co Director.

BJ: And I've been a tutor from the start working here. And it's been a privilege teaching younger people and helping them in the stress in life, a lot of younger blokes ... it's been good, I've done a lot for young people and I'm still here, which I'm still be here at Wilurarra. Look it up. It's on the Internet.

Scotia: BJ has been here for a long time, since the studio was built.

BJ: It's been here ever since. And it changed, a lot of things came, and the direction just went from there to a different thing, yeah it's um, expanded a little bit, but in a big way for a lot of young people and older people.

Scotia: Ngaanyatjarra people have particular protocols to welcome and host non-Ngaanyatjarra people in their community.

BJ: Well, we're always looking out for people who come from cities who work and we always tend to be teach them the ways not to go to certain sacred sites or business ground and say certain dead people's names. Well, if not to be spoken in the community.

Scotia: It's not a one-time thing, a set of rules you learn on arrival to follow.

Rather, this relationship between Ngaanyatjarra and non-Ngaanyatjarra people living and working together in the Warburton community is ongoing, and part of everyday life for Silvano and BJ.

BJ: And they they pick up on the cultural side of things. We tend to teach them when they're here, fill them in the do's and don'ts so that they are comfortable without having to run into trouble and get back on a plane and kick them out.

Silvano: Do you think that's like, to me, I think that's why, like that sort of stuff is why Wilurarra works quite well, you know, because people here are always -- it's not just, like one, one book that you can read and then, you know, everything. It's like a ongoing thing. Because we have to listen to Ngaanyatjarra people who, you know, like older people and young people because they know.

BJ: Yeah, every time they don't even know. There's business, business happening, or funeral. So there's a lot of things going on during funeral and business. And when the visitors that come, they are well aware of what's going on because we inform them and keep them safe so that they just doing their own job and whatever is happening outside of their activity-thing, it's not bumping into each other.

Scotia: Each non-Ngaanyatjarra person who comes to the area has a Malpa - a person who teaches and guides you through local life in an ongoing way.

BJ: You know, that's what the Northern Territory is all about. When you come here, you got to have a Malpa. They call it a Malpa. And that person intends to show you. Teach you the yes and and nos, the dos and don'ts. All this stuff. And how to find people directly, instead of I see all these sisters and nurses running around all showing up at my house all the time. Where's this person? This is not a bloody tourist information thing! Go away! I always swear at them. [laughs]

Silvano: You're upset by them.

BJ: Mm.

Scotia: For Silvano, this clarity around his role in the community is important, and it's not a rule that can be applied across multiple First Nations communities.

The relationship between Ngaanyatjarra and non-Ngaanyatjarra people is very specific, and this is where Silvano looks to guide his personal and professional interactions.

Silvano: So they have a system called working Malparara Way. And so - if it's alright I might actually just if it's alright, I might actually just read from the cultural induction book. So this is from a book called Maliki Nitiringutacu. So strangers coming in, learning Ngaanyatjarra Way - a guide for new residents and visitors in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. So it's edited by Kate Fielding, Delvina Lawson, Jasmine Wilson and Janet Faust. So it says 'Malpa is a Ngaanyatjarra word meaning friend or companion working Malparara away describes a long term co-worker relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people being paid to work alongside each other using their different areas of expertise. These skills include cultural and social knowledge, professional training, language fluency and technical proficiency. Malparara Way fundamentally recognises the exchange of skills, knowledge and experience goes both ways. Everybody has things to learn. Everybody has things to teach.' So this that not at like Malparara ways that not without a knowledge and direction on how Ngaanyatjarra and non-Ngaanyatjarra people should work alongside each other.

Scotia: Malparara Way focuses on the two way relationship, on what Silvano brings to the relationship and what being non-Ngaanyatjarra can bring to a role as well.

Silvano: So the fact that I'm like from outside this community actually means that I'm not tied up in the cultural obligations of Ngaanyatjarra life. And so because I'm outside of demand sharing or I'm outside of a family relationship, that means that I have to go to a funeral and sit down for a couple of weeks. It means that Wilurarra can continue to be inclusive of all families. And all Ngaanyatjarra people, men and women, and also be open and accessible for a much broader time.

Scotia: Because of this relationship, after ten years in the community, Silvano is better able to advocate for the community's needs when it comes to funding and priorities.

Silvano: It also means that I can deal with funding bodies that I can go for, be that translator between, especially now that I've spent a longer time in a Ngaanyatjarra community. And I understand much more the kinds of priorities and the things that are important in the ways that projects work ... So it's fundamental to everything we do. And, I'm constantly working on

that, with my co-director, BJ, to develop that practise and to make sure that it sits across our whole programme.

