

CREATIVE RESPONDERS

Podcast Transcript

In Conversation with June Moorhouse

October 2021

Scotia Hi I'm Scotia Monkivitch,

Welcome back for another episode of Creative Responders: In Conversation; our monthly interview series where we hear from people on the frontlines of the arts and emergency management sector as they prepare, respond and recover from disaster.

I am recording this a few days ahead of World Mental Health Day - October 10 - which is a day designed to provide an opportunity to talk about mental health issues and what more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality.

This is something that we at Creative Recovery Network, along with our colleagues at WA's Community Arts Network have been focussing on a lot recently - particularly around issues of self-care, mental health and wellbeing for community-based artists.

After four years of collaborative research, we recently released a report titled 'Creating Well: Recommendations for practitioner wellbeing in the Community Arts and Cultural Development sector'.

Like those who work in emergency services and social support services, artists who work closely with communities are at high risk for burnout, stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

They are often working in isolation in remote or rural communities and work closely with communities that carry many layers of social complexity and sometimes trauma.

And unlike other sectors that have well established, built-in support structures, the Arts does not always provide an effective framework for things like peer support, professional supervision or time and budgets for proper induction and wellbeing processes.

So together, with our colleagues at Community Arts Network - or CAN - we wanted to look deeper into what specific challenges arts workers are facing and how we, as a sector, can shift to more sustainable work practices.

Today we're hearing from one of the most seasoned arts professionals in the country who has a deep knowledge of both the challenges and joys of community practice.

June Moorhouse is the co CEO of Community Arts Network which is based in Perth.

I have known June for many years and wanted to bring her on the podcast so that we could break down some of the recommendations in the Creating Well report and also to hear her personal reflections on the issues facing the sector and the evolution she has seen in community practice throughout her career.

June has more than 35 years experience in the arts, working in senior management and leadership roles, most recently leading the team at CAN in an innovative job sharing arrangement with her colleague Monica Kane.

CAN's purpose is to create positive social change through the arts, building inclusion and understanding between people and you'll hear from this conversation that June has a wealth of experience to share for anyone working - or interested in working - in community-based practice.

I hope you enjoy my conversation with June Moorhouse.

Scotia Thanks for joining us, June, I'm connecting with you from Meanjin, on Jaggera Turrbal country. Where are you today?

June I'm on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja here in Walyalup, near Freemantle.

Scotia And hopefully, the weather is getting a little warmer.

June Well, actually, it was eight degrees here this morning, just a little a little chilly for this time of year. So yeah, I'm rugged up, but that's mostly talking to you across this country.

Scotia Yes, and we have we have the touch of spring and summer in the air today. It's quite beautifully warm, so I sent some down to you.

June Yeah, we had some, just not today.

Scotia Well, it's been such a real pleasure working with you, June and your team at Community Arts Network on this project, creating well, I mean, you are one of the most seasoned members of the community arts and cultural development community and bring such a vast range of experience through your own practice over the years and your extensive interaction with many community arts and cultural development workers.

I wanted to start by asking you to set the scene a little bit about why this work was necessary. When we look at mental health and wellbeing for arts workers in community, what have the conditions been like up to this point and how do you kind of reflect back on that?

June I think the issue of self care in community arts and cultural development is long standing. It's been around as long as the practice has been around and I've been involved.

So if you look at the roots of this work in the social activism of the 60s and the conviction that most artists I know I bring to the work plus and you add in the deep relationships that workers form with the people in the communities that they're working with on projects, it's a real cocktail for over work. I think boundaries are difficult to maintain in that setting and over the years that I've been involved, it's been an ongoing issue. I think it could be argued that when the CAN Community Arts Networks existed in most states, there was greater

support. So as I think you're aware that I was job shared the executive officer role for Community Arts Network in Victoria.

Scotia Yes, I met you when you were there in that iteration of your career.

June Good. You must have been a young thing.

Scotia Yes.

June Cos I was a relatively young thing then. And you know, that was the first year the Australia Council had funded networks in New South Wales and Victoria, initially and Queensland?

Scotia and Queensland as well

June Then they rolled out in each state, and I would say that obviously the purpose of the networks at that time, they'd grown out of people who were committed to this form of practice, coming together to support each other and to advocate for this way of working.

So the networks really took that up and became service organisations for people working in this area, doing a lot of advocacy work, trying especially through local government and then upwards to state and feds. And you know, we would organise professional development to have regular meetings of people working in community arts.

So there was quite a lot of peer to peer sharing. So over those years, and obviously, the CAN's became more sophisticated in their offerings. We had regular newsletters, all that kind of thing happening in the national network. There was greater support and ongoing dialogue, I think, between peers. But, you know, I don't know the degree to which we were focussed on self-care in those days, I think we were much more focussed on getting this kind of work happening in as many communities as possible. So that sort of apparently selfless position can end up being quite a dangerous one, because, you know, I do think we were all so gung ho that you just went at it and or maybe this a personal reflection because I was younger and had more energy, we just went at it. And yeah, how that translates to a sustainable long term working life in this form of work or in the arts generally and in leadership, which is sort of more been the direction I've taken, I guess, I think these are just huge issues, and I'm really glad to at this point as I am looking to exit CAN in WA to know that this piece of work has been done and really grateful that we were able to support CRN to do this.

And I guess, look, just as a piece of context, too, people probably wonder, Well, why is Community Arts Network only now alive in WA? There was a shift in the funding away from service organisations and to key producers back in the early 2000s and CAN in WA, was by that time working very extensively with Noongar communities. And so was able to make that, these days, we would say pivot and and argue its place as a key producer of best practice community arts and cultural development. And I think that's what allowed CAN to continue. And certainly, we've seen that service delivery side of our business increasingly challenging to sustain and maintain.

