



**Creative Barkly**  
SUSTAINING THE **ARTS** AND **CULTURE**  
SECTOR IN REMOTE AUSTRALIA

## Preliminary Report, January 2018

### Introduction

Creative Barkly is a three-year Australian Research Council Linkage project (2016-2019) that aims to investigate the arts and creative sector in the Barkly, and how it contributes to economic and social development in the region. The project is being led by the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre at Griffith University in partnership with Barkly Regional Arts (BRA), Regional Development Australia NT, and University of the Sunshine Coast and Southern Cross University. It will deliver information back to the region that will be helpful in planning the future of arts across the Barkly. The research is being conducted in two phases: first, a mapping of arts/creative practices and initiatives in the region, followed by case studies of specific organisations and/or programs that provide a diverse and detailed exploration of how the sector operates in this remote context.

Since February 2016, the research team has conducted several field trips to consult with community stakeholders, Elders and representatives in order to refine the design and methodology of the project to ensure it meets the needs of a diverse and sparsely located population. In July and August 2017, we returned to the region to commence data collection for the mapping phase. This coincided with two key events: the Tennant Creek Show and the Desert Harmony Festival. This report is based on preliminary findings from a survey that was administered to artists and arts workers at both of these events, and across the region more widely in communities, houses, Art Centres and on the street. Many respondents were approached through Art Centres including BRA and Nyinnka Nyunyu in Tennant Creek, Kulumindini Art Centre in Elliott, and Arlpwe Art Centre in Ali Curung. Others were recruited through word-of-mouth and the researchers' visible presence in communities over the course of the month.

This report is designed to offer the team, project partners and key stakeholders an opportunity to look at the demographics of the respondents who have completed the survey to-date, in order to assess whether it is necessary to recruit more participants from particular demographics / locations etc. This preliminary report is also designed to flag some of the themes that are emerging from the data. These emergent themes will inform the more detailed analysis/coding phase that occurs after data collection for the mapping phase has concluded, as well as the selection and design of the case studies.



Images from left: 1. Creative Barkly Project leader Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet with Warumungu Elder and Traditional Owner Rosemary Plummer; 2. Creative Barkly stall at Desert Harmony Festival with researchers Dr Naomi Sunderland, Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, and Dr Sarah Woodland.

