

QUEER ART
COLLECTIVE
2022 - 2023



Burrinja acknowledges the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, on whose lands we live, work, and play. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all nations of this Land. Sovereignty has never been ceded.

It always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

We also acknowledge and thank our diverse LGBTQIAPBS+ elders, leaders, trailblazers, and activists who have worked hard for the rights of LGBTQIAPBS+ people and to create safer spaces and societies.

QUEER ART COLLECTIVE

The Queer Art Collective (QAC) project engaged young LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals in creating a co-designed piece of temporary public art. Simultaneously, QAC hosted various arts-based events that welcomed LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals of all ages.

Together, these activities created a dynamic intersection of social connection and creativity.

The following report contains data from post-project assessments examining the project's impact on participants and the community at large.

QAC was an 18 month project delivered by Burrinja Cultural Centre, with partnership from VicHealth through the Big Connect program. Burrinja is supported by Creative Victoria, and in partnership with Yarra Ranges Council.

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CONTEXT: QUEERNESS IN MELBOURNE'S OUTER EAST AND BURRINJA'S RESPONSE

Burrinja's strategic plan includes two major focus areas - 'championing multiple voices and cultural values' and 'strengthening community through art'. The organisation is situated in the unique metro-regional context of Yarra Ranges, and its work is responsive to this context. The QAC project is an integral contribution to Burrinja's long-term vision, which aims to facilitate meaningful connections between local communities and play a key role in the cultural and community development of the region.

Through a dedicated think-tank with young people, as well as its community-engagement process in developing a new strategic plan, Burrinja perceived a lack of opportunity and an underrepresentation of LGBTQIAPBS+ voices within the communities of the Dandenong Ranges. It was noticed that there was a lack of connective tissue between these communities, especially within the youth sector. Further, the intense period of lockdowns and social isolation from the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significantly diminished levels of community connectedness. All of this converges in the Queer Art Collective project, and many of these factors drove the design of this project with a strong social impact focus.

“Increasing representation, especially on a local level with local names and faces, is incredibly important in preventing the “othering” of a group. It’s easy to hate an anonymous label, but witnessing queer joy and expression locally not only helps prevent demonisation but also gives other queer people, especially those

isolated or not out, a beacon to look to and feel seen so that maybe taking the leap towards visibility won’t be so scary.”

- Participant

QAC's vision was to strengthen and deepen social connections among young LGBTQIAPBS+ (also referred to as queer) individuals, through art experiences. The project was designed and delivered by Burrinja's QAC Facilitator, Gülsen Özer. Özer primarily worked with Burrinja's Creative Director/CEO, Gareth Hart, and Lead Artist Tay Haggarty to realise this vision.

The project centred artists and facilitators with a lived experience of queerness and delivered a curated program of workshops, performances, events and experiences. Predominately designed to support social connectedness for young queer people aged 18 – 26 years old, QAC fostered a range of intergenerational queer connections, engaging participants aged 14 – 60+.

“I think that connecting different generations of queer people has been invaluable. It’s important young people get the chance to see people like themselves at different stages of life, and for older queer folk to see the social progress that is helping queer youth to thrive.”

- Participant

Page 3 image: On Day 2 of the QAC public artwork project creative development in 2023. Courtesy of Burrinja.



(EMBRACED)

PROJECT OVERVIEW

QAC can be categorised into three strategic project stages:

Stage 1: Programming and event delivery

Design and delivery of 15 creative events, spanning workshops, performances, films, guest artist presentations and community dinners. Programmed by Facilitator Gülsen Özer, this series of events brought key queer artists and leaders from the Victorian creative sector to Burrinja to deliver a series of highly engaging events.

Stage 2: Co-design process for a new temporary public artwork

Lead Artist Tay Haggarty facilitated a four-month creative development process. Within this, 12 young queer people were contracted to co-design a new piece of public art. Comprising a four-day creative development, ongoing one-on-one mentoring by Lead Artist Tay Haggarty, and a synthesis of ideas from young people resulting in the conceptualisation of the artwork *Carabiner Bench (Nature found no fault with me)*.

Stage 3: Installation and activation of public artwork

The Lead Artist and QAC Facilitator worked with young people, stakeholders and manufacturers to deliver and install the *Carabiner Bench* at Birdsland Reserve, Belgrave Heights. The work was activated by a range of public events, including launch events, a poetry reading day and an online exhibition.

Ongoing throughout project

Over the 18 months of this project, QAC's collaborative efforts extended to partnerships with local organisations, resulting in the delivery two major youth Queer Formal events. Additionally, QAC served as a referral hub, bridging the gap between queer artists and health and arts organisations seeking queer collaborators.