Scotia Well, it's a very different focus, isn't it, with the demise of those kind of networks, which were there primarily to support and grow capacity and look at longer term strategies, there hasn't been any really other opportunities to catch that or to hold it in any way unless it was a really dedicated Producer who really implemented it into their programme, it

certainly wasn't encouraged through our arts funding bodies or philanthropy engagement, it was very much about do the job get it done and move on

June and give us the outcomes. Yeah, I think the other thing I would reflect on at the moment is that this work - community arts and cultural development, if, if, if that's the terminology we want to use - but really good community based practise is so relevant to what we have been experiencing in these times. We're seeing it over and over again that what people are hungering for as they work their way through this global pandemic is places for reflection and connection locally based.

Scotia Well, it's about relationship support and relationship connection. Isn't that what's become so evident? Absolutely. You can't go out in the peripheral space and connect with people.

June Yeah. And forms different forms of expression that can somehow capture what for so many people is an experience like no other they've had in their lifetime. So I observed that within the arts sector, there is much more interest in this form of practice, and that's been happening over time, generally with individual artists looking more and more of where their work sits in that broader societal context and wanting to place their work in that context and developing relational work. So I think the things that we have honed and learnt through community arts and cultural development are ever more relevant to ever more practitioners. And that's one of the things that I guess I'm also excited about with the idea of the practice framework. But will we'll get onto that? But that's just some sort of context.

Scotia Yeah, I agree. I think it's becoming, you know, we've got this opportunity to really highlight the vital role that that this work plays. But maybe it's good to briefly outline the process or the methodology which we we took with this profession with this pilot 'project. Can you, perhaps

June which unsurprisingly, could really only be hosted in a way where there is a community arts network because we did have remaining networks and continuing networks with practitioners across the State

Scotia with a very dedicated focus around practise and engagement strategies. So yeah, how amazing

June Well, it was and it was just wonderful that, you know, you were really pushing in this way through CRN. So we we started with the self-care forum. Oh gosh, it was 2017.

Scotia I think it was sixteen, no seventeen. You're right, it's terrible. It's a feels like a few lifetimes ago, but it was quite a while ago.

June Hmm. Which was fantastic. And still, you know, very clear in my mind about the dynamism of that session, and we just had a panel discussion opening up these questions. But I don't think there were many people in that room who didn't have something to say about this issue and felt very passionately about the importance of both structural and individual change to address the need for better self-care, really. So that was that was fantastic. And then the next year you took us all away to the country. You went away to us. You went to Binjarra Boodga, didn't you? Yes.

Scotia That was that was for the Making Time artist's self-care retreat, and so it's kind of built on where a lot of this work and in a really directed way, I suppose began was the

Making Time on a self-care retreat that we held in Melbourne in 2015. And that was through the directive of a range of independent artists who were, you know, we'd got together at the Regional Arts Australia Forum and we were having our usual whinge about how hard it's been.

And then we made a decision that actually it's all very well to talk about this amongst ourselves, but we really have to put something into action. And that was the beginnings of pulling together a national group of artists and creatives who were working with their communities to address some, some self-care needs and start to, I suppose, begin a conversation about what are the gaps and how might we respond to them and build a better practise around how we do our work.

And so the Making Time artist's self-care that was running Perth was a development on that. We had I think it was 20 artists who came together over a weekend intensive where we shared stories. We discussed practice issues. We we we worked through a whole raft of different care modalities. We had an engagement with peer leaders, particularly from indigenous community and health and wellbeing communities. And we also just had time to care for ourselves and be nurtured and be well-fed and to have some space to be able to clear our mind and reflect and try and understand our own place within this multitude of practises that we all sit on working.

June Well, the feedback was phenomenal from the practitioners who attended and certainly from all the crew can who took part, and that I remember one comment from Fiona Sinclair from Northcliffe about along the lines of, you know, there's been so much talk, but this is an occasion when it all came to bear and it really the caring really was delivered. So I think that was a very powerful beginning to the ongoing programme for people in WA

Scotia I think what that does too which is sad to say, but is the truth is it's not until you experience a kind of nurturing space, do you actually realise the dearth of it? So in some ways, we we have been supporting ourselves intrinsically through our peers and the other mechanisms we have in our life. But to actually have it functionally framed for us through the sector that we work in, is such I think unfortunately are really rare experience.

June I think you're right, and I think that's at the heart of what we've been doing together here. So, you know, I really hope that this can just keep marching forward and pull people together in realising the outcomes.

Scotia So from that and sort of continuing conversations you with you and Mon, we wanted to kind of take it another step and start to look at functionally, how what how might we create some influence in our sector? And I think the biggest thing for me is to understand that currently there's a lot of talk around mental health and wellbeing, but more often than not in the arts sector, it's always put back on the artist. You need to do this. What about that? What about going to see them...get your shit together, basically.

And meanwhile, we're here for you, but the here for you was kind of fairly vague. And what I understood and what we understood in our conversations is that this that we do have to have individual responsibility, but actually the structures around which we work need to support that and actually guide us and be part of the leadership in terms of how we can actually make that happen. And so, you know, we we came up with this idea of the pilot and met our great colleague, Shona Erskine, who's a practicing psychologist and and practicing creative as a kind of perfect match for us to look at developing some sort of for,

you know, it's a perfect match for us to look at developing a container of what what a really good professional supervision support might look like. Yes.

