

SOCIAL ART PARK BELCONNEN

EVALUATION REPORT



COMMUNITY OUTREACH ARTS FUNDING
ARTS ACT

Dr Cathy Hope and Dr Sylvia Alston

INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by Belconnen Community Services and Wellspring Environmental Arts & Design to provide an evaluation of the impact of the Social Art Park Project as part of Arts ACT's community outreach arts funding initiative.

The 'Social Art Park' project was an initiative of Belconnen Community Services (BCS). BCS provides essential social, health and wellbeing programs and activities for children, families, young people, seniors, people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and other diverse social groups.

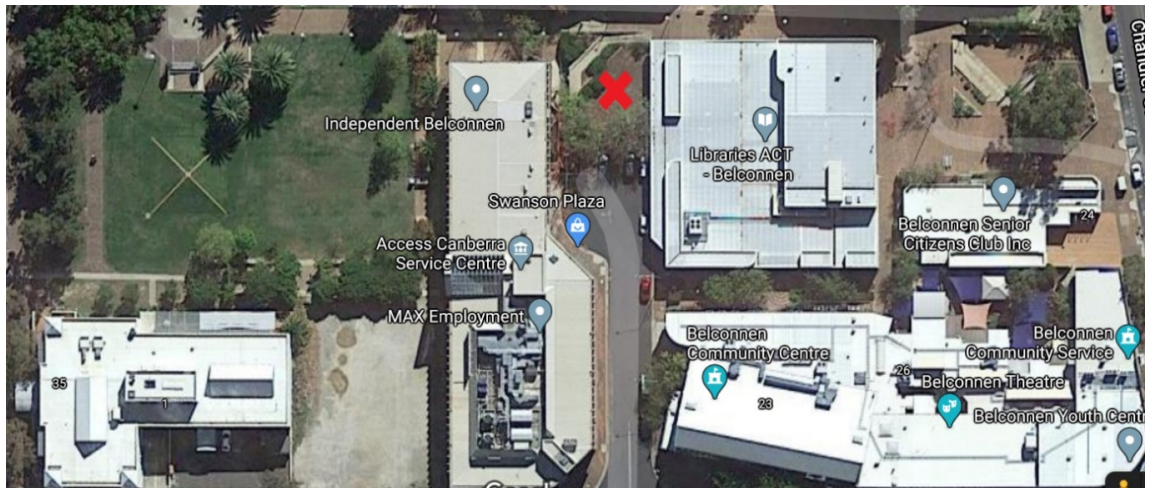
The project built on BCS's history of community engagement in the arts for personal change and is part of the organisation's long-term strategy to empower individuals as community members through expression and participation.

BCS delivered the 'Social Art Park' project in collaboration with Wellspring Environmental Arts and Design – a local business with 28 years of experience in art, design, community development, place making and arts event management. Wellspring Environmental Arts and Design has collaborated with BCS on several arts and community development projects.

The term 'Social Art Park' was chosen because it embodies the transformative power of arts engagement in lives, communities and places. The project involved local residents, external partners and the wider community to demonstrate the transformative power of the arts engagement and expression in individual lives, the community spirit and creating people places with soul.

The site for the project was the micropark located behind the Belconnen Library, 11 Swanson Close, Belconnen. The park is adjacent to Belconnen Youth Centre and Belconnen Community Service (BCS). Activities for this project were undertaken between 4 May and 28 September 2019.





'Social art park' was delivered in the micropark near Belconnen library

AIM

The aim of Social Art Park was to work with the community to revitalise a small green space in a 'forgotten area' of Belconnen using the transformative power of the arts. Four criteria identified by ArtsACT were used to measure the success of the project.

These were to:

1. increase participation in the arts
2. respond to community needs and interests
3. develop the artistic skills of the community
4. engage sectors of the community that otherwise may experience barriers or disadvantage that inhibit their participation in the art.



Social Art Park site prior to activation



Social Art Park during activation – Belconnen Library storytelling

Three key methods were used to activate the park with community:

- a) Beautification through street art and art installations
- b) Installation of temporary infrastructure (e.g. chairs, cubby, stage)
- c) Free public events and activities

The project offered a range of art workshops, live music events, roving performers and Belconnen Library regular story time sessions delivered in the park.



SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES RESULTS

The outcomes of the project were measured against the following Community Outreach Arts Grant criteria:

1. Increase participation in the arts

Social Art Park project facilitated significant community participation in a wide range of

- (a) creative roles: from art project co-creation to place making design and infrastructure outputs, to participation in events and activities
- (b) art forms: including visual arts, maker activities, circus and roving performance, music (listening and making) and storytelling.

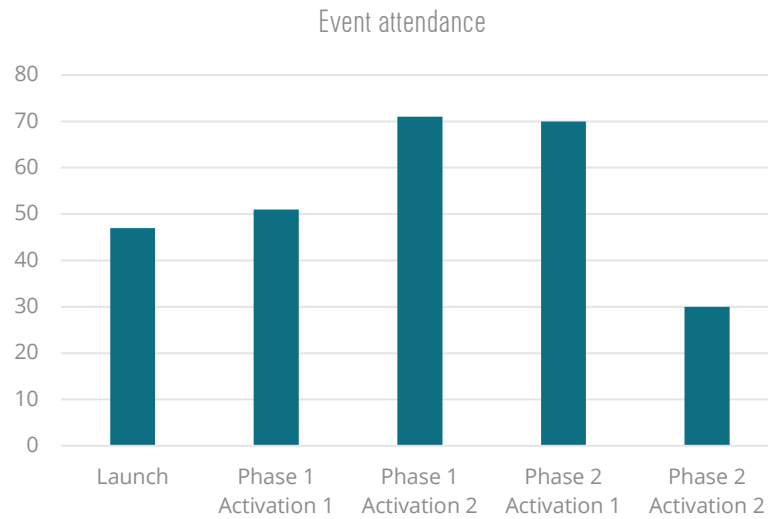
Around **372** people actively participated in the arts elements including:

- (a) **84** participants in workshops and working groups (from 8 – 50 years of age)
- (b) **269** visitors attending events in the park (from 2- 70 years of age)
- (c) **19** artists participating in event and project delivery

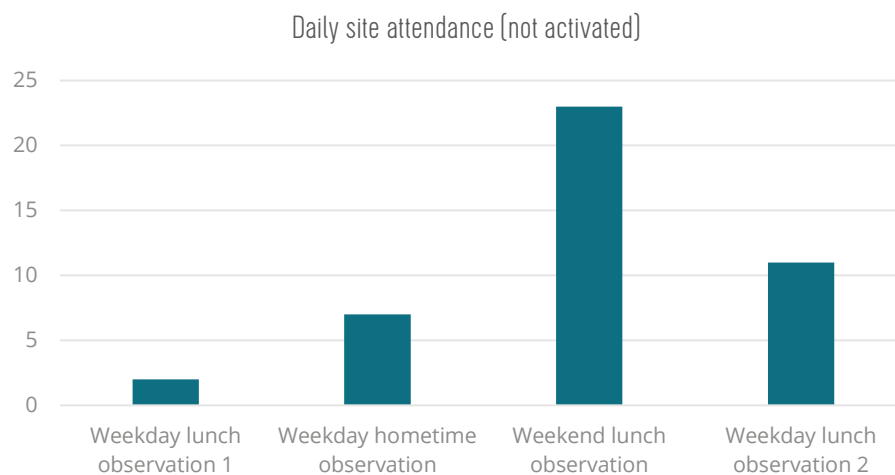


Drumming activity with Sheree

The events attracted anywhere between 30 and over 70 community members to gather around arts activities in the park, as the graph below suggests.

