

**Media Release
16th July 2008**

The Hon. Maxine McKew MP Announces Key National Music & Arts Initiatives

The new member for Bennelong and Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare, The Hon. Maxine McKew MP, will announce on 22 July **two key national music and creative arts initiatives** to enhance the educational and social outcomes for disadvantaged children across Australia: **The Song Room Online** and a Major National Research project on the impact of arts-based programs on children.

The impact and benefits of arts for children's educational outcomes and social engagement and development are well understood. Despite this evidence, in Australia recent research has indicated there are significant gaps in music and arts based programs, particularly in the critical primary school years.

"I am delighted to support The Song Room's exciting and strategic initiatives which will have a significant impact on the educational and social outcomes for children right across Australia," said Ms. McKew. "We know that music and the arts help engage children at school and build vibrant, connected communities," she said.

"The Commonwealth Government is pleased to support The Song Room and these innovative new projects," said Ms McKew.

The Song Room Online will offer some 7,000 disadvantaged schools across Australia access to a members' website with a range of creative arts and music resources to support generalist teachers in those schools more confidently incorporate music and creative arts programs into the curriculum.

The Song Room also announces a major, groundbreaking Research Project in partnership with its University partners and major supporter, Macquarie Group Foundation, to investigate the outcomes of arts-based programs particularly on recently arrived refugees, indigenous communities and children in regions of high juvenile crime.

"The Song Room Online and the Major Research Project directly support the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs' key principal that all children and young people should have a high quality arts education in every phase of learning," said The Song Room's CEO, Caroline Aebersold.

"It is essential that we have rigorous data from the Australian context as a basis for programs in these communities, to ensure they produce with the best possible impact. It is also essential to provide accessible resources to support schools so they can create sustainable outcomes. I am therefore very excited that we are launching these innovative initiatives," Ms Aebersold said.

According to Julie White, Head of the Macquarie Group Foundation, the major research project will be the most comprehensive study of its kind in Australia. "The Macquarie Group Foundation is delighted to be supporting the Song Room as it embarks on a major national research initiative over the next three years, with the key aim of best meeting the needs of the young people it supports."

The Song Room is a national not-for-profit organisation providing free long-term arts and music based programs for 40,000 disadvantaged children in schools / communities across Australia each year as a means of better engaging them in school, improving educational, social and personal development and community inclusion.

Event Details: The Hon. Maxine McKew launches The Song Room Online and Research Project

Date: Tuesday, 22 July 2008, 12.30pm to 2.00pm **Where:** BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne

Media Opportunity: 12:15 to 12:30pm with Maxine McKew

For Further Information and contacts, see over page



For Further Information Contact:

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Enclosed: The Song Room Briefing Paper

About *The Song Room Online*

- The music and creative arts resources, available through the members-only website and designed particularly for schools without existing music/arts specialist teachers or programs, include curriculum and teaching resources, online activities and DVD footage, music and creative arts activities for the classroom, professional development for teachers, and links to other creative arts resources and arts and education bodies.
- The Song Room Online will bridge access to these innovative resources to schools right across Australia and is a key step towards The Song Room's objective of creating sustainable music and creative arts outcomes for all schools.

About the Major Research Project

- Whilst there has been research indicating the important role that arts-based programs can play in building the educational, personal and social circumstances for children, there is considerable variation in perspectives associated with arts education, and large scale research in Australia has been limited.
- Supported by the Macquarie Group Foundation, the strategic three year project, the most significant of its kind in Australia, will not only build the capacity of The Song Room to further develop and deliver its programs in a more specific and targeted evidence-based manner, but will also build capacity in the broader context of music/arts policy and program delivery in education nationally.
- The specific research findings will provide guidance on a range of music / arts program design issues and guidance on more effective targeting of program types and arts media to diverse target groups across Australia. For example, identifying key arts-related components related to reduction of juvenile crime risk indicators and indentifying components that have discernible impacts on refugee youth mental health and assist with settlement and literacy.
- The research will provide findings relevant to arts education programs and input into Government public, education and social policy development and programs, such as the follow up implementation of recommendations of the Federal Government National Review of School Music Education, the Settlement Programs for the Immigration Department and the Justice Department's Community Crime Prevention Programs.

