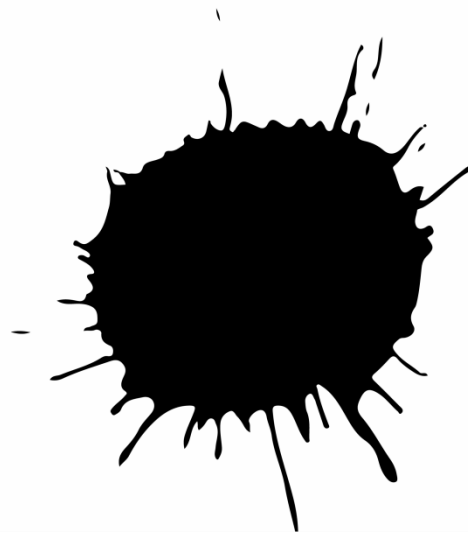


HUNTER WRITERS CENTRE



Annual Report 2015



Arts
NSW



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA



The Hunter Writers Centre Inc. is a not-for-profit Incorporated Association

City Library, Laman St, Newcastle

PO Box 71, Hamilton NSW 2303 Australia

0408927299

info@hunterwriterscentre.org

hunterwriterscentre.org

[facebook.com/hunterwriterscentre](https://www.facebook.com/hunterwriterscentre)

@HunterWritersC

ABN 44 903 609 935

From the President

When typical feedback on a Hunter Writers Centre workshop includes the statement: 'Very worthwhile. I feel as if I have dipped my toes into a new ocean,' we know we are doing something right.

In 2015, Hunter Writers Centre (HWC), celebrated its twentieth year and continues to maintain its status as the region's leading literary centre. Our programs develop and support the artistic and professional development of aspiring and established writers. Through an innovative approach to literary experiences we not only nurture our core membership but we also work with the community to increase participation in high quality and relevant literary experiences for those who are marginalised or disadvantaged.

Apart from our successful regular Workshop and Membership program and dynamic National Competition schedule, this year our focus was to reduce barriers for people with disability to access literature experiences, activities and events. We employed specialised Inclusion Officers, Catherine Mahony(L) and Karen Eastwood (R), to engage the disability community of Newcastle and the Hunter region and provide targeted opportunities to encourage aspiring



Catherine Mahony, Karen Crofts, Karen Eastwood

writers and celebrate established writers with disability. A highlight for me was the celebration of writing and the live reading of shortlisted entries on the International Day for People with Disability Writing Competition. We look forward to hearing more from those talented writers as they participate in our other mainstream programs.

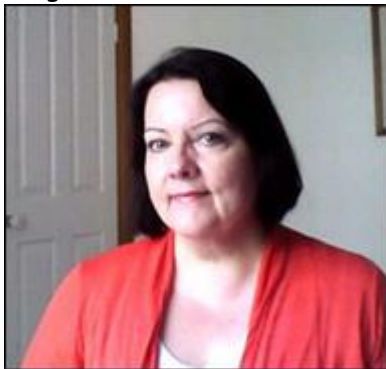


Participation in the nationally acclaimed Newcastle Poetry Prize and the highly successful Grieve Writing Competition increased in 2015 and again the wonderful talents which were unearthed through these events make me proud to be leading this important regional cultural organisation. The Newcastle Short Story Award was also launched later in 2015 with much interest from the community and support from Newcastle City Council, local businesses. Through our programs we acknowledge literature as essential to the wellbeing and creative development of our community and look to engage writers of all ages and abilities. We traversed the lower Hunter region this year, thanks to our collaboration with Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Maitland Libraries network, and provided valuable experiences to those in regional locations.

Thanks again goes to the extraordinary effort of our Director, Karen Crofts and staff members Louise Woo, Karen Eastwood, Catherine Mahony, Helen Levy and Kylee Stanojkov. The whole team not only continues to challenge the local community with new and inventive ways to engage with literature but has maintained consistent participation in our programs and secured an increase in operating surplus for the year.

Thank you also to my committee members who support the organisation with their time, expertise and passion and volunteer their time to contribute to this terrific organisation. We look forward to the continued support of our community, supporters, stakeholders and local and state governments.

Megan Buxton



From the Director

In 2015, HWC engaged the community at a very high standard and enabled us to achieve the goals we set as the Hunter region's leading writers centre with a national perspective.