June Yeah, it was a fantastic match, and we can talk a bit later about other work that Sean is doing now or just recently with the Chamber of Arts and Culture, which again is picking up on this issue of supporting individual and independent artists because, of course, things have only escalated in light of COVID since we began this work. So it's so relevant to what's going on now. But Shona's been a real contributor to that conversation

Scotia So with Shona, we we ran the pilot, which was to engage with a whole cross-section of practising practise in away urban, rural and remote workers. And we went through six processes of kind of unpacking sensibilities around self-care and looking at different modalities of how we could support ourselves and also to create structural changes of care for ourselves, as well as looking at opportunities of how we might linking to broader support. And we finished that process in 2020, and we compiled the findings, the outcomes from that, as well as a full day of investigation and conversations that we held with a whole raft of of sector organisations and independent artists working in the area of community practise.

June Yeah, that was a really excellent day too, because it brought together a much more diverse range of practitioners into the room for that conversation, which was important to us because of this recognition, that community based practise is happening at a range of levels and it's not always framed as community arts and cultural development, but that knowledge and set of understandings and protocols around working with communities and nevertheless entirely applicable and thinking about how we situate this learning in that broader arts frame felt important so it was great to see the level of engagement we got from a diverse set of practitioners.

Scotia It's true, you know, that the language we put around a practice becomes so definitive in a way where actually the pendulum of of activity in what we call community engaged practise or community and cultural element is so broad that part of our challenge is to work out what would be an umbrella to frame that and support it and to be able to articulate it more effectively so that we can have good care and responsibility within how we do that work.

June I think it's really important to take on board the broadening out of this practice. You've heard me before on this idea of seeing community arts and cultural development on a continuum of arts practice, where there's different levels of engagement that are happening with communities. There's different levels of self-determination and transference of power that are playing out in various projects that are being undertaken with or by communities. So but I think that some of the fundamental learnings that have come out of years of the practise that we've done in community arts and cultural development is is relevant across that continuum. And I'm really keen that we keep our eyes up and seeing the relevance of the practise more broadly. So that the practice framework is really a resource that can be tapped into by a broad range of tracked practitioners and is certainly not seen as a series of hoops that people have to jump through before they can call themselves a community arts and cultural development practitioner. Like for me, that's a form of reverse elitism that I have railed against all through my engagement in this in this sector. So yeah, that that that feels to me, to be the real opportunity we've got here.

Scotia Yeah, I agree to be able to give some support and collegial engagement across that whole spectrum is so important.

June Hmm. And to understand, understand ourselves as vital within the arts sector and to see artists across the spectrum as our colleagues. Yeah, I guess the sort of advocate in me never dies.

Scotia It's always been a challenge, hasn't it, to be able to articulate effectually the common language? And maybe that's part of the beginnings of the process, isn't it?

June I think it is. I often find myself saying to people, Look, it's not rocket science, because otherwise it can sound like something that's exclusionary. But at the same time, it's a very sophisticated thing to be able to go into a community. I mean, it's such a privilege and responsibility to work in the community and the need to do that in a way that at the very least does no harm and at its best opens up a kind of whole world of creative possibilities that participants can control and use to tell their story their way. Like that takes time and skill and thoughtful reflection.

Scotia So, yeah, it requires a kind of articulated process, doesn't it? So we do, we do have to be able to create a clarity around what our processes in order to be able to assure our funders, our communities, our participants, that they are working with us in safety and with some intent.

June Exactly. I feel like we've got into talking about the practice framework and the Code of Conduct now, but that's great. But I also don't want to lose the other thing that came with the with the pilot programme was the establishment of making time, which was the peer to peer gatherings that Joe Brown from CAN worked with you to put together across two years, which were monthly telephone connections. Listen to me. What an old girl

Scotia telephone

June monthly. You know,

Scotia Zoom conferences

June Oh they were Zoom. Oh look, it was even more sophisticated than I knew. But you know, again, that peer to peer support, I think, was really fantastic. And I'd love to see CAN back in a position where it could sustain that within its ongoing programme because I think people found that really helpful.

Speaker 2 Yeah, it's interesting, you know, I think that's if nothing else, Covid has showed us the potential more broadly of what can occur on on a screen. But you know, it is. I think we've got still a lot to learn about that online space and how we actually use it as a functional, safe relational building platform,

June Yes, it's incredibly challenging. Yeah.

Scotia Yes, a great adventure ahead, really. The whole online and

June continuing adventure,

Scotia continuing adventure. Well, out of all of this conversation and and questioning, we've created this Creating Well report that aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the challenges of the community, arts and culture of development workers, but also a pathway like an action map to how we as a sector might be able to address some of these challenges we really wanted from this work that there be a legacy that continues to grow and kind of advocate, I suppose more effectually for some real structural change so that we can be supporting each other in this process, rather than seen as an isolated, difficult task to be advocating always for yourself. So shall we have a look at the recommendations?

June Let's.

Scotia So there are six recommendations that have come out of this research phase, and we're going to break down each one a bit and describe what the recommendations mean and why we felt that they were important. June, would you like to take the first one, establish a practice framework and code of conduct like this may not seem the immediate thing that will come out of something called professional supervision, but actually it was a key driver that we needed to address in order to support all of the other processes that we were looking at.

June Yes. And for me, this is framed by some of that earlier context we've talked about today that so often it's very difficult to describe the work to people who haven't experienced it or don't know what it is - community arts and cultural development means. And really, over the years, we've had so many discussions about definitions, et cetera, et cetera. I'm actually more interested in what's come out of this, which is this idea of a practice framework and code of conduct that's not so prescriptive about definition, but is a way of capturing what matters most in the work and gives people a roadmap for practice I think whether that's for use by arts workers or employers or anyone who's even contemplating starting to work meaningfully with communities. So it's really about the things that support ethical and safe engagement, as you were saying earlier. And because there's so much, there's an inbuilt irony in this work, because you're going into a community and looking to transfer power from you as the artist or the arts worker to the participants so that they can determine how that project unfolds, what the stories are that are going to be shared and they're in a position to tell their story their way. But you've also got to maintain your own internal power throughout that process to hold the project effectively and help bring it to fruition. And that is quite a dance.

