



Podcast Transcript

Creative Responders: in Conversation with Kate Sulan July 2020

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 front lines of the arts and emergency management sector as they prepare, respond and recover from disaster.

Today's guest is Kate Sulan.

Kate is a performance maker, director, dramaturge and facilitator. She is the founding Artistic Director of Rawcus - an award winning theatre company based in Melbourne, comprised of a radically diverse ensemble of 15 performers.

She is also one of the artists working on the five year Refuge project at Arts House which brings together emergency management, artists, the community and local, regional and international partners.

Through her work with Refuge, Kate has developed a productive working partnership with the Red Cross relating to their workshops around emergency preparedness for young people.

I've known Kate for many years now and I feel like her work is the perfect embodiment of what we mean when we talk about a "creative responder".

We cover a lot in this conversation and I particularly enjoyed hearing Kate's thoughts on how energising it is to work with young people; her observations on what arts-based thinking can bring to other sectors and also loved having the chance to talk about her wonderful cubby house installation project - which was part of the first year of Refuge and is such a powerful example of how the the intersection of creativity, young people and the emergency management space can come together to produce a real sense of delight.

I hope you enjoy this conversation with Creative Responder, Kate Sulan.

Scotia: Welcome, Kate. I'm here in Jaggara Turrubul country in Brisbane, Queensland. Where are you today?

Kate: I'm on Wurundjeri Country in Melbourne. And I just wanted to say that I particularly been taking a lot of nourishment, I live just up the road from the Mary Creek and it's been a really amazing place to be at this time. Very special place.

Scotia: Beautiful. We've just had rain here, which has been long awaited. Have you had any flushes through the creek there?

Kate: We have. One of the things that's been great during this time of lockdown is is just watching the creek swell and contract during this time but at the moment, it's a beautiful sunny day here and the creek's quite low.

Scotia: Kate, I met you in a more direct way, I think, through the refuge project, which we will come to a little later on in this conversation but I've known of your work for a long time, but I thought we might start to introduce our audience to you by asking you a little bit about your background and what your journey has been, your history as an artist?

Kate: Yes so, I am a theatre director and a performance maker and facilitator. And I have all the projects that I work on or make I make collaboratively, I have a really collaborative process with whoever I'm making with they're always co-authors and co-makers of the work.

And in particular, I'm the Artistic Director of Rawcus and have been for 20 years now and it's a company of performers with and without disabilities and we create and devise work that comes from the hearts and the minds and the imaginations and the bodies of these fifteen diverse performers.

And now I also do other projects and I came to the Refuge project as an artist who didn't have a big history of working in this space.

Many of the other artists of the Refuge Project have long practise of working creating art around climate crisis but that was quite new for me and my experience working on Refuge has really changed my practice and the way I think about things so that's been a really great project to be involved in for the last five years.

Scotia: Well, before we talk about Refuge, can you tell me a little bit more about your role in Rawcus, for people in Victoria it's a pretty well-known and loved company, but probably many of our friends listening wouldn't know much about the material that you create. Can you tell us a little bit about your journey in that very long relationship you've had.

Kate: Yeah, so. So Rawcus is a long term ensemble, so it's an ensemble of 15 artists and it's a group of very diverse artists who some identify as having a disability and some of the artists in the company don't - we have a range of type of different disabilities in the company.

And as I said, yes, fifteen performers and we work with a core design team and what's been amazing, it's really a long term artistic conversation between this group of performers and designers and together, we create work that really investigates what it is to be human, how complex and beautiful and wonderful it is.

And and each work kind of informs the next work we make. They're all in conversation with each other and the last the last work we made was a work called 'Song for a Weary Throat', which was a work about the state of the aftermath, what happens post a disaster and how a community recovers or doesn't recover, or how they traverse that time post-disaster and post-trauma and how to get out from loss and heartbreak and failure and it was a work about that, which was a big work.

Scotia: And such beautiful poetics in the title 'Song for a Weary Throat', where did the inspiration come for that?

Kate: So it's actually from a from a poet called Pauli Murray and she wrote "hope is a song in a weary throat" and I really love that and so that's where the title came from.

Scotia: Well, I can just sort of feel myself melt a little when I hear that.

Kate: I like that idea that, you know, that sometimes when we're at our lowest, we can find hope. It doesn't have to look energetic or optimistic or positive. It can be really small and beautiful.

