

February 2024



Report:
**Impact Evaluation of
Performance Troupe
2023 Production**



Acknowledgements

This report was prepared for Spaghetti Circus by research agency Patternmakers.

The authors would like to acknowledge the participants involved in this research project.

Spaghetti Circus and Patternmakers acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and the contribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia past, present and future.

About Spaghetti Circus

Spaghetti Circus is one of Australia's leading youth circuses, providing highly specialised circus and physical theatre training and is renowned for producing innovative performances.

Through its circus arts school, Spaghetti Circus fosters creative education, exploration of ideas and local stories, confidence, health, body awareness and fitness.

About Patternmakers

Patternmakers is a research agency specialising in culture, creativity and community. We believe in the power of insight to help the arts flourish in Australia.

For any questions, please contact Tandi Palmer Williams, Managing Director on tandi@thepatternmakers.com.au.

Image credit: Hamish McCormick

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Key Facts

Young Australians, especially those living in regional areas, face many challenges placing them at risk of disempowerment, poor mental health, and a lack of social connectedness



~50%

of serious mental health issues in adulthood begin before age 14, and the 15-24 age group has experienced immense decline in social connectedness (-17%) since 2000.



1 in 3

Northern Rivers secondary school students are at risk of anxiety and depression, and 20% are at risk of trauma-related stress according to the Resilience Survey.

Spaghetti Circus' *Monumental* gave participants an opportunity to create a positive, professional, high-quality performance they were proud of



100%

of the troupe reported positive experiences. 93% said they were proud of the show, and a further 93% said the show celebrated diversity and identity.



100%

of the troupe were satisfied with the show's artistry and originality, and another 100% were satisfied with the venue and its features.

Spaghetti Circus is delivering positive intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes for its Troupe, which will enhance their futures



100%

said the *Monumental* troupe helped them connect with more people, with many saying they felt immense support throughout the process and made lasting friendships.



88%

of the *Monumental* troupe agreed the experience was beneficial to their overall wellbeing, and 94% said they now have more self-confidence after participating.

Monumental delivered a positive audience experience, and many audiences reflected on the excitement, humour, and quality of the show



9 in 10

audience members had a positive experience watching the show. 32% thought the ticket price point was great value, and 58% said it was reasonably priced.



4.7 stars

was the average star rating for the show given by audience members, and many left feeling inspired by the talent and vibrancy of the Troupe and the production value.

1 Executive Summary

Young people in the Northern Rivers are at risk of poor mental health, disempowerment, and social disconnect – compounded by the effects of recent natural disasters and the pandemic

- ▶ Young Australians, particularly those living in regional areas, are facing many challenges that can lead to **disempowerment, poor mental health, and a lack of social connectedness**.
- ▶ In the past few years, **young people in the Northern Rivers have experienced disruptions**, including natural disasters like the 2017 floods, the 2019 bushfires, the 2022 flood and storm events, as well as the the pandemic – which have **heightened the risk of mental health issues and trauma**.
- ▶ For secondary school students in the Northern Rivers, **over 1 in 3 are at risk of depression and anxiety** (according to Northern Rivers NSW VitalSigns 2023), and **a further 20% are at risk of trauma-related stress** (as reported in the Northern Rivers' Resilience Survey).

Local circus arts company Spaghetti Circus enabled 14 young people to devise a new original work called *Monumental* – and 100% of the troupe felt positively about the experience overall

- ▶ Circus arts company Spaghetti Circus, based in the Northern Rivers, has a Performance Troupe consisting of 15-20 young people. Every two years, the Troupe **devises a new, original work, which they perform for the community under the guidance of a Guest Director/s**.
- ▶ In 2023, Performance Troupe created *Monumental*, which they shared with the community in a sell-out season of 10 shows.
- ▶ Of the fourteen 12-17-year-olds in the *Monumental* troupe, **100% reported feeling 'very positive' (82%) or 'positive' (18%) about the experience overall**.
- ▶ Participants in Spaghetti Circus' Performance Troupe program say it gives them a taste of what it's like to be a creative in a fun professional context. **100%** were satisfied with the **originality and artistic vision of the show** and the **venue and its features**. Furthermore, **94%** were satisfied with the **professionalism** of the show, and **88%** were satisfied with the show's **level of skill**.

Participating in *Monumental* helped improve social and mental wellbeing outcomes for the troupe, as well as build their confidence

- ▶ For young people, participating in the arts has been shown to **improve social and mental outcomes**, equip them with **known protective factors against mental illness**, and provide opportunities for **social connectedness**.
- ▶ There are signs that participating in *Monumental* has shaped the troupe members' futures in a positive direction, as it helped them **connect with more people (100%)**, benefitted their **overall wellbeing (88%)**, provided **opportunities for leadership (88%)**, increased their **self-confidence (94%)**, and helped them **feel more confident in their body (76%)**.
- ▶ Troupe members shared their experiences on the **friendships they've made** that they'll take forward into the next chapter, and felt the group was like a **supportive 'family'** and a **safe space created by the Spaghetti Circus team**. The group also noted the benefits of **moving their body** and being **pushed out of their comfort zone**, and reflected on their enhanced **confidence in their abilities**.
- ▶ Looking ahead to the future, **9 in 10 (88%)** of the *Monumental* troupe felt the experience has **prepared them better to face future challenges** – and another **82% feel inspired to make healthier lifestyle choices**.

Audiences loved watching *Monumental*, and commended Spaghetti Circus for enhancing the troupe's confidence, skill, and passion

- ▶ *Monumental* delighted audiences, with the sell-out 10 show season receiving a **4.7 star rating**, and **9 in 10 audiences** saying the experience was either **'beyond their expectations' (37%)** or **'incredible' (52%)**. Audiences shared their amazement at the **high quality, humour, and professionalism** of the performance.
- ▶ **The troupe's confidence and passion were palpable for audience members**, with one sharing: 'It was so inspiring to see local kids being confident, creative and showcasing their skills. Great for my kids to experience and witness this.'
- ▶ **Nearly all (99%)** audience members agree that Spaghetti Circus is fulfilling their mission to **create community, inspire social and physical strength and confidence through creativity**. One audience member shared: '*Monumental* expressed the talent, skill and inspiration that the Spaghetti Circus is renowned for, coupled with outstanding live music. We were more than entertained! It's hard to believe that these are local kids, destined for the world stage. We got to see them first!'

2 Introduction

Background

Young Australians today are acutely aware of and passionate about social and environmental issues, with social media making it easier than ever for them to stay informed. However, young Australians, especially those in regional areas, face many challenges that can lead to disempowerment, poor mental health and a lack of social connectedness. Spaghetti Circus is helping to overcome these challenges and help regional youth flourish.

The lasting impacts of the pandemic and recent natural disasters are having adverse effects on the wellbeing of young people in the Northern Rivers

Children and young people in the Northern Rivers region have recently experienced natural disasters, with the closure of community facilities and disruption to school activities occurring after the 2017 floods, 2019 bushfires, and 2022 flood and storm events, as well as disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have [compounded existing mental health issues and trauma in the regions and created additional individual and collective trauma](#).

Youth disengagement is an issue throughout the regions, with 11% of 15–24-year-olds in Regional NSW not engaged in employment or education [according to Northern Rivers NSW VitalSigns 2023](#).

Over 1 in 3 secondary school age students are at risk of depression and anxiety – and young people today are experiencing a decline in social connectedness more than they were previously

The [Resilience Survey](#), conducted in the Northern Rivers following the 2022 flood events, found that more than 1 in 3 secondary school students are at risk of depression and anxiety, and the risks are higher for young people not identifying as male or female. Furthermore, around 20% of secondary students are at risk of trauma-related stress.

Around half of serious mental health issues in adulthood [begin before the age of 14](#). Young people are also at risk of loneliness and feeling a lack of belonging or connectedness, [with the](#)

[15–24 age group showing the greatest relative decline in social connectedness \(17%\)](#) in the 20 years since 2000.

Arts participation has been shown to improve social and mental outcomes for young people

Arts participation could [have a positive impact for young people](#), as it provides a platform for young people to explore issues that matter to them, and has been shown to be positively associated with other forms of civic engagement, like voting and volunteering.

Participation in the arts can increase wellbeing in young people by [equipping them with known protective factors against mental illness](#).

Furthermore, increasing social connectedness through performing arts can have a positive ripple effect – [Australian research](#) found that social connectedness in one year strongly predicts better mental health and civic engagement the next year.

The need for audience research and evaluation

Spaghetti Circus' Performance Troupe works alongside professionals to develop circus and performance skills that enhance their future prospects as budding creatives

Spaghetti Circus' Performance Troupe is the culmination of the circus arts school's performance stream and offers significant devising, creative development and performance outcomes.

The Performance Troupe, which consists of 15 to 20 young people, is drawn from the participants involved in the general performance stream, regularly perform at community and professional events.

Every two years, the Troupe develops a new original work under the guidance of Guest Director/s. The Troupe also undertakes technical training in lighting, sound and stage management in addition to physical and performance training. This results in a broad range of career pathways for graduates.

A significant Guest Director/s are invited to work with the Spaghetti Circus Performance Troupe over a two-year period. They devise and direct a show that centres around the

concerns and interests of the young participants. In 2023, the work was *Monumental*, which examined creating monuments to community's unsung heroes.

The current production, *Monumental* premiered at the Brunswick Picture House in mid-2023 and will be remounted at the National Circus Festival

Monumental was developed over a two-year creative development process and delivered a sell-out 10 show season at the Brunswick Picture House in mid-2023, and will be remounted at the National Circus Festival in 2024.