“QAC has really helped broaden my mind to the opportunities and possibilities that exist within the surrounding community. Prior to this I would have expected to need to travel to the inner suburbs perhaps to experience any project similar. It has deepened my connections to the community and expanded my appreciation for both unique and shared queer experiences.”

- Participant

(CONNECTED)



ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

QAC 2022-2023

+May 2022: Queer Collage party facilitated by Aaron Billings (Pink Ember)

+June 2022: Theatre performance of 'BOOBS' by Selina Jenkins

+July 2022: Queer New Worlds performance and artist presentation by Sarah Ward & Bec Matthews (Fat Fruit Productions)

+August 2022: Queer Collage party facilitated by Aaron Billings (Pink Ember)

+September 2022: Story Sharing writing workshop with author Roz Bellamy

+October 2022: Pronoun badge-making workshop and social get-together

+November 2022: Queer Shorts – QAC x RAPA (Ranges Academy of Performing Arts) short film screenings

+February 2023: Tay Haggarty and collaborators work on temporary Public Artwork creative development process

+March 2023: Tay Haggarty and collaborators converge at the Victorian Pride Centre to finalise the temporary Public Artwork design

+April 2023: Eco-bath bomb workshop, facilitated by Delsi

+May 2023: Peter Waples-Crowe guest artists presentation

+August 2023: Polymer Pride earrings workshop, facilitated by Delsi

+September 2023: Mini Happiness Hacks workshop, facilitated by Delsi

+October 2023: *Carabiner Bench (Nature found no fault with me)* Artwork launch event at Birdsland Reserve, featuring live performance by Miller

+October - December 2023: 'Full Flush' Online group exhibition by young QAC collaborators

+October 2023: QAC Carabiner Bench Art Party, featuring live performance, DJ, and activities

+November 2023: QAC queer poetry reading, held at the *Carabiner Bench*.

All of these activities provided opportunities for connection through food, such as queer community dinners, lunches, and morning or afternoon teas.

“I wanted to be part of this ambitious and timely project because it genuinely put queer community and connection first. This is a project I wish I had access to as a queer youth living in a regional town.”

- Lead artist

“My daughter was struggling to find her tribe. I remember asking her after the first event we ever went to, How did you find that? Would you come again? To which she responded, Yes, I feel like I am around people like me.”

- Participant



(ENGAGED)

INSIGHTS INTO CO-DESIGN AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

In 2022, Burrinja appointed experienced artist Tay Haggarty to work with 12 young participants (as collaborators) in co-designing a new piece of temporary public art. These young creatives came together to collaborate and create a unique depiction of what it means to be queer in the year 2023. Through a combination of historical, contemporary, and public art perspectives, the group explored complex concepts surrounding gender, sexuality, mental health and queer joy.

Throughout the co-design and workshop process, collaborators engaged in a range of activities: movement workshop, lecture presentation, sharing meaningful objects and creative response tasks. Participants also explored and contributed to the 'Queering the Map' online resource.

As the process unfolded through the workshops, conversations deepened through an exploratory collage workshop, which drew on previously explored themes. Site visits to local townships further contextualised the artwork's creation. Collaborators were then assigned a homework task to submit an idea for a public artwork based on their interests and experiences (through QAC, yet also more broadly in life). Individual catch-up sessions were facilitated by the lead artist and the project facilitator, allowing for in-depth discussions on collaborators' ideas.

At the final creative development session held at the Victorian Pride Centre in March 2023, Tay Haggarty presented and reflected on collaborators' ideas and proposed a developed concept for the temporary public artwork, synthesising and adopting various elements from all youth collaborator proposals. Subsequently, collaborators transitioned into smaller working groups based on their interests. These groups focused on critical aspects such as the form of the artwork, colour/aesthetic

considerations, site location, and the overall experience and associated public programs. Through this process, young collaborators were integral to the resulting artwork's overall design, aesthetic, experience, and activation.

The resulting artwork was called *Carabiner Bench (Nature found no fault with me)*.

“Being involved within the public art project was an incredible and, unfortunately, quite rare opportunity that I feel privileged to have been involved in. It has allowed me to expand my connections and relationships within my community and reach beyond to feel like I have made a positive impact for others like myself who I don't know but who might connect with our work.”

