**Our Safety and Wellbeing Framework**

**A Trauma-Informed Approach to Theatre-Based Family Violence Prevention for Young People -** *Peninsula Community Legal Centre & Red Stitch Theatre*

The safety and wellbeing of young people is the absolute priority of the PCLC Youth Theatre project. We recognise that addressing family violence and coercive control through theatre requires exceptional care, professional expertise, and comprehensive safety measures.

This document outlines our evidence-based approach to ensuring that our work creates positive impact while protecting all participants from harm.

We acknowledge that safety and wellbeing are dynamic concepts and that the framework will be regularly refined through collaboration with young people, lived-experience voices, and professional experts.

## Guiding Principles

**Do No Harm Above All Else**

Every creative and delivery decision is evaluated first through the lens of participant safety. When artistic vision conflicts with safety requirements, safety takes precedence without exception. We prioritise emotional safety over creative risk and maintain that meaningful impact can only occur within a framework of absolute safety.

While safety takes precedence, limiting creative ideas will not mean silencing survivors. Group agreements will be co-created so all participants understand and support decisions. Decisions will be explained transparently to avoid feelings of dismissal.

**Trauma-Informed Practice at Every Level**

Our approach is grounded in trauma-informed principles that recognise the prevalence of trauma among young people and the potential for re-traumatisation. We assume that trauma may be present in any audience and structure our work accordingly, focusing on predictability, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.

At every stage of this project, we offer permission to be inarticulate or remain silent without stigma, soft exits and after-care supports.

**Survivor-Centered and Strength-Based**

Recovery is a lifelong journey rather than a short destination. We center survivor voices and experiences while emphasising resilience, agency, and pathways to safety and healing. Our narrative approach challenges harmful myths while portraying help-seeking and recovery as achievable and positive outcomes.

We acknowledge survivors face setbacks and believe it is valid to “not be ok” and to experience ups and downs without it meaning failure.

**Inclusive and Respectful Practice**

We are committed to creating safe spaces for all young people, recognising that family violence affects students from all backgrounds and experiences. While our primary focus is on the core themes of family violence and coercive control, we ensure our approach does not exclude or inadvertently harm any students.

## Evidence-Based Framework

Our safety approach is informed by leading best practice frameworks and guidelines, including:

* **Our Watch** - Change the Story framework and Working with Young People resources
* **Victorian MARAM Framework** and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme principles
* **Respectful Relationships Education Framework** (Victorian Department of Education)
* **Safe + Equal Prevention Guidelines** and best practice resources

## Lived experience and target audience involvement

We recognise that authentic, safe, and effective theatre requires meaningful input from those who will experience our work and those who understand its subject matter through lived experience. Our commitment to community-centered practice means establishing structured feedback processes that genuinely influence content development and delivery approaches.

Our consultation framework includes three essential voices:

**Young People (Aged 14-18)**

We engage directly with our target audience throughout the development process to ensure content is age-appropriate, relevant, and emotionally safe. We include young people from diverse cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and identity backgrounds to ensure our approach is inclusive and does not inadvertently exclude or harm any students. Young people provide ongoing feedback on content appropriateness, language choices, scenario relevance, and delivery methods.

**Adults with Lived Experience of Family Violence**

We work with survivor-consultants who provide guidance on authenticity, sensitivity, and the portrayal of survivor agency and resilience. These consultations are facilitated in trauma-informed environments to ensure emotional safety for all contributors. Lived experience voices help us avoid harmful stereotypes, ensure realistic portrayals of help-seeking journeys, and center hope and recovery in our narratives.

Survivor consultants will be renumerated, offered debriefs immediately after the session and offered a single point of contact to ensure consistent support.

**Professional Subject Matter Experts**

Our Professional Subject Matter Experts include trauma specialists, educators, and legal experts. They provide ongoing consultation on content safety, therapeutic approaches, crisis response protocols, and evidence-based prevention strategies.

All consultation processes are designed with clear boundaries and trauma-informed practices that prioritise the wellbeing of everyone involved. Feedback is actively incorporated into content development, with transparent communication about how input has influenced the final work.

## Content Development Process

### Structured Review Framework

Our content development follows a three-stage review process.