The 2-year process involved:

1. **Pre-production:** 14 young people attended 5 sessions per fortnight, being 2 weekly training sessions in circus skills and 1 fortnightly creation session for putting skills to work in an artistic process. The number of young people involved changes each year.
2. **Devising period:** the troupe, coaches, and staff worked with guest directors, musical directors, a costume designer, and a lighting designer. This occurred across 2 periods of 3-4 full days during school holiday breaks.
3. **Production:** over a four-week period, the young people worked intensively on the show, gaining experience working with guest directors, technicians, and coaches.
4. **Performances:** young people performed in a professional venue for 10 shows over two weeks.
5. **Remount:** the show is reimaged in the round and performed in the Big Top for the National Circus Festival (presented by Spaghetti Circus).

The Spaghetti Circus Performance Troupe is designed and implemented in a way which seeks to obtain positive outcomes for the young people involved.

This research seeks to capture the impact of the program, particularly in relation to areas that are a specific challenge to regional youth.

Methodology

In 2023, Spaghetti Circus commissioned Patternmakers to evaluate the findings from an audience and a participant survey into the impact of the *Monumental* performance troupe

Following the *Monumental* performance season, Spaghetti Circus distributed a survey to their audience members, enquiring into their experience and the impact of the performance troupe. The survey heard from 74 audience members.

Spaghetti Circus then commissioned Patternmakers to develop a survey to be distributed to the *Monumental* troupe, similarly enquiring into the impact of the performance troupe. The survey heard from 16 participants.

This report presents the results from the audience and the troupe surveys.

3 Reach of the Program

About the troupe

A mix of ages and backgrounds existed amongst the 14 members of the *Monumental* circus troupe in 2023

There were 14 members of the *Monumental* troupe.

The youngest troupe member was 12 years old, and most of the troupe are under 14 years-old; all but one member was under 17 years old. Many of the members have been at Spaghetti Circus 8 or more years.

Two of the troupe members identify as having an Aboriginal background, one of the members identifies as having a disability and one identifies as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community.

About the audience

***Monumental* was a sell-out, attracting over 1,600 audience members – and audiences came from across the Northern Rivers, Sydney, regional NSW, and Victoria**

The whole *Monumental* season was a sell-out, with over 1,400 tickets sold (Figure 1).

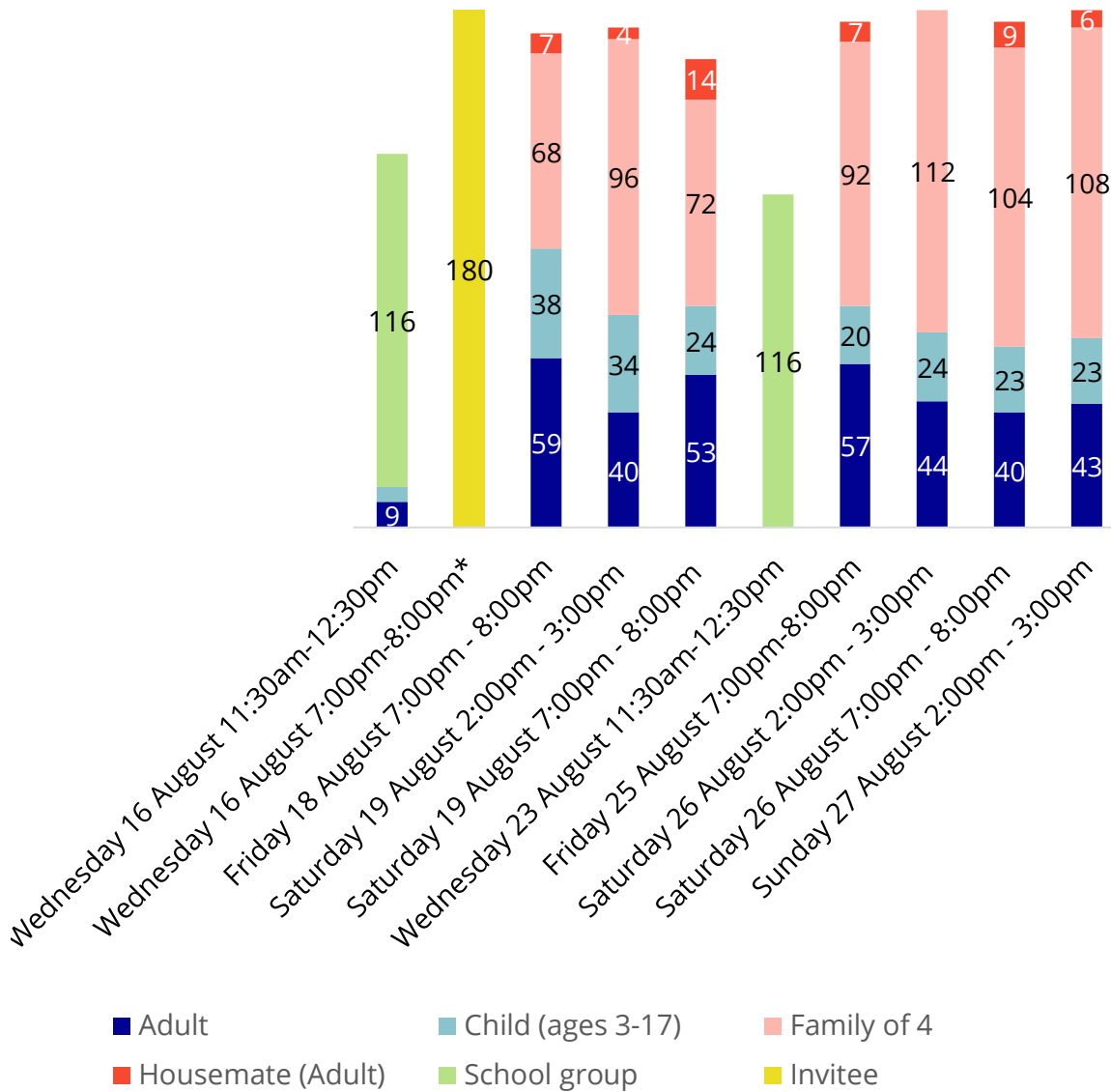
A high proportion of tickets were sold to families of 4, followed up adults and children (Figure 1). A smaller volume of tickets were sold to Housemates.

Monumental was also shown to three schools: Brunswick Heads Public School, Wilson Creek Public School, and Mullumbimby High School.

A further 180 guests were invited to the opening night on Wednesday 16th August 2023.

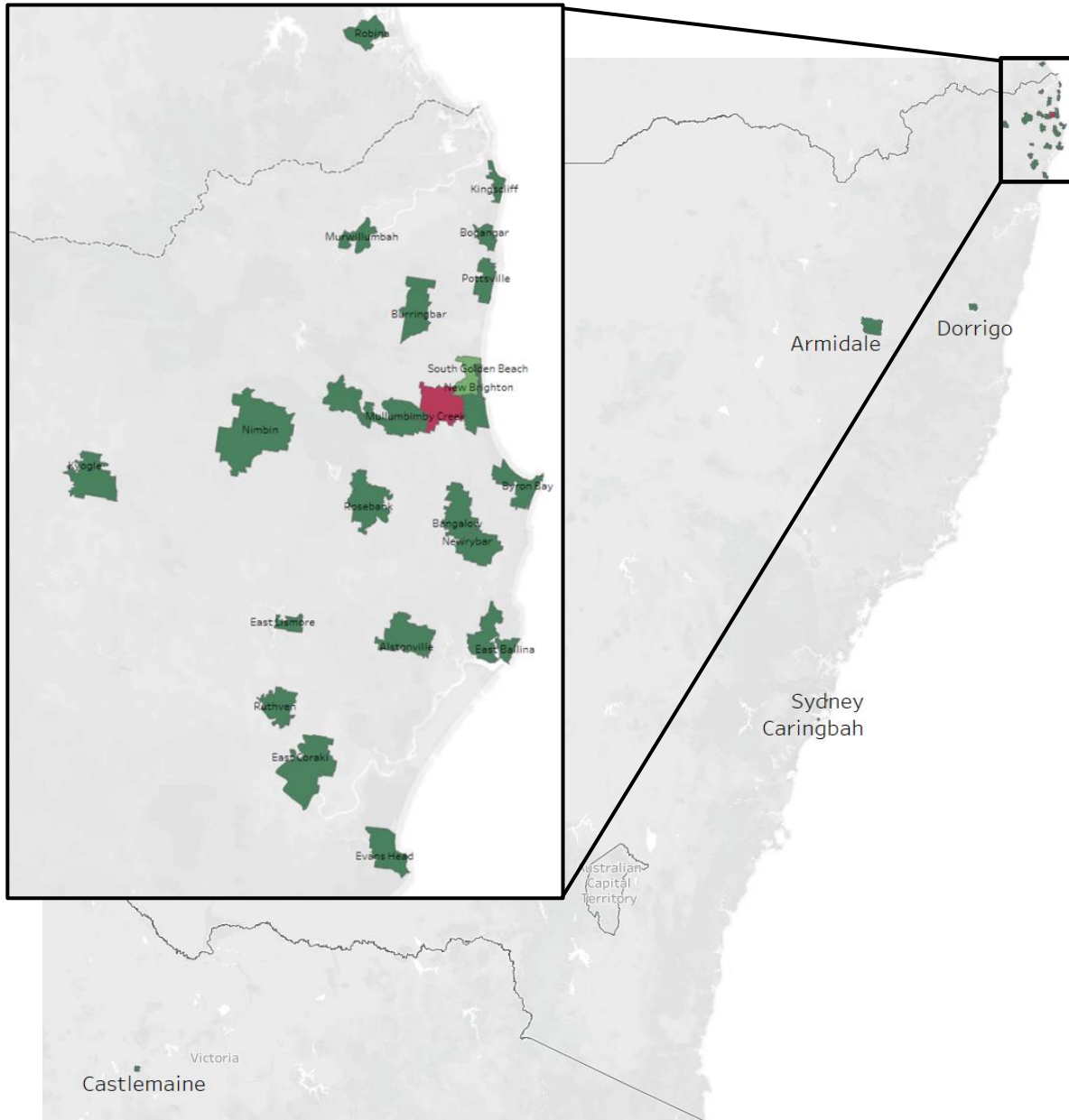
Audiences mostly came from the Northern Rivers Region, with some people visiting from Sydney, as well as other regional NSW and VIC towns.

