

polyglot

Annual Report 2023



theatre is child's play ~~~

About Us

Polyglot Theatre is a world-renowned contemporary theatre company based in Melbourne/Naarm making exceptional arts experiences for children and families.

Our unique brand of theatre encompasses a wide variety of forms and is shared with audiences everywhere, from the world's most prestigious theatres to the football grounds of regional Australia. Our artistic and philosophical approach of child-centred practice has earned us a strong reputation at home and abroad as a leader in the theatre for young audiences (TYA) sector, celebrated for creating distinctive, participatory and inclusive works that are playful and conceptually rigorous. Access is central to our work at Polyglot, driven by the right of all children to experience growth and resilience through creative play.

Our Vision

At Polyglot the child is central. We seek a world where all children are powerful: artistically, socially and culturally. We work with deep respect for our audience, investigate the relationship between adult and child in live performance, and use original and relevant approaches to

Polyglot acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay our deep respects to Elders past and present. For more than 65,000 years children and families have created and played on these lands and continue to do so. We are grateful to be able to make our art on this country too. Always was, always will be.

art-making to ensure all children have access to art and creativity. Polyglot is committed to ensuring we reach the broadest, most diverse audience with safety and care.

Our Values

- Children are central to our art as creators, collaborators and participants. Our work exists to give children the power and agency to be in control, to communicate their ideas, to have an effect and experience freedom.
- Our artistic approach is one of unbridled curiosity, rigour and daring; we champion innovation and invite the unexpected.
- We understand that play is the basis for creative exploration and is vital for children's development and wellbeing.
- We work with respect, resourcefulness and in a spirit of genuine collaboration in the pursuit of a sustainable future—environmentally, creatively and economically.



Creative team, Paper Planet in specialist schools. Photo: Lexie Wood

- We work with inclusive practice and a strong focus on accessibility, prioritising equitable engagement and access in everything we do.
- We believe in leading change and pursuing best practice for our staff, our artists and our Board.

Our Mission

Polyglot's mission is to make innovative and daring theatre to provide children everywhere the opportunity for imagination and adventure through participation. We offer transformational, playful arts experiences that are alive and human in their content and connection. We relish the endless possibilities in theatre and performance for this very specific audience, providing scope for an extraordinary range of form and style. We advocate for the right of all children to experience arts and culture, and promote the importance of young people as a discerning audience from the earliest years.

Front cover: Come Back Home. Photo: Studio ZNKE, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Singapore. Back cover: Paper Planet. Photo: Sarah Walker

Polyglot People

Polyglot's strength lies in our people – our Board, our Staff, our Artists and our Audiences. Our people are central to Polyglot's resilience and recognition, and the force behind our adaptability and constant innovation.

The company works with a co-CEO model of Artistic Director and Executive Director, who lead a multi-skilled and dedicated staff. A genuine partnership and collaborative approach are central to Polyglot's leadership. In January, we embarked on the exciting journey of new creative leadership, with Cat Sewell as Artistic Director. This transition follows the 22-year tenure of Sue Giles AM, who led Polyglot's artistic evolution to the place of innovation and child-centred practice for which we are now world renowned.

Polyglot has an expert Board of Directors, and an informal ensemble of highly skilled freelance artists who deeply understand the company's artistic approach and ethos: The Generator. Children are central to our work, both as collaborators and as participatory audiences. Polyglot Inspiring People Society (PIPS) is a group of children who regularly contribute to new ideas, strategic planning and policy, and shared creative exchange.

Board of Directors

Sarah Hunt – Chair (until April)
Sandra Robertson – Chair (from April)
Rasika Mohan – Deputy Chair (until April)
Geoffrey Renton – Deputy Chair (from April)
Sandra Stoklossa – Treasurer
Dr Mark Williams – Secretary (until April)
Matthew Hall – Secretary (from April)
Angela Aroozoo
Romi Kupfer
Vivian Romero
David Ryding

Staff

Cat Sewell – Artistic Director & co-CEO
Kath Fyffe – Executive Director & co-CEO
Emily Tomlins – Associate Director
Lucy Day – Business Manager
Rainbow Sweeny – Producer
Julie Wright – Producer
Lexie Wood – Project Manager
Erica Heller-Wagner – Marketing & Development Manager
Sunari Sooriaaratchi - Marketing & Access Coordinator (until April)
Matthew Siddall – Marketing & Access Coordinator (from June)
Sophie Overett – Administration & Operations Coordinator
Luke McLennan & Danni Faul, The Wandering CFO – Bookkeeper

PIPS

Archie, Ava, Charlie, Azalea (ZayZay), Chester, Daniel, Dash, Dolly, Fenna, Frank, Gabe, Goldie, Hux, Julian, Lulu, Maisie, Mat, Milaan, Miro, Naiya, Oscar, Reema, Rosie, Scout, Vivi, Wirran

Artists, Facilitators and Production Staff

Clement Baade, Tirese Ballard, Nick Barlow, Vernon Bartlett, Valerie Berry, Betiel Beyin, Allegra Caleo, Moses Carr, Alice Coffey, Archie Coffey, Graham Coffey, Sophia Derkenne, John Marc Desengano, Briony Farrell, Curly Fernandez, Lana-Marie Filies, Katrina Gaskell, Sue Giles, Milly Grindrod, Jaz Harwood, Kaite Head, Ashlee Hughes, Hannah Jukes Frere, Grace Kalai, Pisa Lee, Youbi Lee, Mischa Long, Jacqueline Luty, Lachlan MacLeod, Kuda Mapeza, Ekko Mckerlie, Sylvie Meltzer, Hannah Murphy, Hollis Ngai, Steph O'Hara, David Pidd, Ian Pidd, Rose Pidd, Zak Pidd, Rizman Putra, Alice Qin, Tamara Rewse, Ania Reynolds, Marie-Rose Riley, Stefanie Robinson, Emanorwatty Saleh, Lauren Sheree, Vignesh Singh, Colleena Smith, Rockie Stone, Sonya Soares, Lauren Swain, Meg Taranto, Keila Terencio de Paula, Emily Tomlins, Afsaneh Torabi, Natalie Tse, Glen Walton, Ashleigh Walwyn, Justine Warner, Kate Washington, Blayne Welsh, Pinky Wittingslow, Sunny Youngsmith



Achievements



39,021 People reached



81% Accessed our work for free

35% International

15% Regional/remote Australia

371 Artist employment opportunities

302 Performances delivered

281 In-school and kinder sessions

100 Kids Collaborations sessions

115 Sessions and shows in regional and remote Australia

15 International seasons across 7 countries

Top left: Paper Planet. Photo: Sarah Walker. Top right: Come Back Home. Photographer: Studio ZNKE, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Singapore.