**Stage 1: Draft Script Development and Review**

**Deliverable:** Complete draft script with scene breakdowns

**Review Process:**

* **Young People Consultation (14-18 years):**
  + Focus group sessions reviewing script concepts and language
  + Feedback on character authenticity and relatability
  + Assessment of emotional intensity and age-appropriateness
* **Adults with Lived Experience Review:**
  + Script authenticity and realistic portrayal assessment
  + Identification of potential harmful stereotypes or misrepresentations
  + Guidance on survivor agency and empowerment messaging
  + Review of help-seeking pathways and recovery narratives
* **Professional Subject Matter Experts Review:**
  + Clinical trauma specialist assessment for safety and potential triggers and protective factors
  + Legal expert review for accuracy of legal information and pathways
  + Educational specialist evaluation for developmental appropriateness

**Stage 2: Play Development and Rehearsal Review**

**Deliverable:** Rehearsed performance ready for pilot testing

**Review Process:**

* **Young People Consultation:**
  + Observation of rehearsals and feedback on performance elements
  + Assessment of emotional pacing and intensity through full performance
  + Input on visual elements, staging, and audience engagement approaches
* **Adults with Lived Experience Review:**
  + Full performance observation with focus on emotional safety
  + Assessment of non-verbal messaging and subtext
  + Evaluation of empowerment messaging through complete narrative arc
* **Professional Subject Matter Experts Review:**
  + Trauma specialist assessment of performance impact and safety measures
  + Educational expert evaluation of engagement and learning outcomes
  + Legal expert review for accuracy of legal information and pathways
  + Crisis response protocol testing and refinement

**Stage 3: Pilot Delivery and Refinement Review**

**Deliverable:** Final performance version with documented safety protocols

**Review Process:**

* **Young People Consultation:**
  + Post-pilot feedback from audience members
  + Assessment of actual emotional impact and safety experience
  + Input on audience engagement and comprehension
* **Adults with Lived Experience Review:**
  + Evaluation of pilot delivery outcomes and audience responses
  + Assessment of whether safety measures were effective in practice
  + Review of any incidents or concerns that arose during delivery
* **Professional Subject Matter Experts Review:**
  + Analysis of pilot safety data and incident reports
  + Educational expert evaluation of learning and engagement effectiveness

### Clear Content Boundaries

Our content guidelines establish firm boundaries to ensure safety while maintaining impact and authenticity:

**Prohibited Content Elements**

* **No graphic depictions of violence:** Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse is referenced but never enacted, described in detail, or visualised
* **No victim-blaming narratives:** Content explicitly challenges myths that blame survivors for their experiences
* **No hopeless endings:** All scenarios must include visible pathways to safety, support, or positive change whilst acknowledging that recovery is an ongoing journey and not necessarily a short-term destination.
* **No stereotypical portrayals:** Characters avoid cultural, racial, gender, or socioeconomic stereotypes about who experiences family violence
* **No intimidation or coercion techniques:** Content never models or demonstrates manipulative or controlling behaviors that audience members might replicate

**Required Content Elements**

* **Survivor agency is always visible:** Characters demonstrate choice, resistance, and decision-making power, even in constrained circumstances
* **Multiple pathways to support:** Content presents diverse options for help-seeking that acknowledge different barriers and preferences
* **Intersectional experiences represented:** Characters reflect the diversity of young people's experiences across identity factors
* **Positive help-seeking outcomes:** Support services and trusted adults are portrayed as accessible, believing, and effective
* **Clear distinction between healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics:** Educational content explicitly contrasts respectful relationships with controlling behaviors

**Content Intensity Guidelines**

* **Emotional intensity calibrated for adolescent capacity:** Content creates impact without overwhelming developing emotional regulation systems
* **Progressive disclosure structure:** More challenging content is introduced gradually with preparation and support
* **Accessible language without minimisation:** Complex concepts are explained clearly without reducing their seriousness

### Age-Appropriate Content Design

Our content design framework explicitly addresses the cognitive, emotional, and social development characteristics of 13–18 year-olds:

**Cognitive Development Factors:**

* Abstract thinking capacity is developing but not yet fully mature
* Complex scenarios are broken into clear, logical sequences
* Legal and support information is presented in concrete, actionable terms
* Decision-making frameworks emphasise both emotional and logical considerations