Figure 1: Ticket volume by session. (n=1,645)



* Not a reflection of sales to the public. On Wednesday 16th August, an opening night was hosted, and tickets were for invitees, not the general public.

Figure 2: Which of the following are you? Select all that apply. (n=74)



Audiences were related to Spaghetti Circus in a variety of ways and were most frequently members of the public or Spaghetti friends – as well as families of the performers

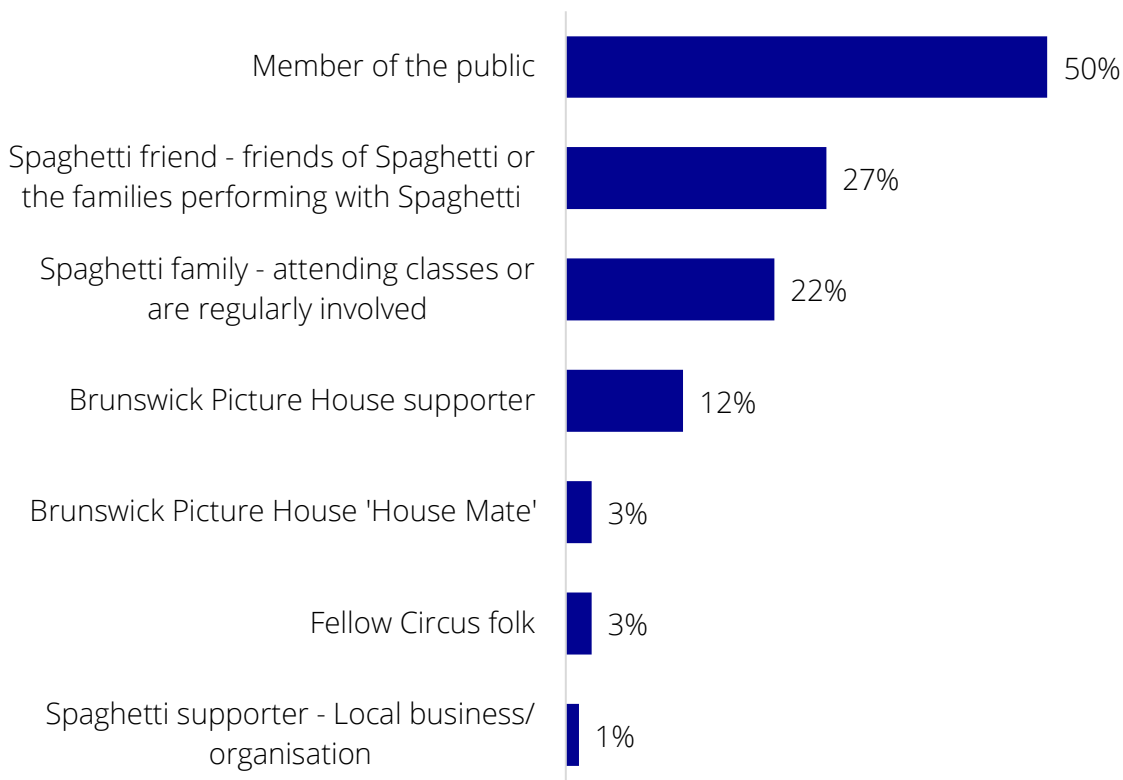
Audiences were asked about their relationship to Spaghetti Circus, and could select multiple options.

The majority were members of the public (50%), followed by Spaghetti friends, being those who are friends of Spaghetti or the families performing with Spaghetti (27%), and Spaghetti family, being those who attend classes or are regularly involved (22%).

Smaller proportions were involved in the Brunswick Picture House, with 12% saying they are Brunswick Picture House supporters and 3% saying they are a 'House Mate.'

Fewer were fellow Circus folk (3%) and Spaghetti supporters – local business/organisation (1%).

Figure 2: Which of the following are you? Select all that apply. (n=74)



4 Experience

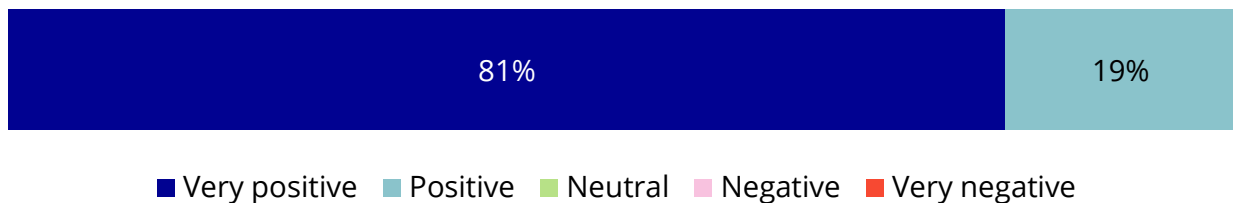
Overall sentiments

The *Monumental* troupe overwhelmingly reported 'very positive' feelings about the experience

Thinking about performing and creating *Monumental*, the troupe were asked how they felt about the experience. Responses were overwhelmingly 'very positive,' (reported by 13 participants) with another 3 participants reporting 'positive.'

No respondents said they felt neutrally, negatively, or very negatively about the experience – a great sign that the program is having a positive impact on the troupe members.

Figure 4: How did you feel about the experience? (n=16)



For 9 in 10 audiences, the Spaghetti Circus performance experience was overwhelmingly positive – and *Monumental* received an average 4.7 star rating

Audiences were asked to rate the quality of the Spaghetti Circus performance experience.

Responses were overwhelmingly positive for 9 in 10 audiences, nearly 4 in 10 (37%) said the experiences was beyond their expectations, and half said it was incredible (52%).

Smaller proportions of audiences had slightly less positive experience, with 8% saying it was 'pretty good' and 3% saying it was 'okay.' No audience member reported a negative ('not amazing') experience.

Figure 5: Overall, how do you rate the quality of the Spaghetti Circus performance experience? (n=73)



Audiences were also asked to rate the quality of *Monumental* on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest. *Monumental* received an average 4.7 star rating, taking into account the 78% who awarded it 5 stars, 14% who gave it 4 stars, 5% who gave it 3 stars and 3% who gave it 2 stars.

One person shared,

'Monumental expressed the talent, skill and inspiration that the Spaghetti Circus is renowned for, coupled with outstanding live music. We were more than entertained! It's hard to believe that these are local kids, destined for the world stage. We got to see them first!' (Audience member)

Another said,

'...we were blown away by the high standard of performance and execution. It was very entertaining, and we really enjoyed the used of space in the theatre (using the window openings/ jumps from the back of the stage/ trapeze and silks from the roof). Also, the music was very good and suited the mood of the show. Very impressed and hope to see another show in the future.' (Audience member)

The show and venue

Overall, the troupe were satisfied with *Monumental's* artistry and originality, the venue and its features, the professionalism and the level of skill in the show

The *Monumental* troupe were asked about their satisfaction levels pertaining to the show's originality and artistic vision, the venue and its features, the professionalism of the show and the level of skill in the show (Figure 6).

All respondents (100%) expressed that they were satisfied with the originality and artistic vision of the show, with 63% saying they were very satisfied and 38% saying they were satisfied.

Similarly, all respondents (100%) were satisfied with the venue and its features, such as lighting and stage management, with 56% being very satisfied and 44% being satisfied – further adding to the positive quantitative and qualitative findings around enjoying working with the Picture House team and perceiving the venue as having an inspiring, positive, creative atmosphere that enhanced the performance and enabled connection with the audience.

Almost all participants (94%) were satisfied with the professionalism of the show – though they were slightly more likely to be satisfied (50%) than very satisfied (44%). A small proportion (6%) felt neutrally.

Strong satisfaction levels (88% overall) were also felt by troupe members in terms of the level of skill in the show, with 38% being very satisfied and 50% being satisfied. A small proportion (13%) reported feeling neutrally about this statement.



"*Monumental* expressed the talent, skill and inspiration that the Spaghetti Circus is renowned for, coupled with outstanding live music. We were more than entertained!

