


HEAPS DECENT

ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22



Heaps Decent acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands on which we work and collaborate - the people of the Eora nation, Dharawal country, Wiradjuri nation, and Barkindji nation.

We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and honour the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Janine Agzarian (Chairperson)

Oliver Ryan (Treasurer)

Nina Agzarian (Secretary)

Andrew Levins

Nerida Woods

Emily Copeland

Hau Latefuku (from September 2021)

STAFF

Nerida Woods (General Manager / CEO)

Adam Bozzetto (Lead Facilitator)

Amy Mifsud (Content Manager & Administrative Assistant)

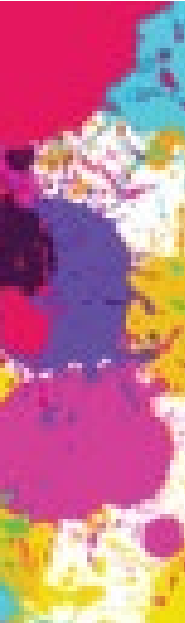
Sebastien Fava-Verde (Relationships & Development Manager until November 2021)

ARTIST TUTORS

Adam Bozzetto, Mark Egan, Michael Moebus, Nina Wilson, Tom Elliot, Isabella Martin, Wesley Boney, Rick Bull, Amy Mifsud, Michael Black, F.Stop Workshop: Patrick Ronald and James Farley

Volunteers: Martin Green, Olivia Kim

Heaps Decent is a non-profit company limited by guarantee, holding Tax Charity Concession (TCC) and Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status.





OUR MISSION

Heaps Decent is an Australian organisation empowering diverse young people to express their creativity through music and multimedia.

We support engagement for change, positive futures and the development of high quality content with a unique identity.

ABOUT US

In early 2007 young Sydney DJs Nina Agzarian and Andrew Levins were volunteering for independent radio station FBi. Teaming up with visiting American DJ Diplo (Wesley Pentz) they ran workshops in the Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre in Wagga Wagga. A few months later they ran workshops at Juniperina all-girls Juvenile Justice Centre with British Indie Popstress M.I.A.

In these workshops they glimpsed how stories and music change lives - and it started by changing Levins and Nina. Determined to sustain the work they rented space in Alexandria and used equipment donated by Diplo to work weekly with girls released from the centre. From there they were introduced to Youth Off the Street's Key College and the project snowballed.

By 2008, Fuzzy, organisers of Australia's premiere music events, took notice and provided kick-start funding and assistance as a key partner/ benefactor through donations and administrative support. Heaps Decent grew exponentially.

From the start Heaps Decent successfully enlisted the support of professional local artists and guest tutors from a wide variety of musical genres - starting with Diplo there have been numerous performers, DJ's and singers who've donated time and energy, including Aloe Blacc, Lykke Li, M.I.A, Sinden, A- Trak, videoartist Ghostdad, DJ Mehdi, Spank Rock, Devlin, Lady Sovereign, Brodinski, The Cool Kids, Busy P, AC Slater, 12th Planet, Jesse Rose and many more.

A passionate beginning, and 15 years on more than 6000 young people have participated in projects. More than 3000 creative workshops have been delivered in over 40 partner communities.

Heaps Decent has more than 13,000 followers of online content, a weekly profile spot on FBi and SYN radio, with select tracks achieving airplay on triple J, and a number of other community radio stations. Content has been featured on ABC Radio National, Rage, 585, and Channel V. Performances have included Parliament House, The Sydney Opera House, The Oxford Arts Factory, and many regional community festivals and events. Emerging artists have featured at VIVID festival events - Heaps Gay and Curveball at Carriageworks. Heaps Decent has also toured with the Groovin' The Moo regional music festival, delivering workshops in collaboration with featured artists.