Scotia Well, that's interesting because my favourite definition that is to be a choreographer of experience, because it is a dance, isn't it.

June Yeah, that's a lovely phrase. Yeah, because, you know, one minute you're leading, you are stepping in and and creating a framework and a space in the next minute is stepping back to make sure that others are taking over and and giving voice to anything and everything that they are feeling. But so, so and that's happening all the way through the process, so to ensure if I go back to my idea that you're doing no harm in that process and also that you don't exhaust yourself in that process is quite the task. So I think having practitioners articulating some of the intricacies in that - the ethics of the work in the form of protocols and practices will be of enormous benefit to many who work with communities and help others to kind of consider and appreciate what is involved, what you need to be aware of, what you need to be thinking about.

Scotia So yeah, I think that there actually is structured framings around what we're doing. It's not,

June you know, it's not make it up as you go

Scotia It's not an improvisational process. It's improvisational within that, but it's framed around a real strength of of intent and purpose and articulated thinking

June and years of thinking and practise. So that's the other issue here that it's not about hampering the diversity of practise that we do see across communities and across countries, really, but coming to the core of what underpins this? The ethics of this work and the ability to create safe spaces for it to happen, I think that's what's at the nub of the practise framework and the code of conduct. Yeah, I think that's fundamental to to the advocacy for structural change. I think we have to be able to articulate this in order to tell people what their responsibility is in relation to a sustainable way of working.

Scotia Yes, exactly. Like we can't ask and demand for change if we don't have a baseline from which we are asking that. Yeah.

June Yes. Absolutely. And also a baseline that sort of spells out. Who's responsible for what? Well, so that the responsibility of the artist or arts worker is also clear. And just sort of assists in that process of contracting or boundary setting. So I think for all of those reasons, it's important. But also, don't you think that, you know, with all that's been going on in our society to make more explicit the unspoken power dynamics that are at work in so many settings, whether that's, you know, the prejudices and unconscious biases that that are at work in a dominant culture, this this is so much at the heart of this community based practise that I think being able to articulate this is is timely and necessary. I mean, people want you to be as explicit as you can be these days about power, really?

Scotia Well, exactly, and that's the principle underpinning the work, surely. So the more articulate we are about that, the clear it is people understand what they're coming into and also the positions that they can take within that work.

June Hmm. And you know, for if I think about it from the point of view of Community Arts Network, where we constantly engaged in cross-cultural and intercultural practise and working on that principle of First Peoples first and having that grounded in years now of working with Noongar communities and learning from them. You know, it just it could never be more relevant than it is right now. So for, for me, with that long view and the and the more recent view, it's a kind of coalescence of things that I think have been at work in community arts over decades. So there's a lot to contribute to the broader discussions that are going on, and there's a lot to take, especially from the intercultural work, I think.

Scotia Yes, and what a great time with energy around to make this happen.

June Yes.

Scotia So our second recommendation was to build targeted professional development programmes, and this came as a, I suppose, going back to what you're saying about the dearth of service providers and this lack of any real opportunity for new or emerging artists to come into the practise is even less opportunity for people to connect in a mentoring role on projects that are already happening because they are. I have to say, less and less available for less projects happening on the ground than there were. Certainly when I was

developing in this practise and had the privilege of been working alongside many great elders in the sector.

So we it was identified very clearly on on the point of view of all artists at every level coming in that the need to be very specific and to target a professional development for them, the environments in the work that was being conducted and that it needed to fit both emerging artists but also have work, particularly for the experienced artists where there is, I think, across the arts in general a sense that there isn't much support around capacity building or further expansion of work practices.

So if we could again, if we go back to the idea of framing a practice and building a code of conduct that from that we can build ready and responsive training that will support people one to understand what that means in reality on the ground, but also, two, how they can build and articulate and to identify their gaps, but also their strengths in being able to be part of training and also potentially to offer training coming from a background of great experience and multiple applications of their work.

I think that capacity to actually offer training again is something that there was a real hunger for that, particularly from some of the elders in our communities who have such a wealth of experience and knowledge and yet don't seem to have any capacity or pathways in order to share this as they're leaving, like yourself, leaving the sector and also feeling like that, there isn't a capacity for that legacy to be recognised and held precious.

June Whoa, well, I could really stomp into that turf, couldn't I? Oh yes, and sound very pompous. But it's more... You know, there's a couple of things in there. Learning is just lifelong. So the things I've learnt in the last few years. Especially well in the last five years, five to six years, it can, particularly around the intercultural work. You know are things that would have been really helpful to know 40 years ago when I kicked off, but that's not the nature of our learning journey. And when you're engaged in this kind of practice, where you're putting yourself out there with all kinds of people, real cross-sections of ages, experiences, cultures, you've got to stay sharp. And you've got to stay curious. Or you stuffed, really, I think, or or or you're potentially dangerous.

Scotia Yes, you don't remain relevant. Yeah. There's danger of harm.

June Yes, exactly. So. So I guess I would temper that thing of elders and wisdom with I would frame that in the in the context of it, we're all lifelong learners, so it keeps happening.