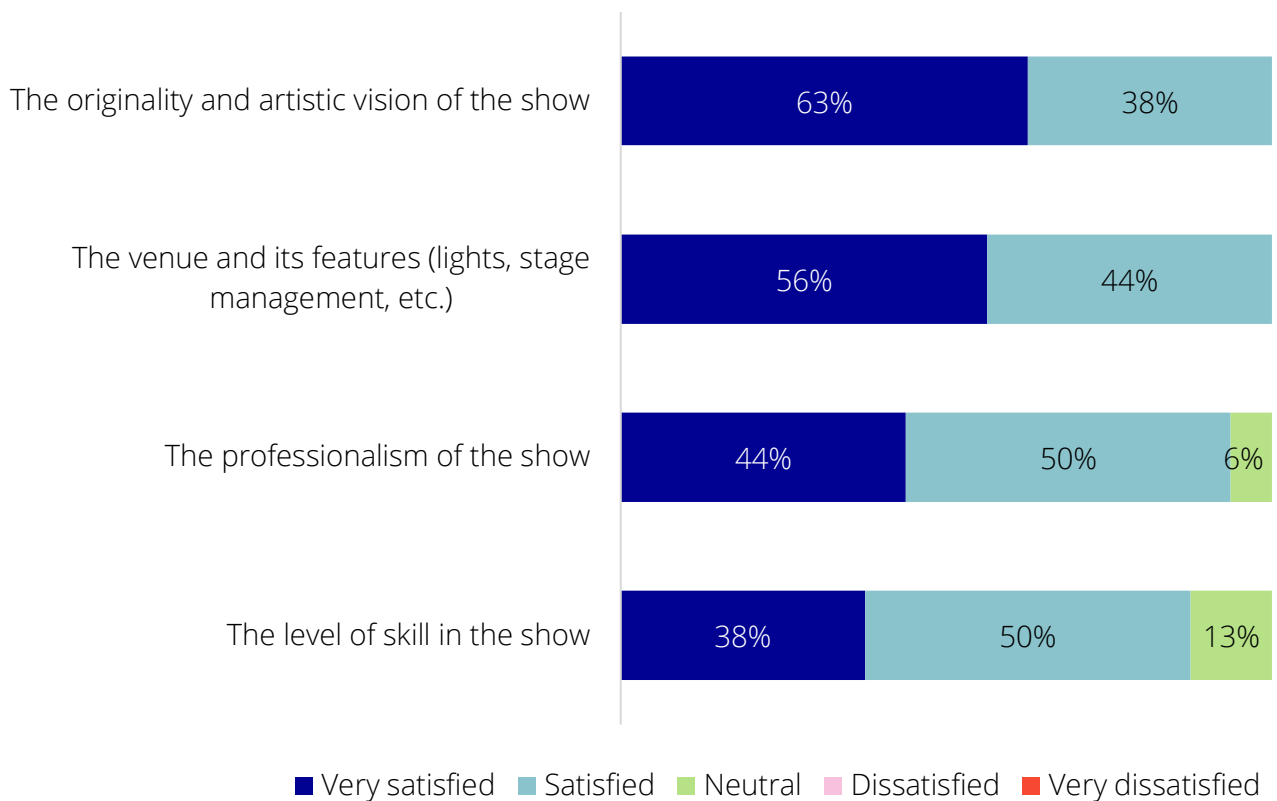
It's hard to believe that these are local kids, destined for the world stage. We got to see them first!"

Audience member





Figure 6: During the *Monumental* season, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the following? Please select an option for each row. (n=16)



9 in 10 troupe members enjoyed working with the Brunswick Picture House team – and audiences and the troupe felt that the Picture House had the right infrastructure to optimise the atmosphere and the performance

The opportunity to work with the Brunswick Picture House team and performing in the Picture House was enjoyable and enhanced the experience for many participants.

All (100%) troupe members agreed they enjoyed working with the Brunswick Picture House team, with 79% strongly agreeing and 21% agreeing (Figure 9). Qualitative feedback indicates that the Picture House team provided the troupe with the support and encouragement they needed to feel confident in their abilities and commended them for their kindness. One shared,

'The Picture House crew were all very kind and helpful.' *(Monumental troupe member)*

Another agreed, and added that the Picture House team contributed to the sense of community amongst the troupe:

'The feeling of being part of one big supporting community/family and the incredible hospitality of Brett and Chris.' *(Monumental troupe member)*

Performing at the Brunswick Picture House was an added bonus, and it provided a good atmosphere for the troupe to feel inspired and get into character. One said,

'It's such an amazing historical building, and it was great to have practice time there, and do multiple shows! We loved the 'windows' character times and being able to land in from 'backstage!' I think the audience really enjoyed and were thrilled by the wheels, bike, teeterboard, silks and more, working together with live musicians on a tight but well used stage. We were lucky to have great trainers to bring us to our heights, tower moments, and Monumental moments in a Monumental performance space!' *(Monumental troupe member)*

One troupe member felt that the infrastructure and layout of the Picture House facilitated interaction with the audience, saying,

'Being able to talk to the audience as they are leaving was very enjoyable because I got to hear their feedback and I felt more connected to the audience.' *(Monumental troupe member)*

The value of the venue was recognised also by audience members, and one felt that the utilisation of the Brunswick Picture House enhanced the production value greatly, sharing,

'I loved how the space felt like a big part of the performance: it felt so dynamic with faces popping up at windows, bodies leaping from balconies and running down aisles!' *(Audience member)*

Another shared that the visual and auditory production features available within the venue made the show more professional, dynamic and enjoyable, saying:

'I really thought the way the show came together with colour, lighting, and live music was exceptional and the thematic way of tying it together made for a lovely sensory experience.' *(Audience member)*

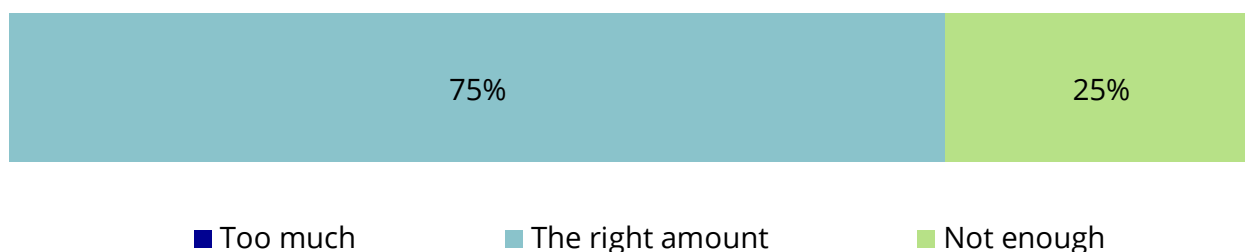
Amongst the troupe, the majority of participants considered that doing 10 shows was the perfect balance – though there may be an appetite amongst some to perform even more

The troupe were asked whether doing 10 shows was too much, the right amount, or not enough (Figure 7)

Three in four (75%) said 10 shows was the right amount, indicating that Spaghetti Circus has successfully achieved a good balance for the performers. However, there might be appetite amongst some to continue performing, with the remaining 25% saying 10 shows was not enough.

Meanwhile, no one felt that 10 shows were too much.

Figure 7: Troupe participants' responses to whether doing 10 shows was too much, the right amount, or not enough. (n=16)



Troupe participants who said there were 'not enough' shows were asked how many would be perfect, and all said that they would have appreciated being able to do more shows. One said,

'If we had done another week, it would have been really nice.' (Monumental troupe member)

However, many troupe members felt that having 10 shows was a good balance and suggested that adding any more shows on would have been fatiguing. One troupe member said,

'Towards the end, I was a bit exhausted like everyone else, and even though I really really liked performing *Monumental* and it was really enjoyable, towards the end the number of shows left was sort of like motivation. But I think the experience definitely made up for being a bit tired.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Others mentioned that 10 shows provided the troupe with the chance to develop their skills and get into the rhythm of performing, with one saying,

'It was great to have the opportunity to perform the show 10 times, because that way I really got into a rhythm and was able to improve throughout the show season. Every show was different, which made it lots of fun and kept me on my toes.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Another said,

'Performing our show multiple times was an experience to grow and develop the show and our confidence, and troupe team time. Landing a backflip off teeterboard, front sault onto stage, German Wheeling tricks!' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Meanwhile, some of the troupe felt that 10 shows provided enough space for them to connect with the other members and appreciate their collective wins. One said,

'I enjoyed doing [10] shows, as it let us have time to connect with each other in between day shows, and it felt like we had accomplished everything we had worked so hard for.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

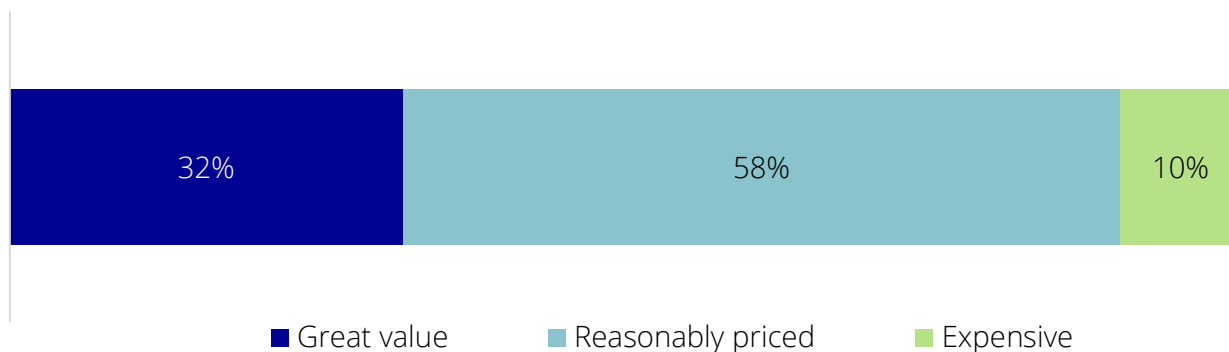
9 in 10 audiences felt the tickets were great value or reasonably priced – with most in this group saying 'reasonably priced'

The majority – 9 in 10 – of audiences felt that the tickets were great value or reasonably priced. Audiences were more likely to feel that the tickets were reasonably priced than great value, with 58% selecting the former option compared to 32% selecting the latter.

