

## As music festivals continue to go under, do community festivals stand a chance?

As the town clock strikes midday on a crisp September afternoon, thousands of smiling, chattering festival goers line the edges of Kyneton's main street.

Shopkeepers lean on their door frames and punters file out of the pub, beer in hand, while enthusiastic kindergarteners throw cut daffodils at their feet.

Adults, children and dogs wave and cheer, as the faces of local schools and businesses trail down the street in homemade floats.

The annual Kyneton Daffodil and Arts parade is considered the biggest day of the year for this country town, and more than half of Kyneton's eight thousand residents are here to watch.



The 52nd annual Kyneton Daffodil and Arts Festival "Grand Parade". Credit: Joanna Beard, 2024.

It's not an easy time to run a festival right now.

Rising overheads, extreme weather and a decline in discretionary spending have seen music festival cancellations dominate headlines over the past few years.

According to independent news outlet, The Daily Aus, these conditions led to more than a third of music festivals [recording a loss](#) across 2022 and 2023.

This illustrates the condition of the music festival industry, but how are regional community festivals faring in comparison?

When asked about what it takes to run a community festival, Leanne Taylor, Secretary of the Kyneton Daffodil and Arts Festival (KDAF), laughs.

“A lot of work,” she says with a chuckle.

“It’s a big undertaking and it’s all volunteers,” Ms Taylor says.

“For a 10 day festival [like ours] you pretty much need to start thinking about next year now. There’s so much to do.”

In a country town like Kyneton, events like KDAF are an important way of bringing locals together.

“It’s about getting our community of Kyneton together but it’s also about getting the wider community of the Macedon Ranges together,” Ms Taylor says.

“We have the Lions Club who volunteer, we have the Rotary who put up the flags, we have the CFA that comes and helps with the parade,” she says.

Ms Taylor says that while events like KDAF are much loved by the local community, the cost-of-living crisis means sponsorship and funding is becoming less certain.

“You have to make sure you get sponsorship,” she says.

“Times are tough, we did really well with our sponsors this year but are they going to be able to sponsor next year? It’s getting tougher and tougher everyday for everyone.”

Ironically, at the same time as festivals struggle to find funding, they are increasingly important for the local economy and small businesses.

Ruby Wallworth is a shop assistant at Banks Fine Wine on Mollison Street in Kyneton and says the parade helps to increase foot traffic in the store.

“Afterwards when everyone’s lingering around they’ll usually come into stores and have a look,” Ms Wallworth says.

“It brings a lot of people from other towns to Kyneton which helps our business because we have a new audience coming in and looking around.”

Ms Wallworth also says the festival and parade bring “a sense of inclusion” to the community.

“Everyone can participate in it, it’s not a discriminatory thing, which is the whole point of the parade, to celebrate community,” she says.



Dogs dressed in daffodils. The Kyneton Daffodils and Arts Festival parade. Credit: Joanna Beard, 2024.

It’s well known that volunteers are the backbone of country towns and their events.

But in this time of financial strain, volunteers are becoming harder to find.

According to an [article](#) by SBS News, at the beginning of 2022 there were almost 2 million fewer volunteers than before the COVID pandemic.

Sonia Orchard is the Founder and Director of *Mountain Festival*, Australia’s first environmental writer’s festival, held in the Macedon Ranges.

Ms Orchard says getting volunteers, and keeping them, is one of the biggest challenges of running the festival.

“Small festivals rely on volunteers and as we know, volunteerism has really plummeted since COVID,” Ms Orchard says.

“People just don’t have the time anymore, everyone’s working double jobs and if anyone’s got any spare time, they’re trying to get more work rather than volunteer.”

Ms Orchard says despite these challenges, the community is helping however they can because they want these events to succeed.

“There’s so much community support. My inbox was flooded with ‘thank you’s’ from the community after the first festival,” Ms Orchard says.

“Volunteerism is so important in order to get things like this happening for the community because without these kinds of events, there’s not a lot happening in regional towns.”

It’s a precarious time for festivals.

When asked what she thinks the future holds for events like hers, Ms Orchard sounds hopeful, but unsure.

“As for whether the festival will survive, I don’t know. I really hope so,” she says.

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