International



National



Leadership Reflection

In 2023, Polyglot's engagement with children, families and communities hit a seven-year high. We reached more than 39,000 audience members through extensive international tours, premieres, commissions and partnerships, play workshops in regional Victoria and seasons at iconic venues and festivals around Australia.

We embarked on the exciting journey of new creative leadership, with Cat Sewell, Artistic Director, joining Kath Fyffe, Executive Director, as co-CEO. This followed the 22-year tenure of Sue Giles AM, who remains closely connected as an artistic collaborator and friend.

Polyglot is proud to play a leadership role through our Generator program for independent artists. In 2023, we continued extending Generator activity through creative exchanges with Western Edge and Rawcus, and an artistic residency with the Victorian College of the Arts (University of Melbourne). Further expansion of our new Pathways program is planned for 2024 onwards.

Our strategic focus on inclusion, diversity and access was epitomised by the re-development of *When the World Turns*, our collaboration with Oily Cart (UK), commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne, for presentation in specialist schools,

Sandra Robertson, Chair
Cat Sewell, Artistic Director & co-CEO
Kath Fyffe, Executive Director & co-CEO

and our ongoing collaborations with community in Shepparton / Yorta Yorta (VIC) and Kempsey / Dunghutti (NSW). Steady consultation and commitment to action over the last five years see these values now deeply embedded both creatively and organisationally.

Following several years of surpluses and the disruption of the COVID period, a planned investment by the Board in creative development and artistic programs resulted in a financial deficit of -\$86,862. It is expected that Polyglot will return to achieving modest annual surpluses from 2025. Reserves remain above the benchmark level of 20%.

The successful delivery of the breadth of activity in 2023 is a demonstration of the skill and generosity of spirit shown across our Polyglot teams – in the office, in the rehearsal room and on tour. We are proud of everyone who helped us achieve our program of transformative arts experiences for children and families.

Our impact and reach are made possible by a wonderful, warm community of supporters, many of whom have been integral to Polyglot's story for a long time: our many presenting partners,

government agencies (federal, state and local), philanthropic bodies, sponsors and generous donors. Forging and maintaining these strong, reciprocal relationships is a daily highlight for our team, and we are so appreciative of our champions. These substantial investments in our work provide the stability from which our creativity can bloom, and our art can be shared.

In April, Polyglot farewelled our Chair, Sarah Hunt, Deputy Chair Rasika Mohan, and Secretary Dr Mark Williams. Sarah served as a Board member from 2016, and was appointed Chair in 2019. We thank her for her clear vision and powerful leadership, and Mark and Rasika for their exceptional service. Sandra Robertson was appointed Chair, Geoffrey Renton, Deputy Chair, and Matthew Hall, Secretary. The guidance and wisdom of all of our Board members is felt in so many ways throughout the organisation and will resonate for years to come. We thank them for their service.

Of course, it is with our audience's imaginations that our work truly soars. We offer a heartfelt thanks to all the children, families, and educators who created, played, adventured and shared with us.



“It has been an immense year of learning for me, understanding the different streams of Polyglot's program that weave together to create such impact for children, families, artists and the wider sector. I have had the pleasure of witnessing so many of our works, and have delighted in seeing play and creativity bring joy and connection to participants; from large, public facing tours, to precious engagements in small communities. Another highlight was meeting so many people, from supporters to presenters, audiences to artists. I particularly value being able to create space for artists to come together as a community to think deeply about our practice, share ideas, engage in training, and learn new perspectives.”

~ Cat Sewell, Artistic Director & co-CEO

“Polyglot’s artistry is forged with and for children and families, but it is made possible by our many generous supporters and wonderful artists and staff, led by co-CEOs Cat and Kath. I would like to thank all of these stakeholders and my Board colleagues, past and present, for their tireless commitment to our vision of a world where all children are powerful – artistically, socially and culturally.”

~ Sandra Robertson, Chair

“2023 was filled with some incredible highlights, including a huge international touring year of 15 seasons across seven countries, the deepening of our engagement with communities in regional and remote Australia, and the happy news of Four Year Investment from Creative Australia to bolster the company from 2025. We look forward to building on the achievements of 2023 to forge a strong and creative future.”

~ Kath Fyffe, Executive Director & co-CEO

Pg 6: Cat Sewell & Kath Fyffe, co-CEOs. Photo: Theresa Harrison. Right: Emily Tomlins. Photo: Sarah Walker.

Artist Reflection

Emily Tomlins, Associate Director

Looking back at a year is an interesting reflective exercise. For a company it can be measured in numbers - of shows and tours, of people in attendance, children reached. It can be measured in feedback - from presenters, from communities, from our audiences. It can be measured in distance and time.

Anyone involved can look back at their diaries and see how incredibly full 2023 was, from world tours to local tours, to community engagement, exchanges, new ideas. But what does it mean to be another year down in this larger scheme of making Art for young audiences? What is the real impact, inside and outside of Polyglot?

There are certain aspects of making a show, and running a company, that are felt but never talked about - the magic between the gaps.

2023 was a year of new beginnings both officially and unofficially. Stepping into the role of Artistic Director, Cat Sewell brought a new energy to the company. At a time where we were all picking ourselves up from the pivoting of the lockdown years, Cat spent time meeting and getting to know a large group of people both individually, and as the wonderfully strange family that we are.

An incredibly generous offering of her family’s holiday home saw some of us come together for Generator Camp - a couple of days at Phillip Island - eating meals, playing games, creating art and having deep conversations. The nurturing of these relationships outside the faster energy of making and touring shows, is invaluable.