Meanwhile, 1 in 10 (10%) audiences felt that the tickets were expensive. One person expanded on this view, reflecting of the price point:

'Way too high for the quality and makes a family think twice, instead of making a family able to see each and every offering from Spaghetti Circus.' (*Audience member*)

Figure 8: How did you find the ticket price point? (n=72)



Best part and suggestions for improvement

The show was an opportunity for community building, with collaboration cited as being the 'best part' for many troupe members

Audiences and the *Monumental* troupe members were asked in their respective surveys what the best or favourite part of their experience was.

Many believe that the experience created a sense of community and collaboration.

Amongst the troupe, many mentioned that the 'best part' was the chance to collaborate and create a show that was meaningful to them and of which they were proud. One member shared,

'Having the opportunity to perform in such a supportive environment and create something that's ours with incredible people.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Other troupe members echoed feelings of pride and reflected on the friendships and opportunities for social interaction and bonding created by the program. One said,

'I felt really proud and happy to perform, and it made me feel really good about myself to see the people enjoying it so much. I also felt really bonded with the other kids in the troupe.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Regarding the performance, multiple troupe members described feeling a sense of recognition and sharing with the community. The connection to the broader community was described as 'magic':

'[The best part was] the community feel it had... and the magic that was produced and shared.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

The sense of wonderment by the audience was seemingly palpable for the troupe, with one performer suggesting the performance had a transformational impact:

'The feeling at the end when you just stand there while the audience is clapping, and you know you have made it...!' (*Monumental troupe member*)

For audience members, the sense of community between the troupe members was very apparent and highly commended, and one member reflected that the success of *Monumental* rests with the continued efforts of Spaghetti Circus as a community-centric organisation. They shared,

'Spaghetti Circus is inspirational, particularly in the way all the elements blend together, from management, crew to performers. The strong bond between all these parties is tangible and to be celebrated. This circus troupe just gets better and better: a credit to all the creative souls who established this community circus, and those who have helped it flourish for so many years. *Monumental* is the result of a cast of thousands over many years, with promises of so much more to come.' (*Audience member*)

Other audience members wanted to commend the troupe on their confidence in sharing their skills with the community and providing inspiration, with one saying:

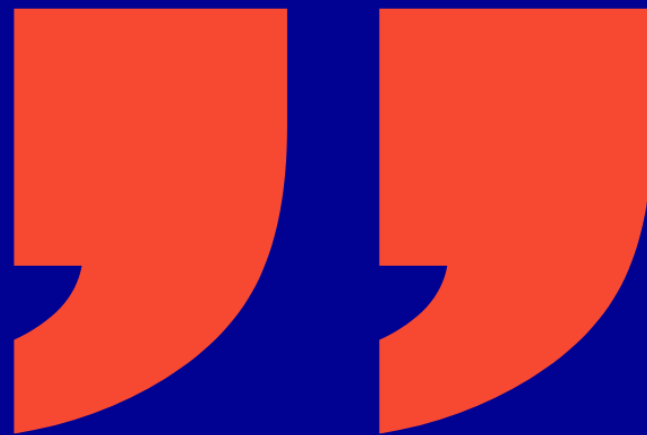
'It is great to see kids showcasing their talent and sharing it with the local community. An inspiring show!' (*Audience member*)



"I felt really proud and happy to perform, and it made me feel really good about myself to see the people enjoying it so much.

I also felt really bonded with the other kids in the troupe."

Monumental troupe member



The program offered the troupe the chance to develop a lot of skills – and audiences were impressed with the troupe’s level of skill

Another best or favourite part of the program/experience identified by troupe members and the audience was the performer’s level of skill, including the skill progression and the impressive end result.

Many troupe members spoke of the skills they gained in planning the performance and reflected that they loved being involved in the creative process and seeing their ideas come to fruition. One said,

‘The process of having a say in what the show will look like. Making up our own parts and contributing our own ideas to *Monumental*.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)


Another troupe member mentioned that learning ‘how to switch to different roles under pressure’ and ‘the adrenaline and excitement that comes with performing’ was the best part for them.

Many audience members reflected that the elements which showed off the talent of the performers, the level of the production and the expertise of the performers were their favourite parts about *Monumental*, including the trapeze, the silks, the teeterboard, the human pyramid, hoops, juggling, the wheel and the comedy skit. One audience member shared,

‘If you want to see the next generation creating their own stories in a way that is fearless, funny, and incredibly skilled, see *Monumental*. These kids are fantastic.’ (*Audience member*)

Another audience member shared it was great to see the troupe recover and support each other after unplanned occurrences and mistakes happened on stage – and reflected that their approach to recovery was a positive experience for their own child. They shared,

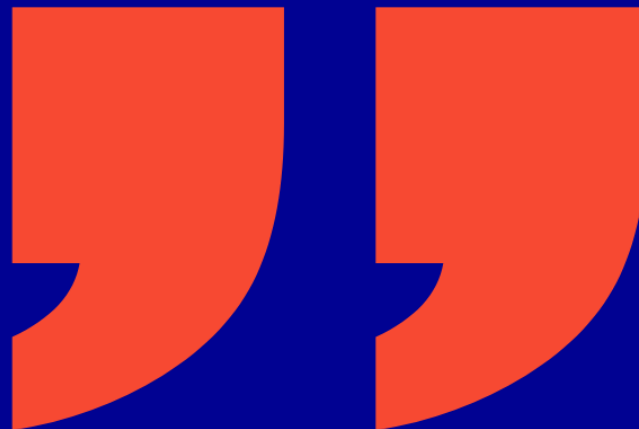
‘...when they made mistakes, they embraced it as per of the show. Our daughter really picked up on this and it inspired her, because she’s often self-conscious about making mistakes.’ (*Audience member*)



"Spaghetti Circus is inspirational, particularly in the way all the elements blend together, from management, crew to performers. The strong bond between all these parties is tangible and to be celebrated.

This circus troupe just gets better and better: a credit to all the creative souls who established this community circus, and those who have helped it flourish for so many years. *Monumental* is the result of a cast of thousands over many years, with promises of so much more to come."

Audience member



The troupe had a lot of fun creating and performing the show – and the audience were entranced by the fun, humour and magic of the show

Another best or favourite part was the fun and humour of the show. One troupe member shared that their ‘best part’ of the show was simply:

‘Having fun with everyone and performing.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

The enjoyment of the performers was palpable for the audience. One audience member shared,

‘It was beautiful to see young people perform on stage and create such a professional, fun, well-rehearsed show. The energy was great, accompanied by awesome live musicians.’ (*Audience member*)

Some audience members said they could feel this positive energy through the personalities that shone through during the performance and the enthusiasm of the performers. One audience member shared,

‘You guys just have the most incredible energy... from the smiles on the performers’ faces, to the helpers [on the] side of [the] stage. It’s really beautiful.’ (*Audience member*)

While the troupe reported overwhelmingly positive experiences, there are opportunities to improve the pre-show preparation, clarity on performance nights and scheduling issues

The *Monumental* troupe were asked what could have been improved about their experience.

Responses suggest that more preparation could be done to prepare the troupes for a variety of unforeseen circumstances, like weather and equipment:

‘Being prepared for rain in the first show.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

‘Some of the equipment was hard to get off the stage but other than that it ran pretty smooth.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

Some mentioned that there were opportunities for more clarity on the night about positioning and knowing who was performing. One reflected:

'Often it wasn't clear which roles people would be doing on each night, as some had injuries or were away.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

However, others recognised that certain last-minute changes to the troupe were hard to predict, and it was important for the troupe to be prepared to make last-minute switches on the night. One said:

'I think we dealt well with changing up for a sick or injured troupe members, during the show. It's hard to train for that but it was challenging. We all improve with practice time!' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Some wanted a little more time to interact with the audience before the show, and others found it a little hard to follow the schedule:

'More time to talk to audiences and less time in costume before the show.'
(*Monumental troupe member*)

'The only thing that wasn't brilliant was that it was a little hard to follow the schedule, because we were given different dates at first and then knowing which was old and what was new was confusing at times.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Though audiences were overall impressed with the skill of the performers and quality of the show, there are opportunities to continue refining this or encouraging further skill development for the troupe

Audiences were asked whether they thought Spaghetti Circus could have improved on anything within their *Monumental* experience.

Though quantitative and qualitative data affirms that the majority were impressed with the skill of the performers and the quality of the show, some suggested there are opportunities to refine the content and comedy in the show. One said,

'I guess I wasn't too sure about the messages around underrated heroes; some names were familiar, others not, but is there a better catch phrase than 'look them up'? I did enjoy the bits of storytelling about these figures which I think came through the songs.'
(*Audience member*)

Others mentioned that there are opportunities to continue developing the performers' techniques, possibly in future programs – but also recognised the nature and purpose of Spaghetti Circus' program for these young people. One shared,

'...we understand they are young folk, so it's not adult circus. I think accepting these are kids working hard and learning is part of the experience. My child was mesmerised and loved seeing kids on the stage rather than adults.' (*Audience member*)

Other audience members reflected on the logistics of the venue, with several commenting on the seating arrangements for smaller children. One said,

'Put kids closer to the front of the audience as many couldn't see over adults, nothing else!' (*Audience member*)

Others asked for a longer show, though this desire from the audience should be balanced with what's best for the young performers. One said,

'Maybe another 15 minutes to 1/2 hour if possible.' (*Audience member*)

5 Outcomes and Impact

The majority of the troupe strongly agreed they were proud of the show and that the show was a way to celebrate diversity and identity

Confidence, pride and self-esteem are related concepts that all promote beliefs about our ability to succeed or how we can manage our shortcomings. Increasing confidence, pride and self-esteem [can change how young people think and act in the future](#).