Scotia I think it also is part of that reflective learning like you talk about lifelong learning, but reflective learning also requires time and space for us to be able to reflect and investigate whether there is pressure to take the next job or to kind of move on the we don't really have structured support around that reflective process in order to identify great things, but also the challenges that we met and how we how they might be new or more more complex within these new contexts of our societies that we working in. So I think part partly the meaning of that in terms of our experience, more experience artists is to be able to do that, have time for that and be supported to do that more effectively.

June Absolutely. And I love that process myself. I mean, I do find myself sought out by younger practitioners who identify something in the way that I operate that works for them. I mean, I'm not out working on the ground with communities anymore, but. Well, yeah, not so often. It's more in that managerial and leadership role, but still it's the thing of walking,

walking your values, I guess, walking your talk and I love those opportunities, but you're right that - whether they'll pay, once I'm no longer on a wage. It's another matter. I mean, I've been there before, you know. But whether they do or not, they pay me back in terms of the exchange and the sharing of the new environments that some of the some of those practitioners are finding themselves in in the shared problem-solving that we do when we talk, which I find, well it's just shared problem-solving and collaboration is is just the air I breathe, that's how I like to work. So it's very fulfilling.

Look, I also would observe in relation to this particular. A recommendation that we have waxed and waned around any kind of formalised or tertiary study of community arts and cultural development. So certainly in the early days of practice, there was not a lot of formalised training and it was not fully it wasn't being embraced in any of the institutions. And then that did start to happen. But over time, with all the the cutting back of Universities and training institutions and the vocational thing and the importance of getting people into well-paid jobs. We've seen this work diminish from that agenda. And I. Wouldn't necessarily comment on the quality or otherwise of the direction that those particular institutions and programmes took. But you know, it's another area where it's very hard for anyone to identify a pathway into the work other than by doing.

Scotia Yes, exactly. And then in the doing, it's often in isolation, unfortunately. So the media and the mistake, yeah, I'm working with a mentor or working as a kind of trainee or or what's the term apprentice doesn't really exist anymore.

June No. Well, I mean, we we tried to build that in where we can with our programmes, particularly because we are keen to develop the skills of people from the cultures of the communities we're working with. And well, often the skills are there but placing them into the context of this kind of work and creating new opportunities. But it's yeah, so we know the issue of the need for structural change because it's not easy to argue for that kind of capacity building budget in your funding application. So you know it is and it's in the applied learning is the best. In this job, you must you if you've got the right people running alongside you and you've got the sounding board, as well, I think I think what we're discovering in this conversation is how interlinked all these recommendations are.

Scotia Yes, exactly, because the recognition

June all my dot points are coming up at once.

Scotia Yes. Well, they are all interlinked. And part of the challenge of this next part of the campaign, I suppose, is to look at, well, it's not the chicken or the egg. You know, we collectively have to look at all these in a in a similar way and one will feed the other. And hopefully, as we inch along the pathways of getting these things, some will get getting some clarity around these opportunities, but also some structure put into place. Then all the rest will equally be balanced in the process. So, you know, build and maintain a community of practise is number six, and that's really what you're talking about. Like, how do we work at a peer level to share and learn as part of our professional development? But also, how do we escalate that so that that learning can be shared more broadly, particularly for new artists who are wishing to come in and see some validity in this practice?

June Hmm. And as you say, for the mid-career or more established artists, then you're starting to talk about a bespoke model for what it is that they are honing in their practice and who it is that might or who they are that might best support that.

Scotia Yes. That growth, which is kind of number four, which is the embedded wellbeing plans and professional supervision into community arts and culture management practises. So there's a number also

June kind of three,

Scotia yes. Oh, actually, we've jumped on him. We really have that way, I guess.

Let me take you back to establishing a professional supervision network.

Yes, which is exactly what you've been expressing in the experience of trying to look for containers of articulation and support, which is directly into the practise that we are through the framework trying to articulate more specifically.

June Yeah. And if I will just reflect on this a little bit from a personal perspective because I think. This is essential. And professional supervision for me has been quite critical in leadership and it's been self-funded. You know, essentially I've gone looking for the support I needed at various points. And for me, and I think this is relevant in community work as it is in managing staff or running organisations. It's actually about making sure that my pathology doesn't play out in my workplace. So or at least not too much so that I recognise when my reactions or responses are being coloured by my own formative experiences. And then I've got that capacity to just take pause. Step back a moment and reflect before I jump in or move forward. So I've definitely self-funded forms of supervision throughout my working life. And. Still always seek help when I recognise that something is being triggered by something at work. So, you know, that's that's human to have that happen. But it's. I think it's an essential part of being able to operate. As cleanly as possible and to create safe environments for others that you know and hold your own areas of. What I call pathology, I guess the potential areas of dysfunction. And you don't play them out on your colleagues or your community.

Scotia Well, coming from a performance background, I really like the words of Aristotle, and he talks about to be a best actor is to be the best person you can. And that means to, as you say, to understand yourself in a way that you can see what you're reflecting into the world around you. And you know as facilitators and choreographers or however you want to frame that their job is, is to make sure that we can be as transparent as possible. So part of that is to explore ourselves, really, isn't it, and to understand how we work and and how we present ourselves and what triggers us and yeah, we all, we need to do that from both sides. I think when you talk about pathology, it's a kind of broader sense of whole of self, whereas it's about our own psychology, but also about our practice. So this idea of a professional supervision network is to have both, you know, that we're where can we get some psychological self-care connected with an understanding of our practice so that the two can walk side by side?

