

CREATIVE RESPONDERS

Podcast Transcript

In Conversation with Melinda Rankin

September 2022

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 emergency management and creative sectors as they prepare, respond and recover from disasters.

Today my guest is Melinda Rankin, Director of Fabrik Arts & Heritage, which is located in Lobethal, a small regional town nestled in a picturesque valley on Peramangk and Kurna Country in the Adelaide Hills.

Arts organisations play a critical role as community connectors - particularly over the past few years as they support both artists and the wider community through challenging times.

Fabrik is an arts and heritage hub, run by Adelaide Hills Council. Its public program started in early 2019 and at the end of that year, the Cudlee Creek bushfire devastated the area.

As a newly established arts organisation with a remit covering both community and economic development goals, the team at Fabrik immediately looked to ways the premises and public program could play a role in supporting the community in its recovery.

I'm so pleased to have had this chance to hear more about Fabrik's considered approach to this work, the meaningful impact they have had, and the ongoing growth of their role as a connector within the community.

I'm sure Melinda's insights will be of interest to many undertaking this kind of work in communities across the country. Please enjoy my conversation with Melinda Rankin.

Scotia Thanks for inviting me into your home and into such a pleasure to be here.

Melinda Lovely to have you.

Scotia On the lands of the Ghana People's, yes. Well, it's a very damp Adelaide today.

Melinda Yes, sorry about that.

Scotia A little drizzly, drizzly in but I'm watching the beautiful, vibrant yellows of your wattle tree out the window here.

Melinda Yes. Signs of spring.

Scotia Yes, we're creeping out of the cold.

So tell us a little bit about yourself and your role currently.

Melinda So my role is director of Fabrik Arts and Heritage, which is based out in Lobothel, the Adelaide Hills on the beautiful lands of the Peramangk and the Kaurna people. And Fabrik is run by Adelaide Hills Council. And I still call it an emerging arts and heritage hub. We've been going since mid 2018, but in a very raw environment of the old Onkaparinga Woolen Mill, where the blankets and fabric used to be made. So it's a pretty raw factory industrial space in the freezing cold Adelaide Hills in winter. And yeah, we've, it's a community based organisation developing exhibitions and artist residencies and workshops and retail and events for our with our community but with a textile theme looking back to the textile heritage of the the woolen mill.

Scotia Can you unpack a little bit for us? Because we were talking and you said that a lot of the work when that centre started to open was trying to be responsive to this massive change that was going on for that community.

Melinda Mmm. So the mill operated for 120 years and it was, the mill was, the town was Lobethal really everyone worked in the mill, had connections and generations work there. So when the mill closed in the early nineties, which a lot of the mills did around Australia it was devastating for the town so that people lost their jobs, generations of people who had worked there then had to find work elsewhere. And so that's been, I guess, a trauma for the town actually that still sits there in residual in the town as something that hasn't really properly healed. I think some people moved on, some people never worked again after that. So yeah, it has been a trauma that has shaped the town. Yeah.

Scotia And so how did you work with that when.

Melinda Yeah, it was actually the first thing I wanted to do was you were operating in this mill that has amazing history, but I wanted to understand some of that a bit more and see explore ways that the arts could connect with that and maybe work with some of that help shift some of that that was stuck. So we engaged with Vic McEwan from Cad Factory and through funding from Country Arts SA to capture some of the stories of those mill workers and partly to help them see that those stories were important and to honour that, and also to start to explore ways that contemporary visual arts can actually dig into some of these stories and share them in a, you know, to a wider a wider community. So that was a lovely project Vic did, you know, as sensitively as he does all of his projects and he interviewed, filmed different people and then created this really lovely or curated really range of events that included large scale projection of mill workers onto the buildings. Again, it was it was winter, it was May, and we were all rugged up in Onkaparinga Blankets and we worked our way for these performances throughout History Month in which is in May in South Australia and two evenings a week we would take people around the site to see these projections and then we took them inside and they heard some of the ghost stories about the building. Further inside they were taught by some former mill workers how to dance the military two step because they used to have an Onkaparinga ball and they were taught by former Queens of the Onkaparinga ball. So he just teased out these beautiful histories of the town that we hadn't even been aware of. We had a local singer songwriter perform a song about when the last whistle blew because the the mill had this whistle that sounded throughout the whole town. So you had this lovely range of stories that picked up on some of the lovely aspects of the Mill's history in the town.

