



'A DREAMLAB WHERE CREATIVITY IS NURTURED'

The Impact of Story Factory's Year of Poetry and Year of the Novella Programs on Youth Wellbeing

Story Factory is a not-for-profit creative writing organisation, with a vision for an Australia where all young people have a voice and the skills and confidence to tell their stories. As part of Story Factory's evaluation process, we commissioned independent consultants String Theory to evaluate the impact of our **Year of Poetry** and **Year of the Novella** programs on the wellbeing of young people from under-resourced communities.

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Story Factory is a magical space. A dreamlab where creativity is nurtured by empowering students with skills, resources, opportunities, and a sense of community.

—Amuor
Year of Poetry Alumnus



BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

Many young people who work with Story Factory report having negative experiences of school, and challenging home environments. They often do not feel valued for creativity, and have limited access to creative opportunities and connections outside of school and home. As a result, young people can internalise the stigma associated with their social identity and experience negative self-image.

Our Year of the Novella and Year of Poetry programs focus on supporting young people to create and publish their own novella or book of poetry. Both programs run one evening each week during school terms between February and December, and encompass all aspects of book publishing; from storyboarding and writing, to editing, typesetting, and designing a professional publication. The programs conclude with a book launch, where students and their families come together to celebrate their achievements.

This evaluation demonstrated that the Year of the Novella and Year of Poetry programs impacted students' wellbeing in three key ways, over the short-term, medium-term and long-term, ultimately leading to increased feelings of agency, identity and belonging.

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As people from Western Sydney ... we've been told our whole lives that we are the less fortunate and we live in a low socio-economic area ... But with writing, you realise that actually, you are the advantaged one. Because you have so many stories to give, so much uniqueness.

— Young person



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I would describe Story Factory as highly inclusive, immersive, positive. There's no bad idea. They truly do help their students.

— Young Person

AGENCY

By expanding upon their vocabulary and writing skills, young people involved in Story Factory programs said they experienced satisfaction, fulfilment and increased confidence. They were more likely to take positive risks, and step out of their comfort zones. All of this led to an increased sense of confidence, and an improved sense of agency. This agency allows young people to interact with systems, structures, and social groups effectively and positively.

LONG TERM

3 AGENCY

- 2
- Resilience
 - Self-efficacy

MEDIUM TERM

- 1
- Critical & creative skills
 - Pride in achievement

SHORT TERM

LONG TERM

3 BELONGING

- 2
- Cognitive empathy
 - Voice

MEDIUM TERM

- 1
- Communication & collaboration skills
 - Improved connections

SHORT TERM

BELONGING

The connections young people built with others and within creative communities, alongside the opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives and give and feedback, led to greater empathy and an ability to clearly express their own voice. The skills learnt in Story Factory programs built on young people's capacity to voice their views, be heard and feel represented. Overall, this led to a strong sense of belonging; both with peers, but also to a wider creative community.

IDENTITY

Through Story Factory's creative writing programs young people explored identity and negotiated their relationships with themselves, using writing as a tool to unpack negative stereotypes about their communities. The opportunity to explore in this manner led to a rejection of these stereotypes, instead promoting autonomy and positive self-concept, which ultimately led to a transformation in their identity. Story Factory programs allowed young people to experience positive changes by accepting who they are, understanding those around them, and feeling connected to a community of like-minded peers.

LONG TERM

3 IDENTITY

- 2
- Autonomy
 - Positive self-concept

MEDIUM TERM

- 1
- Rejection of stereotypes
 - Sense of self

SHORT TERM

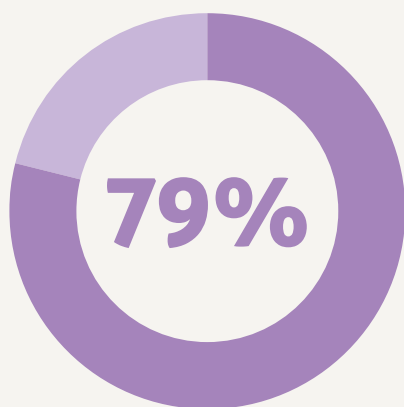
The evaluation took place over 2023. The methods were co-designed with Story Factory staff, program facilitators, and two program alumni, with data coming from literature reviews, surveys, and interviews. Four Story Factory staff, two teachers, 10 alumni, and one parent were interviewed, along with a survey of all 28 students enrolled in the programs in 2023. Also included are quotes from alumni about their experiences in Year of Poetry and Year of the Novella.



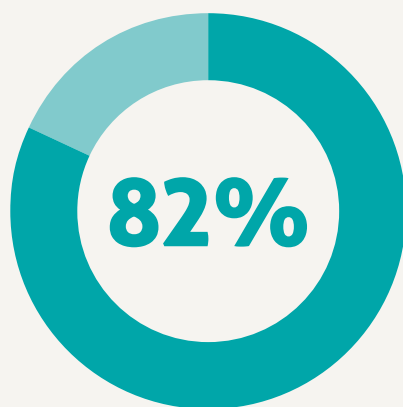
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Story Factory has always been like my safety net. Every time I had a rough week, I always looked forward to Story Factory. It was something that was like a sanctuary. They recognised me, that was enough. It was just a good space because everyone was passionate. I've never been in a room full of passionate writers who were good at what they were doing as well. When I was low, the encouragement was enough, that sincerity was enough.

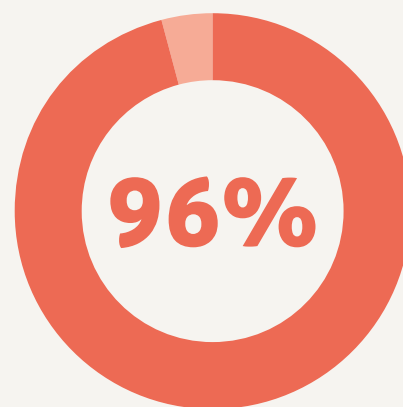
—Young Person



of young people said they felt stronger and prouder in their identity



of young people said that the facilitators helped them to think about how to best represent who they are in their writing



of young people reported enjoying connection to a community of young people who enjoy writing

StoryFACTORY

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Please note that independent consultants String Theory were not involved in the creation of this report summary.