## Participants

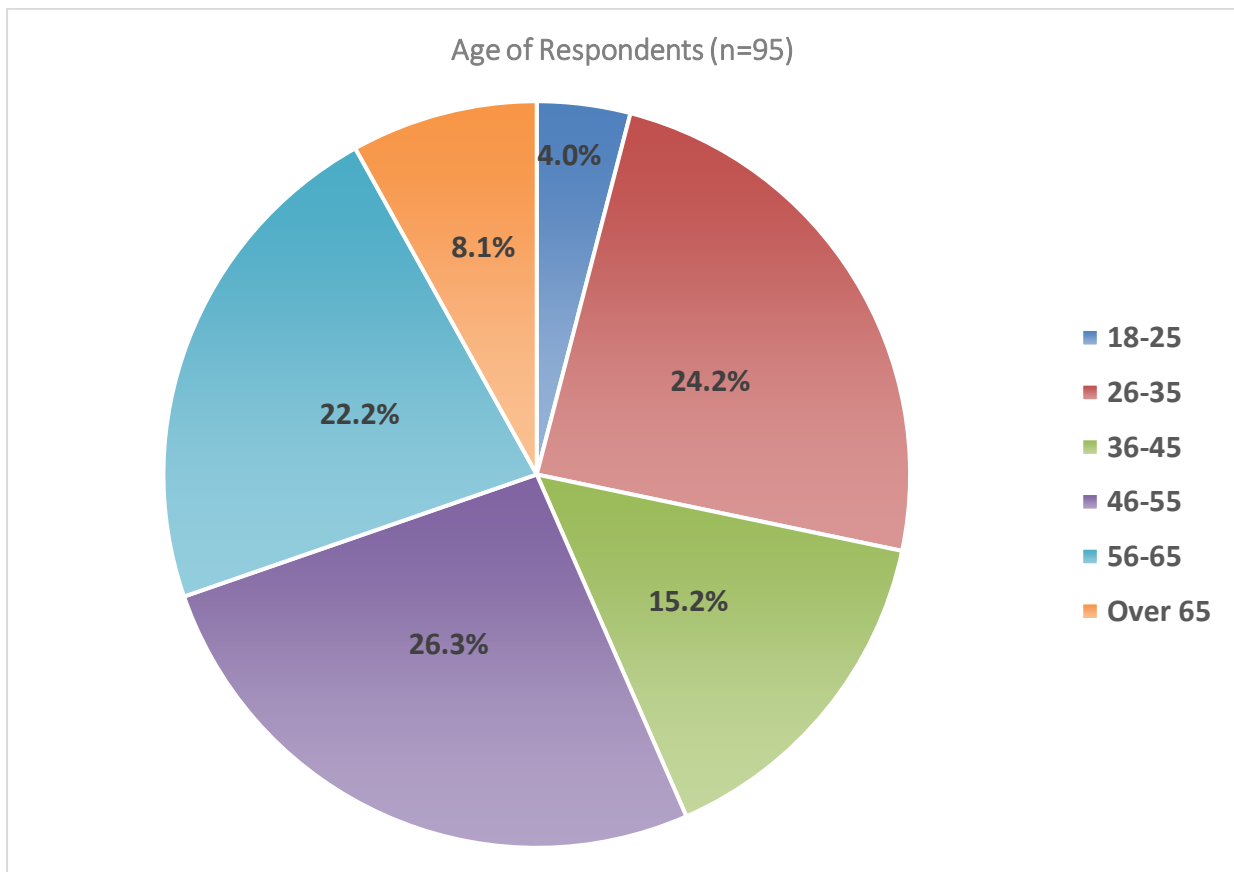
These findings are based on responses from 104 participants in the survey for individual artists/creative producers in the Barkly (at September 2017). Of the 96 respondents who specified, 93.7% completed the survey in person with a researcher, with the remainder accessing the link online. For the purpose of the research, the arts and creativity are defined broadly as encompassing a wide range of creative arts and industries (for example, painting, poetry, music, sculpture, photography, needlework, and design to mention a few). Respondents were given a long list of possible art forms and activities to choose from, and space to add others that were not on the list.

For the purposes of this study, an artist/creative producer is defined as someone engaging in arts/creative activity on a professional or amateur basis, paid or unpaid, formal or informal; and may include those in supporting roles such as arts worker, technical producer or teacher.

The current sample size of 104 represents 1.4% of the total population of **7530 people currently residing in the Barkly Local Government Area (LGA)** (Estimated Resident Population, ABS 2016). Out of 97 respondents who answered the question, **68% identified as Aboriginal**, which is representative of the Barkly region as a whole according to the most recent census data (ABS 2016).

The gender distribution for the survey currently sits at **61.2% female, 37.8% male, and 1% transgender** (n=98). These figures vary from the latest profile of the region, which shows a distribution of 51.6% male and 49% female. The higher percentage of women represented in the survey may indicate an emerging trend in terms of creative occupations and activities in the region, however, the team is aware that there may be other factors contributing to this high representation. These may include the presence of an all-female research team during the in-person implementation of the survey; and the concentration of survey data within art centres such as Nyinkka Nyunyu, Kulumindini and BRA, which engage predominantly women artists. With anecdotal evidence that there are a number of male artists in the region with whom the research has yet to engage, the team has identified the need to recruit more men to the survey.