– Participant

QAC collaborators:

Aubarino

Ben Guerrine

Damian McKenna

Em/Ollie Constance

Jordan Morise

Jordan Treadwell

Kate Kilduff

Lachlan Wyness

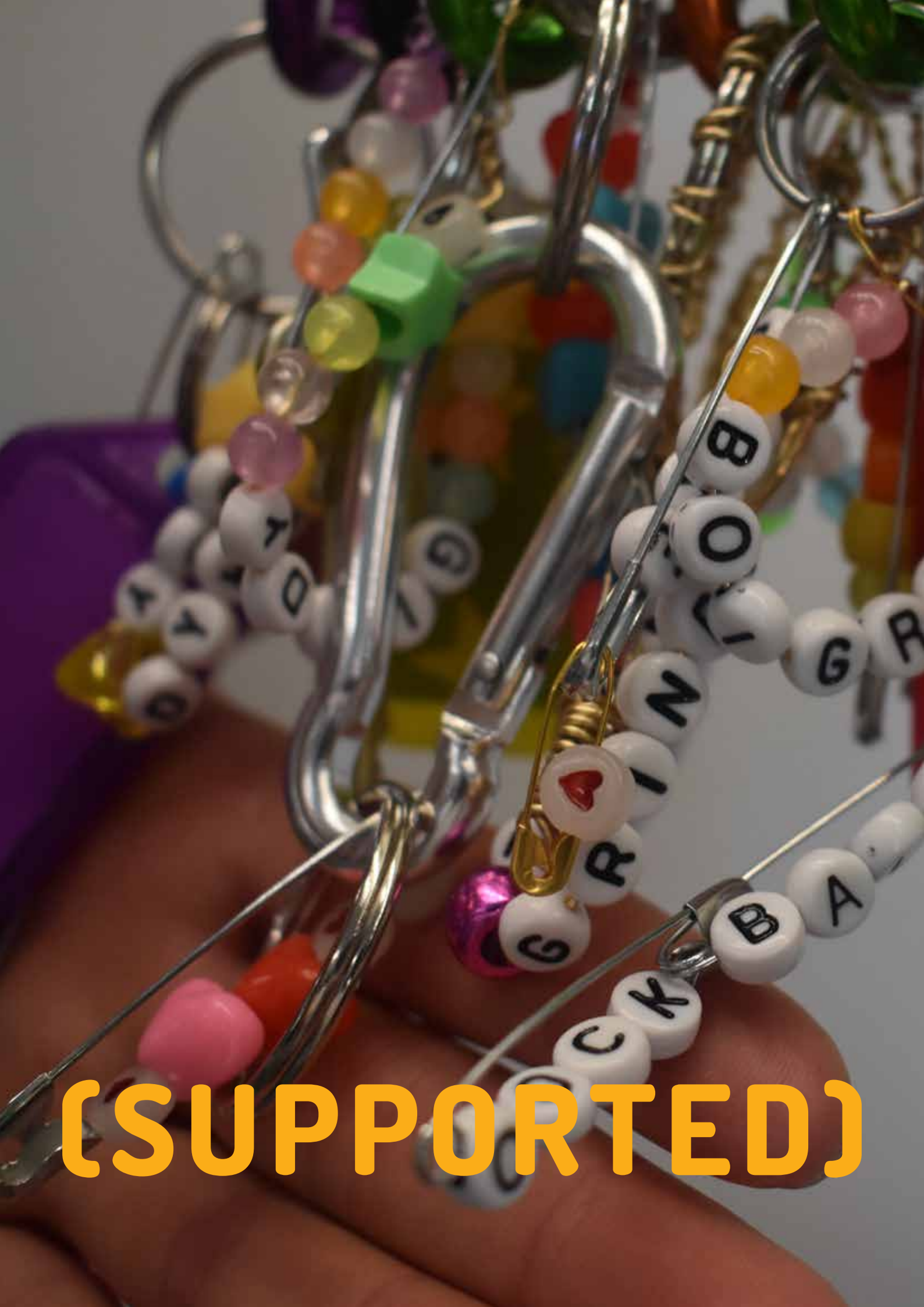
Louis Jenkin

Poppy/Gideon Adams

Zali Mustafa

Zeth Cameron

Page 9 image from QAC carabiner making activity, part of public artwork creative development process, 2023. Photography by Tay Haggarty.



(SUPPORTED)



“The benefits to the young people involved in the project are clear - they were able to meet like-minded young people, make professional connections, be a part of a large-scale public art process, and see their work legitimised by the wider community.”
- Guest artist

Images: Public artwork creative development, 2023. Courtesy of Burringja.





“The venerability and celebration of the Queer Temporary Public Artwork experience helped me feel more rooted to and within the community. My involvement has helped me feel like there’s a space for me in this community and even an appreciation.”

- Participant



Images: Top right: Public artwork creative development, 2023. Courtesy of Burrinja.