Scotia: Now, I think a lot of the philosophy I read talks often about the magnificence of the ordinary. And that often those small daily steps that we don't necessarily value are the true value of of our resilience.

Kate: [00:07:15] Yeah, I love that. I love that. And I think what I discovered, what we discovered together making that work is, you know, like it's not a linear - emotions don't flow in a linear way when you're in recovery. -

[00:07:26] You know, you're you can be in a state of deep despair and then find yourself hysterically laughing and then move into kind of a place of gentle hope and I think that work really moved between those states.

And I know I know that I've had an experience where I've been at a funeral and sobbing one moment and then laughing, you know, with such joy in the next moment and how those emotions can sit together

Scotia: and release each other, really, don't they?

Kate: Yeah. So I felt I, I find that really helpful when I think, you know, it's not a linear thing, recovery, in any shape or form.

Scotia: [00:08:05] No. You know, in some ways that work perhaps has been influenced by your interactions with the work around the disaster management sector that you've been developing through Refuge. We haven't talked about refuge on this program before - would you like to introduce that project? It's a partnership that we've had with Arts House over a number of years now but can you tell us a little bit about how you came to it and how you perceive that project?

Kate: [00:08:32] Sure. Refuge is, it's a five year project which and it was conceived by Angharad Wynne Jones, who was at the time the artistic director of Arts House and it's a project that brings together artists and emergency services, scientists, academics, community members to explore climate related disasters.

And it does so in each year, each of the five years, it imagines into a different climate related disaster. So the first year was a flood. The second year was a heat wave. The third year was a pandemic, which feels very interesting now to have imagined into that scenario and then be living into that scenario. And then we looked at displacement and this is its final year. And we're looking at a confluence of multiple climate crises, which also feels so poignant, given that we're you know, there's been the bushfires and pandemic rolling and cascading into one another.

Scotia: [00:09:28] And I think that's such a deeply untapped conversation, really. We've talked about it before you know, this idea of being prepared from for multiple and longitudinal impact is something that our systems haven't really articulated particularly well to date.

So, you know, we're in a real learning curve around that now, not only in Australia, but in the world around how do we how do we create some balance about managing at such a diverse range of ways?

Kate: [00:10:01] Absolutely. And how do you prepare and recover at the same time, you know...

Scotia: and in an articulated way rather than an assumed way

Kate: [00:10:10] Absolutely. So I think it's a really interesting year this year. All the artists were getting together and we were talking about the year that we did the pandemic and we were laughing because we couldn't imagine it, even our imagined version of the pandemic wasn't as extreme as we found ourselves in. And so we even hit the limits, we thought we were kind of being

quite bold with our imaginative offer in that time. And it was quite, kind of understated compared to what we've actually what we are and have been living through. So that was interesting.

Scotia: [00:10:45] But I think I think one of the beautiful things about the project is it really is a space where nobody is the expert.

So everyone's the expert in their various areas but together, we are kind of all trying to navigate and work something out together and it's been quite a beautiful process for me. You know, I really hadn't had a conversation with anyone who worked in emergency services before this project and now I feel like I understand that in a really different way.

And the way that the project runs is at the beginning of each year, we have a lab. And in that lab, the artist's listen to scientists, academics, emergency services experience, and then we also share the artistic process so it's very much an exchange where we're listening and asking questions of each other.

And from that lab, we take away some of those ideas and conceive of projects or ideas from that place. So it's a real... it's one of those projects where the sectors are coming together to create something that couldn't exist before or even independently and it's a really interesting project

Scotia: and an exciting place to have some experimentation where you don't have to resolve or create positive outcome necessarily - you can fail and learn and share in a really safe environment.

Kate: [00:12:16] Yeah, and there's some really important parts of the philosophies behind the refuge project, you know, First Nations wisdom is really important and valued.

We talk a lot about being in the unknown and playing in the dark together. We look at what we need to build in ourselves and each other and and it's kind of this deep knowledge that the survival of each individual is bound up in our collective ability to survive and thrive.

And there's another artist, Lorna, who who is deeply involved in the project and she she talks about conversation a the art form and so it's very, the artists who are involved in the project all have really different disciplines and ways of working and it's a really interesting mix of thinkers and makers.

Scotia: [00:13:07] So your first project, which I really loved, Kate and I often talk about, was the cubby house project. Can you tell us a little bit about who you worked with on that and how you kind of evolved the idea around the importance of building cubbies?