The troupe were asked statements which assessed immediate personal experience outcomes and were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with those statements (Figure 9).

Around 8 in 10 participants (79%) strongly agreed that they were proud of the show, with another 14% agreeing. A low proportion of participants (7%) felt neutrally about this statement.

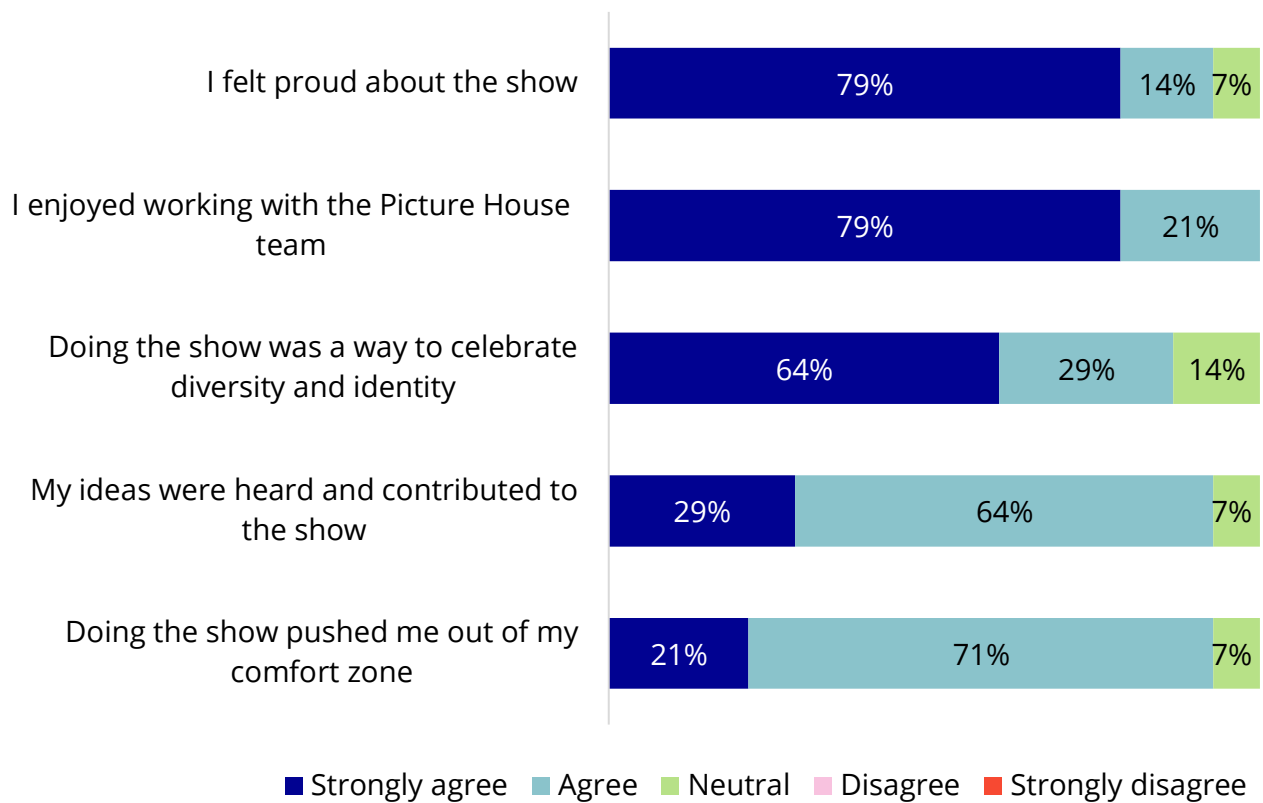
The majority (93%) of participants agreed that doing the show enabled a celebration of diversity and identity, with 64% strongly agreeing and 29% agreeing. Only 14% felt neutrally about this statement.

Participants were also more likely to agree that their ideas were heard and contributed to the show, with 93% agreeing. However, a lower proportion strongly agreed with this statement (29%), compared to the proportion who agreed (64%) – indicating there may be opportunities in the future to allow more participants to take a stronger role in the creative process and developing the final product.

Doing the show also pushed the majority of participants outside of their comfort zone, with 21% strongly agreeing with this statement, and 71% agreeing. Meanwhile, 7% felt neutrally.



Figure 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Please select an option for each row. (n=14)



Participating in the troupe had positive impacts on the social life, confidence and opportunities for leadership for the young people involved

The *Monumental* troupe were also asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements concerning the overall impact of participating in the show (Figure 10).

Participating in *Monumental* enabled positive social interactions and helped foster a sense of belonging for the young people, with all participants agreeing that participating in the troupe helped them connect more with other people. The majority (75%) strongly agreed with this statement, while the remaining 25% agreed.

Participating in the troupe also resulted in positive wellbeing outcomes for many, with around 9 in 10 (88%) agreeing the experience in the troupe was beneficial to their overall wellbeing (75% strongly agree; 13% agree). A small proportion felt neutrally (6%) or disagreed (6%).

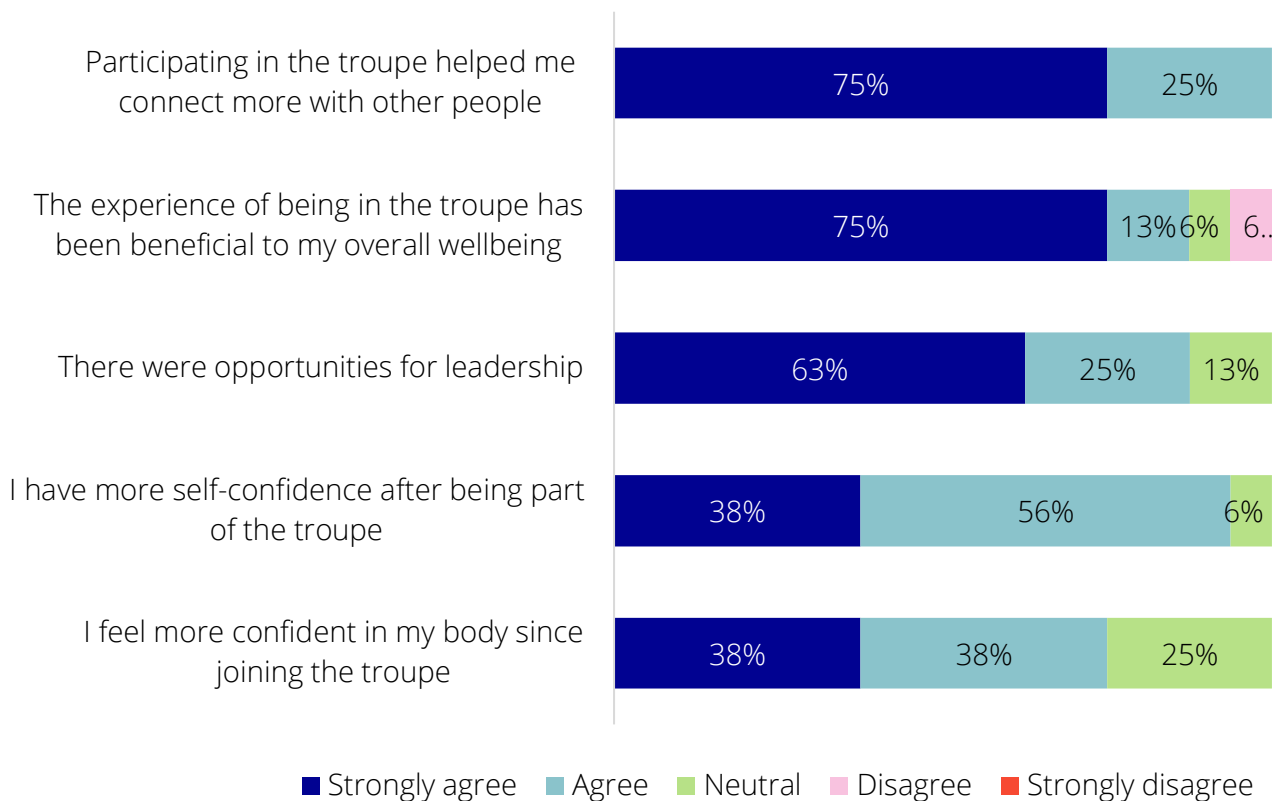


Around 9 in 10 (88%) agreed there were opportunities for leadership in the performance troupe, with 63% strongly agreeing and 25% agreeing. 13% felt neutrally – and there are opportunities to continue facilitating leadership opportunities in this program.

Almost all (94%) agreed that they have more self-confidence after being part of the troupe. A higher proportion selected ‘agree’ (56%) with this statement compared to ‘strongly agree’ (38%). As self-confidence is a journey and something that the troupe will have to continue working on throughout their lives, and it appears that participating has positively shaped this path for many.

Three in four troupe members agree that the experience helped them feel more body confidence (38% strongly agree, 38% agree). One in four (25%) felt neutrally about this statement, perhaps underscoring how ingrained body issues are for some young people.

Figure 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the performance troupe? (n=16)



100% say participating in the troupe helped them connect with more people – and many say these connections are some of the key takeaways from the experience

Participating in the *Monumental* troupe helped all participants to foster more connections with other people – and for many in the group, these connections have been transformational and are key take aways from the experience.