2023 was also a year of taking stock of what had become glaringly important in recent years - relationships, community, exchange, safety and making space. Across all levels of the company there is an increased focus on how we can nurture ourselves and others, and how we can find the right space and pace for each project we tackle, big or small. Through our exchanges, with other companies and tertiary institutions, we have also been able to share the excitement of what we do in the TYA sector and have invited new collaborators into our projects and family.

As Associate Director, I have a rare privilege to observe the company from within the office, and out in the theatres and play spaces. Each person, each member of this family, is driven by a belief in the importance of children’s right to access art and creative experiences. This belief spurs all of us to keep pushing out into new possibilities, even when they feel hard or distant or chaotic or just very large.

As the company becomes increasingly stronger internally we are well placed to find ourselves back in the world, from Kensington to Norway to Coburg to Japan. As we look outwards with these new connections and collaborations, we are also faced with the ever increasing need for art, creativity and empathy in the world. There are a lot of things we can’t change, but we can strive to keep finding that magic between the gaps.



Child's Voice



The child's voice is fundamental to everything Polyglot does.

Our work centres the child's experience, empowering them to speak, interact, grow and create in and out of performance spaces. Children communicate their world views through play and creativity, and Polyglot artists engage them through their expertise in child-led, participatory practice. Beyond the verbal, we capture the child's voice through visual representation, games, sound, story, and object creation.

It is important to give children agency, both in the way they engage with our work, and in the way we elevate the importance of their opinions, experiences and feedback.

Polyglot commits to this vision across all of our shows, in our Kids Collaborations, with our unique listening module, Voice Lab, and through our PIPS.

In 2023, Voice Lab continued enabling us to hear directly from children about a range of things important to them (see page 17).

Voice Lab: If you were teacher for a day, what rules would you make?

Child: Don't rip the books, and ask the kids to be nice to our other friends.

Polyglot Inspiring People Society (PIPS) is a group of young people who contribute to the testing of ideas in the creation of new work, and to the company's continuing education of how young people think and collaborate. PIPS are invited to participate in, and give feedback on, works in development and shows already in programming circulation. They offer their opinions and their creativity, energy and joy.

In April, PIPS attended *Paper Planet* at Fed Square, playing in the forest, making costumes and paper rainstorms. They brainstormed what they liked about PIPS and what they wanted more of, before meeting Polyglot's new Artistic Director, Cat and sharing their experiences with her.

Later in the year, some PIPS gathered at Abbotsford Convent to create, play and direct a photoshoot with Generator artists at a Catalyst day. Others spent time on Yorta Yorta Country with Polyglot artists and Rumbalara Football Netball Club, making special artefacts: t-shirts, masks, gauntlets and mechanical wings.

PIPS were also vital participants in the creation of a new video, supporting our Creative Australia application for Four Year Investment.

The end of 2023 was celebrated by PIPS with a magazine full of drawings, crosswords, stories and interviews, which was launched at the inaugural PIPS Picnic!

"The best part was me."

Child, age 3, *Tangle*, Bunjil Place

"I was happy and proud because I was able to be a leader."

Student, *Totems*

"There was no limits to the creativity [you] could make anything you wanted."

Child, *Paper Planet*, Fed Square



Top left: *Forest*. Photo: Darren Gill. Top right: *BLOOM*. Bottom right: *Rumba Gallery & Gift Shop*. Photo: Darcy Kent.

Industry Leadership

Polyglot Theatre holds a leadership position in the Theatre for Young Audiences sector, recognised nationally and internationally as an innovator in child-led practice and a champion of sector advocacy.

We regularly share policies, expertise and international market insight with other companies and independent artists in the sector. We value exchange, shared training and robust discussions and reflection across the TYA sector – many of our artists work in other organisations and companies. By lifting each other up, we strengthen the quality, resilience and capacity of the sector as a whole. We advocate across sectors and regions for the necessity of arts and culture for children and their right to access it.

2023 Highlights

Our new Pathways and Creative Exchange program, designed to bring new and diverse ideas and voices into the company, with a focus on reciprocal creative and leadership opportunities:

- Creative exchanges with Rawcus, Western Edge and The Venny; staff health and wellbeing reflection days with Western Edge;
- Second year of Victorian College of the Arts two-week training residency, led by Associate Director Emily Tomlins, and formalised into an annual program;
- Deakin University students observing *Pram People* performance, followed by a Q&A with Director Emily Tomlins; and
- University of Melbourne and Rumbalara Football Netball Club's Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE), three-day workshop led by Polyglot's Rumbalara Kids Collaboration team and Project Manager Lexie Wood.

- Professional development workshop delivery: Coburg Special Development School, Barking Gecko (WA - online), the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne Medical Staff Association, Rom for Dans (Norway) and Starlight Children's Foundation Australia (NSW)
- Green Room Award nomination, Contemporary & Experimental Performance – Work for Children and Young Families: *When the World Turns*, a collaboration by Polyglot Theatre (AUS) and Oily Cart (UK), commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne for major arts and disability festival Alter State 2022
- Facilitating Trauma Responsive Practice training by the Australian Childhood Foundation for both Generator and broader independent artists
- Continuing best practice policies in the areas of safety and wellbeing
- Participation in: Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM), Australian Performing Arts Exchange (APAX), Australian Performing Arts Forum (APAF), Theatre Network Australia (TNA) Producer Mentoring, TYA/USA.



Polyglot & Rawcus creative exchange.
Photo: Cat Sewell



Polyglot & Western Edge creative exchange.
Photo: Emily Tomlins

The Generator

Supporting over 25 independent artists, The Generator is one of the unique structures that make up Polyglot's working ethos. It values experience, deep investment in the company and flexibility.

In recent years, The Generator has deepened and expanded into a program that has care, wellbeing, financial support and creative stimulus at its heart. It supports Polyglot's artistic vibrancy and sustainability by creating opportunities for artists to take the lead in the development of new work, represent Polyglot at conferences, deliver training and mentorship to other artists and educators, and receive professional development opportunities in all areas of the company.

Generator-driven projects make up the majority of new works recently developed, embedding artistic rigour, new voices and diverse approaches across Polyglot to ensure the strongest work for our young audience.



