



Clifton School of Arts Inc. Strategic Plan 2023 – Consultation Draft for Members

Introduction

The Clifton School of the Arts is an historic landmark building, located just south of the Sea Cliff Bridge in Clifton, in the Illawarra region on the south coast of NSW. For over 110 years the building has provided a spectacular space for exhibitions, recitals, film screenings, talks and a host of other community activities. The Clifton School of Arts building is owned and maintained by the community and is managed by a Committee of dedicated volunteer local residents.

History

The Clifton School of Arts Stands on Dharawal Country, the Traditional Homelands of the Wodi Wodi People. The CSA Committee and members pay their respects to the First Nations People of this country.

Situated on a narrow ribbon of land between the ocean and the Illawarra Escarpment, the village of Clifton grew around the Coal Cliff Colliery which commenced operations in 1877. In its heyday, the village boasted about a thousand residents. In 1910, the residents decided to replace their one room ramshackle 'School of Arts' with something substantial and lasting. Raising £100 by public subscription, the community built on land donated by the mining company the iconic, now heritage listed, Clifton School of Arts.

The Community planned to construct the facility in two stages. The first consisted of four rooms on two storeys. The building included a small reading library, an upright piano and rooms where the community could gather for meetings and classes. The second stage was to be a large hall at the rear of the building but before work could commence, the industrial dispute was settled, and the men headed back to the pit.

Not long after opening its doors, the little School of Arts was being buffeted by history. The following decades saw the Spanish Flu pandemic, two World Wars and the Great Depression. While these years of turmoil caused wild fluctuations in the fortunes of Clifton, a chain of committees somehow kept the Clifton School of Arts functioning.

By the 1980s the Clifton mine had closed, and the town's population had dwindled. Over the decades, the School of Arts building had deteriorated badly and looked as though it would have to be demolished. In 1996, the School of Arts Committee began fundraising and lobbying to restore the building. Grants were received from Wollongong City Council, NSW Heritage Commission, and private donors. Through the efforts and enthusiasm of the local community the beloved building was brought back to life. It has remained in community hands for over 110 years.

Vision

That the Clifton School of Arts continues to thrive as a vibrant hub serving and inspiring our community now and long into the future.

Purpose

To inspire, encourage and celebrate our community by continuing to offer the Northern Illawarra a diverse and sustainable-program of cultural, educational and community activities, honouring the vision of the original founders.

Values

We aspire to be collaborative, accountable, inclusive, high quality and welcoming to all. We view the arts and creativity as essential for a healthy and thriving community and fundamental to our humanity.¹

Objectives

By December 2023, the Clifton School of Arts will have:

1. Enhanced the **range of activities and services** that it offers to the local and wider Illawarra community and visitors to Clifton by:
 - a. Delivering a diverse program of CSA-initiated cultural and educational events that are relevant to members' interests and appeal to a broader cross-section of the community in terms of age and cultural diversity, including Indigenous communities
 - b. Planning a calendar of events for 2023 and beyond that maximises the venue space available and ensures a balance of community and income-generating events
 - c. Continuing to develop the program of forums, workshops and classes
 - d. Developing and presenting the Ian Gentle Project in partnership with the University of Wollongong, Wollongong Art Gallery and other partners
 - e. Preserving, researching and exhibiting the CSA's movable cultural collection
 - f. Exploring the feasibility of a more permanent, small exhibition open to the public in the downstairs space.

2. Developed a **stronger profile** for CSA and its activities by:
 - a. Continuing to build its reputation through the local media and other fora
 - b. Increasing engagement and outreach by updating the communications plan focussed on key stakeholders
 - c. Publishing a promotional brochure to support fundraising
 - d. Seeking to expand the number and diversity of members, supporters and friends of the CSA
 - e. Maintaining regular communications with members, supporters and the community through the newsletter, events, website, and social media

¹ *"The arts are fundamental to our humanity. They ennoble and inspire us—fostering creativity, goodness, and beauty. The arts help us express our values, build bridges between cultures, and bring us together regardless of ethnicity, religion, or age. When times are tough, art is salve for the ache."* Randy Cohen (Vice President of Research and Policy at Americans for the Arts), March 2013 Artsblog.

3. Preserved the **CSA's heritage building and facilities** and plan for the **construction of disability access and facilities and a multifunctional gallery**, thereby completing the work that the original miners started in 1911 by:
 - a. Continuing to operate and improve the existing building and facilities and ensure that they are environmentally and financially sustainable
 - b. Clarifying the construction phases and costs of the new development
 - c. Preparing the business case for the building of the extension and its ongoing management to assess its financial viability
 - d. Exploring options for the management of the venue and its programs
 - e. Seeking funds through a capital campaign, in line with objective 5 below.

4. Built a **network of key partners, members and supporters** that wish to contribute to the future viability of the organisation by:
 - a. Reaching out to neighbouring venues, community groups, cultural institutions, schools, and Wollongong City Council to gather information about identified needs and strengthen the northern Illawarra cultural trail
 - b. Engaging members and volunteers in the activities of the CSA by being part of a 'working group'
 - c. Acknowledging the contribution of volunteers, donors etc via newsletters, meetings, certificates, plaques etc
 - d. Raising awareness of the historical, cultural and architectural significance of the building.
 - e. Raising awareness of the CSA among new audiences that are younger and more culturally diverse, and among local Indigenous communities.

5. Established a **stronger financial base** that supports CSA's future aspirations by:
 - a. Maintaining a balanced budget for the current building, the extension and the long-term operation of the CSA.
 - b. Developing a fundraising strategy and capital campaign that identifies a range of potential donors to support the building of the extension.
 - c. Organising ongoing fundraising activities to support the current programs
 - d. Submitting applications for funding to foundations, philanthropists, sponsors, and local and state governments for current and future projects
 - e. Developing new fundraising initiatives such as through merchandising and crowdfunding.

6. Enhanced the **governance, planning and management** of the CSA and its activities by:
 - a. Creating working groups to bring volunteers together to assist with delivering key aspects of the Strategic Plan
 - b. Continuing to hold regular meetings of the committee and members, and working towards increasing and diversifying the membership, particularly with young people and those from indigenous and other, diverse cultural backgrounds.
 - c. Ensuring that the management and financial practices of the CSA will be able to meet the anticipated increase in activity and demand.

- d. Meeting compliance requirements e.g. by providing an annual information statement to the ROCO² and Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

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² Subject to approval of our application for inclusion in the Register of Cultural Organisations (ROCO) which would give us Deductible Gift Recipient status.