June Well, that's the ideal way towards a sort of integrated self to help you take your whole self to work, which does not mean you knock yourself out. No, it yeah. If you really take your whole self to work in a safe way, then it means you've got some boundaries and some clarity about self-responsibility in this. So. So I guess, you know, that's always been really important to me. So I think this issue of the professional supervision network is a really exciting one because even as someone who's been able to earn a living wage most of the times through my career, it's not easy to sustain that level of psychological professional support. So and it's almost impossible on an independent artists wage. So the

opportunity to work together to create some kind of sustainable delivery of professional supervision is, to me, one of the most exciting initiatives that arose from the report.

Scotia Yeah. And in some ways, it's one that's accepted across other sectors with for a very long time. So people who are working in the front lines of community engagement and yet seem such a long way away from what we currently have. But, you know, I think it's very exciting.

So Recommendation four is embedded wellbeing plans and professional supervision into CACD programmes. So in some ways, we touched on this earlier with the idea that, you know, there's dual responsibility for independent artists working on programmes, as well as the organisations and the funding bodies that are supporting them to to be active in terms of an articulated support programme. Because I think we we often talk about it and there's a kind of expectation that it's done, but it's not necessarily part of project management or a considered sensibility around how projects are implemented.

So, you know, it seems like a simple recommendation, but actually it's quite complex in the culture of how we currently working in the sector. And there's a kind of inherent white, as I said earlier at the moment, that artists just need to pick it up and get on with and look after themselves. Whereas actually, what we're trying to say in this recommendation is that we both have to work collaboratively on this process and both have dual responsibility around a duty of care for ourselves and the communities that we working with. Because inherently, if we're going into communities in a situation that isn't where we're not operating at our best, then we're also potentially opening up the opportunity for that to be problematic.

June Yeah, definitely. And I think one of the challenges with this recommendation, to be honest, is going to be who's going to drive that advocacy and how are we going to get that forward? Because as we know, both our organisations are under the pump in various ways and we can do our bit, but we need much broader buy in, I think, to really get this issue of self-care through to federal and state government funders and and local government.

Scotia Yes, I think I think that's where we we're sort of talking about budget lines in the way that you have to kind of ensure that things are budgeted in to an appropriate sensibility of timelines, et cetera. But we've got a lot of support around us in terms of other sectors who've done this and do it very well. Like if you look at the sports sector who have an extraordinary framework of professional supervision and stipulated programmes for their athletes, you know, we work in the same way at a high performance level and yet we don't have this as part of our intrinsic practise, and that's come through a strong advocacy from the sector organisations. Also, the social worker and health care has come through with strong mandates around professional supervision and care programmes, and that's been a very strong union activity that's enabled that to happen over the years. So you're right, it is about how do we come together to actually seriously address this as a collective responsibility rather than saying, you know, rather than dividing it up into a kind of your responsibility or their responsibility, we do have to see it as a collective engagement process

June and understand as that sports environment understands and frames it that we're talking about risk - managing risk and responsibility here too. Risk to our workers and risk to communities and people who, for whatever reason, are more vulnerable in the processes that we undertake.

Scotia It's interesting working in the disaster management area, there's a kind of research that came out where currently, the point of spend for disasters is I think it's 97 percent per cent of funding, which is a massive amount of money is spent on recovery, whereas three percent is spent on preparedness and mitigation. And they are currently desperately trying to shift that around because they understand that in order to reduce that cost, you have to have better mitigation structures.

So you know, it's the same for us in order to reduce our impact cost. We have to look at ways of mitigating and it is a collective task that is required. And, you know, maybe it's in our approach in the way that we language things will enable us to be able to get through into those conversations with our governments and state federal organisations in terms of being able to see that as a care responsibility.

June I hope so, because when you talk about that mitigation in the emergency response setting, you know this, this work IS one of the mitigations.

Scotia Yes, exactly.

June And so. Yeah, as as it is for so many of the issues that people are confronting, so being able to argue that this work well, I suppose that's the more generalised advocacy for this way of working.

Scotia Well, that's how framework goes back to that point one.

June Mm hmm. Yeah, exactly. And what it produces, what it allows for people and and therefore. You need as you are doing that work, to be able to model the care that you are offering to communities because, you know, I mean we our work is strength based always. And we need to maintain our own strength to be able to stay with it.

Scotia And to give the work the best opportunity it has. To the goal that we say it is.

June Yeah, but again, it's also that understanding of process and of the things that underpin good process and combating that notion of just give us the outcomes.

Scotia And, you know, there are a lot of collaborators around the development of community practice who who also need to take some responsibility in terms of how these projects are being supported and and what the plans of support and care are put around that that's primarily people like local government who are funding and expecting great outcomes from these projects, as well as other philanthropy bodies, not just the community, arts organisations or arts artists themselves. So, you know, this recommendation is to also up the ante for all those people who are building and expecting outcomes from the funding or the offering of these projects.

June Yes. And I think that is where I feel like I've seen certain local governments who really are getting the depth of this work over time and understanding that if you do it wrong, you you you don't engage your community. You can disaffect you

Scotia you live with the legacy

June these communities. And then that's your legacy, and that is more harm than good. So some of us so certainly some, I think over time I'm seeing and really appreciating that there is a depth to this work. So I think local government is a really good place for us to try

and work with with this. The other thing is that local government is the place where there's budgets for professional development, and we've found both at CAN and I see this in my role as on the board of the Chamber of Arts and Culture in WA that when professional development is offered in the area of the arts, there's a big take up from local government. So there is a hunger for increased learning around the application of the arts broadly and also the the importance of really responsive community engagement that is enacted through community arts and cultural development. So I think if there's some way of working with them about have that appreciation for professional development for their workers translates to the realm of the individual artists or the people contracting on to these projects. You know that that's just a line that I think could be important to us. Who knows how far we get?