Scotia And such deep connection therefore with the people.

Melinda Yeah, yeah, yeah. They, they loved it. Even like, the Mills story, sorry the whistle story. People come to us afterwards to say the mill whistle was blown by our, our dad. You know, he died a couple of years ago, but he was he was the timekeeper. And he'd ring the he'd he'd ring the time, you used to be able to ring up to see what the time was to make sure he pulled the whistle at the right time for it to blow. So there's this other it connects people to things yeah.

Scotia Well, the strong support and vitalness of culture and the arts is about relationship. And not long ago you had another big trauma for your community, that of the fires of the Black Summer period. Can you tell us a little about that experience and how you were able to kind of build on those key community relationships in terms of trying to find ways to be able to support your community in this new change?

Melinda Hmm. Sure. Yeah. So that was December 2019, and our community was in the middle of its lots of Lobethal Festival, which have been going for decades, a really important celebration throughout the town of these beautiful lights and different activities. And we were poised to collaborate with Gathered Market, which is a local business of artisan markets, to have a Christmas market. And it was canceled due to catastrophic fire day and then completely canceled because on the 20th of December we had a fire. The Cudlee Creek Fire started nearby and came through low before and then kept going. So it went beyond Lobethal and yeah, it devastated homes, houses, sheds, fences, stock and livelihood. So it was quite it was a quite a traumatic event. And we knew from a previous fire several years before, the Sampson Flat bushfire, that we knew that even eight months out from that fire there were still high rates of domestic violence and mental health issues and car accidents but people weren't necessarily connecting that to the fire, so knowing this fire was bigger we knew it would have a long tail. So in my mind, I was thinking, well, we've got an arts organisation here that is connecting to community. What do we have? We can't rebuild homes. We can't offer funding to put up new fences. What can we do? What have we got to offer in our tools? And so we offered our first thing we offered was our space so we had in our raw factory space we do have one building that has hot water and air conditioning and toilets. And so we offered that space for our community. The lovely thing about that actually was that, well, lots of lovely things, but the building itself in the Mill was called the blanket room. So when the blankets came off, the the machinery they all came to this building is a two storey building called the Blanket Room, and there were women there that inspected every single blanket and mended anything, any threads that had been broken through the process or anything that had not been the pattern had gone awry. They fixed it. And so it has always been spoken to some degree of fondness by the communities as the blanket room, and it was mostly women that work there. And so there's something nice about inviting a community back into that space. But also it was a space that had been a place where care had been taken.

Scotia Care and healing. Beautiful

Melinda Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And so we made sure that was part of the stories we talked about, the recovery centre. So we're run by local government. So that was an appropriate thing for local government to be offering to state government - housing, the housing trust housing SA to manage that recovery centre where all the different organisations that are offering support to the community can be based. But we also wanted to work with them without interfering with their work to ensure the place wasn't corporate and it felt like a community space. So the first thing we did then when they were starting to settle in was

invite Michelle Cripps from the Royal Adelaide Hospital's Arts and Health Program and she generously came out and just wandered through and just gave us some feedback on little things that could help to soften that corporate feel. And they're really practical things. Like she said, why is everyone walking around with fluoro you know high viz vests on, you know, the ones with Chaplain and ones with you know volunteer on them and everyone's in high vis and she said the emergency's over now we need to calm it down for people that don't need to be brought to this space that's telling them the emergency's happening - that's finished now. She looked at things like someone had donated a whole load of magazines for people to read in the waiting area, she said, if you've lost your home, you don't need a Home Beautiful magazine, get those out. Things like the white board. There's a whiteboard where everyone was just writing information because it's so chaotic in those early days, you know where to get hay for your, you know, your cattle and all those kind of things have been written up there. But it was it was a chaos. And she said, yeah, she said, there are too many colours. If you're colourblind, you can only read half of this you need one person was really good writing to write it out calmly and neatly. So there were just they were just really practical, small things, but they were important. We thought.