Scotia: One way this impacts the way Wilurarra Creative works is when artists visit.

I can work with my Ngaanyatjarra a co-director, to make sure that we host visiting artists really well and that we host them both in a Malparara way and a non-Ngaanyatjarra way. And all of that like that. Malparara Way is actually a fundamental process that Wilurarra Creative uses to do cross-cultural work.

Scotia: For Silvano, when he first came to Wilurarra Creative, this induction came from both Ngaanyatjarra and non-Ngaanyatjarra people.

Silvano: And so, like having that induction from both non-Ngaanyatjarra people and then having a really strong framework of Ngaanyatjarra and non-Ngaanyatjarra people working together for the programme really just meant that I had a really well-rounded, supported induction process, I guess, and an ongoing induction, which was important.

Scotia: Often in remote communities staff turnover is high, and handover periods are short.

Silvano's situation was different - he knew the former directors well, and spent six months learning from them.

Silvano: I count myself very lucky that I had such a long handover with Kate and Ben, you know, so with the previous directors like it, it's really over about six months. I think that that's something that, you know, like really set me up to succeed.. And something that's very, very rare in a remote, you know, particularly First Nations community, you know, where it's such a different environment. And they had sort of set up some really good systems of self care and of like, you know, sustainable practice that, you know, I just, you know, like got from them. And then I developed my own as well. So I guess that was kind of really good grounding. And so I give thanks for those people that came before me that, you know, developed it. But I've also taken those seeds I guess, and I've nurtured them into something, you know, like my own practise.

Scotia: Silvano has also shifted the way he thinks about the impact of the projects they work on, looking at success long-term.

Silvano: That strong framework of community development and having a longer term approach to anything, everything that I do, or that Wilurarra does.

Scotia: This supported induction process that Silvano talks about was the product of a few conditions - the previous Directors' approach, the productive collaboration they had with the community and the added benefit of a long handover period -- it's not something that always occurs when community arts workers start a new role, and it varies greatly between organisations and communities.

We started working with CAN in 2017, developing a series of sector forums, the Making Time weekend retreat and the Making Time Online program.

It was clear from these forums that a more systemic approach was needed to ensure safe and supportive working conditions and a stronger culture of good work practice for individual creatives and the organisations they work with.

So together we decided to investigate further through the professional supervision pilot project.

The pilot project involved a consultation day, one-on-one interviews with a diverse and targeted group of practitioners and then evolved into a 6 month program working with 13 artists to test professional supervision models.

June: My name is June Moorhouse and I'm co-CEO of Community Arts Network or CAN in Western Australia. So I job-share the leadership of the organisation with Monica Cain. And that's an unusual arrangement. But it's been fantastic. And we've been leading the organisation for the last four to five years.

Scotia: CAN has grappled with those questions Silvano has, about the best way to engage with communities, for a long time.

June: So, at CAN, we're committed to creating an environment in which people can come together to share their stories, create connection and understanding across cultures and between people knowing that art can transform communities in doing that.

Scotia: June and CAN see self care and support for artists as a real gap in the community arts sector.

June: And we see this not only in the staff who are managing the projects that we run, but also more broadly with the artists we contract and with artists working in other settings who are working with communities that are trauma affected or have been deeply impacted by their marginalisation. And we were really keen to see some more systemic support made available for people in that setting. Monica and I are very much drawn to the ideas that are generated coming out of the work. ... I think what CRN was proposing here was let's get in, run this with practitioners and really see what happens when we wrap around a degree of self care and clinical skills to support practice.

Scotia: The group of 13 artists in the pilot project were working across a range of settings - some in disaster impacted communities, like Fiona Sinclair who you heard from in Season One, and some in remote communities - like Silvano.

They met monthly for a group program targeting specific practice issues - 6 in-room in Perth and 7 online, connecting from across regional and remote Western Australia.

Each artist was also able to undertake six one-on-one sessions with practice psychologist Shona Erskine, who you heard from earlier.

It was a way to put these ideas about self care into practice, and see how it influenced the day to day experience of artists on the ground.

June: I think one of the other parts of this model that's really powerful is the peer to peer work and the building of that network of people interested in this work. Because one of the first things that alleviates some of the pressure is the sense that you're not alone in the work, whereas when you're at a community you often feel very alone in the work, but if there are peers, there are you know that you're part of a group of people who understand this practice and know some of the patterns of of the challenges that emerge, that if you can tap into that in some way, then that's a very powerful thing.

Scotia: The pilot showed that this type of peer to peer support, where practitioners with similar amounts of experience work together, is extremely beneficial;

But so are other kinds of support such as professional development, supervision and mentoring - taking into consideration the experience level and the specific needs of the practitioner.