For our emerging writers across the Hunter, we truly inspired a passion for literature through our successful Newcomers programs, specialised workshops, mentorships, literary fact sheets, newsletter, social media connectivity, the HWC blog, writing groups and new awards within our national writing competitions specifically for local writers.

We provided and cultivated an inclusive, supportive and accessible environment of specialised workshops, writing groups, live readings and writing competitions which were enjoyed by many locally and across the nation. In 2015, our reach extended across the country with the renowned Newcastle Poetry Prize and the Grieve Writing Competition which boasted representatives from each state and territory and the new Newcastle Short Story Award.

Thank you to all members, tutors, judges, staff and the (volunteer) HWC Committee who have helped make 2015 the most successful year to date.

Karen Crofts
Director



L to R: Lynne Cook, Winner, Newcastle Short Story Award; Karen Crofts, Director, Hunter Writers Centre; Glenys Osborne and Michael Sala, Judges NSSA 2016

Our Community

Membership increased from 192 in 2014 to 246 in 2015. From journalists to bloggers, poets to reviewers, children's authors to editors and publishers, our region reveals a diversity in people devoted to and employed in literature.

Our regular writing groups and live readings provide collegial support between members and a strong professional start for newcomers to writing. Our activities build an understanding and appreciation of prose and poetry and constantly attract new, aspiring writers. This community supports writers to share their work and reduces the isolation often felt in the solitary pursuit of writing.

Our website and social media plus our monthly newsletters provide excellent resources for local, national and international programs and opportunities. We celebrate members' achievements and offer publishing opportunities online. We aim to maintain a quality of training and ethics in the profession and pursuit of writing. We link networks in specialised areas of writing such as micro theatre, spoken word poetry and we promote and annually sponsor the Newcastle Writers Festival. We increase writer visibility by celebrating our members' publications, books and literary successes.

Crunch the numbers:

- * Workshop attendance was consistently high across all HWC literary activities
- * Grieve Writing Competition participation doubled from 2014
- * Facebook engagement increased from 1500 to 3000
- * Twitter was established in 2015 with 450 followers by the end of the year
- * Financial Membership increased from 192 in 2014 to 246 in 2015

Our Community Leaders

The HWC elected committee for 2015/16 succeeded the outgoing committee and continued to govern and oversee the organisational Strategic Plan and Business Plan for 2014 -17. This included providing leadership to the local cultural sector with its commitment to inclusion for people with disability. The HWC committee is a dedicated group of volunteers who offer their time, expertise and passion to building diverse audiences for the centre, improving engagement with local community, building greater awareness of the craft of writing and grow the appreciation for literature across the Hunter region.

Hunter Writers Centre Committee 2014 - 2016

2014/15

Megan Buxton - President
Sandra Ognibene -Treasurer
Ted Bassingthwaite– Secretary
Matthew Griffin
Lee Jones
Jillian Sims
Alex Spathis
Alexander Wheeler

2015/16

Megan Buxton – President
Lee Jones – Vice President
Sandra Ognibene -Treasurer
Ted Bassingthwaite– Secretary
Ardie Morris
Joan Shanley
Christine Bramble

Partnerships

In 2015, HWC continued to engage local, regional and national writers and participants at all levels of writing and to advocate for Hunter region writers to a broader community - acknowledging the valuable economic, cultural and social impact of writing and literature.

Strong partnerships helped to build our community and increase brand awareness of the organisation. In 2015 we built on existing and forged new partnerships with other arts, non-arts organisations and individuals to ensure the high standard of our programs were maintained and there was an increase in awareness and appreciation of the art of writing and literature across the community.

With our mission to cultivate, support and sustain an inclusive thriving literary community, HWC built on its relationship with the local disability community through our involvement with Community Disability Alliance Hunter (CDAH) to ensure an ongoing dialogue with people with disabilities and people interested in inclusive literary practice.

We strengthened relationships with a number of organisations in the Health Sector supporting the Grieve Writing Competition and secured another successful partnership with the **City of Newcastle** with their support of the Newcastle Short Story Competition. Our partnerships with other not-for-profit organisations increased with NALAG returning to be the major sponsor for Grieve 2015 and the Australian Funeral Directors Association joining the sponsorship team.