Scotia Well, they're pretty vital, isn't it? I think one of the things about evacuation centres or recovery hubs is that they're they're such a connector, but they're also a place where triggers happen. And there's not a lot of sensibility. Everyone has a job and then getting on with it. And it's a kind of high stress level. But to think about it as being a place where people feel welcomed and cared for and have a sense of. Time to be able to see it. It's kind of counterproductive, isn't it? Exactly. Yeah. How much and how beautiful. We can offer a space to be able to soften those edges and make people really feel like they have the time and space to sit and be heard.

Melinda And we had the time and space to do that because we weren't the ones trying to set up the centre and make sure everything was working and all the paperwork was done. We could actually take that little bit of a step back and see that and make sure there were fresh flowers in vases and toys for the kids and homemade biscuits just for those first few weeks initially. And then they got into the rhythm of it and it was fine. I also invited a number of artists to loan us what I called works of comfort so that so that the space had artworks around that would be there. They didn't need any fire fire artwork, and I just needed something that was soft and comfortable and soothing to soften the corporate feel that could happen in that kind of environment.

Scotia And did you do anything with regard to sound?

Melinda Uh, no. No. You mean like bringing in sound specifically? No, because it.

Scotia Is usually such noisy, harsh places. Yeah.

Melinda Yeah. Yeah. No. People respond to the smell of that building because it still has a lanolin and lanolin smell. So it had a different feel to it.

Scotia Embedded in the stones.

Melinda Yeah, yeah. And in the timber floors I think as well it's in there as well. So. No, and you know, that's an interesting question to me because I come from a visual arts background and it maybe limited my response to thinking about sound as well. Yeah.

Scotia And we'll talk more about the projects that you've done consequently. But I'm curious to know I'm in that exchange of having a recovery hub in an arts precinct space. What do you think was the sharing that happened there? Do you know that we've got so much we can share with each other and learn from each other, do you think consequently there was an interesting collaboration that came out of that?

Melinda Yeah, I think there was. There was that crossing over of, you know, we would know people and suggest, you know, go to recovery center. There'd be people who think that they didn't lose their home, therefore they didn't need support and not realize there was still counseling available, that there was still people that could help with their fences or there was still support they could get. And they didn't have to have been a total loss to get that. So I guess there was that role that we could play, if not the local businesses that was straight, you know, encouraged them to come over with someone and then we could also keep it from them when they had people they thought might be interested in doing some art projects. One one really tangible project was they they the recovery center asked us if we knew anyone that could knit or crochet because we want to think there's a need for scarves and hats and things. So we started a yarning circle for people that wanted to do that and got donations from that of of wool. But what was interesting, we found that people that were knitting for people who had total losses, we had people who were who had lost everything, who came to those groups to knit for others. And it was a really interesting reflection to realise you might have lost everything, but you still. There are times when you need to give as part of your recovery as well.

Scotia You need to feel valued. Yeah, exactly. In your work.

Melinda Yes.

Scotia Yeah.

Melinda Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So, yeah, there were those little comings and goings in and out that kept happening throughout the whole time.

Scotia Hmm. And so from there, what has evolved in terms of other programs that you.

