



Songs for Freedom Report Reveals Music's Power to Drive Change in Remote First Nations Communities

Big hART, Australia's leading arts and social change organisation, today shares a groundbreaking report detailing the transformative impact of its Songs for Freedom initiative in Ieramugadu (Roebourne), Western Australia. Produced in collaboration with Griffith University's Creative Change Project and funded by the Australian Research Council, the report offers rare insights into how songwriting and performance are building wellbeing, healing trauma, and advancing cultural justice for First Nations Peoples facing deep systemic inequity.

Drawing on the voices of over 100 participants, including Elders, incarcerated individuals, youth, and professional artists, the report finds that community music not only boosts confidence and connection among individuals, but also serves as a platform for truth-telling, intergenerational healing, and national advocacy.

Key outcomes include:

- improved mental health
- stronger cultural identity
- increased public awareness of First Nations incarceration—particularly youth detention

"The report makes it clear—community-led music can help shift the dial on long-standing injustices," said Big hART CEO Scott Rankin. "From prison workshops to national stages, these songs amplify voices too often ignored."

Joel Spence, PhD candidate, lead researcher SFF case study, Creative Change Project, Griffith University says:

"The Songs for Freedom case study highlights how First Nations communities have come together through collaborative songwriting and performance to create powerful spaces for collective healing and truth-telling. These community-driven musical practices allow participants to reclaim narratives, address intergenerational trauma, and strengthen the cultural bonds that colonial systems have severed. Led by their Elders Ieramugadu residence have established pathways toward social justice and transformation through their leadership and collective strengths."

Prof Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Project Leader, Creative Change Project, Griffith University says:

"Insights from this case study form a vital part of a larger national story about the role that music plays in generating greater social equity in Australian communities. Songs for Freedom has provided a powerful platform for truth-telling, where community members have not only sung their stories of local injustice, but also courageously advocated for wider juvenile justice reform across the whole country."

The release comes amid ongoing national conversations around juvenile justice reform and follows the Songs for Freedom national concert tour, marking the 40th anniversary of the death in custody of 16-year-old John Pat.

Download the report: <https://creativechange.org.au/resources#bighart>

For more information on the *Creative Change Project* visit:

<https://creativechange.org.au/>

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