DIRECTOR'S REPORT

It's a pleasure to introduce the 2021/2022 Annual Report. 2022 marks the 15th year of operations for Heaps Decent. What an incredible ride it has been in that time, and truly wonderful to see the organisation come through a very difficult period during COVID to continue supporting the creative development of young people across New South Wales. We champion those who are often off the radar, facing a number of challenges and barriers to successful engagement in education and community, or simply isolated due to location or circumstances. Through creative expression they make sense of their world, and many work through experiences very disproportionate to their age and coping skills. They find connection to personal identity, and connection to others.

After the turmoil of last year, it was terribly disappointing to see so many activities put on hold once again from June - November 2021, during the most severe of COVID "lockdown" periods. Creative staff reached out again to run workshops online and maintain contact with our network of young people and services, but there was a noticeable fatigue with distance communication. Of course, there were many without access to technical resources, meaning they were very much cut off during this time. Despite logistical difficulties local artists ran activities in Wagga Wagga, and we collaborated with Wilcannia Central School long distance to create a song and video as the community was impacted by COVID.

We assisted other young artists from Sydney and regional NSW with new music releases, and everyone was very eager to get back into a real studio.

From November we were delighted to resume work in a variety of settings including Youth Justice centres and refuges, but this was by no means easy with the Omicron wave setting back activities in the new year - particularly as so many people were absent and isolating with the virus. It was memorable to run local council school holiday workshops in full PPE. Things really picked up momentum toward June 2022, by which time we were back to running a full program of activities including regional travel and live performances.

Several of our key staff members undertook Youth Mental Health First Aid training this year. One of the great challenges ahead is the increase in mental health issues among our young community members, with corresponding social anxiety and disengagement from school after long absences.

Our program prioritises positive impacts and supports well being. Creative engagement reduces stress and lifts our spirits, it supports genuine social connection and provides a scaffold for young people to express how they are thinking and feeling; to explore their identity and be safe and secure in this. It has been pleasing to see an increase in demand from health, education and community providers for Heaps Decent activities and workshops. It reflects the growing cross sectoral interest in better supporting the needs of youth - and all ages more broadly.

From July 2021 - June 2022 we delivered over 200 workshops across NSW with more than 300 participants. It's a terrific achievement given the see-saw of rules and restrictions we all had to follow.

We are immensely thankful to our principal funders over this period, including the NSW Government through Create NSW and Multicultural NSW. Thank you to all other funders, donors and supporters for ensuring we can reach children and young people and provide equitable resources for creative expression.

Thank you to the wonderful program participants who have shown great courage once again. In project work this past year young people have made work authentic to their own lives. To take the time to listen and really hear this diversity of voices and perspectives is a continued reminder of the hope, resilience and humour they champion.

Thank you to the other Board directors, staff and artist facilitators who continue to power Heaps Decent with their talents, positivity and passion. A warm thanks to our project partners who continue to provide valuable skills and resources to support activities and our mission to deliver high quality, accessible and inclusive creative opportunities.



Janine Agzarian,
Chairperson



Artwork from workshops in Wagga Wagga.

MAJOR PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES: WHAT WE DO

Heaps Decent artist tutors start with the ideas that are immediately around young people - their stories, their neighbourhoods, challenges and aspirations. As workshops unfold, young people are up-skilled in music software along with more advanced ideas of how to create a song, source their own sounds, write lyrics, operate equipment and get on stage even when scared or lacking confidence. Coupled with multimedia art, video production and other visual skills it facilitates a great learning strategy - a pathway young people follow because they want to see the outcome and are ultimately inspired by their own works.

Outlined on the following pages are highlights from a year in the life of Heaps Decent.

Our website archive has further project details and can be accessed at www.heapsdecent.com. We invite you to take a look around!

Artwork from workshops
in Wagga Wagga



KEY COLLEGE

12 workshops delivered

Since 2008 Heaps Decent has been a weekly feature at Key College in Redfern. “Key” is an accredited independent High School (operating under the auspice of Youth Off the Streets) catering to young people at risk, without stable accommodation. At Key they can complete year 10 studies. Students work to achieve music goals over the course of the year, through individual tutoring and mentoring. From July 21 through to November we ran a series of online music production workshops, and made a return to hands-on activities in 2022.