Melinda Yeah, a whole range of of things. So the gathered, the gathered market that we didn't have, we ended up holding in the months after since it's in January. So just a month after the fires, there were a lot of fundraising things happening at that time and with, oh, everyone's getting bit fatigued. But we had artists who had made produce and we thought, Let's do this as a fundraiser. So we also created space in the market for any local business that had been impacted by the fires to have a free space to sell. So wineries that had been impacted and nurseries and so and we had a donation to the local CFS and we had 6000 people over two days come to this market. We raised I think it was \$12,000 for the CFS. Old Des, 80 year old DES from the CFS is stuffing notes into his CFS hat. It's really quite lovely and it was a really lovely support and way for people to gather and I felt like yeah we are going to be right. I mean it was such early days, but that was an important gathering. We also that was a large kind of gathering. Also immediately, probably the week after the fire, we had a local schoolteacher and artist ask us, if she could use one of our spaces to bring adults together for just a creative activity, just to come bring whatever the drawing or needing or making and talk just to be. And again, among that group were people who had evacuated and people who had lost everything, and they continued to meet for months afterwards. She also created a space for children to come and just draw and be together after school. And so those kind of smaller gatherings started happening.

We had another local person who was an artist and a counselor offer creative journaling classes. Those classes have continued. They're still continuing now. Actually, one of the groups has continued to meet. So those smaller gatherings have continued all the way through and still going now of people building relationships and and expressing themselves through their sometimes they're expressing through their work. Sometimes it's about taking time out and not even thinking about it, thinking about what's happened. Just being able to immerse into that meditative process of making and giving space to create. And so they're not just about being a bushfire victim, but they're actually a creative individual human being that can immerse in something and make something new. So they've been that's been those kind of things have been important pulses for us to give people a chance to connect through, connect with each other, and also to take time away from thinking about their recovery and just immerse in their making. Also, opportunities to use making and creating as a way to look at what they're doing differently, look at what they're going through a little differently. And then our activities that are bigger ones, like the markets and different events we piled up in the last two years have been about connecting up with businesses who are struggling to bring people out. There was that hashtag bring an esky time, so linking in with that, but also through COVID as well. Gathering when we can gather and doing that in a way that impacts our town. Feel like we will get back to normal. It's going to happen. Yeah.

Scotia So important to have a sense of possibility.

Melinda And I hope that's really important.

Scotia What did you feel was the impact of the overlay of COVID on this process? How do you think that that sort of has woven itself through a bushfire recovery sensibility?

Melinda Yeah, it's been an interesting, it has for everyone, I'm sure. For us, the timing of that meant that just when the community, you know, that's those stages of recovery when there's fragmentation afterwards and that they need to meet together and start hearing each other stories deeply. That was when they were sent home for COVID isolation, and they were sent home to houses they had had to evacuate. So there was that that sense of, hang on, this was unsafe, now is the only place to be safe. And for some people that sent home, they didn't have a home, so they had a shipping container or a caravan or someone's spare room. So that was a complicated thing already. During the COVID lockdown time, though, we were also hearing people going, Oh, COVID doesn't exist. Like we're just about recovery. Like they just couldn't take another thing on. So there was also not wanting to think about it because they were just too busy thinking about recovery. But it has meant, I think the importance of gathering has been complicated. And so as a community arts organisation, we've been we had to get really creative about how do we okay, how do we get the how do we keep connecting people? And so we had projects during those lockdowns. We connected up with writers SA and had a project where we it was a letter writing exchange project, and we had workshops online about writing and journaling, and we exchanged letters as a way of people being connected. We had workshops online, and then as soon as we could gather again, we did. And first gathering back was August actually during South Australian Living Artists festival that happens in the state. And we had an exhibition that was Jane Skeer, a local artist, who had had a residency on Kangaroo Island. So she created all of artworks, a very emotional response where she had she was so devastated by what had happened with the fires there. She had lived on Kangaroo Island. So seeing so much devastation, she just emotionally got into some xanthorrhoeas that had been burned the stumps and was smashing them with a hammer and created these really energetic works with the risen from that. And so when I

saw she was doing that on Instagram, I said, Can you bring that work to Lobethal because we need to connect these to fire grounds and Lobethal also has Bushland Park which is an area of native bush that hadn't ever burnt in the whole time of since European settlement. And people have kind of gone oh bushland park is pretty special. Like it's it's never burnt and if that goes we're done for. 95% of bushland park was burnt, it makes me want to weep just saying that, but the xanthorrhoeas were part of that and by August, so the xanthorrhoeas had six foot high flowers. So there were this sign of hope and regeneration as well. So Jane's artwork was just the right thing at the right time. And to remind people, Yes, COVID is happening, but we're still with you. We still know you're in bushfire recovery. The story hasn't changed here. We know that it's still happening.