Kate: [00:13:20] Sure. I love that project too. So that was my very first project for the Refuge project and that year we were turning Arts House, who hosted this project, into a relief centre

because Arts House is actually one of the designated relief centres for North Melbourne. And in the lab, I just listened a lot to, I've never I'd never been to a relief centre, and I listened a lot to people who were talking about those relief centres.

And there were some things that struck me. One was this statement that currently in a disaster, animals are better catered for and planned for than children in relief centres. So that really stuck with me.

Also something you said, Scotia, I don't know if you remember, but you talked about them being very noisy places. How do you deal with the noise in relief centres? And that really stuck with me as well as this kind of idea of, you know, I've always been interested in, you know, hope and how do you maintain hope?

And then there was another thing that I thought about that came out of that lab was, you know, children need to feel and know that they're safe. But also, you know, what is the role of young people in a disaster?

And so those were kind of things that sat in my brain from that lab. And so I conceived of this project and how it worked is there was a big central cubby, a very, very large space, which was all made out of paper and cardboard and in that space hosted, it was a space to kind of be calm and relaxed and there were, it was beautifully, you could come and sit and get comfortable.

And in it, there were three listening stations and in those stations were music for a disaster. And I interviewed three different groups of people and asked them what kind of music they'd like to have access to in a disaster.

So there's a one set of a playlist composed by eight to 12 year old - scouts actually, the Kensington Scouts and their playlist is fantastic. So, you know, they didn't want soothing, calming music. They wanted inspiring - they had the theme from Tinker Bell. They had Indiana Jones in their playlist. They wanted to kind of feel like heroes. And that was a lot of their music was th

Then I also interviewed some teenagers and so had their music, which was different again. And then some adults. So, yeah, music that people would like to have access to in times of disaster and also Red Cross hosted workshops in that space and we had a harpist play as well.

Scotia: [00:16:04] I think something about the environment was the sign of the handmade processes and the idea of a place that would hold you. That's not a room, but it was soft and it was well, it was kind of a place you could be held by.

Kate: [00:16:21] Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, they were weaving workshops in there so you could it was really a space like a like a breakout respite space really in this in this very chaotic space.

But the other part of the project, which I really loved, was that - so there was this big central cubby. But then there was an invitation to anyone, young people took it up, but actually lots of people took it up, different ages and it became a kind of multi aged activity - you could build your own cubby anywhere in the centre.

And we had some material we had blankets and string and cardboard and tape so nothing very elaborate and you could come and get some materials and build a cubby.

But the difference is it wasn't just building a cubby, you had to register your cubby, had to give your cubby a name. There was a big cubby registration board so you had to register your cubby, give it a name, say where it was.

And then you were invited to also create a postbox for your cubby and then there was another postbox at the Central Station and people were invited to send notes of hope or encouragement to each other's cubbies and they were delivered by the scouts.

And so you had this beautiful thing where there was cubbies being set up everywhere and letters being exchanged between Cubbies, people asking to borrow things, Cubby villages and then when people moved on, they came and said, my cubby's now empty and there's an invite to someone to take it over, make it their own, or you could decommission your cubby, which meant the materials came back into the central pool.

So throughout the project, that relief centre ran for, you know, 24 hours but this this particular activity was open for 12 and the way the space kept evolving and changing and people occupying different spaces and it also just put this fantastic energy because...

Scotia: Oh it was beautiful, there was this real sense of drive and purpose. And I think to me, if we're thinking about trying to philosophise any of this, the fact that people could have ownership over their space, which is not the reality of a refuge centre, generally, you're kind of pretty confined to a fairly structured and organised space. But the fact that you could take a little corner and make it your own and actually give it your own sense of identity and care and kind of commitment was pretty beautiful.

Kate: [00:18:45] It was gorgeous. And the names that people came up with and you know, the encouragement that they sent to each other and relationships happened so, you know, there would be a child here and a child there and they'd kind of come up around the same time and I'd invite them to make a cubby together and suddenly you had, you know, new friendships formed and relationships made.

And I didn't expect it would have such a incredible take up that adults wanted to do it as well.

Scotia: [00:19:14] And, you know, I mean, again, you know, maybe it's that sense of sharing and hope and key... I think one thing that is always noted in post-disaster is a sense of your control being taken away by the orders and the demands and the just the destruction that you're facing, which to have some small part of your world that you can hang onto and have some control over and that is yours, is really important. And in a way, these cubbies that you created were such an epitome of that.