HWC maintained a solid relationship with the City of **Newcastle Region Library Service** through our operational presence in the Laman Street Cultural Facility of the Library. This ongoing partnership aims to expand the scope and nature of services provided to members of the Newcastle community by both the Library Service and HWC. The other aspect of the partnership is to create opportunities to develop congruent programs and activities which aims to build stronger capacity for both organisations and increase community participation in high quality and relevant literary experiences. We also forged new and exciting relationships with the **Lake Macquarie and Maitland Library networks** which offered greater inclusion for people wanting to experience high quality literary experiences in their local region.

The existing ongoing partnership with The **University of Newcastle** was strengthened in 2015 through the Newcastle Poetry Prize. This partnership has been deepened through the unique opportunity for postgraduate Visual Communications students to typeset and design the Anthology. Our collaboration with UoN supports our commitment to community engagement and program and product quality. During 2015, the University pledged to increase the prize money such that First prize is now \$15 000.

We worked closely with a number of innovative literary enterprises including the **Newcastle Writers Festival**, local independent book store **MacLeans** as well as other independent local literary groups and initiatives in order to foster a passion for literature in the community through professional advice, support and resources.



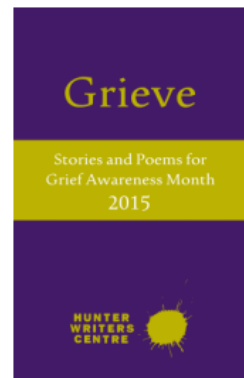
Members of Hunter Writers Centre

National Reach

Grieve Writing Competition 2015

She cannot understand that memories which were once happy now bring tsunamis of sorrow. She cannot understand the confusion of wanting memories and mementos, but not wanting the pain they bring. (From 'If' by Penny Lane, Winner, 2015 Grieve Writing Competition)

The Grieve Writing Competition was again held in 2015 as part of Grief Awareness Month in November. This highly successful initiative of engaging national, mainstream short length prose and poetry brought the expertise and talents of a regional literary community into focus for a national audience. HWC maintained strong professional relationships and forged new and exciting partnerships with the health sector through this project: specifically Beyond Blue, Hunter New England Mental Health and the Australian Funeral Directors Association. Calvary Mater Private Hospital and the National Association of Loss and Grief returned for another year to sponsor/support. The competition attracted double the entries on 2014 from around Australia, each state was represented, and we hosted a stirring Live Read attended by over 250 audience members at the Conservatorium of Music Concert Hall, Newcastle - one of the best acoustic venues in Australia, just perfect for the spoken word.



The high profile and committed judges selected 120 short stories and poems and made available to all public readers, sponsors and dignitaries involved in the project.

How entrants heard about the project: 519 = social media; 121 = email; 54 = flier; 159 = friend; 62 = newspaper; 325 = 'other'; 2 = radio

[Listen to a discussion about the Grieve Writing Project and hear from one of the winners via the ABC](#)



[Radio 1233 Newcastle soundcloud](#)



Newcastle Poetry Prize 2015 - A Celebration of Poetry

<http://www.hunterwriterscentre.org/newcastle-poetry-prize.html>

2015 Newcastle Poetry Prize winners and shortlist

Winner: Connective Tissue – Anthony Lawrence

2nd Place: Roman Sonnets – Jakob Ziguas

3rd Place: Two Blue Black crows – Shari Kocher

Winner, Local Award: Hospital Suite – Jean Kent

Winner, Hunter Writers Centre Members' Award:

Seraphine Speaks – Jan Dean

and the following poems were selected for the anthology:

(alphabetical order by title)

After the Storm – Luke Fischer

And the word 'environment' – Brook Emery

bail-time blues - Lauren Brady

water and ground – Kevin Brophy

Charles Dodgson in Cheshire – John Jenkins

Counter-pastoral at 140 kph – Brett Dionysius

Father – Rod Usher

Father and Son - Benjamin Ward

Guinea Fowl – Todd Turner

Itinerant – Jo Gardiner

Perouse - Myles Gough

Leopard Leper – Chloe Wilson

Mayday Lunatic Asylum – Jo Gardiner

On carrying: seven cledons – Felicity Plunkett

Saeculummaureum – Simeon Kronenberg

Seconds Before – Rod Usher

Skeleton Woman Writes a Letter – Shari Kocher

Snippets from a Soul Party – Patricia Sykes

Song Cycle of the Newly Divorced – Debi Hamilton

Songs in a Red Key – Felicity Plunkett

Taxonomy – Anthony Lawrence

Testament – Mary Jones

The Greater Silence – John Foulcher

The Stentman Sonnets – Ron Pretty

The Tent at Evening – John Jenkins



Winner, Anthony Lawrence with 2015 Newcastle Poetry Prize judge, Judith Beveridge