Bottom right: Queer poetry reading event at *Carabiner Bench*, 2023. Photography by Cathy Ronalds.

QAC ACHIEVEMENTS

- +Facilitated 23 events, fostering a peer-to-peer network and enhancing participants' social connections and sense of belonging.
- +Facilitated two interactive art activities at Pride Formal events (managed by a broader consortium of service providers), connecting with 180 queer young people aged 12-19.
- +Engaged 53 LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals aged 18-25.
- +Engaged 143 LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals aged 12-19 or 26+.
- +Facilitated over 200 social connections between young, queer-identifying people
- +Collaborated with 32 artists.
- +Reached over 16,000 audience members, including non-LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals, identified allies, participants' family members, and other support people who attended QAC events or viewed the temporary public artwork at Birdsland Reserve during its 3 months display period.
- +16,132* people comprised a broadcast audience who accessed the project through QAC web email subscriptions, associated webpages, social media, local news articles, and online art editorials.
- +Successfully implemented a co-design approach, uniting LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals, resulting in the creation and public exhibition of artwork.
- +Generated a prominent public artwork, sparking conversations within the broader community.
- +Fostered intergenerational connections and challenged stereotypes, contributing to broader narratives around art and the queer experience.
- +Produced an online exhibition and collaborator-designed and printed a tee shirt, with proceeds supporting fundraising for Indigenous LGBTQIA+SB organisation, Black Rainbow.

MAJOR OUTCOME: THE CARABINER BENCH

The resulting temporary public artwork is a sculpture and communal seat titled *Carabiner Bench (Nature found no fault with me)*. The form represents a large carabiner shape split into three sections and welcomes viewers to weave into the sculpture and take a seat to rest and reflect.

The carabiner is a longstanding wearable symbol within the queer community. Pre-internet, this utilitarian item was often seen holding a set of keys and placed strategically on a person's belt or bag as a signifier of queerness and desire to connect. The work aims to embody this historic intention and act as a catalyst for positive connections.

The title and location for the artwork are inspired by the many collaborators who valued the importance of nature as a place of respite. Their sentiment is expanded on by prominent writer/queer theorist Leslie Feinberg, who, in his book *Stone Butch Blues*, writes, *Nature held me close and seemed to find no fault with me*.

Birdsland Reserve made for a fitting location to display the artwork: a natural sanctuary for local and visiting communities. The warm yellow used in the artwork evokes a feeling of comfort in nature, with reference to the sun's natural warmth.

* SOURCE: Combination of Estimated readership of print and digital editions. Via Google Analytics, Mailchimp and Facebook Insights.

Page 13 image from *Carabiner Bench (Nature found no fault with me)* public launch, 2023. Photography by Cathy Ronalds.

**“When you proudly
celebrate a minority
group it sends a strong
message that what makes
them special doesn’t have
to be a secret or kept in
the shadows.”**

- Lead artist



(CELEBRATED)

IMPACT

+100% of participant feedback indicated that QAC contributed positively to an increase in their social connections. Respondents also reported that the increased social connection gained through QAC positively impacted their daily life outside of QAC.

+100% of collaborator feedback indicated that they felt that their ideas were valued and that their QAC experience had provided them with new and beneficial life changes.

Response trend #1: Social connection & inclusion

Feedback gathered from QAC participants and stakeholders tells an overwhelming story about the importance of this project in feeling connected to others, community, and place. As a primary focus of the overall project, it is evident that centering the social aspects of workshops and events (i.e. through the presence of community dinners) helped people feel connected and included. This is exemplified in the following feedback:

“I feel more accepted, particularly in my own head, in the queer community. I have sometimes doubted my degree of belonging and validity within the queer community. The positivity and respect I have experienced within this project from queer people helped immensely to rebut these feelings.”

“I was somewhat wary of displaying my queerness in community spaces before QAC, and so to begin this journey surrounded by community was invaluable. I’m aware I still exist in a bit of a bubble, but I feel far less alienated seeing the positive responses to the public artwork and feel like I’m helping that bubble to expand.”

Response trend #2: Queerness and creativity

A secondary aim of the project was to centre engagement with and

participation in creative processes through a queer lens and lived experience. This design choice led to much conversation and impact around the value in cultivating queer joy – at an individual and community level. Participants and stakeholders both shared insightful feedback about the strength of public art in enabling queer joy within public spaces. This is exemplified in the following feedback:

“The project was strongly collaborative and innovative. It used public art and place-making to promote inclusion and reflection and raise awareness of the experience of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the wider community.”

“QAC helped to open minds and build appreciation for the creativity inherent in the queer experience.”