Kate: Yeah. And they, they also were a source of delight. People loved, you know, like if you didn't want to make one, you also had all these little installations popping up and people busily working away and really their materials were just blankets and string and tape and cardboard. They were not elaborate materials at all.

Scotia: I think one of the key processes with the refuge project has been the building of those relationships and part of the interest in setting up the programme from the beginning was looking at, you know, where does influence lie in influencing how artists work within the space and understanding of disaster management but also the other way around, how can we as artists influence these organisations that are generally operating in a pretty historic and structural way? And one relationship you have evolved over these last few years with Red Cross. Can you tell us a little bit about what your exchange has been with them and how that came to be?

Kate: [00:20:51] Yeah, it's been a really lovely also, I think that's a benefit of a long term project, is that that relationship has grown really slowly and carefully and there's a deep, deep relationship now.

And it's really started with Red Cross running, they ran their RediPlan. So Red Cross run a preparedness workshop called the RediPlan Workshop and the first year they ran it in the main cubby.

And what happened in that exchange was they were planning to run the standard RediPlan workshop but because the environment was so different, they adapted their workshop for the environment, it was much more, became much more one on one conversations and very fluid.

And what also happened in that time is they became like curators for the art space, they were introducing each other and people to the art they were saying, after you've spoken to me you should go and listen to this music track.

And so they became hosts for the cubby. And that was not something that was planned that just kind of evolved and was this beautiful thing where they were interacting with my artwork and I was interacting with their workshops and it was forming this new new relationship and that just happened.

So that was where it started. And then I started to think about preparedness a bit more and what that looked like and what that could mean and I worked with, one of his next projects I did was with the students at St. Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre, which is a school for disadvantaged and disenfranchised young people, teenagers, secondary school it is.

And the young people who who else who access that school, really, they live many of them live in a state of disaster permanently. You know, there's a lot going on in their lives and they really have a lot to say and a lot to offer on this on this in terms of, you know, how to prepare and recover and live through disaster,

Scotia: Well, resilience isn't it...

Kate: Resilience. But extraordinary young people in extraordinary circumstances. And so I did a project with them where we took the Red Cross RediPlan, which is a document which kind of says, you know, to be prepared here's some practical things you need to think of your documents, you know, food, water, etc, etc..

And I said, yes, this is great, but what about if we made an emotionalo ...so you need your practical grab and go bag - but what would an emotional grab and go bag look like? What would that look like? So that you could be emotionally prepared or emotionally supported. And so we did. And I worked with him over two terms. And we created together this idea of a of an emotional preparedness kit. And we looked at objects and we looked at environment, again we looked at sound and music. We looked at what qualities they had inside themselves that they could draw on. Sense of humour, you know, sense of hope. We created kind of banners with words of encouragement. So it was a beautiful project. And then we used the kind of template of the Red Cross RediPlan document, and we created an alternative version, you know, something to go with it that was an emotional version, emotional grab and go bag version.

And then the following year, which was last year, Red Cross and I actually co-ran a RediPlan workshop as part of Refuge, where they delivered their version of the RediPlan and then I added kind of this other version and we're going to continue that project and look at developing and designing that preparedness workshop that takes in, that is is inclusive and diverse and takes in a whole lot of other ways of of being in the world.

So that's that's a project that's ongoing and a relationship with Red Cross that's kind of really deep and embedded now.

Scotia: [00:25:07] Yeah. And I think it's worth reiterating again that, you know, these kind of exchanges take time and it's such a privilege to have that time because so often we don't get an

opportunity to sit in relationship with our partners to be able to unpack and be able to think through and test and trial ways of collaborating across different knowledges.

Kate: [00:25:29] And absolutely, you know, Red Cross are coming from a very particular framework and needed to trust that whatever was going to complement or sit next to it was not going to take away their really important messaging that Red Cross is doing around preparedness. So, you know, building up that trust and understanding that that it's a complement, and not a change or a mixed messaging is important when that work on preparedness is so important and vital.

Scotia: [00:26:01] And I think something about your work in Refuge that, again, has been of interest for me is this role of the voice of children and young people.