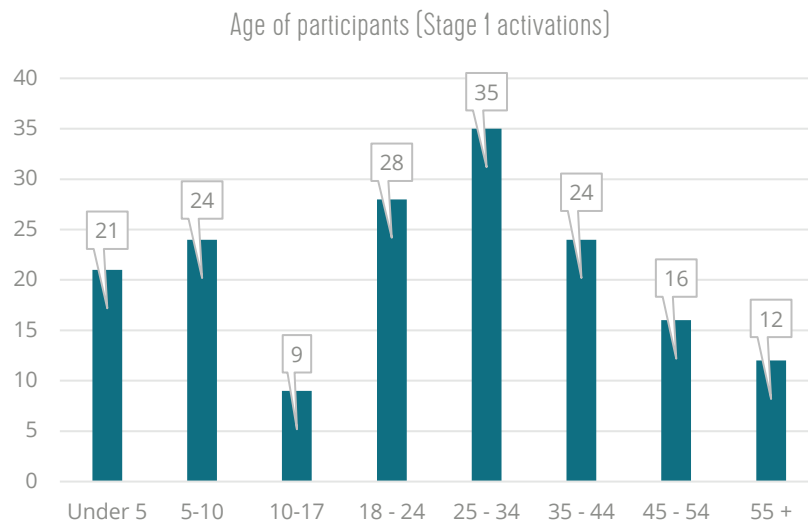


Community engagement with the Social Art Park site was significantly increased when compared with general daily use of the site. It is also worth noting that there was an 818% increase in community use of the site between the weekday lunchtime before the delivery of Social Art Park (2 users) and one month into the Social Art Park activation period (11 users).



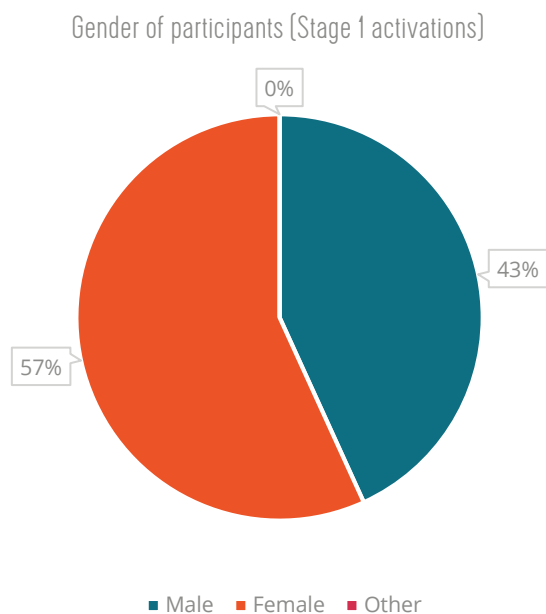
Demographic diversity

Social Art Park encouraged significant demographic diversity including a strong representation across almost all age groups with the two exceptions being teenagers and seniors. However, participation by these two age groups in general public realm events and activities is traditionally very low unless those groups are specifically targeted.



Gender diversity

Both genders also had strong representation at Social Art Park events. The larger percentage of women visiting Social Art Park suggests the events were perceived as safe and welcoming.

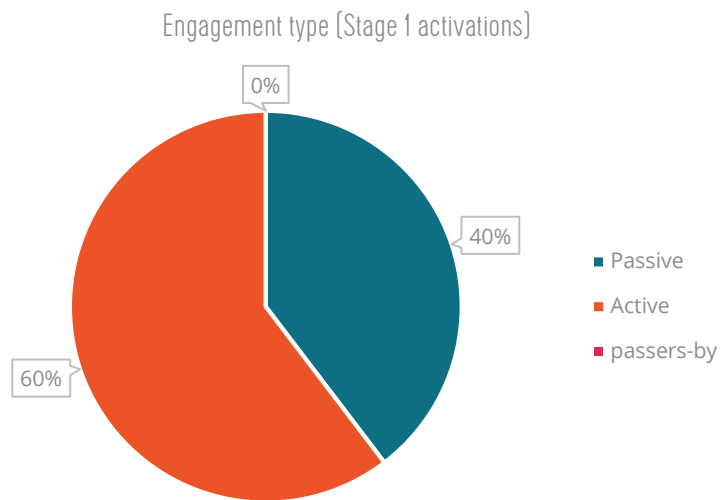


Cultural diversity

While it is not possible to provide accurate data about cultural representation at Social Art Park events, research observation suggests that event visitation was culturally diverse. Cultural backgrounds of those attending events included: Vietnamese, Chinese, African, Aboriginal along with Europeans from many countries.