Scotia Very true. Well, I know just working with some local government representatives in a project down in southern New South Wales, where their response was, you know, you do the work that we can't, but that we need to be doing. And so they are, you know, you're right. I think there's a broadening understanding of of what value we add to the expectations and responsibilities of the local government.

June And that is what we are seeing increasingly with the work that we're doing with Noongar communities and First People that that local government is recognising that if you go into that space and get it wrong or it's very hard, then to build trust and move forward. So the capacity to come to an organisation that has used the arts and community arts and cultural development to build that relationship over years with different communities has I feel like that's much more being recognised as a very particular set of experiences and knowledge that is worth tapping into.

Scotia And again, it's a matter of how we articulate that message so that we can get them to back this process as part of our ongoing campaign. So what about with community artist practitioners creating individual wellbeing plans, that's number five, and in some ways, I think it's a similar challenge, you know, we have we have a group of practitioners who are mostly kind of under the pump to get work done don't have a lot of time to kind of reframe and reflect and perhaps haven't been encouraged into good practise around this work and certainly not been given any leadership necessarily around how to do it well.

June Oh, I feel really strongly about this one, too, because and and I do situate it along with the need for structural change, but really, you know, nobody can set the boundaries for us. So that's that's something you have to do for yourself. And I guess I learnt the hard way through experiences of burnout and anxiety starting to impinge on my effectiveness or, you know, at key periods stopping my effectiveness entirely. So I think. Yeah, fundamental to this is understanding that we are not indispensable. So no matter how compelling we think the case is that we are, it's time to let go of the ego and let that truth in that, you know,

Scotia as hard as it is, we all like to be indispensable.

June We are not indispensable. And once you once you allow yourself to consider that possibility, it's really liberating. You know, and for me, it's been essential because often in CEO roles, you can really feel like that and it's a pathway to disaster.

Scotia Yeah, I also think it's exacerbated, too, because more often than not, this work is done in isolation. You're like, you're the singular artist working within a kind of a very

complex and deep kind of exchange with the community that you're working with. So you can begin to feel that very strong sense of being a linchpin for a lot of action and support.

June Oh, definitely, definitely, and people will very happily put that on you. You know, whether that's whether that's your employer. You know, I remember a very feisty stand up I had to have with a manager in a local government authority where I'd been contracted to do some work and then had very little support for that work. And I was managing a really significant piece of work that had a large public profile and said to this person. I'm hanging out on a limb and potentially a significant reputational risk to your organisation if I don't pull this off. So really, you need far better support. Mm-Hmm. But, you know, it's not easy to stand up to an employer in that setting.

Scotia No. And also the stress that you know, particularly for independent artists, is that you feel that then you won't get another job.

June Well I was an independent at the time, but I mean, you know it, it took it takes courage. And that's I haven't done, you know that that's quite a singular memory of just thinking this is absolutely beyond the pale, what's going on here, and I need to reframe this for this manager. But you know that that's not, yeah, that isn't easy to do, and it's not easy to walk away from things. But all of these things are occasionally necessary in a working life, in a long working life. They can be necessary if that's what it takes for you to hold your values and take care of yourself. But of course, you don't arrive at the position where you can do those things and look after yourself strongly unless you've got pretty good support and good sounding boards around you to work that stuff through. You don't arrive at that position instantly or in time, usually you get there after you've already started to feel the effects of overdoing it. So I think this thing of having trusted colleagues or supervisors and being able to formulate some ideas and look for some opportunities to manage different situations and settings is really important because we all need to develop a repertoire of ways of dealing with the difficult employer, the difficult community member, the difficult scenario, if we've only got one way of going about that, you know, we'll run out. So the more we can share knowledge and hear, from another perspective, the more you've got a chance to sort of build up your kit bag of approaches and

Scotia Yes. Well, that is a beautiful segue into recommendation six, which is build and maintain a community of practice, which is in essence what you're talking about.

June Hmm. Definitely. Yes. I mean, the idea of being an individual who creates a well-being plan for themselves and and then, you know, how is it enacted? It can't be enacted without

Scotia being without collegial support in

June In relationship with others working in your sector. Yeah. I think this is key.

Scotia And it's interesting we have them intrinsically to some degree, in greater or lesser degrees and some come and go and some stay with you forever. But I think there is something about that structured form which gives rise to a consistency that we don't get necessarily otherwise in our day to day practice. And I think it's through the consistency that we can start to feel that strength and support. And I should say, gather the tools around us to be able to be better and more effectual in having these conversations or setting these well-being structures around us and our communities.

June Yeah. And I think for those who've got a memory of the days when there was a community arts board or a community cultural development board or community partnerships community and that long history through Australia Council of quite specific funding into this area. It may there's a there's a potential to become nostalgic for that. And I guess I'd rather see that there's an opportunity now for this to be practitioner-led. And not a top down funding dependent model. We are talking about structural change to budgets and the input of new budget lines, and of course, that means some changes to the funding models

Scotia But ultimately, it's about self advocacy, isn't it?

June It is. It absolutely is. It's about getting to the point where you are courageous enough. Well, firstly, you're insightful enough to know what it is that your body, your mind, your heart needs to be able to sustain yourself as a worker. And you're courageous enough to, you know, hold to that.

Which is, you know, I have the voice of some of the individual artists who've been speaking up loudly in this independent artists process that's been going on in WA and they don't lack courage and they don't lack a voice but they still aren't getting the pay rates that they would like. So, you know, it's going to be a journey. I'm not pretending that it's easy and it just takes individual courage. But but I just want to make the point that I think it's easy to look back on those days when there was a sort of centralised agency that had a real hold on this area of work and become nostalgic for it. And there was there were real positives with it, and there were potential downfalls with it. And I think we have to hold, you know, it's time for us to own this.