We often are trying to advocate and look at ways of how we bring alternative and diverse voices into kind of the broader framework of disaster management. And I think the place of children, young people, has always been very hidden.

And there's a number of projects that we've highlighted through this podcast and other work around how they have so much to offer actually in preparedness and recovery and response and recovery. And their contribution needs to be equally valued and there's many things that they bring into this space, which we we don't get access to in general practise.

Would you like to make any comment about that? I think there was something about the poetics of the voice of children that came through your work particularly. But, you know, it's had its influence now right into a key structured organisation in in the disaster management field.

Kate: [00:27:11] Absolutely. I mean, I think that young people are brilliant. And I think that they have a different experience and take on the world. And that that wisdom is really important for us to listen to and hear.

And I think, you know, I come from the place that we need as much diversity of thinking and experience, because that collective wisdom just makes us make better decisions when we're hearing from as many different experiences as possible and young people have a really great voice.

I think my experience of working with young people is they often ask the best questions that make me think about things in a way that I haven't thought about them. And at the end, because their questions are so great, it means that we work together to try and kind of find answers or navigate the questions, you know.

I've been thinking about that Norwegian prime minister who ran a session for young people to ask her questions during the pandemic and I think, yes, it's great they get to hear from the prime

minister, but also the prime minister gets to hear the questions or what what is of most concern for that group of people and that's of real use. And, you know, definitely during the cubby project, just rather than seeing them as something to be managed, they were a huge resource in that in that relief centre

Scotia: Well, they led, they led so many things, actually, and just in an energetic sense, let alone practical and reflective processes. You know, they really held that space, didn't they?

Kate: [00:28:58] Absolutely. So, you know, I think it's a mistake to think think of young people and children as people to be managed. But there are definitely resources with incredible offerings into this space.

Scotia: [00:29:10] And how would you imagine, you know, how could we imagine that have evacuation centres into the future were led by children and young people, what a different space they would be for everyone.

Kate: [00:29:21] Absolutely. Because young people understand the need to host, how you welcome people, what a space feels like. You know, all of those things. Yeah. They're brilliant.

Scotia: [00:29:32] They can perhaps articulate more clearly what they need to feel safe and often in an adult, we kind of shut those things down.

Kate: [00:29:43] Yeah. And I think I mean, my experience is, because young people aren't stuck in going 'we've always done it this way so this is the way we do it' because they've often got more responsive to that moment that they can really respond in a without the kind of baggage of 'that's what we do when we're here in this state' and I think that's of real use

Scotia: So this phase of work that you're working through Refuge, I know you've done multiple different projects, but how did this deepen your understanding of how the arts or creatives could bring value to other sectors?

You know, that we often talk about people coming to the arts and community arts and cultural development work is all about how we go and meet and be part part of active citizenship in our communities. How is this experience for you kind of broaden your idea of how that is possible or what contribution can we make?

Kate: [00:30:43] One thing I really started to understand about my my artistic practise in art and perhaps more broadly about artists is that my comfort and appetite or ability to sit in the unknown and actually see that as a very creative and fertile space.

And so I think when working in this in this space where there's so many unknowns all the time, there's something about having a comfort with the unknown, a capacity to be fluid and flexible and responsive is a real asset in this area. So that's something that I've been I've been think about.

And also just the creative problem solving brain can perhaps take, which is one of the things I really love about the refuge structure, where you have this lab where you hear the kind of things that, you know, either emergency services or people or academics are grappling with and perhaps put through a different kind of brain with a different training just our ability to kind of come at it another way.

So the problem is, what do you do with the noise in a relief centre? What do you do with it, with the children who don't have much to do? And our brain can kind of find a way to go 'well, that's a great problem. How do we solve it?'

Scotia: [00:32:07] And it's kind of like saying the power of curiosity is one of the great strengths we could bring, isn't it? Yeah. How do we how do we approach something with curiosity rather than dread?

Kate: [00:32:18] Yes. Curiosity rather than dread. How do we listen and listen really carefully and deeply and what do we pay attention to? And I think those are the kind of things as an artist, you're always looking at your quality of attention, your quality of listening, your curiosity is really key and and a sense of growing something from nothing. You know, we do that all the time. And so there's a kind of feeling that that's that's okay and a comfort with that.