Jakob Ziguas, 2nd place

By

La



Shari Kocher, 3rd place and Prof. Andrew Parfitt, Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Newcastle

A Welcoming Community - Inclusion

Hunter Writers Centre wants to ensure that people with disability can fully participate in all the activities that we offer. We are committed to including all within our community who are interested in writing. Hunter Writers Centre wants to lead the way in our local community by including people with disability in everything we do. In 2015 we undertook a variety of exciting programs

Our inclusive programs in 2015 included:

- Mentorships
- A Radio Project capturing lived experience in order to reflect on perception, myths and barriers.
- Schools Program
- Blogging workshop
- A Writing Competition for International Day for People with Disability

On the Air Waves

Five Year 6 Hunter students interviewed 5 storytellers to find out their experience of living with a disability. This was a great opportunity for the children to develop an awareness of disability, radio, the role of the interviewer, storytelling and reflecting. It was also a chance for our storytellers to share their lived experience of disability.

ABC 1233 [Summary interview about the project](#)

ABC 1233 [Individual interviews - young people interview adults with a disability](#)

[Speak Out for International Day for People with Disability](#)

Hunter Writers Centre and Ability Links, Hunter region, recognised International Day for People with Disability (IDPWD) with your stories. **[Learn more about this exciting writing competition and live reading here](#)**

Blogging and Social Media

At the workshop for blogging, Kimberly O'Sullivan covered issues such as: Why do you want to blog? What can blogging do for you? Finding your voice as a blogger. Can I make money from my blog? What's your unique selling point? Which blogging platforms should I use? When to say goodbye to your blog.

Mentorships

Writers with disability were offered mentorships to work with published writers, developing blogs, telling their stories.

Young Writers

A workshop for young people which focus on "Writing with All Our Senses". This popular workshop is provided by 2 teachers. Students learn to write engaging all 5 senses and focus on writing without the visual sense. Catherine Mahony who holds a communications degree and is blind discusses lived experience without the sense of sight. This writing focused activity inevitably develops into a broader discussion of blindness and disability. Via writing, young people are introduced to the lived experience of a person with a disability,



Children at the Radio Waves Disability workshop



Young Writers workshop Charlestown Library

Local Programs, Connections and Support

2015 Workshop Program

7th February: Creative Writing

14 February: Creating Characters with Kerri Lane

7th March: Plot Development with Michael Sala

14th March: Mastering Style with Bill Pascoe

19th April: Memoir Writing with David Kelly and Pat Feenan

9th May: Writing the Sacred - Diane Cousins

8 & 15 May: Creative Writing - Karen Crofts

Focus on Poetry

2nd May Jean Kent @ City library

9th May Mark Tredinnick @ Belmont library

6 June: Publishing *with Dionne Lister*

19 June: Monthly Writing Group - *Megan Buxton*

Advanced Creative Writing *with Michael Sala* - Weekly 22 June - 13th July

4 July: Editing *with Helena Newton*

11 July: *Blogging* with Kimberly O'Sullivan

23 July: Writing for Children *with Kerri Lane*

1 August: Short Story Writing *with Ryan O'Neill*

Thursday 6, 13, 20, 27 August

Creative Writing for Young People

East Maitland Library

12 August: Life Writing *with Patti Miller*

19 & 26 August : Memoir *with Megan Buxton*

5 & 12 September: Creative Writing, Toronto Library

10 October: Writing for Children *with Jess Black*

Evenings: 20 October, 27 October, 3 November Memoir Writing, Belmont Library

Saturday 7 November Creative Writing - East Maitland

The workshops held at Lake Macquarie libraries were successful. Thanks to Lake Macquarie Library's Program Coordinator Julie Dunn there was great attendance at Mark Tredinnick's workshop considering it was a niche topic poetry. The Children's Writing workshop in the July school holidays far exceeded expectations with all ages 12-17 represented.

Keryl Collard is manager of Maitland libraries where regular writing gatherings, workshops for young writers and one-off Saturday workshops were conducted by HWC established writer-members.