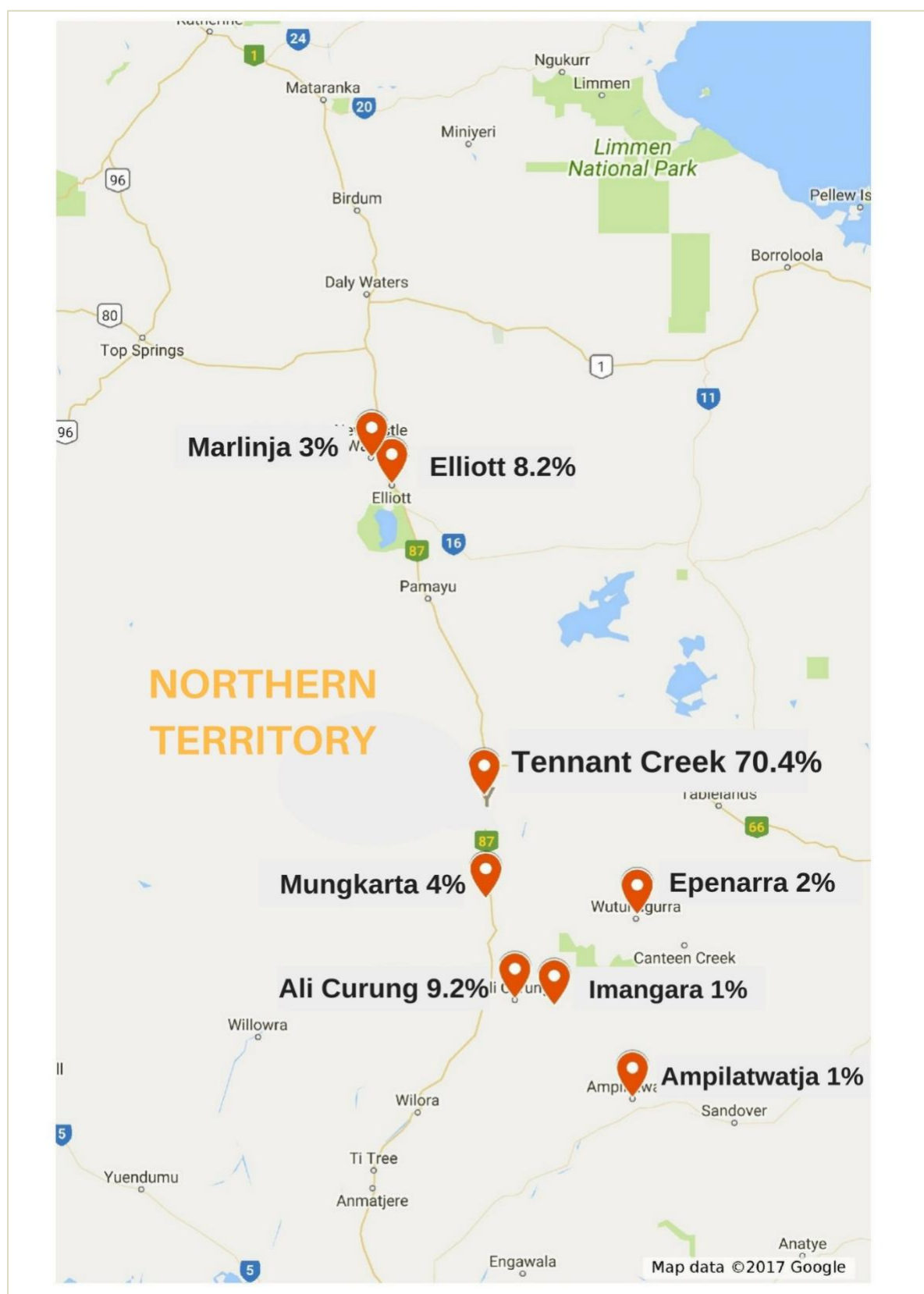
The age distribution is outlined in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Percentage of respondents by age range**

These figures vary, in some cases substantially, from the age distribution in the region as the whole. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) puts the population aged 20-24 at 9.5%, which is 5.5% higher than the representation of 18-25 year olds in the survey. As with the representation of males in the research, the team has recognised a need to engage with this younger cohort, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that they are active in the arts and creativity in the region. Of particular interest is the high representation of respondents in the 56-65 age bracket (22.2%), where the census places this age group at 9.2% of the total population (ABS 2016). This is another possible area for further investigation in terms of why this age group is particularly attracted to arts/creative activities, and what the social and economic implications of this may be.