Kate: [00:32:51] One of the drives of the Refuge project amongst many was to, you know, open up to the disaster management sector, the idea of participatory engagement with artists and, you know, often our challenge is to bring, you know, to get people to meet us and not see arts or creativity as a kind of peripheral thing that occurs at certain times and kind of gets whistled up when needed in a very sort of decorative sense.

How would you, you've had some really direct exchanges with people within emergency and disaster management, how would you propose that we invite someone in or sort of begin a relationship with somebody who hasn't had an experience with the arts?

Because, you know, that's one of the bridges that Creative Recovery is trying to do, to say, well, you know, we were here and we've got so much to offer, these are the kind of processes that we can engage with you...

But how would how would you suggest that people go about inviting people into that unknown space? Because often people who work in quite structured organisational systems don't see the potential.

Kate: [00:34:08] Absolutely. I think it's about, you know, it's like any relationship you have to build that and you have to build trust.

And I think perhaps the because there's so many structures in place and protocols and systems, sometimes I think it's it's that they can't see how something else doesn't have systems and protocol is going to fit into that or not destroy or undermine that.

And so it's a case of really deep communication and listening. I think, you know, to kind of go what, you know, we want to support and work together, not distract or make it more complex for you, which I think is kind of perhaps a little fear that sits there.

And I think, you know, it's about a slow, careful process. It's about explaining that knowledge and listening to kind of go 'we really want to hear what is important to you and help with that' not create something that's going to cause more difficulty in a time where there's a lot of resources that are being stretched and pulled in various ways.

But I think, you know, like I, I think it was really great at the end of the very first Refuge when we did our evaluation day and you know, it was the such and the five of us who worked on that very initial one, we were kind of in our evaluation going, oh, you know, did the dramaturgy of the experience work? Did the you know, how did it go from beginning to end? And what was the you know, was that did it work? And we were all kind of questioning it.

And someone from Emergency Services Victoria said this was an amazing success, we got 700 people through the door engaging in a way that we've been trying to engage with people all the time. You know, we just had such different take on what success looked like.

And we had this big laugh and we kind of realised that, yeah, that what success looks like was different for each other. But then also what what we found together by trusting in, you know, the people that we've worked with in Refuge - their appetite for trying something new for giving it a go has been amazing. And because of their generosity to play with us, we've also been generous to play with them. And there's just been this reciprocity and we both realise the deep respect for each other and the work that we do and I think that's really important.

Scotia: [00:36:55] I just wanted to start on a similar but different topic that we've been exploring in these podcasts, this kind of concept of community-led recovery, because in some ways it's a little bit grappled with in Refuge, but certainly out in the field is a commonly used term and unpacked in multiple different ways by different services.

But you work a lot in community practice, Kate, through your performance work and Refuge in a range of other projects so what's your sort of take on what that means to be community-led?

Kate: [00:37:29] Yeah, I'm not 100 percent sure what that means in terms of kind of this area. But in terms of community led artistic practise, you know, for me, it's coming back to that idea that every individual has something to offer and that a collective of experiences and voices, the more diverse the better, because there's a collective wisdom that comes and that if you create space for people to bring their own ideas and find a kind of a collaborative way of approaching something, it's going to be so much stronger than someone telling you what to do.

And so much richer and so much more diverse and inclusive and have buy-in. So, you know, that's that's my preferred way of working is to

Kate: [00:38:30] And so how what is it within your practise or within what you see occurs within culture and the arts that we can offer to enable that?

[00:38:41] I think it's about, it's a value system.

So, you know so for me, if I to talk about how we work in Rawcus, where we've got fifteen diverse voices, it takes time.

So it's understanding that that process takes time. It's about finding how it's about robust conversation. It's about robust listening. It's about setting up things that are inclusive and flexible enough to meet multiple needs and approaches.

So whether that's, you know, in Rawcus, our creative process has lots of different ways of entering to to to accommodate the lots of different ways that people access information or move through the world.

And then there's this kind of process that happens where we have these robust discussions and go, okay, so perhaps we're not trying to find something that everybody completely agrees on, but we're trying to find something that everyone can live with.

And in that kind of finding that moment and finding things that we hadn't thought of and someone pointing out something there, we come up with something that's better than just one individual had tried to think through a problem.

Does that make sense?

Scotia: Yeah, you know, that's a pretty amazing statement. We're not going to...what did you say? We're not going to find something that everyone will agree with, but something that we can all live with. Yeah, a real compromise.