BIG UP

50 workshops delivered

Big Up has been a staple in the Heaps Decent program for more than a decade, involving visits to NSW Youth Justice Centres and their Education and Training Units where young people continue with school. Unfortunately it wasn’t possible to run remote activities during travel bans and isolation in the latter half of 2021. However from November onward visits were approved, and with COVID management in place workshops resumed. This was truly welcomed after many months of restricted programs in the centres.

“ This program should be every day ”

We worked with Reiby Youth Justice Centre - through the Dorchester ETU, Cobham Youth Justice Centre in St Mary’s, and Riverina Youth Justice Centre in Wagga Wagga.

Powerful themes continued to emerge from these music workshops: home, transformation and growth, journeys and future, family and friends, belonging, freedom and restriction. Dozens of catchy and heartfelt tunes have been created by some very talented participants in this project in collaboration with Heaps Decent facilitators.

We continue to work with young people upon release from detention who are keen to follow up, stay in contact and make more music. This is just one of the excellent outcomes of the project, which sees participants engaging in writing, expressing themselves positively and envisaging a brighter future.

Heaps Decent is committed to supporting young people detained in youth justice through programs that build skills and resilience, and support mental health.

*This is a long road I have to walk
It has its ups and downs, I’ll get through it all
It’s hard to see the light in these dark times
But i know this sweet freedom will be mine
I know my friend is waiting I’ll soon be free
If I close my eyes and visualise it’s not too hard to see*

Participant, Dorchester ETU, Reiby Youth Justice Centre

*Home soon when I walk out these gates
It’s been a while since I’ve seen sun at the end of a rainy day
Fly me to the moon don’t let me in space
Cause i’m willing to take your place
Choose your choice that’s a risk you make*

Participant, Shepherds Park ETU, Riverina Youth Justice Centre

HOME BASE

70 music production sessions delivered

Another project we had to move online for a while, Home Base offers creative and production mentoring for young people at all stages of their music journeys. From those just beginning to explore songwriting and music production to others who are getting their first releases out there, the project offers individual and tailored support in all aspects of development as an artist. Sessions provide the opportunity to explore new ideas with a producer one to one, and develop work through to completion. Some participants have already engaged in a Heaps Decent project elsewhere, some are referred, and others just seem to find help right when they need it. This project has been running for more than 10 years, emerging from the sound studio at Redfern Community Centre.

The start of 2022 has seen a bigger demand than ever for studio time, now booked out weeks in advance. We have continued to work from 107 Projects in Redfern, Glebe Youth Service, Hope Street in Woolloomooloo, Bank Studios in Haymarket and the brand new City of Sydney Creative Studios in Bathurst Street, Sydney. Home Base continues to produce high quality content with a small group of emerging artists from across Sydney.

“ Today we secured a radio premiere
for Princess Atlantis’ new release.
Very exciting! ”

It was awesome for some young artists to jump back into live performance after a long break in opportunities. 17 year old Lil Arts went on tour with Kobie Dee’s Block Party in Gomeroi country, and went on to open for The Kid Laroi during his Australian tour - an amazing experience.

Heaps Decent presented an eclectic 2 nights at 107 on the Rocks - an activation in the harbourside precinct that featured a mix of our seasoned artist facilitators alongside emerging artists. One young talent, Princess Atlantis also appeared at the Knox Street Bar and the iconic Heaps Gay Qweens Ball.

*I gotta shine like the sun shining bright
Like the moon in the night when the sky turns dark
Follow my dreams good things coming in my path
And I love it when they say LilArts with the fresh bars
These bars are coming from my heart
‘Cause I’ve been through the rough night
When i was ten
Watched my brother get left behind
But now I’m gonna change his life
Put that stuff behind
‘Cause it’s back in time
‘Cause you people don’t understand how it feels to be in my hands
‘Cause I come from Kamilaroi land
Where the two rivers meet
It’s where I plant my feet
Far away from the city streets
Where I go to find my peace*

Lil Arts, “Sky Turns Dark”



In the 107 music studio, Redfern

Lil Arts opening for the Kid Laroi in Sydney
Credit: Weave Community Services

NO BORDERS IN OUR SKY

25 creative workshops delivered

Who are we now as a community, and who could we be? No Borders In Our Sky brings diverse young people together to express their vision of shared belonging in the regional town of Wagga Wagga. We are working in partnership with the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga, who provide high quality programs and services to assist people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to settle into life in the local area.