Of 98 respondents to the question, 100% stated that they currently lived in the Barkly Region, with the majority of those having Tennant Creek as their usual residence (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Percentage of respondents by place of usual residence**

(Note: 1 respondent gave their place of residence as "bush/outstation")

According to the 2016 census, 44.6% of Barkly residents resided in Tennant Creek, which is 25.8% fewer than those represented in our survey (ABS). The concentration of research activity around Tennant Creek likely

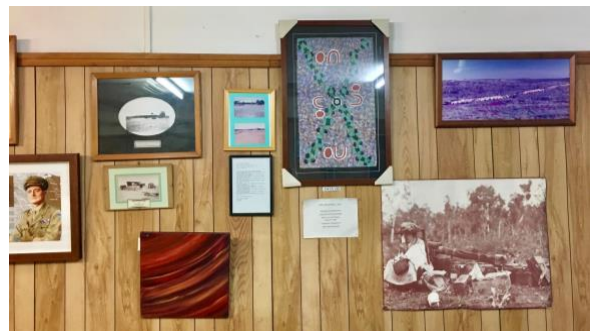


contributed to this disparity. This has occurred for logistical/travel reasons, as well as the relative ease of access to art centres such as Nyinkka Nyunyu and BRA, and our presence at Desert Harmony and the Tennant Creek Show. The spread of residents in other communities varies slightly in comparison to the census data. In the case of Imangara and Ali Curung, the representation was the same; in Elliott and Marlinja, there was higher representation in our survey; and in Ampilatwatja and Epenarra, lower. This last disparity is unsurprising, given that the team has not yet travelled to Ampilatwatja and Epenarra to implement the survey.