Scotia We have to step into the leadership role. It's we need to do it in partnership with them, but we need to be able to lead it and be self-determining in how that information is, is framed and how it's developed

June and walk our talk really in this process. You know, organisations working in this space and as individuals who are committed to it.

Scotia Well, you know, the report was designed really as an invitation to our sector, to our peers and colleagues so that we could continue this conversation and map that path forward as a together as a kind of collective engagement process. And you know, we're sitting this week. World Mental Health Day is this week and the theme is "Mental health care for all. Let's make it a reality." And I suppose we're trying to make it a reality for ourselves and for our sector, and to do that with some generosity and dignity, I suppose in the process of how we build and formulate this as a kind of campaign, how, how for you and for the people who are listening to this and would like to do something to get involved, either as an individual practitioner or if they working for a funding body or an arts organisation or a local council, what could they do to take these findings and start implementing them in a practical level? What what are some of the ways that we could offer to begin this process?

June Well, I know it sounds really basic, but I think the first thing is to make sure the conversations happening and to talk with colleagues about your own well-being and and not in the ongoing anecdotal 'Oh my god, this is happening' way, but in the in the sort of group like sharing all good practice sharing solutions, sharing ways through

Scotia being action orientated.

June Yes. And really trying to turn maybe some of those well, moving beyond the the um, just debriefing into quite purposeful thinking about how you can support yourself more effectively and what you do need. So I think that that's the kind of starting to own this conversation in the peer to peer realm and getting that live. And then, you know, I think there are questions that we need to be ready to review around contracting and to look at getting the time and resources in to allow wellbeing practice.

Scotia And those practical steps are small but big, but also very manageable, aren't they? It's a matter of getting some of those structural frames together to share and to encourage the implementation advocacy for.

June Hmm. I think so, and I know at CAN we have this conversation when we get on a bit of a rolling kind of the big head of steam of momentum with projects and more ideas or opportunities are coming to us. And that ability sometimes to say no, because actually we've got to carve out the time for this reflection at a team level. You know, we can lose sight of that. And then, you know, it becomes apparent and we have to try and someone tries to pull it back. Mm hmm. So you I think we will wax and wane on this, but it's so important that this conversation is elevated and that the. And therefore, we're conscious when we're putting together a budget that the time is in there. And then we've got to advocate up and out. So it's all very well for all of us to decide, yeah, we've got this nailed, we know it unless we get that change moving up through the ranks of state, local, state and federal government agencies and spreading out to the philanthropic acts, and

Scotia this is where we

June sometimes the philanthropic can be easier.

Scotia But yeah, maybe they understand it more effectually, but this is where we we need to start to build our collective language about how we tell the story and then how we can escalate that into different spheres. Hmm.

Scotia We're looking forward to working with those colleagues who are keen to start building some, you know, again, looking at really formulating some actions around doing these very things that you've just talked about so that we can really get some legs behind it. So putting together some structural tools as well as putting together some of the language around the story, which we want people to be sharing and taking to their government representatives. So the working party is out there, people can sign on to it through our creative recovery website. We'll have the link at the bottom of this episode. And yeah keep the conversation going, I think that's really key. As you mentioned right up there, if we don't continue to have the conversation in a really serious and dedicated manner, then once again it will dribble away. You know, it's a very ripe moment in time and the context in which we're living in the context within which we're working for this work, to get traction and to find a place and and a bridge to enable it all to be actualise. So I look with some encouragement and enthusiasm to the fact that we can make these instrumental changes happen.

June Me, too, and I'll be there.

Scotia Good on you June

June post CAN.

Scotia Well, I'd like to thank you and take this moment to wish you all the best for your next chapter, because some listeners will know you and your co-CEO Monica Kane are about to finish up your tenure at Community Arts Network. Both of you having long on and off investment in that organisation, and I'm sure they're very sad to see you go as we in the sector are. But you know, what an amazing privilege has been for me to meet and work with you and to partner with you on this work and to be supported by your insights and encouragement and also the investment that you've made over your career and into this very vital network of artists and communities that you've been working with.

June Thanks Scotia. I mean, it's just been such a rich experience for many years, but this one, these years at CAN have been very special and in part because I've been co-leading with Monica and I know you've seen us in action together and it is a joy to work in such a dynamic and robust way with someone and generous way. I love it and I will miss it and we're both a bit melancholy at the moment, but we know that it's a great time to hand the organisation over. And yes, so it's been a privilege for CAN to be a part of this work, thank you so much

Scotia we wish you all the best for your next journey.

June Thanks.

Scotia Thanks for joining me for Creative Responders: In Conversation and special thanks to June for making the time to speak with me.

If you'd like to read the Creating Well report or access the sign up to the working party, you can go to creative.recovery.net.au/creatingwell. We'll also include links in the show notes.

If you're interested in hearing more on this topic, I'd also point you towards two of our previous documentary episodes that feature some of the participants of our Creating Well professional supervision pilot project -

Season 1, episode 4 with Fiona Sinclair, manager of the Understory Art and Nature Trail in Northcliffe, WA.

And Season 2, episode 4 with Silvano Giordano who shares his experience as co-Director of Wilurarra Creative, a community hub and arts studio for young Ngaanyatjarra people in Western Australia's Warburton Community.

All of our past episodes can be found in the usual podcast apps and also on our website along with transcripts for every episode and links related to the topics we cover.

We'll be back next month with another conversation, I hope you can join us then.

This podcast is produced by me, Scotia Monkivitch and my Creative Recovery Network colleague, Jill Robson.

Our sound engineer is Glen Morrow and original music is composed by Mikey Squire.

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Thanks for listening.