We launched this project in April 2019 and activities continued into 2021 and 22, despite the postponements, interruptions and curve balls of COVID. Local arts organisation, F.Stop workshops also ran a series of photographic workshops during the NSW 2021 travel bans, resulting in wonderful portraits, landscapes and perspectives on local life while NSW travel bans kept us at home.

With a number of subsequent visits and a big body of music and art we are working toward a public outcome to celebrate the end of the project. This will feature audio and visual work at a number of locations around the town. This project is funded by the COMPACT Program, an initiative of the NSW Government. COMPACT is a program administered by Multicultural NSW and “aims to inspire young Australians from all communities to stand up and stand united as champions for community harmony.

*Coming in hot water my feet
Everywhere I look everywhere I see
Wagga's my town the place to be
The place I live yeah that's me
There just no place like my hometown*

Kip, “Wagga”



Artwork from workshops at the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga



Music, art and photography workshops,
Wagga Wagga

OUTER WEST SESSIONS

The visits we had planned to the far west of NSW were not possible. This included proposals to work with Wilcannia Central School and the local WINGS drop in centre. The remote community of Wilcannia was severely impacted by a COVID outbreak, and local people and services endured great difficulty amid already stretched resources for health, housing and food supply. Wilcannia Central School assisted with the delivery of necessary supplies, and worked to support students and their families. With Assistant Principal Sarah Donnelly, Heaps Decent collaborated on a song for the young students during this period, "Stay at Home". We edited a video with footage from many years of visits, and this was shared with the community.

We are safe

It's our job

We have to stay home

To care for our Mob

We are respectful

Our people are strong

But we gotta stay inside

Stop this going on

Wilcannia Central School, "Stay at Home"



REFUGES

24 creative workshops delivered

It was inspiring to have one of the intensive support services we work with in Sydney jump on board for online music workshops during lockdowns. This meant young people could have some outside connection during an extremely isolating time. There is no substitute for hands-on activity, and as soon as permissions were in place we returned with weekly music and visual media workshops. We worked with the Sherwood program, The Girls Refuge and The Lillian Howell project. These sessions supported positive self expression, heartfelt storytelling and were a fun outlet and break from personal situations.