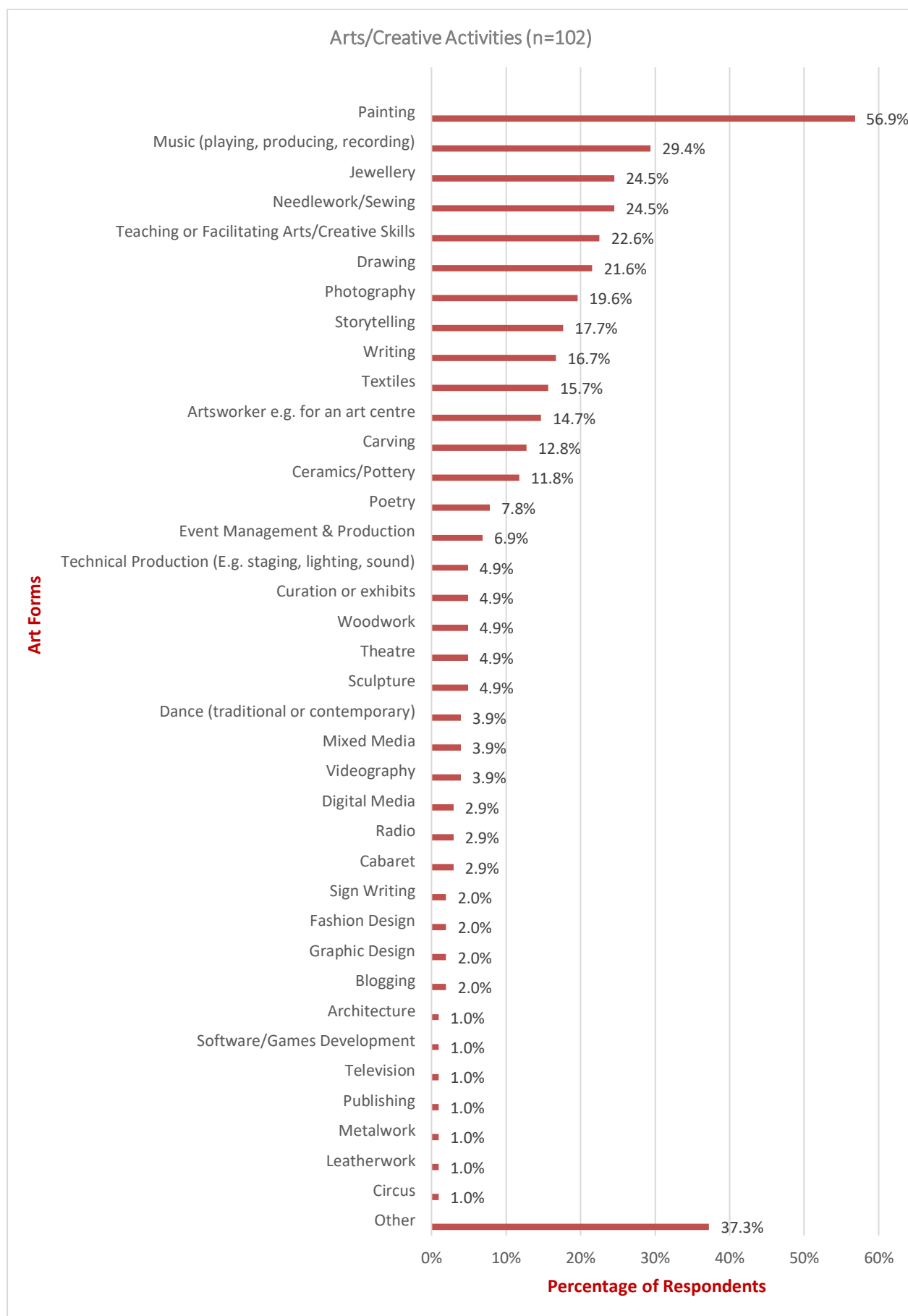
## Findings

### Arts Activity in the Barkly

The first section of the survey invited responses about the kinds of creative activities undertaken, the places and spaces where the activities occur, and the value that people see in doing arts/creative practice for themselves or the wider community. Figure 3 below shows the different arts/creative activities undertaken by percentage of respondents. Respondents were able to select multiple responses indicating all the different activities undertaken, and then nominate the main activity separately. From the 102 responses given, **Painting was the most popular art form, followed by music, needlework/sewing and jewellery.** The 37.3% of respondents who ticked the “other” option listed activities such as bush medicine, bush tucker and printing. While some definitions of arts/creative practice may not encompass traditional practices such as making bush medicine, the team recognises that this kind of activity plays a crucial role in the creative lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that cannot be separated from other activities such as painting.



Images from left: 1. Printed fabrics at Kulumindini Art Centre, Elliott; 2. Art works on the walls at Renner Springs Road House; 3. Bush tucker and bush medicine garden at Arlpwe Art and Culture Centre, Ali Curung



**Figure 3: Arts/creative activities undertaken by percentage of respondents**

Out of the 102 responses given, the most frequently used spaces for making, creating or rehearsing were: **home office, studio or workshop (57%), Arts Centre (49%) and Outside/On Country (37%)**

**A total of 89% of 102 respondents said that they show, share or sell their arts/creative work** outside of friends and family, with the most common spaces for showing work being Art Centres, public spaces/venues and public markets within the Northern Territory.

Respondents were asked to describe what they see as the value of doing their arts/creative practice to themselves, to those around them, and the wider community. An early analysis of these responses, along with other discussions that the researchers have engaged in during fieldwork indicate at least three emerging themes in relation to value:

1. The connection between arts/creative practice and **wellbeing**; specifically, that such activities are associated with feeling happy, connected to culture and family, and diverted from boredom and/or negative activities such as drinking or drugs.
2. The importance of **passing on cultural skills and stories** through artistic/creative practice to the younger generation.
3. The importance of arts/creative activity as a form of **personal and community expression**.

The most common negative impacts on respondents' ability to undertake their arts/creative practice include (in no order) a lack of funding, lack of time, family commitments and/or issues, and sickness.

### Training, Support and Networks

Of the 100 respondents to the questions about mentoring and training, **90% said they had received some form of mentoring or training** in their arts/creative practice, with 50% of those stating that they received informal mentoring from elders and family members.