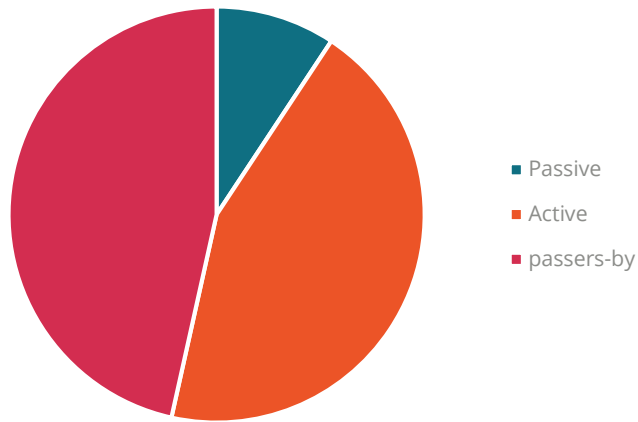
Level and type of arts engagement

92% of people observed in the vicinity of Social Art Park participated in some form of creative activity. The majority of these were active participants – engaging directly with the performances or installations. The remaining third passively participated in these arts activities through listening or observing others’ engagement.



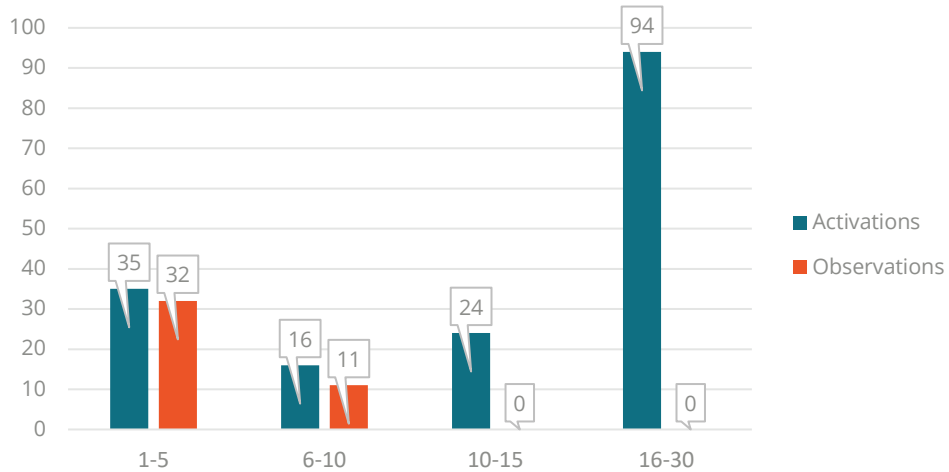
It is also worth noting that there was a significant increase in active use of the site during Social Art Park activations when compared with daily engagement type, with the majority of community members simply passing through when unactivated.

Engagement type (daily use)



There was also notable increase in time spent - or dwell time - in this public place, as the comparison between general daily use and use of the site during activations demonstrates:

Comparison of dwell times (Stage 1) mins





Children interacting with 'Linus' the roving performer

2. Respond to community needs and interests

The Social Art Park project responded to community needs and interests in multiple and complex ways. To demonstrate this, the following section uses a community engagement spectrum model adapted from the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

SOCIAL ART PARK COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
To provide community with information to help them understand a problem, project, opportunities	To obtain public feedback on project	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in aspects of the project including development of outputs and identification of preferred solutions	To place the project in the hands of the community

Adapted from IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND CO-DESIGN

Social Art Park employed **all five stages** of the community engagement spectrum with community.