Many troupe members have been touched by the positive social interactions and the meaningful friendships they built throughout the process, with some suggesting this made the entire experience and that these connections will continue outside of the program. Some shared,

“The connections I've made with people are so special and I cherish them so much, and a continuous love for every aspect of circus.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

‘Everything has made me the person that I am. The family sense, friendship, being heard by other people. Circus is a big part of my life and I'm not sure what I would do without it.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

Another agreed, and added that the experience has left them with long-lasting memories:

‘Many great memories and friendships, that'll stay with me for a lifetime.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

Although many reflected on the positive social interactions and friendships they made, there are opportunities to continue fostering the connection between the troupe members and ensuring everyone is included. One troupe member reflected on struggles they had socially within the troupe, saying:

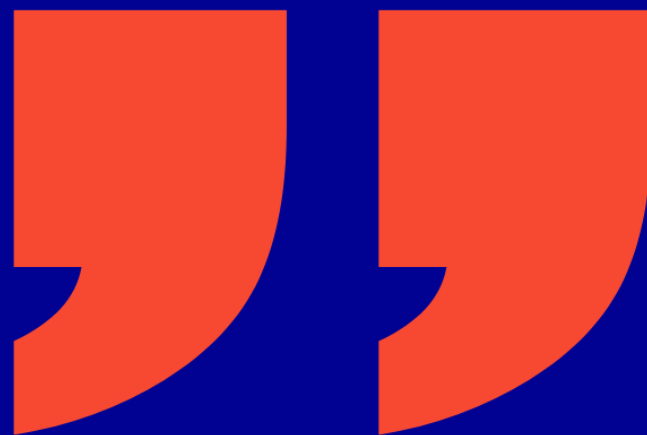
‘I have learned a lot but struggled socially, although well-supported by teachers.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)



"Everything has made me the person that I am. The family sense, friendship, being heard by other people.

Circus is a big part of my life and I'm not sure what I would do without it."

Monumental troupe member



9 in 10 troupe members agreed that their participation in the troupe benefited their wellbeing, with many saying that moving their body and socialising helped relax their mind

Around 9 in 10 (88%) troupe members felt that the experience of being in the troupe was beneficial to their overall wellbeing, with 75% strongly agreeing and 13% agreeing.

Those who agreed or strongly agreed with the prompt around wellbeing were asked an additional question:

'You mentioned that the experience of being in the performance troupe was beneficial to your wellbeing (wellbeing is a combination of your physical, mental and emotional state). Can you explain why and how?'

Many troupe members reflected on the meaningful relationships, filled with trust and emotional safety, that they had while training and performing, and likened the Spaghetti Circus to a 'second family' that had a sense of belonging, support and acceptance – contributing to positive wellbeing outcomes. One said,

'There [are] definitely moments when I feel like troupe is my second family and they don't judge or criticise me at all, and so I don't have to worry about what they think of me, and everyone is really supportive of one another.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Another said,

'The troupe is like a little family, and we all encourage and support each other. It means that you always have people to talk to, and to give you advice.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Others mentioned that the coaches and participants created a safe space where participants could feel comforted and process personal challenges and connect in solidarity. One said,

'The performance troupe, including the coaches, have been a family and a safe place for me in some hard times. I can go there and be myself and feel good. No judgement only happiness, kindness and encouragement.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

One troupe member commented on the transformational impact that being around talented professionals and the community atmosphere of Spaghetti Circus had on their personal identity and their performance capabilities, sharing:

'Because I got to learn so many new skills and work together with so many talented performers, coaches and directors. The sense of community and the feeling of being supported by the Spaghetti family made it possible for me to grow as a person and really emerge myself in the process of creating and performing a show, which I've never done before.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Others commented on how participating pushed them beyond their comfort zone, allowing them to see what they are capable of, and how this impacted their wellbeing positively. One said, (*Monumental troupe member*)

'Being in the troupe has made me go out of my comfort zone and has pushed me to be the best I can be. These things I think are good for mine and other people's wellbeing.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Furthermore, several troupe members mentioned that being physically active was beneficial to their wellbeing, and that participating in a circus was a fun, engaging way to exercise. Some shared,

'Being active is so great, I love moving and it makes me feel more positive in general. It's also just great to keep up a general level of fitness and circus is such a fun way to do so.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Another said,

'It's also good for my physical health (obviously), and it's great to get moving after a whole day of being stuck inside a classroom.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Developing and improving confidence has been a key takeaway for many in the performance troupe – and something which the audience could feel from the troupe when watching the performance

Almost all (94%) agreed that they have more self-confidence after being part of the troupe and 76% saying they feel more confident in their body since training and performing with Spaghetti Circus, and qualitative data affirms that the experience has instilled more self-confidence and self-belief into the lives of some of the troupe. One said,

'That we can do more than we think! Fear stunts our fruition.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Another reflected on a level of self-acceptance that they gained from the experience, saying they have taken away:

'That being yourself and being happy with what you can do benefits you and those around you.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Others have taken away an enhanced understanding of the role of nerves and confidence around the creative process and performing, trusting the process, and learning to handle pressure. One said,

'That I can cope under pressure, and still have an amazing time. And that it's normal to be nervous, no matter how many times that you have performed.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

One troupe member reflected that they gained an appreciation of choosing one's own path and being guided by personal happiness and passion, saying,

'That anyone and everyone should be able to do whatever they want in life and not be looked at different from others.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

The audience could sense that the overall experience and the skills the performers had developed over the course of the program contributed to an increased level of confidence, and one audience member shared:

'Seeing young people that I know, grow in their confidence and abilities, as well as seeing an incredible amount of talent and skill.' (*Audience member*)

Another reflected that it was important for the local community to see young people modelling such confidence, saying,

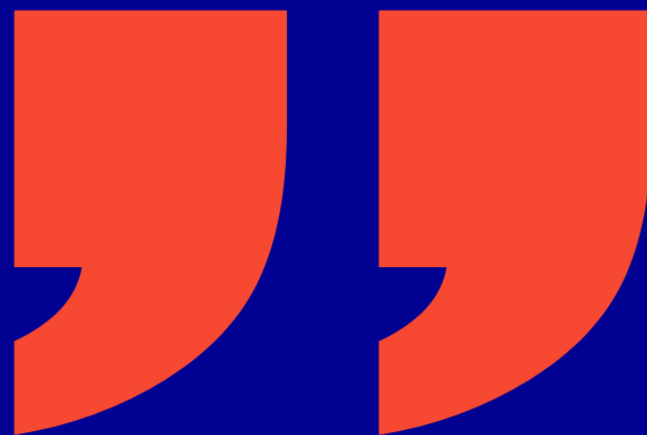
'It was so inspiring to see local kids being confident, creative and showcasing their skills. Great for my kids to experience and witness this.' (*Audience member*)



"Because I got to learn so many new skills and work together with so many talented performers, coaches and directors.

The sense of community and the feeling of being supported by the Spaghetti family made it possible for me to grow as a person and really emerge myself in the process of creating and performing a show, which I've never done before."

Monumental troupe member



Around 9 in 10 feel better prepared to face future challenges and feel encouraged to explore performing arts career options – and 8 in 10 are inspired to make healthier lifestyle choices

The *Monumental* troupe were also asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements concerning how the experience may have shaped their future, in terms of facing challenges, exploring career opportunities and making healthier lifestyle choices (Figure 11).

Around 9 in 10 (88%) feel better prepared to face future challenges because of the experience, with half (50%) strongly agreeing with this statement and 38% agreeing. One in ten (13%) responded neutrally.

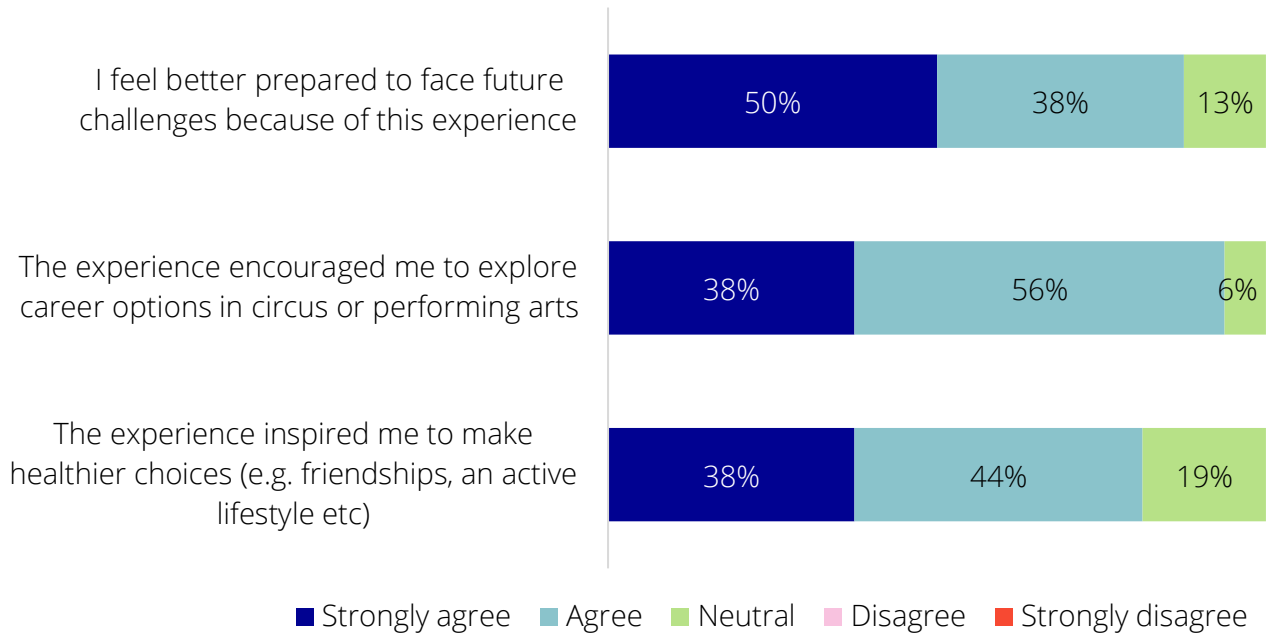
The experience may also have had a transformational impact in terms of allowing participants to see the options out there for a career in the performing arts, with 94% agreeing that the experience encouraged them to explore career options in circus or performing arts (38% strongly agree, 56% agree). A small proportion (6% or n=1) responded neutrally. Performing in a professional venue like the Brunswick Picture House may also inspire aspiring creatives to envision themselves engaging in performing arts work in the future. One troupe member shared,

‘I realised that there are work opportunities for me because of Spaghetti.’