Top: Generator Camp. Bottom: July, Catalyst day, with Stacie Piper, Wurundjeri artist. Photos: Cat Sewell

2023 Highlights

- Emily Tomlins continuing as Associate Director.
- Briony Farrell continuing to lead Polyglot Inspiring People Society (PIPS) strategy and activity.
- Two Catalyst days: paid professional development opportunities throughout the year for our artists to gather, share creative practice and play, and interrogate how and why we make our art.
- Inaugural two-day Generator Camp: an in-depth Catalyst experience in Millowl (Phillip Island), sharing practice, undertaking creative labs in nature, cooking and eating together.
- Professional development opportunities provided for artists: online Auslan courses, and Trauma Responsive Practice training by the Australian Childhood Foundation.
- Artist training and creative exchange with Rom for Dans (Norway).
- Professional development workshop delivery with Starlight Children's Foundation Australia

The Generator is generously supported by the Besen Family Foundation, the Canny Quine Foundation, the Sidney Myer Fund, and the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.



“Through Polyglot’s child-led approach, I’ve had the privilege of collaborating with kindred spirits—fellow artists and children. This philosophy has cultivated an environment where creativity thrives through childlike play, stimulating my imagination and celebrating the craft of expressive art. This ideology has profoundly enriched my artistic journey.”

Betiel Beyin, Generator artist

“The Generator artists have welcomed me with open arms... Skillful, generous, attuned, creative people from all walks of life, joined in service of the children and families Polyglot connects with. I feel very privileged to work with such a great team.”

Cat Sewell, Artistic Director & co-CEO



“I’m very, very excited to watch what has started as a tiny, tiny seed of an idea becoming something that we finally get to share with an audience... You’re going to be part of a story that is beautiful and playful and exciting and like nothing you’ve been part of before.”

~ Sylvie Meltzer, Assistant Director, *Come Back Home*

Come Back Home. Photo: Studio ZNKE, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Singapore

“We’ve done two days of shows here, at specialist schools, with students mostly in wheelchairs. It has been amazing to see how Paper Planet overcomes barriers... We all wear masks so our communication is done with eye contact, gesture, and (silly) vocalising. It’s been a JOY! Chased by laughing kids (I was a sea monster, fair play to them), decorating them to become sea creatures... It’s uplifting, heartwarming and a blessing that we can bring this gift to another country and to kids who may not otherwise experience it. Polyglot makes magic.”

~ Mischa Long, Generator artist, *Over the Sea - Japan*



Over the Sea - Japan. Photo: Ai Ueda

Touring



Ants

An interactive performance that brings children together to explore the landscape around them.

- ~ Patchwork Festival – 10th Theatre Olympics, Győr, Hungary (Apr)
- ~ Bondi Festival (Jul)
- ~ Dream Day - Association for Children with Disability VIC, Melbourne Zoo (Oct)

Inlet Dance Theatre partnership:

- ~ EarthFest, American Museum of Natural History, New York (April)



Bees

A joyful, interactive work in which children are welcomed into a world of community, communication, wonder and imagination.

- ~ Moomba Festival, ArtPlay, Melbourne (Mar)
- ~ Cairns Children's Festival (May)
- ~ Horizon Festival, Sunshine Coast (Sep)
- ~ Wyndham City Children's Week Picnic, Werribee Mansion (Oct)



Inlet Dance Theatre partnership:

- ~ JUNIOR Festival, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, Canada (May)
- ~ Surrey SPARK Stages Family Weekend, Surrey Arts Centre, Canada (May)
- ~ International Festival of Arts & Ideas, New Haven Green, Connecticut (June)
- ~ Big Umbrella Day, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York City (July)
- ~ Lynn Wyatt Square for the Performing Arts, Houston, Texas (Sep)



Boats

Engaging children and families in accessible play that transforms familiar space into something wild, unpredictable and fun.

- ~ Australian Wooden Boat Festival, Hobart (Feb)



Feast

A meal like no other, inviting children to make gastronomical delights from a pile of most unusual ingredients.

- ~ MPavilion, Melbourne (Jan)
- ~ Shepparton Art Museum (Mar)



Paper Planet

Theatre and play merge in this universally accessible experience that families find utterly captivating.

- ~ Glen Eira Gallery, Caulfield (Jan)
- ~ Fed Square, Melbourne (Apr)
- ~ Sydney Opera House 50th Birthday (Sep-Oct)

Ants. Photo: Lucy Parakhina, Bondi Festival. Bees. Photo: Richard Termine, Lincoln Center.

Boats. Photo: Jason Lau, Arts Centre Melbourne. Feast. Photo: Casey Horsfield, MPavilion. Paper Planet. Photo: Sarah Walker



Pram People

A moment in time for the children who ride in prams, and the adults who push them.

~ Convent Kids, Abbotsford Convent (May)

This season was supported by the City of Yarra. The original development of Pram People was supported by the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government initiative, and the City of Melbourne through the Arts and Creative Investment Partnerships fund and ArtPlay.



Tangle

Children and families are invited to create a giant, vibrant, interactive artwork that shifts and grows over time.

~ Bunjil Place, Narre Warren (Jan)



Sound of Drawing

Texture and technology come together in an interactive soundscape, drawing meaningful creative contributions from children and adults alike.

~ Kids Takeover, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne (Jan)
 ~ ArtPlay, Melbourne (Nov)
 ~ Hyphen - Wodonga Library Gallery (Dec 2023 – Jan 2024)



When The World Turns

A collaboration with Oily Cart (UK), commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne

A fantastical experience for young people with complex disability and their families, leading a participating audience into a sensory state of mind and body.

~ Bunjil Place, Narre Warren (Sep)

“My girls felt really happy doing this. My eldest daughter said, ‘I felt like I belonged there.’ It was a fun and unique experience.”

~ Parent, Tangle, Bunjil Place

“This has been an incredible journey.”

~ Child, age 8, Paper Planet, Fed Square

“We felt very happy to be participating in something specifically for us.”