The Advanced Creative Writing workshop run by Michael Sala was our first foray into extension creative writing. Michael commented how fantastic it was to teach enthusiastic adult writers. And he especially remarked that he felt the talent of the writers who attended this workshop series were of similar standard to any university student of creative writing he had taught. Michael has gone on to gain a two year lecturer position at University of

Newcastle having completed his PhD in creative writing. He won an award for his book *The Last Thread* - Regional winner (Pacific) of the 2013 Commonwealth Book Prize and Winner of the 2013 NSW Premier's Literary Award for New Writing

[The HWC blog](#): 2015 started calling for 600 word rants from our members under the topic "What Gets your Goat". This publishing opportunity resulted in terrific feedback from other members.

Workshops at the Theatrette, City Library, Laman St, Newcastle:



Wendy James Writing Gymnastics workshop



Patti Miller Life Writing workshop



Dionne Lister - self-publishing workshop

Feedback from Advanced Creative Writing Workshop



- Hard work but worth it - especially persevering from week 1 through to 4. Wish it had been longer. Michael's enthusiasm and passion also reflected in participant's willingness to share - everyone learns. Margaret
- Very informative. Great listening to everyone's writing and considering the strengths and weaknesses. Vesna
- I have really enjoyed this workshop. For me I am trying to reignite my writing and this workshop has really done this. Michael's knowledge and input was great - really enjoyed him. Would really love to have more of these workshops. Audrey
- Excellent, gained a lot and enjoyed his analysis and insight. Peter
- Wonderful sessions. Michael's ability to recognise and focus on the strengths and weaknesses of our written work is often just one listening is most impressive. The course

was relevant and totally useful. The handouts were clear, detailed and very helpful. I loved it all. Margaret

- Very worthwhile. I feel as if I have dipped my toes into a new ocean, that a whole world of information is hiding around the corner. Great group, willing to give a lot. Michael's feedback clear and constructive, always pointing to something to improve the writing. Thanks for organising it. Interested in more. Bev
- Absolutely fantastic. So informative and interesting. Would love to do more. Feel we only just barely scraped the bottom of the barrel. Thank you - but I want more! Christy
- Confusing to understand. Often got lost in class. But, need to re-read, look-up, study, think about re-look-up to better understand. Still quite lost but lots of stuff for this little boy to learn to become a grown up. Kevan

Writing Groups

News from the HWC Children's Writing Group for 2015: Convenor: Katrina McKelvey

The Children's Writing Group met every 3rd Thursday of the month throughout 2015 in the theatre of Newcastle Region Library. They shared information about the children's book industry as well as ways to improve their writing. They supported each other whether writing for fun, entering competitions, submitting work to publishers, celebrating writing successes or attending local children's book-related events.

Achievements:

Cynthia Hyde: Won an ASA mentorship program position earlier this year and is currently being mentored by Jackie French

Zoe Disher: has had multiple non-fiction articles accepted for publication by 'The School Magazine'

Katrina McKelvey: Released her first picture book, 'Dandelions', illustrated by Kirrili Lonergan and published by EK Books, on 1st October. It was launched at Newcastle Region Library on 31st October. This manuscript was critiqued by this group and the group has had the privilege of being part of its journey from first draft to finally published.

News from the HWC Poetry Group for 2015: Convenor: Kathryn Fry

Jan Dean was awarded the HWC Newcastle Poetry Prize Members' Award for her poem 'Seraphine Speaks' shortlisted in the 2015 Newcastle Poetry Prize and published in the anthology *Connective Tissue*. Jan's published a pocketbook *Paint Peels, Graffiti Sings* with Flying Island Books and *Indelible* in 2015 PATP Members' Anthology. Other anthologies with her work include volumes 18 and 19 of [Eucalypt: a tanka journal](#); [Guide to Sydney Rivers](#), a free e-book and *The Land: Poems from Australia and India* edited by Jaydeep Sarangi and Rob Harle www.cyberwit.net

Leonie Wellard's poem 'Sewing Class' is published in Cordite 52.0 *Toil*.

'Walking in the footsteps of WG Sebald' by **Peter J Wells** was longlisted for this year's University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize and is published in the anthology *Underneath*.

Gail Hennessy has two tanka in *All You Need Is Love* Ginninderra Press; one tanka and two haiku in *Prospect five*, Blue Giraffe Press; her poem 'For My Mother' in Grieve Anthology 2015 and 'Ghosts Along The Georges River' in *Guide to Sydney Rivers* (see above).



Creative Writing class, Hunter Writers Centre



Creative Writing Class Kotara High School