I wanna see my sister sick of being alone

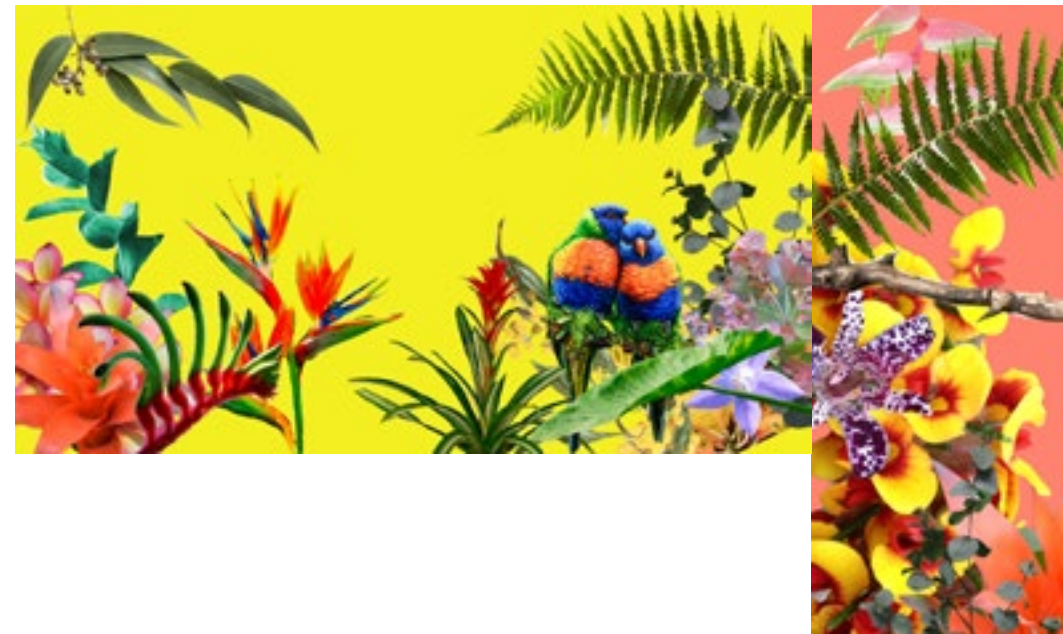
I want to see everyone calling my phone

Want everyone to see how much I have grown

I miss her so much, having her around

My mum is always there wanna make her proud

Sherwood program participant, "Mother"



“The girls ask me every week to listen to their old songs. They are very proud of them and always make the centre staff listen to them”

Sherwood Program, “Flying Free” digital collages



OTHER PROJECT WORK AND HAPPENINGS

31 creative workshops delivered

Lomandra School, Campbelltown

Adam ran weekly music workshops with Lomandra both online and back in the classroom once this was possible. A group of keen students made great progress with song writing, rapping and recording - bringing the talent from Sydney's west.

Heaps Decent has a long history working at the school, first running a project in 2010. Lomandra supports students from years 5-12 with severe challenging behaviours and/or mental health issues, engaging them in relevant, challenging learning experiences that extend their practical and academic skills. The school frequently collaborates with community services to enrich learning experiences.

Guns on the street

It's grown in our generation

People fighting with fire

With someone shot dead

There's no gardeners here

We never clean up the mess

I don't wanna push this

But I swear to God

Keeping up with high expectations

But we're falling apart

I won't say it's surprising

But we know it's all true

Crying with blood on our hands

And it's gone onto you

Participant, Lomandra School



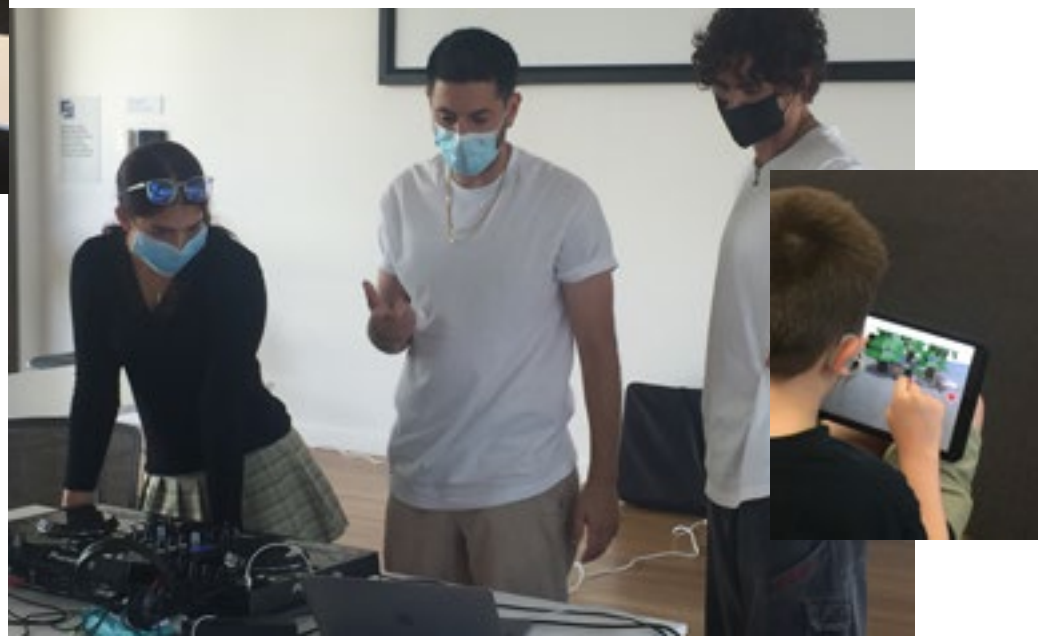
Augmented Reality
and DJing workshops,
Inner West Council