June: And I then people can find their own level. I think that that's another thing that's important about the the model and about the way we move forward is recognising that we have practitioners of very long standing. They have reflected on their practise over many years and need a level of conversation that may not be the same for someone who's recently graduated or is an early starter in the work. So being able to create a network where people can find the level of conversation that they need, or indeed that opens up opportunities across levels of experience.

Scotia: For Silvano, the pilot project connected him to other CACD workers throughout Western Australia.

Silvano: That's been really beneficial to me to just hear other people talking about practice, because I don't in Milidura - I don't have other people that are CACD practitioners, that have kind of frameworks they work from side, that sort of stuff. That has been really great.

Scotia: Silvano thinks about his own practice a lot, and it's evolved over time, in isolation from other community arts workers.

Like being able to discuss community arts and cultural development with peers that are in Western Australia has been really important for for that kind of thing, for seeing how Wilurarra actually does really well or how, you know, my practise practise that I've developed in isolation, you know, like does well in some areas and then how I could make that better.

So I always, like I maintain professional supervision, which I which I have for the last 10 years, because, because it gives me a space within my own control, cultural context to understand, you know, like whether I'm doing okay and and also to make me the best practitioner that I can be.

Scotia: After ten years, Silvano has learnt a lot about working in a remote community. But that doesn't necessarily make life easy.

Some of the challenges of working in Warburton come purely from distance.

Silvano: So, you know, for instance, like, you know, like I think if you've lived in is in the city your whole life, you kind of expect a certain level of service of kind of, you know, and by service, I mean, you know, like you you expect that you can get a plumber if you need one or that you can really go to the shops whenever whenever you like. But, you know, I guess some of the things that you have to accept in that or deal with in a remote setting is that you don't have access to and you definitely don't have immediate access to many of the things that you usually would consider, essential services.

Scotia: A lot of adjustments to living remotely are about everyday needs - like grocery shopping in the limited hours the community store is open, and organising your life to access the services that *are* available in the community.

Other needs are dealt with on remote leave.

Silvano: Which is something, you know, that it's really necessary to self care. And so and that's something that's being inbuilt into the programme. So that is a -- well, it should be a general standard. It's not for every organisation, but that is every three months I get a week, once I get to where I'm going to go to the doctors go to the dentist, like any life administration, and to sit in a cafe and stare at the wall and to also not have people knocking on my door. So I always explain it like this to people who have never been to a remote community. Just imagine that every person that you work with in your life, like in your daily work so all your clients, for instance. So, you know, any anyone that you work with knows where you live and will come and knock on your door to say hello.

Scotia: Silvano has all of this in mind when he inducts a visiting artist.

Increasingly, the ability of an artist to reflect on their own self care practice is an aspect of work Silvano is taking into consideration.

Silvano: It's a it's a big question because it sort of everyone needs different things from self care and from supervision and trying to work out something that is flexible enough, like a system that is flexible enough to to accommodate the, you know, whatever those differences are, is something that I'm always working on in terms of induction and in terms of attracting and employing new staff and new facilitators to come out here. I've now budgeted for all permanent staff to have a budget for professional supervision, because I think that that's a really important process for people to have.

Scotia: Key to Silvano's self care is his relationship with the community.

Silvano: One of the other challenges, but also one of the other awesome things about remote life is that you are part of a community. And so the line between professional and personal is almost non-existent. And in fact, for you to do your best work, it has to be blurred. So, you know, because for Ngaanyatjarra communities, everything is based on relationships. ... And that's the most important thing. So that is a challenge, but also a great opportunity because to work at a different pace that values family, Country, community and each other is a really different kind of way of working.

Scotia: Through his own practice, Silvano has developed ways of balancing this all-encompassing community life with work and self care.

Paying attention to his own energy levels and practicing self care is essential not only for Silvano's personal well-being, but for the creative output of the organisation, and his ability to support those he works with.

Silvano: I guess I have an overarching framework and that I constantly assess and reassess in order to in order to keep myself effective for longer term. So I always I always try to think about, you know, like how a decision that I make, to do or not to do something, will affect what I'm able to do in the future. So yes, I could work at the studio for 10 hours a day

and that I'd probably last three months before I was done. I'd not be able to come back. So there's such a high turnover of staff in these in in remote communities and, you know, that is because people don't get properly inducted. They don't know what to expect. So, you know, I guess I have a long term commitment and I've seen how, you know, Wilurarra has a really important role within the community.

Scotia: At the CAN Day of Demonstration, the room was full of artists grappling with experiences similar to Silvano's.