Response trend # 3: Personal growth and empowerment

At every stage of this 18-month project, QAC has centred on people: young people’s experience, the power of social connection, and the importance of personal expression. It is unsurprising then, that participants have experienced very strong outcomes in personal growth, empowerment, and development. Young people shared with us their growth in self-realisation, feeling more valued to have a voice, and developing stronger self-belief and self-acceptance. This is exemplified in the following feedback:

“I can’t fully put into words the value of QAC. I’ve connected with peers and learned so much about myself as a non-binary individual.”

“QAC allowed me to express myself in a way I hadn’t before, more openly and freely. I believe it gave me more confidence... allowing me to be open with my sexuality, has positively impacted my mental health.”

Page 15 image: DJ Eadie at *Carabiner Bench* Launch after party, 2023. Photography by Cathy Ronalds.

A photograph of a DJ performing at a party. The DJ is a young person with dark hair, wearing a black and white sailor-style top with a white star on the chest and headphones around their neck. They are looking down at a white DJ console. The background is a wall of gold tinsel with two colorful pinwheels hanging from the top. The lighting is warm and festive.

“My QAC experience has allowed me to understand that Queer Art activism deeply nourishes the soul. This has been a catalyst in my life, in having tough conversations with people who don’t understand me and knowing my worth. I now feel like I’ve grown into being proud of who I am.”

- Participant

(EMPOWERED)

IMPACT continued

The Queer Arts Collective promotes appreciation for the inherent creativity of the queer experience. Participating in this project significantly improved the well-being, confidence, and engagement of LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals in the arts.

By bringing the community together, the project helped to combat the isolation and loneliness that LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals often experience, providing opportunities for pride and appreciation of the positive aspects of being queer.

The initiative also helped to create a better understanding of LGBTQIAPBS+ issues through public art, opening doors for future projects.

“I gave an artist talk and had dinner with members of QAC. As an Indigenous queer artist I thought it was important. Creating safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community to meet and to interact improves the social and emotional wellbeing of the community.”

The intensive workshops that focused on creativity had a significant positive effect on the confidence and creative practices of the group members. This is evident in the creation of numerous projects and artworks that were inspired by their shared experiences.

These endeavours sparked conversations advocating for sustained support of the LGBTQIAPBS+ community. The project has raised awareness of the queer community in the local area, fostering a greater appreciation for emerging art.

The project has positively impacted social inclusion, with lasting effects beyond its funded period. Notably:

+Young participants maintain communication through a WhatsApp group and social media, fostering ongoing connections.

+Continued social interactions outside the project, such as attending birthday parties and art events, demonstrate sustained relationships.

+Discussions are underway for funding a Queer Choir in 2024, showcasing ongoing collaboration between Burrinja and QAC participants.

+Structural changes at Burrinja, including signage and amenities, contribute to a more inclusive environment for gender-diverse individuals.

+Increased cultural awareness within Burrinja ensures sustained inclusivity practices.

+Inclusion of at least four QAC events in Burrinja’s annual programming.

+Awarding Burrinja studio residencies to two young QAC collaborators supporting their artistic development.

+Discussions between Burrinja and QAC collaborators about a queer-focused exhibition and ongoing commitment to supporting grassroots arts activities within the community.

“Thanks so much for inviting us to be a part of QAC, it’s such a beautiful night and there is so much heart and love that goes into making it special... you really make everyone feel like they matter.”

-Guest artist



(VALUED)

CONCLUSION

The resounding voices captured in this report affirm that the Queer Art Collective has not only created a space for self-expression but has also ignited a movement for change, acceptance, and celebration within the LGBTQIAPBS+ community.

QAC has successfully cultivated profound social connections, celebrated diversity, and provided a vital space for LGBTQIAPBS+ individuals. The project's dedication to representation, inclusivity, and the celebration of queer creativity, coupled with ongoing efforts to normalise queerness, underscore its long-term importance.

The broader impact on the community and the positive influence on individuals' daily lives highlight the significance of projects like QAC in creating spaces that celebrate and support the LGBTQIAPBS+ community.

This evaluation informs ongoing improvements, ensuring QAC continues as a beacon of queer artistic expression. While also underscoring the need for sustained advocacy and proactive work in ensuring LGBTQIAPBS+ inclusion and support to thrive.

“QAC has shown me that success can manifest through my queerness, not despite it, and shown me the power we have to create our own spaces.”

– Participant

Pronouns save lives!

(IMPACTED)



Artwork: *Carabiner Bench (Nature found no fault with me)* by Tay Haggarty and QAC collaborators (2023).
Image by Cathy Ronalds, during artwork's display in Birdsland Reserve, Belgrave Heights, 2023.