~ Parent, Pram People, Abbotsford Convent

Pram People. Photo: Kenny Waite, Abbotsford Convent

Sound of Drawing. Photo: Pinky Wittingslow

Tangle. Photo: Theresa Harrison

When The World Turns. Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

When the World Turns was originally commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne for major arts and disability festival Alter State 2022. The development and premiere was supported by the UK/ Australia Season Patrons Board, the British Council and the Australian Government as part of the UK/Australia Season, with further support from the Cassandra Gantner Foundation, State Trustees Australia Foundation, the Jennifer Prescott Family Foundation, the Marian and E.H. Flack Trust, ArtPlay, Arts Council England and ecoDynamics.

New Work and Innovation

Premiere

In March, Polyglot Theatre delivered the world premiere of *Come Back Home*.

A tale that winds through the past and the present to seek out a child who went missing a long time ago. Immersive and theatrical, it draws on the experience of children and adult memories of being a child, to celebrate possibility, place and imagination.

This major new work was developed through a collaborative process of creation at a distance. Beginning in 2021, artists from Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Polyglot Theatre worked together to make a new, participatory experience for and with children.

In this creative experiment, the artists collaborated via remote digital connection and play: sharing skills, stimulating ideas and becoming a creative team. Collaboration with children took place in each country throughout the process.

Creative development

Tylden Primary School (Feb)

International premiere:

March On Festival, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Singapore (Mar)

Creative Developments

We commenced creative development for two new works:

Forest

How does the forest call to you? Will you experiment, emerge or imagine? Create and play in the wild spaces among the trees, exploring the connection we have to forests, and the creatures and characters within.

Forest is a new major performance work in development. Directed by Cat Sewell, it is set in a forest. Designed to tour nationally and internationally, Polyglot will work with presenters and their local forest areas. Further development will take place in 2024, supported by Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

ArtPlay, Melbourne (Nov)

Pram People (Hong Kong Edition)

A bilingual version of the colourful, immersive spectacle that first delighted local families, premiering at Melbourne Fringe in 2022. It features a soundscape that incorporates personal stories in Cantonese and English from Hong Kong families. Co-presented and co-produced by WestK and Polyglot Theatre, *Pram People (Hong Kong Edition)* will premiere at West Kowloon Cultural District in 2024.

Hong Kong: Dalton International School, Love Empathy Academy, Sham Shui Po Council Community Services Center, Tuen Mun Integrated Service Community Center, Xiqu Center (Sep-Oct)

The development of Pram People (Hong Kong Edition) was assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.



Come Back Home by Polyglot Theatre is an Esplanade Commission, co-produced by Polyglot Theatre (Australia) and Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay (Singapore) in collaboration with artists in both countries. It was assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.

Photo: Studio ZNKE, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Singapore

“The children were very enthusiastic... they created spectacular pram decorations including propellers, rocket launchers, rubbish disposal and built-in radio. The parents were very generous with their stories and experiences. They spoke openly about the challenges of raising children, the difficulty of getting around Hong Kong with a small child and the pride they feel as parents. It was an emotional session.”

Artist workshop report, *Pram People (Hong Kong Edition)* creative development



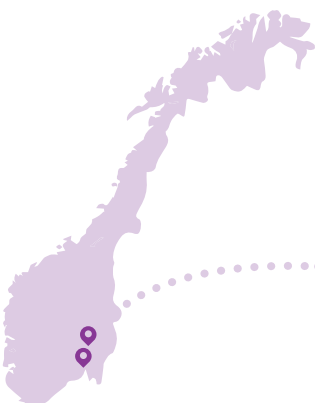
Kath Fyffe & Inlet Dance Theatre, Toronto



Creative development, Pram People (Hong Kong Edition)



Maur / Ants, Norway



Norway

Biri
Dokka
Gjøvik
Gran

Hov
Jaren
Kolbu
Lena

Oslo
Raufoss
Reinsvoll
Skreia

Innovation

Polyglot's ethos of adaptability and innovation has empowered us to respond to new opportunities as the touring landscape has shifted in recent years.

Innovation in touring ensures we reach a broad audience in a way that supports environmental and financial sustainability.

Our local delivery partnership with Inlet Dance Theatre in Cleveland, USA, was seeded in 2019, with the first season of *Ants* delivered in 2021. It enabled Polyglot to maintain our presence in North America when international travel was halted, and has since expanded to include *Bees*.

In 2023, we developed a new partnership with Norwegian dance company, Rom for Dans, in conjunction with the world-leading Den kulturelle skolesekken (The Cultural Rucksack) Innlandet, to deliver *Ants*, or *Maur*, in schools.

These relationships have allowed Polyglot to deliver simultaneous tours in Australia and overseas, broadening the presenters and audiences we can connect with. Our Generator artists trained both Inlet and Rom for Dans, and with the ongoing artistic exchange, Polyglot's practice expands and evolves.

"I feel that Maur is related to our own art productions. It takes the children seriously and activates them physically, in the room."

~ Thea Åretun Svensson, Producer & DKS Coordinator, Rom for Dans, Norway (translated)

USA

In 2023, Polyglot worked in partnership with Inlet Dance Theatre to deliver five USA and Canadian seasons of *Bees* to a total audience of 5,106 across 43 sessions, and one season of *Ants*.

Norway

In 2023, Polyglot worked in partnership with Rom for Dans, in conjunction with Den kulturelle skolesekken (The Cultural Rucksack) Innlandet, to deliver *Ants*, or *Maur*, in schools. Together, we reached 6,062 participants across 159 performances.

~ Oslo and Innlandet County: Gjøvik, Hamar, Lillehammer (Mar-June, Aug-Oct)

"This tour of *Bees* left me feeling very hopeful for my own inner child. There is something so innocent, open, and purposeful about becoming one of the bees, and I know that some part of little girl [me] lives in that space. In Surrey, I felt like she really had the space to fly."

~ Artist, Inlet Dance Theatre, USA



Education

Polyglot's curriculum-aligned in-school programs invite children to experience the joys of creativity and collaboration, while developing their critical thinking skills.

Our week-long model means we can connect across year levels, often whole school communities, ensuring deep impact and exchange.

BLOOM

Our collaboration with the Coburg Special Development School community celebrated the growth and change the school was experiencing as they moved to a bigger campus. Every Thursday and Friday, Polyglot artists spent time in classrooms with students and educators, creating, playing, and exploring the concept of 'bloom' through the senses. Together we made an art and performance installation.