Scotia It's an interesting point. Because I think that gets forgotten. You know, people who go through these extraordinary life changes often feel like if the world moved on and yet they still use this process and their close neighbours have moved on and they don't really understand the continuation of this recovery story or the process of change yet.

Melinda And it's so different for everyone. Everyone's story is what it is and and doesn't need that judgment of assessment of it should be this or that or yeah, it is what it is. Yeah.

Scotia The term community is very heavily used now within this context and to greater or lesser degrees of understanding perhaps. But from your perspective, how do you how do you understand that or how do you unpack that with your work?

Melinda I think being community connected has been really important for us and we where we're run by council, which is part of the community, but there's a separateness. We aren't living neither myself or my colleague Renee - there's two of us full time - live in Lobethal or were living in a fire affected part of the community. So we are in that way separate from that. But it did give us that degree of being separate as well.

Scotia And what do you think is the value of that?

Melinda I think well, we could see that stage when things were getting fragmented and they were different little... someone had an opinion of what we should be doing here, and we were outside of all of that and could see it a bit separately and you still hear all of it as well and not feel like we were part of a faction, I suppose. But we also want to be able to listen deeply and respond. So we have always we still keep listening and trying to make sure we're hearing and we're not just listening to the same people all the time as well. And so that has meant sometimes we've just had to take initiative and hope that that's the right thing and take feedback if it's not. And also be listening when we're being, you know, suggested things. So there was one point where we had community members say, some women saying, look, we haven't we're this group, we call them the kindy mums, but they were connected through Kindy and their kids have gone to school and they don't connect as much. And they really wanted to start meeting to make quilts for people who'd lost everything. So that was their way of creatively responding to the community. And then I saw a saying, actually, we know people who haven't have lost, you know, they don't have any craft materials. Can you start a craft lending library? And so we sought some funding to be able to set up a space where people come and borrow spinning wheels or sewing machines and take thread and fabric and different wool and knitting needles so that they could keep their creative hands moving. So there've been things like that, where we've responded to responses, we've also done some things where we've deliberately sought out different parts of the community. So we had a project again, this is funded by Wellbeing SA, where we connected with an artist with all the local primary schools in the

area so three local primary schools and every child was involved in mapping Lobethal it was at a time it was around almost around the anniversary, the first anniversary, and people were saying to go, look, we need to start looking positively. We need to focus on the positives. And so we thought you had to do that without being cheesy or without actually being superficial and causing more harm. But we wanted to we asked the children to map what they loved about Lobethal, you know, it was the bakery and the footy fields and donuts and and then we also worked we and then also for them to through visually working with an artist map out what they would love to see in and with what their dreams were. And they made them time capsule for the future what they thought would be happening in the future. So that was looking at the younger generation. We then worked with the seniors for the senior citizens and the local Valley of Praise Retirement Village, and the artist worked with them to map what they love about Lobethal and their years of living there. So that created a different kind of map that had photos of weddings and balls and footy games, and they brought in different objects that they'd kept from their lives there. And then we exhibited those as an exhibition and invited the community to come in and we had questions throughout the exhibition about what you hope for Lobethal, what you want us to do more of, what you want us to do less of. And then at the end of that exhibition, we invited community leaders in for an evening of a facilitated session. So we invited principals from local primary schools, the community association, local businesses, different community service groups to come. So we thought, you're the leaders. This is what the community said they love about Lobethal. It's what they've said they would love to see happen. And then we worked with a facilitator for them to start to express what they what their hopes were. And then we put that all together at the end of that and gave it back to them saying, take this back to your groups and see how that can Integrate in. And we now know the community association have been working on that and they want to meet again with all those people to tell them what they've been doing and what they're visiting. So it was

Scotia Dreaming on.