The experience also inspired the majority (82%) of participants to make healthier choices, for example related to friendships and leading an active lifestyle, with 38% strongly agreeing and 44% agreeing. Meanwhile, 19% felt neutrally about this statement.



Figure 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about how the show or the performance troupe might have impacted your future? (n=16)



Audiences agree that Spaghetti Circus is fulfilling their mission to create community, inspire social and physical strength and confidence through creativity

Audiences were asked in an open-response question:

‘Spaghetti Circus’ mission is to create community, inspiring social and physical strength and confidence through creativity, creative kids and strong communities. Does your experience of this show fall within our mission?’

Nearly all (99%) of respondents agreed with this statement, with most responses being ‘yes,’ ‘absolutely,’ or ‘definitely.’ A few respondents expanded on this, and one said:

‘Absolutely. The inner strength was what struck me with the performers. It was obvious the teachers are truly inspired from what the kids could do and express.’ (Audience member)

Another audience member shared that the experience inspired their daughter to want to participate: a testament to positive impact Spaghetti Circus is having on the community and the lives of children. They shared,

‘Yes. I took my 9-year-old daughter to see the show and she was so inspired! She loved how supportive the group was of each other, she loved the team work especially in the towers / monuments and overall, the entertainment value was top notch. We are from out west have been considering the possibility of sending our daughter to live with my brother in Byron Bay so she can attend circus classes full-time. Let’s hope she can be part of another Spaghetti Circus show in the future?!’ (*Audience member*)

Suggestions for future shows include a tour, more diversity within the troupe, and continuing to facilitate their involvement as leaders in the creative process under the guidance of professionals

Research participants offered some ideas for future shows and/or other things that Spaghetti Circus could do in the future.

A frequent suggestion by the troupe members was for a tour to take place, and with some suggesting some possible models were an intergenerational tour, a collaboration with other performance classes/groups, or modelling it from other tours. Some suggestions were,

‘Doing a tour of sorts would be great, like the inter-generational tour...’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

‘Some sort of tour for troupe would be good and more shows where we work with the other classes in the performance stream.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

‘I remember going on tour once in Mighty Twos, which was a really fun experience! Maybe troupe could do something like that?’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

This tour could include going to other schools and organisations to inspire other children and young people to try out circus. One troupe member suggested,

‘Woodford was an excellent experience, and I also think that just doing little shows for kids at school could encourage them to be active.’ (*Monumental troupe member*)

There may be opportunities to seek out more diversity within the troupe. Some troupe members suggested,

'Possibly refer to the audience & troupe demographic stats.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

'Maybe more diversity because in *Monumental*, even though they were talking about people who haven't recognition for the change they made. I do feel it would have more room for people who have disabilities.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

Similarly, some audience members suggested more could be done to make the troupe more diverse, and one said:

'It would have been good to see more males as part of the troupe.' (*Audience member*)

Continuing to let the troupe be involved in the creative process and take ownership and leadership with support and guidance from industry professionals was also a suggestion posed by troupe members. One said,

'I enjoy the process of making new shows from scratch and also having guest coaches like Deb and Spenser come in to work with us.' (*Monumental troupe member*)

6 Opportunities

Opportunities for the troupe

- ❑ Continue to seek feedback from youth programs and evaluate these findings to reflect as an organisation and ensure the positive impact of your work and programs continues
- ❑ Continue facilitating opportunities for the troupe to be involved and have their say in the creative process, with the aim of developing original and artistic shows that are meaningful for the participants – and investigate ways to create more leadership opportunities
- ❑ Create opportunities for the troupe to perform and train in professional venues to make the experience feel more professional, showcase the troupe’s hard work and show them what a career or future involvement in circus and the performing arts could look and feel like
- ❑ Program 10 shows, as this appears to be ‘just right’ for many participants
- ❑ Prioritise collaboration amongst the troupe and positive social interaction
- ❑ Continue creating safe spaces for troupe members to have positive social connections and feel supported
- ❑ Keep prioritising skill development – and showcasing the extent of the performers’ skill to the audience
- ❑ Ensure the troupe are prepared for things to go differently from what is expected/planned on the night, like weather, troupe members being absent and mishaps with equipment
- ❑ Communicate the schedule clearly with the troupe, especially any changes
- ❑ Facilitate more opportunities for the troupe to engage with the community, for example, more time to speak with the audiences about the show after the performance
- ❑ Consider how to reach more underrepresented groups when marketing opportunities to join Spaghetti Circus programs to increase diversity in the troupe

- ❑ Highlight opportunities for future involvement in performing arts and circus, including opportunities that could be just for fun and professional pathways
- ❑ Keep doing what you are doing – your work is having a positive and inspirational impact on the lives of young people in the Northern Rivers

Opportunities for audiences

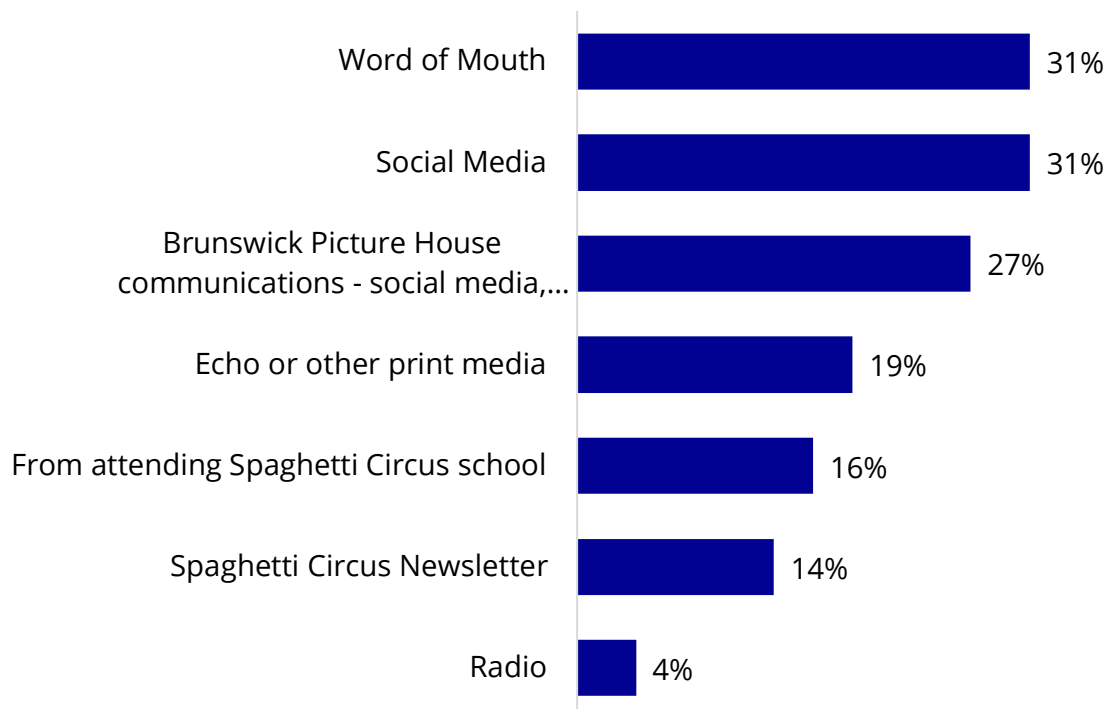
- ❑ Continue programming which engages a broad range of community members, including first-time attendees
- ❑ With strong repeat attendance results, consider how to re-engage audience members to keep them coming back to Spaghetti Circus
- ❑ Continue utilising venues like the Brunswick Picture House when its infrastructure will enhance the content and quality of the show, and contribute to the atmosphere
- ❑ With audiences hearing about events from a wide variety of communication channels, distribute your marketing in a variety of ways – but investing more in word-of-mouth and social media at this time may be more successful
- ❑ Reserve seating at the front for children and other groups to ensure optimum visibility of the stage

7 Appendices

Awareness channels

Audiences heard about *Monumental* through a wide range of channels – with 3 in 10 accessing word of mouth and social media

Figure 12: How did you hear about Monumental? (n=74)



Audiences heard about *Monumental* through a variety of channels. The most frequently cited channels were word of mouth (31%) and social media (31%).

Around a quarter (27%) heard about the event via communications from Brunswick Picture House, via channels such as their social media and newsletters.

Around 1 in 5 (19%) heard about *Monumental* via Echo or other print media, 16% heard about it from attending Spaghetti Circus school, and 14% via Spaghetti Circus' newsletter.

Smaller proportions heard about *Monumental* via the radio (4%).

SPAGHETTI CIRCUS



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