1. Inform

- Promotion of Social Art Park activities, workshops and events on flyers, social media, posters, pavements (chalk), email and RiotACT Canberra
- Information dissemination at workshops and events

2. Consult

- Consultation with key local stakeholders about project design and delivery including:
 - Belconnen Community Services
 - Belconnen Community Council
 - Belconnen Library
 - Belconnen Youth Centre
 - Florey Primary School
 - University of Canberra
- Consultation with community about their aspirations for the park at workshops and events through mixed data collection methods (e.g. workshop surveys, butterfly wishes)



'Butterfly wishes' at events as creative feedback collection method

3. Involve

Iterative community feedback

The project embedded iterative community feedback mechanisms to identify community aspirations for the park which then further informed the project. As a primary example of this involvement, community members attending workshops made the following suggestions for the park, which were then enacted within the Social Art Park site:

- Comfortable colourful seating
- More nature
- Space to hang out



Comfortable colourful seating and butterfly theme for more nature





Space to hang out – nature cubby

Targeted scheduling and facilities

The project team sought to involve a broad cross-section of community by scheduling workshops that aligned with local timetables (e.g. Florey Primary School holiday programme; Belconnen Youth Centre after school hours) and used local facilities (Belconnen Youth Centre).

First Nations involvement

To embed cultural leadership of local First Nations people into the project, Ngunawal elder Wally Bell launched Social Art Park with a Welcome to Country. Indigenous artists also performed across multiple art forms at Social Art Park events.



Ngunawal elder Wally Bell launches Social Art Park

4. Collaborate

The Social Art Park team collaborated with community members on multiple projects including:

Social Art Park Stage 2

Key stakeholders and community members were invited to co-design the framework, programme and delivery of the second Stage of Social Art Park

Social Art Park furniture

Young people from Belconnen Youth Centre designed and delivered the colourful pop up furniture for Social Art Park. Chairs were also painted by Florey Primary students, general members of the community and project team.



Belconnen Youth Centre group creates Social Art Park furniture

Sculpture

A young man who attended all workshop sessions asked if he could create a 'tiki' – a wooden carving in human form for good luck. The project team facilitated this work by producing a wooden figure to paint using the glow-in-the-dark paint requested by this community member.

5. Empower

The aim of Stage 2 of Social Art Park was to move closer toward community custodianship of the project. This included the creation of a working group that could take carriage into the future. However, the short time frame available and resources in Stage 2 precluded the full achievement of this outcome.

1. Develop the artistic skills of the community

The Social Art Park project was designed to facilitate artistic engagement and upskilling of diverse sectors of the community. This included arts workshops with children, young people and adults as well as immersive arts experiences at Social Art Park events using multiple art forms including:

Roving performance:

- stilt walkers and other costumed performers adopting related themes of artmaking and nature.

Circus:

- Sole male performer inviting participation then roving
- Sole Female performer inviting participation then roving
- Glow-in-the-dark night circus free for all

Music:

- 2 x musical duos
- 3-piece band x 1
- Indigenous dance / music performance
- Drumming workshop (great participation!) followed by solo performance by presenter
- Solo performer then jamming with Indigenous performer

Visual arts

- Face painting (volunteer from community)
- Indigenous art exhibition
- Mural painting for kids
- Chalk art
- Butterfly wishes – gathering and display (at all events)
- Informal additions to Stick Cubby between events

Literature:

- Belconnen Library storytime, picture books selected to suit theme
- Little Library (Stage 2 only)

2. Engage sectors of the community that otherwise may experience barriers or disadvantage that inhibit their participation in the art

The Social Art Park project engaged sectors that may otherwise experience barriers or disadvantage by offering multiple free and accessible opportunities for participating in art projects. This participation was facilitated in the art-making activities to create Social Art park, the art-making activities on-site and in the active or passive involvement at the activation events. These community sectors included:

- young people, who often experience barriers to participation in public activities including participation in the public arts
- Belconnen residents who may not have the financial capacity or other necessary resources to participate in arts learning or immersive arts activities
- People with disabilities who may not have access to arts learning



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community response to Social Art Park was overwhelmingly positive, as the following comments suggest:

The Social Art Park experience is a heart-warming, intimate, friendly, colourful, and joyful way to enjoy a Saturday in Belco.

Thank you BCS, Wellspring Environmental Arts and Design, and all of the artists who created this project. Warms the heart!
Dr Sherene Suchy (Suki)

It's really great event for public. Music is life itself. We should enjoy any kind of music in our daily life. My baby is only 10 months old but he can follow the singer's tempo to wave his body. Thank you to all the guys to work so hard to give us a wonderful Saturday.