Melinda Yeah, well, we wanted it. We thought, we can't hold this. We want to know what people want, but it's not ours to hold. It needs to go back into the community for it to be continued on. So yeah, that was the intent of that project.

Scotia So it's really important in this space how we look at collaboration and how we kind of bring the skills that we have to the table for all of these different people working as a so many layers of the recovery space and so many people playing their role and looking at ways to be supportive.

Melinda So yeah, and it's richer by doing that because you can't do that for us. There's only two of us and we can't do everything. So it's finding the right connectors in the community and outside. So in the community we knew it was about, you know, connecting with everyday community, but also who are the people in the community that are the leaders that could take something further? And what are they saying and what feedback can they give us? But what can we give back to them and how can we help them do that as well? And then it's also about the people that we connect with, whether it's the arts organisations and artists or funding bodies to bring other resources into that mix as well.

Scotia But also, you you were saying to me earlier about that that really key need to link, particularly with the health and wellbeing sector and ensure that there were supports within the programs that you offered. So you always invited a representative, a councillor or a support officer or someone who could be there to look out for triggers and wellbeing.

Melinda Yes. Yeah. So we knew our artists would be the artist we worked with, really empathetic and very skilled, but we didn't want them to feel like we need to be counselors as well and we needed the safe space to be safe for them. And so bringing in a professional counselor to work alongside them has been really important. And so we've been exploring ways of doing that. So it's not contrived, but there's been a couple of different ways. Sometimes it's been having a counselor present and maybe involved in whatever the workshop or activity is and said that people know that there's a counselor and can you take them aside and talk with them when they need. And that's been quite successful as well. We've seen that work well and another model has been to incorporate a mindfulness session as part of the workshop. And so there's been one wellbeing professional we've had who'll do mindfulness, depending on what the, what the workshop is, we'll adapt it to that as well. So there was a stage where we're doing this beautiful working with artist Sue Garret, who works with recycled materials, and she was making badges, merit badges, so people doing with children and also with adults of honoring whatever is their strength. And so instead of coming to the workshop and saying, right, what's your strength? Just make something. This wellbeing counselor, took them through a mindfulness relaxation session and a process which would help them to identify what their strengths were. And then she stayed present throughout the whole session. And interestingly, the artists said, Oh, quite interesting. People just got straight into it then they were they were ready to go. They, that they approach the workshop differently having had that session first and then at the end the counselor stayed nearby and then she made sure she spoke with everyone. Sometimes she brought the whole group together to share sometimes she just shared with them separately, but made sure that that circle was closed. So yeah, it's been an interesting process to explore ways of integrating the wellbeing process and that support, mental health support, in a way that's integrated and not kind of tacked on.

Scotia So vital isn't it, particularly in these deep time. Yes.

Melinda Yeah. Yeah. And I think because the conversation around mental health is much more evident generally in the community now, it it's that's really helpful as well. It doesn't seem odd to have someone there.

Scotia And what about the artists? I know that, you know, one of the challenges that we try to address through the creative recovery network is, is the care of the artists, because, as you say, they're not counselors. They're not necessarily experienced in working within a trauma informed process, but they need to be skilling themselves up to be able to sit in those spaces and hold them for the communities that they're involved in. In what was the process or what have you learned from that with your work?

Melinda I think we've we've made sure we've worked with artists who have a history of working with people who might be vulnerable or a strong community involvement and connection. So that's always been important thing and that the the process is as important as the outcome as well. It's not an either or, but there's so everyone feels like they've they are capable regardless of their experience making art in the past because sometimes you've got to deal with that as well. People aren't used to making there can be a...

Scotia I'm not an artist. I can't draw...