**76.8% of 99 respondents** said that they received **help or support** for the practice from people, organisations or places, with 88.5% of those receiving support from an arts organisation.

**52% of 100 respondents** said that they belong to **groups or networks** that support their practice; and 54% of those said they collaborate with other artists/creative practitioners in their work.

### Arts/Creativity and the Barkly Region

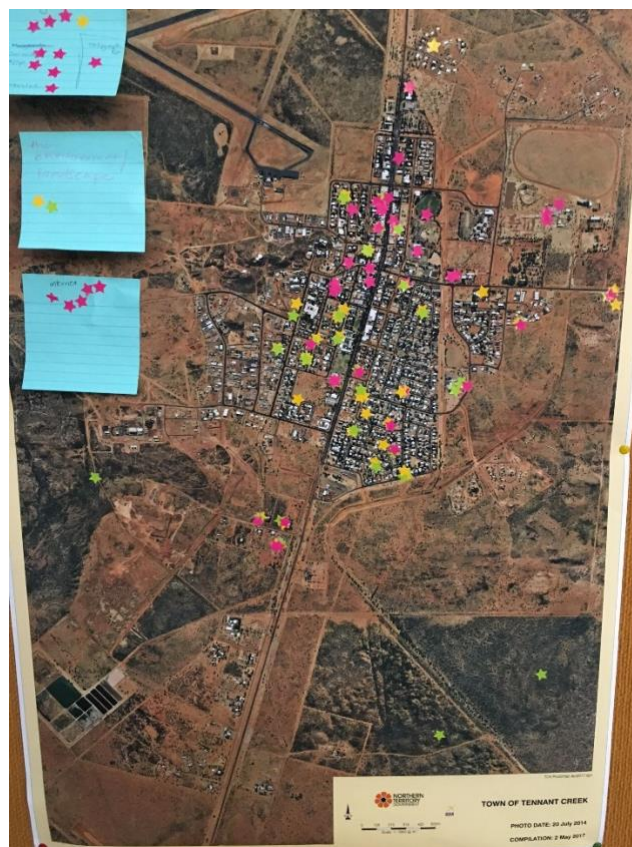
Respondents were invited to list the **advantages of doing their arts/creative practice in the Barkly region**. Out of 98 responses, 42.9% described the sense of home, connection to country, family and/or community as being a significant advantage, with some also describing peace and quiet, and the benefits of a small town in terms of a slower pace and a sense of community.

When asked to list the **disadvantages of doing arts/creative work in the Barkly region**, of those surveyed, nine did not respond, with the researchers sensing that some of these may have been unwilling to provide a negative view of their home. For those who did respond, the disadvantages were mostly associated with the region's remoteness, for example the costs, distances to travel, and limited services.

Out of 95 respondents, 49.5% listed the **Desert Harmony Festival** as an important or valuable arts event in the Barkly Region, with 11.6% listing NAIDOC week. It is worth noting that the majority of the survey activity was undertaken just prior to, and during the Desert Harmony Festival, which may have influenced respondents. These two events were seen as presenting an opportunity to **show, sell and share this work**

**with locals and visitors** and for people from different regions, communities and language groups to come together and **share their skills, techniques and practices**. These events appeared to be more popular than others mentioned such as the Tennant Creek Show (4.2%), general arts workshops (4.2%), public markets (3.2%) and sports carnivals/events (2.1%). A thriving arts/creative sector in the Barkly was commonly seen as one that provided **more opportunities for sharing and collaboration to occur**. In contrast, one of the most frequently cited barriers was **lack of money or a need for funding to undertake arts/creative practice**. This was cited in 29 instances across three questions: *events/changes or factors that might impact on your ability to do your arts/creative practice, disadvantages of living in the Barkly Region, and the vision for a thriving arts sector in the Barkly*.

Further detailed analysis of the survey responses regarding arts/creative work in the Barkly region will be forthcoming after detailed thematic analysis of the survey responses.