Mika Yin, Leo and baby Joy

I'd like to echo the above comment. Thank you for bringing happiness to the community. The music and all the interactions are so nice. Beautiful day, beautiful music, beautiful people. Thank you so much.

Sophie

It's fun.
Tempest

Such a great initiative. Well done to all involved. Lovely to walk past this little splash of colour every day. Our daughter Hanalei volunteered to draw Linus' juggling balls and talks about Linus whenever we walk past the park. She also likes to tell the story of Linus coming to life and learning to all her friends and family. Thank you all!

Scott, Penina and Hanalei

Having the music which brings the public together is an EXCELLENT idea – Hope this program continues. Thank you for bringing happiness to the community.
(Illegible)

I love all the fun I have.
Linh

Why don't you do this at Hawker shops? We've got a good space and community but not music. Good luck, I love it.

Anon.

The community service activity is wonderful. Our family all very enjoy it, it will be a good memory for us! Hope more activity like this to rich our free time!
Anon.

What a beautiful way to bring people together and bring a dull, neglected space into an interactive and colourful space!
Jess

Love the stick cubby! Perfect adventure for imaginative kids. Kids and families need spaces like this.
F. Bos

The new garden space is super relaxing with many chairs and cool `events they also have a cute little hut [cubby] for children to play in with special messages wrote on butterflies. Overall I think this is a great place added to the Belconnen Community.
Anon.

Great. Thank you for such an energising event. It indeed cheered me up and made my night. Specifically meeting you Ms Jennifer. I'm pleased to meet you both. Thank you Rhiannon for such an awesome welcoming manner. Best of Luck, with appreciations. Love live music.
Anon.

I didn't even know this space existed!
Anon.

Great Idea. Good venue. Talented artists/entertainers. Well done – please do this again.
Trevor

Gorgeous setting; a space I've walked past for six years and have never seen a person walk through and sit in. That's changed these past few weeks.
Tara Cheyne, MLA

What a colourful space! Thank you for brightening up Belconnen.
Jen.

Amazing idea, was a great morning spent in the sun Thank you.
Matekka and Shianna

This is a wonderful function, we have lots of fun. Thank you all!

What a lovely way to spend my birthday! Butterflies and art and wishes! Thank You!
Suri

So cool – such a wonderful vibe and great event.
Iless

On my evening back from work my husband called me on my cell phone to say he enjoyed hearing the live band playing near the Belconnen Library. As I was determined to go to the gym first, I began to reconsider my plan because I love music! Friday evenings, and over the weekend I often enjoy a variety of genres. So, congratulations to the team who organised the live music that brightened up our evening! Many thanks to the 'Red Clay' band for your energising tunes and positive vibes – keep it up!
Simon and Bernadine

Great day to take preschool out, lovely story tellers and a beautiful butterfly. A lovely story time in the sun! Thank you.
Anon.

Lovely experience on the eve of Reconciliation week. The atmosphere, relaxing music – lovely and I really enjoyed the friendly and inclusive nature of Phil and the other organiser. Wonderful idea and I hope it gets to be more permanent!!
Caroline

Social Art Park. Thank you so much for your generosity and opportunity you have given us to be part of this wonderful Belconnen community event. It has been such a wonderful night. Despite this cold Canberra winter. You have warmed our hearts with your hospitality, creativity and initiative to share art and make it an integral part of Belconnen. We enjoyed playing music for you guys. And the audience was truly amazing. Thank you Phil, Rachel, Sylvia, Rhiannon, Rene.
Love Red Clay.
Michael and Evangeline

So enjoyed and loved the drumming and singing. A good timeout this last day of warm weather.
Penelope

CONCLUSION

Social Art Park was successful as an arts community outreach project against all four project criteria. It demonstrated the efficacy of the creative placemaking model which involves the transformation of place through the arts. This project model could be delivered with community in other parts of the ACT to foster further artistic expression and community engagement, and to develop communities and custodianship of place through creative endeavours.