Melinda And there's that stage when they start...yeah and that's a real barrier. And you notice with people, there's often a stage if we're used to making things, you're used to not

getting it right at the beginning and pushing through. But if you're not used to making things, you get to that stage where you can't handle it and it's not working. And it can be tempting your brain will just be telling you, you're stupid. You're not any good at this. You're not one of those kind of people that can make things. And so there's an importance to be important, to be able to help people through that, to feel like, yeah, that what they can make will be successful.

Scotia What's so vital in this point that it has to be in some ways, yes. They need to find some some strength in the process rather than a belittling exchange.

Melinda Exactly. So I think that's the other part is having an artist that can a really skilled at having processes that are simple and will lead to a successful outcome that no one fails, and everyone makes something fabulous at the end.

Scotia It's actually a very skilled state to have to be in, like not not necessary all artists are appropriate. But what do you think are the key traits that are required to work in this way?

Melinda Yeah, I think certainly that empathy with people and just loving people and loving what people come up with and loving their ideas. So there's that sense of enthusiasm in terms of their practice. I think often we find it's the ones that have got diversity in their practice that can go, Oh, okay, you're going to need this. How about you do this and they can quickly change things or they can adapt to whatever it is to what the individuals need because they're not working with artists or people that want to be artists necessarily. They work with people that might be new to this. So they need you often need a lot of skills and a lot in your toolkit to be able to know what to reach for at that time with that person. So yeah, those kind of artists have been really helpful. Often they're ones that are already having, you know, offering workshops in their own as part of their own practice and business, anyway.

Scotia Mm hmm. Yeah. And then in due responsibility, what we are trying to encourage is this broader sensibility of how we care for artists who work in this frontline. It's historically, we've seen a lot of people thrown into this space without any container of care for themselves and perhaps a lack of understanding from organisational or funding bodies of the requirement. What's your experience in that and what would you be recommending?

Melinda Yeah, I think it's really important to take care of your artists and make sure the safe the space is safe for them, which is why we were interested in involving mental health professionals to make sure that it wasn't the artist having to deal with someone if they were in a state with a needed support. And it's also about listening and, and, uh, for them to be able to debrief. But we're very aware that artists really gave a lot at the end of last year, I think it was. We invited all of those artists to come together and have a masterclass with India Flint, who is a master natural dye and textile artist as a treat for them to give something back to them. But we're very aware that's an area to look at more. We during last year where we collaborated with Country Arts SA during the Region Australia conference that ended up it was going to be in Launceston, end up being because of COVID regionally based and each time we became the host for that and that was a great program nationally, that was great to work with Country Arts to say, okay, we wanted to invite arts practitioners, whether they're artists or people that work in the arts. They're all tired, they're exhausted. We were going to gather them and I guess we're really interested in the idea of intentional gathering and if you're going to gather everyone, let's make it so it's it's restorative time for them as well, a time for them to share what they're doing. But also let's have workshops for them to do. When you're gathering this creative people

together, they need to be creative. Sometimes they'll need to sit and stitch or needle create while they're listening because that's what they are. So it was interesting to create an event that offered nourishment and nurturing support to artists.

Scotia It's so important and such a strong, beautiful word to nourish. You know, in this sector, in disaster management, the majority of the sector are volunteers, actually, the people who are working. And I think more and more into the future, we have to be really thinking very deeply and carefully about nurture, like how do we reinvigorate very tired people, very tired communities who are going to be more and more stretched. Yeah, actually. And also, how do we create a kind of process of turnover so that we're not all carrying the load?

Melinda Yes. Yeah, exactly. And it's a it's a big question because I think our culture and maybe the arts as well specifically is pretty intensely involved in being busy. And it's partly because, well, I know we're not all of resources and we can see the need. We want to get things done, but it's not sustainable. And we. You know, I'm aware of how often I'll say how busy I am, and it's been a big couple of years, but it's been worth it. But it's also been costly. And I think how can we model wellness and to our community if we're not living sustainably in the arts as well?

Scotia That's such a challenge.

Melinda Yeah, it.

Scotia Is a curious challenge.