**Image: stars on a map show where arts/creative activity is taking place in Tennant Creek. Map generated by local participants during Tennant Creek Show**

### Arts/Creative Work, Employment and Income

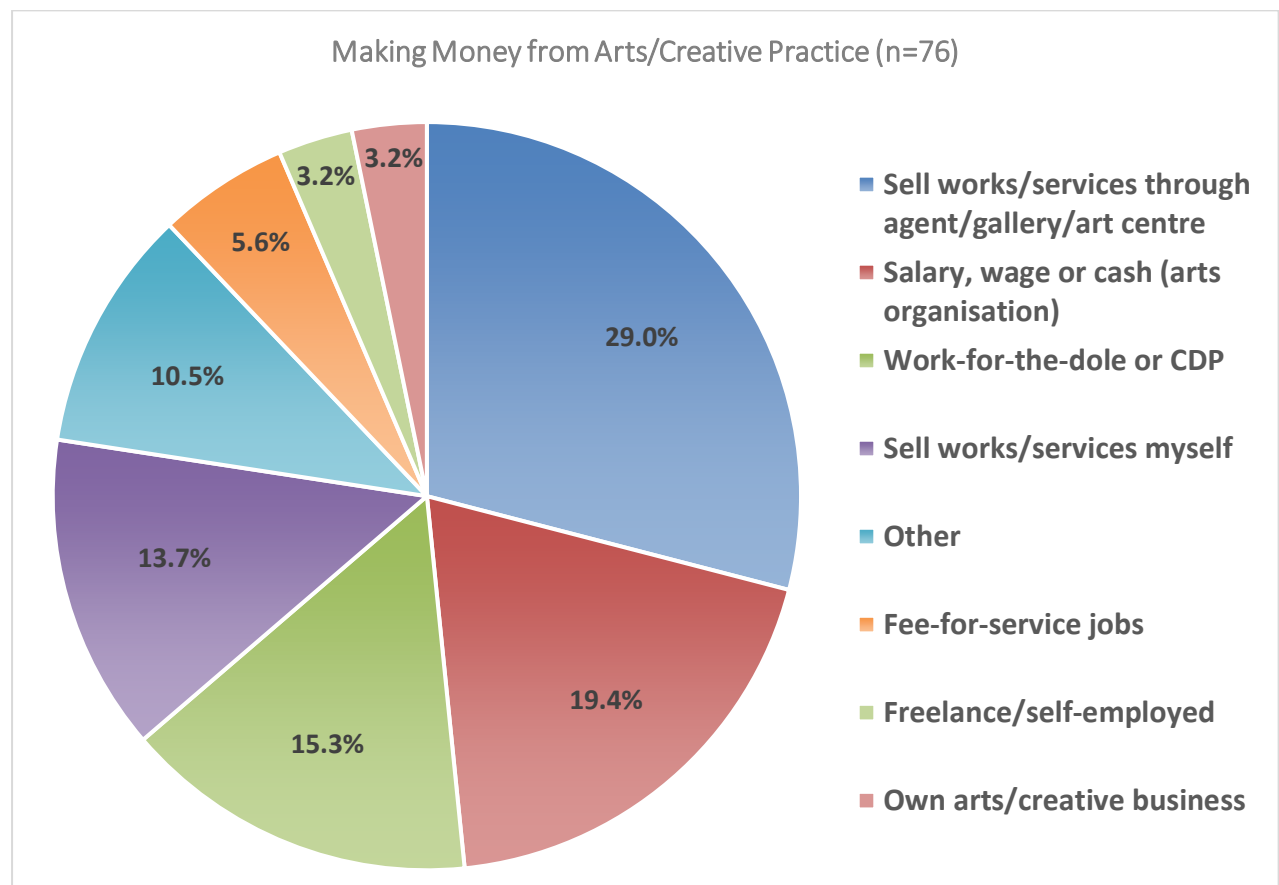
The survey invited responses about the different ways that artists and arts workers spent their time on their practice, and whether they received any income from the sales of works or services.