**Emotional Development Factors:**

* Identity formation and peer relationships are central developmental tasks
* Content addresses how family violence impacts identity development and relationships
* Emotional intensity is balanced with skill-building and empowerment messaging
* Performance structure allows for emotional processing time and regulation support

**Social Development Factors:**

* Increasing independence while maintaining the need for trusted adult support
* Content models healthy help-seeking as a sign of strength and maturity
* Peer influence and social acceptance concerns are acknowledged and addressed
* Scenarios reflect the complexity of navigating disclosure in social contexts

### Intersectional Approach

Our intersectional framework ensures authentic representation without tokenism through:

**Authentic Character Development:**

* Characters are developed as whole people with multiple identity aspects that naturally intersect
* Lived experience advisors reflect diverse backgrounds and experiences
* Language and scenarios are tested with young people from various communities

**Responsive Content Adaptation:**

* Visual and narrative elements reflect community diversity
* Support pathway information includes culturally specific resources

**Avoiding Harmful Representation:**

* Regular review for stereotypical or problematic portrayals
* Community feedback incorporated throughout development process

## Trauma-Informed Performance and Delivery

A detailed implementation guidance for schools is provided in a separate document that clarifies roles, responsibilities, and practical arrangements for each safeguard measure.

### Pre-Performance Safety Measures

Schools receive comprehensive information packs including detailed content notes, support pathway information, and guidance for staff preparation. We will provide briefings for all school staff who will be present.

Parents and carers receive advance information about the performance content and themes, with clear opt-out procedures that protect student privacy and choice. We ensure that participation is genuinely voluntary without stigmatisation of those who choose not to participate.

### Adapting to school environments

We recognise that school environments may not feel safe for all students and adapt our approach accordingly. This includes working with school staff to identify potentially vulnerable students and ensuring additional supports are available.

### Support Service Coordination

We maintain active relationships with local support services including youth services, mental health providers, family violence services, and legal aid organisations to ensure seamless referral and support pathways.

### During Performance Safeguards

Every performance has at least two trained support persons present who are skilled in trauma-informed youth engagement and crisis response. Quiet spaces are always available for students who need to step away, with no questions asked and no barriers to re-entry.

The performance structure is designed to be predictable, with clear content warnings and breaks that allow for emotional regulation.

### Immediate Support Response

We maintain active partnerships with local youth services and mental health providers to ensure support is available during and after performances. Clear referral pathways are established and communicated at different stages of the project, with crisis support information always available.

### Incident Response Protocols

Clear, practiced procedures exist for responding to disclosures, trauma activation, medical emergencies, or any other incidents. These protocols prioritise participant wellbeing while ensuring appropriate reporting and follow-up occurs.

### Follow-Up and Continuity of Care

Schools receive follow-up contact to assess student wellbeing and coordinate any additional support needed. We maintain connection with schools to track outcomes and provide ongoing resources as needed.

## Continuous Improvement and Accountability

### Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

We continuously monitor safety outcomes through structured feedback collection, incident tracking, and regular consultation with all advisory groups. This data informs real-time adjustments to improve safety and effectiveness.

### Transparency and External Accountability

We maintain transparency with stakeholders about our safety measures and are open to external review of our practices. Regular reporting to funders and partners includes safety metrics and lessons learned.

### Learning and Adaptation

We are committed to learning from each performance and incorporating feedback to strengthen safety measures. Our approach evolves based on evidence and experience while maintaining core safety principles.

### Professional Development and Support

All team members receive ongoing professional development in trauma-informed practice and are provided with regular supervision and support to prevent secondary trauma and maintain high standards of care.

## Our Promise to the Community

The PCLC Youth Theatre project represents our commitment to using the power of theatre to create positive change while maintaining the highest standards of safety and care. We understand that trust from young people, families, schools, and communities must be earned through consistent, transparent, and safe practice.

We commit to:

* Never compromising safety for artistic or other goals
* Listening to and responding to community concerns
* Maintaining transparency about our practices and outcomes
* Continuously improving our approach based on evidence and feedback
* Taking immediate action if any safety concerns arise

We welcome questions, concerns, or feedback about our safety approach from any community member. Our commitment to safety includes being accountable to the communities we serve.

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