Elizabeth: I often really alone in what I'm doing - having to advocate as an artist for being paid, for being sufficiently heard, for other artists to being involved, for communities to be involved, and that can be really exhausting sometimes. And so it's been really amazing being in these spaces and hearing that there's so many people out here advocating and that it's being heard.

Kosta: I think the most important thing to learn is how and where to draw boundaries and given art practice is so personal for a lot of particularly independent artists I guess or people who are just starting out, it's not necessarily easy how to know how to do that. Because the personal is professional is personal so it's a bit of a cyclical relationship but it's emotionally taxing and in some cases it can be damaging if we're not taught how to build those barriers for ourselves.

Carrie: I'm Carrie McDowell, I'm an artist and I'm also a community arts worker, I work in Roeburn in a community called Cheetetha community. I'm living proof that it works. I survived the burnout, I've come back with a vengeance, I'm back fully engaged and having a great time whereas I was prepared to chuck it all in a minute ago so I was just worn out.

Alex: It was really exciting to see CRN and CAN having pulled together some really strong ideas, and in some ways looking at them I'm like they're no brainers, they should already be happening, that should have been happening years ago so the concepts of isolation and learning on the ground and the lack of mentorship I think is really crucial.

Scotia: Our focus for the pilot project was to build and articulate a professional supervision framework that can set creatives up to succeed in challenging environments.

A key recommendation is the establishment of a Community Arts and Cultural Development Practice Framework including Codes of Conduct and Ethics.

The Framework will establish a vision for the sector that is grounded in the realities of community practice, supported by research and embedded in a set of principles and values that are essential to the work.

It will provide a clear understanding of what underpins the work, and how this informs practitioners' engagement with communities.

This conceptual map, a broad approach to CACD practice, can then be consistently applied to ensure that projects are built to prioritise wellbeing and care for practitioners and their communities.

It can be used by employers, organisations, contractors and independent practitioners to support things like -

the negotiation of contracts, establishment of protocols, safe and best practice service provision and the induction of practitioners into the community.

June: So the more we can allow people to understand the pressures that are on an artist, when they go into a community and work in a close and detailed and expressive way with communities, the more we need to recognise the time and the resources that are required to support that person through the process.

Scotia: The findings will be released in full this year and our intention is for the recommendations to become a catalyst to drive change towards new standards of practice at a national level.

June: There is such an opportunity for us as workers and participants in this sector to take hold of it and drive what is best practise to articulate for ourselves and own the standards that we want to see upheld in our practice and the knowledge that we know we've got to share across that broader continuum of practice.

Scotia: Working within a Code of Conduct and Ethics that provides clear guidelines and a strong ethical framework is essential in a sector that works with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of people in our society - it sets the tenor for exemplary work practice and is an essential step for clear, safe and ethical future growth.

It's important to get this right. When community arts and cultural development is at its best, it can be transformative.

BJ: The chain is, that thing that held them, trying to lock themselves in. It just breaks open when they see themselves in a different way in a picture, on a paper that just breaks everything. And once that's gone. You know, I reckon there's a - that person there wanting to get out. It's already the glass shattered, and that new person that was there. It just came out and it showed us in a different way. A new them, you know, a new person.

[MUSIC: BOY CRYING FOR FAMILY BY TRAVIS WEST]

Scotia: Creative Responders is an initiative of the Creative Recovery Network hosted by me, Scotia Monkivitch.

We'd like to thank Silvano, BJ, June and a special call out to Jill Brown, our colleague at CAN who works to develop the Making Time program and Shona Erskine and Peta Blevins who collaborated with us on the Professional Supervision Pilot.

The track you're hearing now is Boy Crying for Family by Travis West from the album Wilurarra Desert Reggae: A Compilation of New Ngaanyatjarra Music recorded at Wilurarra Creative studio in 2017.

Visit wilurarra dot com for more information about their work and it's also where you can find their online store for music, merchandise and books by young Ngaanyatjarra artists. The Wilurarra Desert Reggae album is available in the store and also through iTunes and Spotify.

Creative Responders is produced by me and my Creative Recovery Network colleague, Jill Robson

in collaboration with Audiocraft, with Executive Producer Jess O'Callaghan and Sound Engineer Tiffany Dimmack. Production support in this episode from Elsa Silberstein.

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If you are interested in supporting your community in challenging times, you can find out more about what we do at our website [Creative Recovery dot net dot au](http://CreativeRecovery.net.au) or connect with us on facebook, twitter and instagram.

The Creative Recovery Network is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Thank you for listening to Season 2 of our podcast. We'll be back soon with new episodes of our conversation series where I sit down for one-on-one discussions with people working on the frontlines of the arts and emergency management sectors.

Thanks for listening.