**54% of 99 respondents said that they volunteer**, several of them citing teaching their art form to children and family as a significant voluntary activity.



**55% of 95 respondents said that they engage in non-professional or amateur activities** such as making work for their own enjoyment, participating in open mic nights, and making work for friends.

**78% of 102 respondents indicated that they made an income from their arts/creative practice**, with 50% of these stating that it was their primary source of income. It is important to note that this includes income from Centrelink as part of a CDP art program (work-for-the-dole). For those 35 respondents whose arts/creative practice was not their primary source of income, 40% relied on a pension, and the majority of these were on disability support (31.4%). Figure 4 below shows the distribution of how respondents generated income from their arts/creative practice.



**Figure 4: Ways that respondents make money from arts/creative practice**

Figure 4 shows a significant number of respondents do arts/creative practice as part of a CDP or work-for-the-dole art program (15.3%). According to the ABS, this is not counted as employment because the income from such activities comes from Centrelink, however, it demonstrates a trend within the arts/creative sector in the Barkly that invites further investigation. The 10.5% of respondents who ticked 'Other' in response to this question listed arts-based income sources as: selling to staff in an organisation, busking, selling tour merchandise, and owning the property where an arts business is located.

Respondents were asked what percentage of their gross income in the previous year came from arts/creative work, the actual amount of income from arts/creative work, and the total expenditure. The questions regarding actual amounts were optional and only 46% of respondents who earned money from arts/creative work opted to answer these. Many respondents found the income and expenditure related questions difficult for to answer, for example, some did not know how many paintings they had sold through an Art Centre in the past year, or how much of their total income this represented.

Of the 30 responses given, only 16% of respondents who had income from arts/creative practice had applied for a grant, prize or other funding in the last five years, with just under half of these being successful. The majority of funding was listed as coming from Arts NT.

## Plans Going Forward

These early findings have begun to paint a complex and fascinating picture of the arts/creative sector in the Barkly region. In addition to the survey findings presented here, the researchers have also begun to conduct interviews and surveys with representatives from arts-organisations in the Barkly region, non-arts organisations that provide arts based programs and activities, and with arts sector professionals who are able to provide some context about where the Barkly arts sector sits in relation to the rest of the Northern Territory and more broadly. These conversations have begun to highlight how important this research will be to the sector in demonstrating the economic and social value of the arts to funders and policy makers both at Territory level and nationally.

While some of the findings here will be unsurprising to those who are knowledgeable about the sector in the Northern Territory, there are a number of themes emerging that warrant deeper and more detailed exploration. The role that CDP art programs play in the region appears to be a significant area for further investigation in terms of the art economy, its impact on art practices, and the social value to communities. The role that the arts plays in community wellbeing and liveability is another significant area for further exploration, especially in the context of a multi-cultural population with diverse needs and priorities, situated in a very remote area of Australia.

It is important to note that the research team has not completed administering the surveys to individual artists/creative producers in the region. While there has been significant success in obtaining responses from 104 individuals, we have yet to engage with significant numbers of individuals in Ampilatwatja, Epenarra, Canteen Creek, Utopia Homelands or with those undertaking arts/creative activities on cattle stations in the Barkly. We are also aware that there is a low percentage of participation from young people and males in the survey, despite anecdotal evidence that these groups are active in arts and creativity. These groups will therefore continue to be targeted for recruitment in future field trips.

The researchers anticipate that the mapping phase of the research may continue alongside the commencement of case study research in early-mid-2018. This will involve continuing the survey as described above with the aim of ensuring the project has an adequately representative sample, continuing to administer the survey with arts and non-arts organisations, and continuing interviews with key arts sector professionals from organisations whose work reaches into the Barkly Region such as Desart, Artback NT and the Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA).

The Creative Barkly project has so far been met with a great deal of enthusiasm and good will from individual artists, organisation representatives and sector professionals alike. Participants and stakeholders recognise the need for evidence-based tools and resources that will support this vital yet under-reported aspect of the Barkly region economy and the wellbeing of its communities.