School Holiday Workshops

After several COVID related postponements (the enduring theme for the year), we finally delivered a series of workshops for Liverpool Council and the Inner West Council in the January school holiday period. Despite the Omicron outbreak, some keen young locals joined us for experiments with AR software, plus music production and DJing. It was a bit of a tense time with strict COVID management in place, but we all emerged unscathed and everyone enjoyed a chance to get creative and pick up some new skills. Big thanks to the youth program staff at these councils, who worked hard to ensure these workshops were delivered successfully in tricky circumstances.

YOTS workshop

We featured a music production and DJing workshop at Youth Off The Streets headquarters in Merrylands, within a larger series of skills building activities for young people at risk. They got a taste of song writing and building a track from scratch, plus how to use DJ controllers, mixing and FX.



Back from the Brink

We participated in a livestream talk hosted by the Scenic Rim Regional Council in QLD. In it we discussed the value of arts participation for young people in detention, alongside a panel of people with first-hand understanding and experience of the prison system. It was a challenging conversation, highlighting the many systemic limitations and failures to address the causes that result in risk taking behaviour and offending. With the perspective of long term creative engagement in youth justice environments, we spoke about the benefits for young participants - particularly through music.



Westmead Children's Hospital Art Call Out

During the Sydney lockdowns we read about nurses asking for artworks and cards to brighten a COVID ward for children. We did a call out and got a great response from visual artists, designers and photographers who were really happy to contribute. The submitted works were printed to A3 and sent on to the hospital. No doubt the work really helped brighten the walls!



Selection of art work submitted for
Westmead Children's Hospital



107 on the Rocks

The first 6 months of 2022 saw a rush of live events across the Sydney metro area, re-activating public space and bringing communities out to share public events and cultural activity. We were thrilled to be invited to curate 2 nights of music entertainment on The Courtyard stage as part of the 107 Projects multi-arts festival in April. "Balmy Nights" were not so balmy as it was a little wet and cold, but we had a great time bringing together an eclectic line up that included newcomers with some of the more seasoned artists who have worked in the program over the years.



FBi Radio

Since 2015, Heaps Decent Radio has been featured on FBi every Monday at 5pm. These tracks come from rural and remote communities, Youth Justice Centres, and loads of other places not always on the radar. It is vital to connect these diverse voices to audiences that may not otherwise get the opportunity to hear them, and gain insights into a broader cultural landscape. Thank you for another great year of Heaps Decent Radio. For our program participants, there is nothing quite like hearing their music played to a big audience.

SYN Media

Based in Melbourne, SYN is a media organisation run by a community of young people that provides training and broadcast opportunities for young Australians. This past year they have continued to add Heaps Decent tracks to their weekly rotation on the program The Hoist. Thanks SYN!

Princess Atlantis and Lil Arts onstage at 107 on the Rocks



Thanks Heaps to our principal funders, partners and supporters!

Thank you to the Create NSW, Multicultural NSW, the Commonwealth Department of Health, The Foundation For Young Australians, Adobe, The Multicultural Council Wagga Wagga, City of Sydney, The Sydney Community Foundation (Be Kind Sydney), The Pantera Foundation, The SONOS Foundation, NSW Clubs, IMB Foundation and all the wonderful people and businesses who have made individual donations.

Thank you also FBI, SYN Media, and 107 Projects for our subsidised office residence.

Thanks to our partner communities and services who provide staff and space to support all aspects of the program. Thank you all so much for finding solutions to keep the work going despite the setbacks and disruptions of COVID-19.





Get in contact with us
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