Scotia And also to understand, like we we working with people who've been deeply impacted and we may you said you didn't live in that community, but you're still deeply impacted in the work and the vicarious process of how you're carrying and holding and nurturing those stories. So we can't forget the individual weight of that.

Melinda No, no. And well, to be honest, it's easy for me to just not even think that's happening and and to see the need out there and not to look at. Maybe I need some support in there, too. yeah.

Scotia Well, I think it's a common story in community too, like, these people are worse off than I am. And so you get left behind and the leaders in communities don't get nurtured to hold or to transition themselves into other roles. And so much that we can learn and do and I think so much we can offer from a perspective of culture and the arts as a yes, a space for nurture and re reminding of the human nature of hope and need and care.

Melinda Exactly. Exactly. And it's such an important thing to reminding ourselves as I'm speaking, that, yeah, you can if it is if we do really believe that the arts and culture can offer a way of healthy living, then we need to be living that as arts practitioners and professionals as well. Yeah. That's the challenge. Yeah.

Scotia Go forth with curiosity. So where to from here? What are the next steps? Because, you know, we're two and a half or more years on now and still just touching on people. Finally some people finally getting homes, others not like this. There's still a long journey ahead. How do you how are you looking at that for yourself, but also for Fabrik and yeah, the community.

Melinda For Fabrik we've got a new stage, you know, our premises over the last couple weeks have now closed for redevelopment. So we've we have really fortunately received state and federal and funding to link up with the local government, funding to redevelop the site, which means we're closed and but we're really keen to keep a heartbeat of connection with our community and there are community members we want to keep meeting. So there's some small and some of this stuff has been really behind the scenes we haven't been putting on social media. It's because it's private. And so some of that will continued though, as community of small groups continue to gather. We have a project coming up with Louise Flaherty called Memorial for the Forgotten Trees, and that will be a creative project that she'll produce with Tania Vargas and Belinda Gerhertly. So a choreographer, dancer and a musician and composer. And so that's around acknowledging trees and the loss of trees and and that'll be based on bushland park, a performance that will then segue into a series of workshops with community to create a new work in that space, memorialising and celebrating Bushland Park. So we're continuing projects out of site of the walls of Fabrik and exploring ways we can continue to connect with our community without a building at the moment. Because, yeah, we still know there's still a process that people are still going through. It's not over yet.

Scotia No, no. It stays on doesn't it. And for yourself. What's your how are you going to look after yourself?

Melinda Oh, don't ask me that <laughter> Yeah, that big, big gap there is what am I going to do with that?

Scotia It's a long haul isn't it

Melinda Yeah, it is. Time out and reflecting. Not being on the site and entering the new stage of Fabrik actually is a good time of reflection anyway, of what have we done? Who are going to be when we reopen, what what we'll continue on what we need to change. So it is a nice time to take some pressure off to better reflect and take time out and look at support. So definitely that, but definitely more creative my own creative practice needs to be in there somewhere.

Scotia More making.

Melinda Yeah, definitely more making. Yeah.

Scotia Well, I look forward to continuing the story with you. Yeah, it's.

Melinda It's lovely to share with you and connect that with all the other stories that are happening across the country.

Scotia Yeah. Great work and such beautiful connections. Sounds have continue to evolve, you know, small groups and small steps.

Melinda It's a great community. Yeah. Yeah.

Scotia We wish you all the best for the next reimagining.

Melinda Thank you. Thanks very much.

Scotia: Thanks for joining me for Creative Responders: In Conversation and special thanks to Melinda for taking the time to speak with me and for welcoming me into her lovely home.

We will include links in our show notes to Fabrik's website and you can also keep up with their work and exhibitions on Facebook and Instagram, their handle is AT fabrik - that's spelt F A B R I K - dot arts.

If you'd like to access episode transcripts and research links related to the podcast, head over to creative.recovery.net.au where you can find all of our past episodes.

This podcast is produced by me, Scotia Monkivitch, and my Creative Recovery Network colleague, Jill Robson. Our sound engineer is Glen Morrow.

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

Thanks for listening.