Kate: [00:40:07] It's a really important. Yeah. It's a really great way of finding something. And then we kind of stick it out until everyone can live with it.

Scotia: And the creative process gives you a safe container to be able to unpack that until you find the point of liveability, I suppose.

Kate: [00:40:27] And I think we also really we really are interested in the voice, the dissenting voice.

[00:40:33] So if there's one person that doesn't that can't live with it, that's not seen as a blocker, that's seen as like what is the information or wisdom or what is something that that person seeing that we can't see or what is the fear that is holding them back for me to live with?

Oh, there's some there's some information in that. So it's not about us all trying to kind of have the same thought at all. It's kind of really at our core, respecting those different opinions and actually really valuing that process of finding, of listening.

Scotia: [00:41:09] It's the curiosity again, isn't it? The drive, the curious drive

Kate: Because that one dissenting voice might have just that piece that we had that no one else had seen.

Scotia: The diamond.

Kate: Yeah. Or be the voice that you go, If we can find a way to find something for that person to live with, so many people who had that same block will be able to come on board.

Scotia: Yeah, I think that's very true. Often I find that if you work to the focus of one, you feed the focus of many without even realising

Kate: Absolutely. So every single voice is important. Yeah, I never do a voting system because, you know, you have winners and losers then.

Scotia: Yeah so, you know, always again that focus back on time and enabling time and space to work these things through.

I'm just wondering if there was anything on a personal note that you'd like to share with us before we finish. Just sort of an example of your own life or something that's occurred through your work that has illustrated how cultural the arts have made a powerful impact on people or communities particularly impacted by disaster or perhaps through the other work that you've been doing or that you've heard about.

Kate: Look, look, I keep thinking about those incredible young people I worked with at St. Joseph's.

And, you know, when I started working with those young people, many of them didn't feel like they had much to contribute.

And yet they had such powerful experiences of being resilient and kind of working through really tough things. And to watch them move from kind of this place of going I don't know what I've got to offer to really realising that they were the experts in this field and that I was coming to them for their insights and expertise and then watching them just be so proud of the artwork that they made and stand by that artwork and invite people to come and talk to their artwork. It was a really, really extraordinary journey to see how that that could happen.

Scotia: That's that's such a strong point, that idea that we are the voice of the expert.

And I think when disaster management talk about community led or listening to community, it's one thing to say you are the experts, another to give the power into that. And I think what a beautiful example.

Kate: Yeah. And I didn't think they could see themselves. They don't at the beginning they did not see themselves as expert. And then by the end they kind of realised I saw those students really realised that they had things to offer.

Scotia: Well, let's work to ensure that becomes the true driver of what we call community led disaster management.

Kate: Yeah, that would be a beautiful thing.

Scotia: Beautiful thing. Thank you. It's been such a great honour to talk with you. And I'm really personally privileged to see you and your work. And I look forward to engaging with you more over the years ahead and certainly through the credit recovery network.

Kate: Thanks so much. It's been great to have the conversation with you and also, you know, the relationship that we've had over these last five years.

Scotia: Thanks for joining me for Creative Responders: In Conversation and special thanks to Kate for such an insightful discussion.

We'll include links in the show notes if you'd like to learn more about Refuge at Arts House and you can also find other resources and transcripts for all of our episodes on our website.

If you're interested in hearing more about the role of young people in disaster management, you might like to go back to Episode 1 of our documentary series.

For that story, we spent some time at Strathewen Primary School in Victoria to hear from their Year 6 students and principal Jane Hayward about the award winning bushfire education program they developed following the Black Saturday bushfires. We also hear from Doctor Louise Phillips and Professor Lisa Gibbs about some of the research and concepts around the importance of fostering leadership, agency and self-determination among young people facing disaster or trauma.

We are currently working on more stories for Season 2 of the documentary series and can't wait to share those with you a bit later in the year.

In the meantime, we'll keep bringing you more of these one on one conversations each month.

If you know a creative responder you think we should speak to, we'd love to hear from you.

Drop us a line at comms@creativeresponders.net.au or connect with the Create Recovery Network on facebook, twitter or instagram and send us a message.

This podcast is produced by me, Scotia Monkivitch and my Creative Recovery Network colleague, Jill Robson. Our sound engineer is Tiffany Dimmack and original music is composed by Mikey Squire. Special thanks to Jess O'Callaghan and the team at Audiocraft.

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Thanks for listening.