Coburg Special Development School (Oct-Dec)

BLOOM was supported through Creative Learning Partnerships - a Victorian Government initiative.

Family Forts – reflections on play in the home

A playful, creative project with children that investigates the experience of home, family and community from their perspective. In immersive multi-day workshops with Polyglot artists, children explore storytelling and play through space-making.

Developed by lead artist, Ashlee Hughes across 2022-2023, *Family Forts* is a new Polyglot offering for kindergartens. It will begin rolling out in 2024.

Narre Warren North Kindergarten (July)

Botanic Ridge Kindergarten (Aug)

Southern Cross Kindergarten (Aug)

Lynbrook Kindergarten (Sep)

The creative development of Family Forts was proudly supported by City of Casey.

Over the Sea – Japan

Polyglot is honoured to have a warm, long-standing relationship with Japan. In June, we were thrilled to return and reunite with our artistic collaborators, Acchi Cocchi. Together, we delivered performances across the Yokohama region, in specialist schools, elementary schools, and a children's hospice. This project had been postponed from 2020 due to COVID-19, and the subsequent travel and touring restrictions.

Yokohama Minami Support School

Kanazawa Special School

Kanto Gakuin Mitsuura Nursery

Segasaki Elementary School

Ocean and Sky Children's Hospice

Tateno Elementary School

Yamamoto Elementary School

Mitsuura Elementary School

This project was supported by the Australia-Japan Foundation of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.



Over the Sea - Japan. Photo: Ai Ueda

Paper Planet

Based on our popular show, this in-school version is a highly interactive and universally accessible experience, facilitating free play, making costumes and creatures, and manipulating paper. It offers an unusual and immersive environment within school grounds that illustrates the complexity, power and intricacy of students' creativity.

Broadmeadows Special Development School (June)

Hamlyn Views School (Aug)

Western Autistic School (Aug)

Monash Special Development School (Nov)

These engagements were supported by the Victorian Department of Education Strategic Partnerships Program.

Endeavour Hills Specialist School (Oct)

Naranga School (Dec)

These engagements were supported by the Cassandra Gantner Foundation.

Springvale Park Special Development School (Oct)

“The sensory element was incredible. Also the care and patience and engagement of the performers made it feel like a tailor-made activity for my class.”

~ Educator, specialist school, Paper Planet

“We have had plenty of gentle engagement and small moments of connection.”

Artist reflection, *BLOOM*

“When the performers used the vocalisation created by the students as cues and recreated them... it enhanced student participation and [their feeling of] being heard.”

Educator, *When the World Turns: disability inclusive theatre in schools*

Creative Development

When the World Turns: disability inclusive theatre in schools

In August, Polyglot spent a week in residence at Glenroy Specialist School, developing a new version of *When the World Turns* to tour into specialist and supported inclusion schools. It will ensure that even more young people with complex disability, who often face the most barriers to access, can experience this work.

Glenroy Specialist School (Aug)

When the World Turns: disability inclusive theatre in schools is a collaboration between Polyglot Theatre (AUS) and Oily Cart (UK), commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne. The 2023 development was generously supported by the Cassandra Gantner Foundation and ecoDynamics.

Creative Development

Wish Street

A collaboration between Satellite Foundation and Polyglot Theatre

Polyglot and Satellite continued planning and developing a new workshop that celebrates the unique and powerful intersection of theatre-making and family mental health awareness. The pilot will be delivered in schools in 2024.

Voice Lab

Voice Lab is our unique module for collecting the thoughts and opinions of children.

It encourages reflective thinking and the articulation of feelings. Voice Lab is curious and pays close attention to what children communicate. It is an immersive, creative experience for children, one at a time.

In a world where the child's voice is often unheard, Voice Lab provides a way for children to have a say about their present and future.

In November, Voice Lab explored the concept of safety with children across the City of Yarra. It spoke to children aged 4-5 at Gold Street Children's Centre and Richmond Kindergarten about what makes them feel safe, using their voice, and the security that friends and teachers provide in early independence.



Voice Lab. Photo: Theresa Harrison

Voice Lab: What do you think it means to feel safe?

Child: Keeping your body safe.

Voice Lab: What do you think makes people feel unsafe?

Child: Unsafe? Not taking good care.

Voice Lab: Can you tell Voice Lab more about that?

Child: Not taking...not feeding people well and also making people's feelings hurt. That's how people make you feel unsafe.

Voice Lab: How do you know when a teacher cares about you?

Child: When they smile at you.

Voice Lab: Is there anything else you would like to say to Voice Lab before we finish?

Child: Yeah... Thank you, Voice Lab, I love you.

Voice Lab embodies Polyglot's vision to empower children. Its purpose is to listen to children's voices and use the information they provide to make meaningful changes that can improve their lives.

Kids Collaborations

Rumba Gallery & Gift Shop

2023 marked our eighth year of collaboration with Rumbalara Football Netball Club. Polyglot pays our deep respects and thanks to the Rumbalara community and leaders for their friendship, guidance and support. Our reciprocal relationship enriches Polyglot as an organisation and provides invaluable creative and cultural development opportunities for staff and artists.

Our 2023 activity began with Polyglot's new Artistic Director and co-CEO, Cat Sewell visiting Rumbalara FNC and meeting with Belinda Briggs, who generously shared the Club's important history, and its significance as a central place for cultural and community connection. Cat also spent time at Kaiela Arts, learning about the gallery and programs.

Our play workshops kicked off in April, at the first home game of the season: Unity Cup. This is a special

day for the Club, and we worked with the children to create paper awards and medals for women in the community who are important to them.

During the season, our sessions included explorations across artistic and creative mediums: paper and tape, natural material sculptures, cardboard boxes, audio recording and radio broadcast, fabric, painting, and t-shirt design. Facilitated with playfulness, and responsive to individual needs, the workshops were well-attended by returning participants, and children who were at the Club on the day. Together, we created special artefacts and objects.

Children were invited to drop in and out as they liked, with full agency over their participation. In this safe, relaxed atmosphere, participants were deeply engaged, often using art-making and play to process things happening in their lives. One child shared drawings of stronger and stronger houses that could withstand floods, after the region



had been affected by major flooding in late 2022.

We were grateful to again use the large open space of the Club. Family members can drop by and engage directly with their children, or watch the art and play unfold. Groups of Elders gather for afternoon tea in the same space. This intergenerational proximity has been vital in our Kids Collaboration becoming an ongoing, embedded project for both Rumbalara and Polyglot.

The Grand Opening of the Rumba Gallery & Gift Shop took place on Saturday 19 August; the final home game of the season. It was a huge success, with many families and community members visiting to celebrate the children's creativity and 'purchase' their artworks. One child even shared an impromptu speech at the ribbon-cutting. There was palpable pride, joy and generosity from both children and adults.

Rumba Gallery & Gift Shop was supported by the Newsboys Foundation.

“We now have teenagers that were small children in the beginning of this relationship, that have enjoyed the opportunities to have fun using their imagination, creativity and talents to create new worlds within the social and cultural fabric of their days spent at Rumba.

Through the medium of play, they create temporary worlds that are tangible cultural expressions of our children and our families. It's beautiful to see parents or grandparents participating in these spaces and celebrating their creations.

We look forward to Polyglot joining us for each season and value the opportunity to practice an exchange of ideas, sharing of knowledges and savouring the many joyous moments that the children create.”

Belinda Briggs, Rumbalara Football Netball Club, Yorta Yorta & Wemba Wemba Peoples



Photo: Darcy Kent

Totems

Totems is led by two artists: First Nations writer, Blayne Welsh, a Wailwan man, and designer and puppet-maker, Tamara Rewse. Since 2022, we have worked in partnership with the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation in Kempsey NSW, and local schools in Kempsey, to develop the project.

Totems is a First Nations-led interactive experience that is being developed to tour schools around the country, particularly in regional and remote areas. It focuses on animals and stories from different places and communities, and asks children: *What do you want the kids of Australia to know about this place?* Using local totems or moieties, the story is formed by the community, working with Blayne as writing lead, and Tamara as creative maker lead, with both artists facilitating and deeply engaging with children in the re-telling. *Totems* is envisioned as an eventual three-part performance, weaving the stories from three communities into a performance that shares First Nations culture with students across Australia.

In 2023, Blayne and Tamara, together with local First Nations artist Colleena Smith, delivered 17 creative workshops on Dunghutti Country at Kempsey South Public School, collaborating with children to develop characters, stories, narrative arc and a script.

In September, a public performance was held, engaging all 154 children and 22 educators at the school. It featured the story of a giant praying mantis, known as Gurrigiyn in Dunghutti. Many families and community members attended to watch and celebrate with the students, educators and artists.

In 2024, the project will transfer to Blayne's Wailwan homeland, in Warren NSW, where we will work in partnership with primary schools in the region.

Us. Here. Now.

In 2023, Polyglot Theatre and The Venny embarked on a new Kids Collaboration. It brings together Polyglot's expertise in child-centred co-creation, with the knowledge and deep community connections The Venny holds, to empower local children through creative participation.

The Venny is a free communal backyard and safe space for children and young people in Kensington, particularly for local families in public housing. Polyglot worked with The Venny in 2022 during the creative development of *Pram People*, and *Us. Here. Now.* builds on these connections.

A key focus for the first year was ensuring that our creative collaboration is safe for everyone. Polyglot artists and The Venny playworkers participated in creative/professional exchange sessions, sharing cultural protocols and trauma-informed frameworks. Together, we delivered 14 creative play workshops, engaging 369 participants.

In 2024, we will continue exploring identity, collectivity and a sense of ownership of space. Through facilitated creative play and making workshops, the children's discoveries and creations will be shared with the wider community in a public art and performance installation.

Us. Here. Now. upholds our shared commitment that the child is equal in the collaborative space, and acknowledges the power of the child as playful expert.



Totems is assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, and the Malcolm Robertson Foundation.

Us. Here. Now. is supported by the City of Melbourne through the Arts and Creative Investment Partnership fund.

“Colourful tangle blowing in the wind adding a new layer of story to these places that already hold so much love and joy. Seeing the pride spread across their faces as they did show and tell of their special spots.”

~ Lauren Swain, Generator artist, on a resonating image, *Us. Here. Now.*

Top: *Totems*. Photo: Alicia Fox. Bottom: *Us. Here. Now.* Photo: Sarah Walker.

Access & Equity

Polyglot Theatre is committed to reaching the broadest audience possible, prioritising children who face the most barriers to accessing the arts. We are proud that equity, inclusion and diversity are deeply embedded throughout the company, creatively and organisationally. To us, access offers nuanced engagement and equality of opportunity.

2023 Highlights

Reducing financial barriers

We are very proud that most of our works can be presented free of charge to children and families. This year, 81% of our total audience was able to access our work for free, and all of our work in First Nations communities was free.

General & family access

It is now standard practice for Polyglot to gather and share general and family access information for our public seasons. This empowers families to decide if an event is right for them. We include details about the shows, facilities at presenting venues, and travel tips. In 2023, we created 17 What's On listings with bespoke access information and visual stories.

When the World Turns: disability inclusive theatre in schools

In collaboration with Oily Cart (UK), and commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne, we developed a new version of *When the World Turns* that will tour into specialist and supported inclusion schools. Created specifically for young people with complex disability, this new version removes even more barriers to access by reaching students at their schools. Touring will commence in 2024.

Paper Planet

Polyglot continued sharing this beloved Play Space, from residencies in specialist and special development schools to major school holiday seasons at Fed Square and Sydney Opera House. A total of 9,738 children and families were able to create and play in this immersive environment across 184 sessions.



“It is very important for [our] students to feel part of the experience, when they can just be themselves exploring the sounds, textures, and to be comfortable... with no expectations.”

~ Educator, specialist school, on the importance of creative experiences

“You all took the time to plan, create and support our students to engage from their level and it showed by the wide range on ways our students were able to enjoy the experience.”

~ Educator, specialist school, *Paper Planet*

Top: *When the World Turns*. Photo: Suzanne Phoenix
Left: *Paper Planet*. Photo: Sarah Walker

“For me, the opportunity to take play and performance outside has been a fabulous experience. It is ever so important when you are actually dealing with content that is connected with Country. The freedom and natural play that happens in the bush is the best way to make a show!”

~ Blayne Welsh, Generator artist, *Totems*

“It brings you into your culture and helps you to be creative.”

~ Student, *Totems*



Totems. Photo: Alicia Fox



When the World Turns. Photo: Kate Disher-Quill, Arts Centre Melbourne

“It’s so fantastic to be able to enjoy art in a way that has so thoughtfully considered everyone’s needs.”

~ Parent, *When the World Turns*, Bunjil Place

“In a world that has so many rules and expectations, it is so special to have something created that encourages exploration, includes all people and celebrates differences. It was such a fun experience. We will all remember it, you have created something wonderful.”

~ Parent, *When the World Turns*, Bunjil Place

Our Supporters

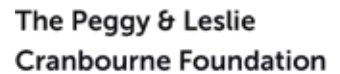
Polyglot's reach and impact is made possible with a wonderful community of supporters.

It is the combination of multi-year investment, project-specific funding, and individual giving which allows the company to achieve everything we do, and we are grateful for the friendship and advocacy of our champions.

Government



Philanthropic



Polyglot's Circle

Polyglot's Circle is our annual giving program for individuals and families.

These donors play a crucial role in strengthening the company.

Inspiring \$10,000+

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Geoffrey Renton
Sandra Robertson
Viv Rosman
Cat Sewell



Paper Planet. Photo: Katje Ford, Sydney Opera House

Sponsorship

Polyglot Theatre is grateful for the ongoing support and services of two sponsors:

ecoDynamics

ecoDynamics collaborative energy, tireless commitment to the process and vision, and thousands of plants, are integral to the great success of *When the World Turns*.



Lucas Dental Care

Lucas Dental Care have been proud sponsors since 2010. Their generous support ensures more children and families can access and enjoy Polyglot's work.



Thank You

Family

We extend a huge thank you to the partners, families and friends of our staff, artists and Board members.

Friends

Jeff Challis and Aakonsult

Collette Brennan and Abbotsford Convent Foundation

Cynthia Nolan Myers and Arts Centre Melbourne

Stephane Urruty, Tanya Dickson and ArtPlay

Ricci-Jane Adams and Jess Kindynis

Robin Batt and Bunjil Place

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Toby Smith and festival.org

Nick Crowther and Freerange Future

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Jo Kelly and Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation

Matt Cann and MaxIT

Peter Wilson and MCA Insurance Brokers

Miro, Youbi, Naiya and Huxley

Nita McIntyre, Nick Moore and Rebecca Ford

Mikako Atsuchi and NPO Acchi Cocchi

Vanessa Pigrum

Glen Walton and Playable Streets

Katrina Cornwell, Morgan Rose and Rawcus

Camilla Myhre and Rom for Dans

Belinda Briggs and Rumbalara Football Netball Club

Rosemary Cuff and Satellite Foundation

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Sarah Walker Photography

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Aseel Tayah

Theresa Harrison Photography

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Penny Harpham, John Marc Desengano, Chanella Macri and Western Edge

Uncle Bill, Katrina Larkham, and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

The staff of our government and philanthropic funding partners



Left: Family Forts. Photo: Cat Sewell. Middle: Feast. Photo: Casey Horsfield, MPavilion. Right: Rumba Gallery & Gift Shop. Photo: Darcy Kent.



“I was very emotional at the beginning but filled with so much joy. This sentiment was shared amongst our family as we watched and participated.”

Parent, *Pram People*, Abbotsford Convent

“Doing long whoosh drawings made the best sound.”

Child, *Sound of Drawing*, Hyphen - Wodonga Library Gallery



“My experience as an artist with Rumbalara and Polyglot has been incredibly rewarding and such a joyful addition to my life. As a First Nations artist, it is not often I get to work with my community in such a meaningful way. One of the most valuable aspects of this project is the exchange between the children and us as artists. It’s not just about us teaching them; they contribute to the art as much as we do. We get to witness and nurture their creativity in a safe and judgment-free zone, which is truly special.”

Lauren Sheree, Generator artist, Rumba Gallery & Gift Shop



Top: *Pram People*. Photo: Kenny Waite. Right: *Sound of Drawing*. Photo: Julie Wright. Bottom: *Rumba Gallery & Gift Shop*. Photo: Darcy Kent

Financials

Statement of profit and loss as at 31 December 2023

Income	2023	2022
Grants		
Government Funding	528,040	789,365
Philanthropic Organisations	297,113	298,001
Total Grants Income	825,153	1,087,366
Other Earned Income		
Performance and Audience Sales	797,923	584,778
Resources Income	34,789	9,926
Sponsorship and Fundraising	102,188	55,700
Business Related Income	42,832	15,485
Total Other Earned Income	977,732	665,889
Total Income	1,802,885	1,753,255
Expenses	2023	2022
Administration	902,695	863,344
Marketing and Promotion	51,709	67,974
Production Costs	935,343	777,514
Total Expenses	1,889,747	1,708,832
Surplus (deficit)	(86,862)	44,423

Following several years of surpluses and the disruption of the COVID period, a planned investment by the Board in creative development and artistic programs resulted in a financial deficit of -\$86,862. It is expected that Polyglot will return to achieving modest annual surpluses from 2025. Reserves remain above the benchmark level of 20%.

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2023

Assets	2023	2022
Current Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,232,631	1,307,302
Other Current Assets	205,386	121,891
Total Current Assets	1,438,017	1,429,193
Non-current Assets		
Property, Plant and Equipment	39,792	51,622
Total Non-Current Assets	39,792	51,622
Total Assets	1,477,809	1,480,815
Liabilities	2023	2022
Current Liabilities		
Trade and Other Payables	83,152	65,364
Provisions	99,385	78,280
Other Current Liabilities	476,635	417,865
Total Current Liabilities	659,172	561,509
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	29,636	17,102
Other Liabilities	202,859	229,200
Total Non-Current Liabilities	232,495	246,302
Total Liabilities	891,667	807,811
Net Assets	586,142	673,004
Equity	2023	2022
Retained Earnings	376,142	463,004
Reserves - Future Fund	210,000	210,000
Total Equity	586,142	673,004

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