



Chairpersons Report – Annual General Meeting 2023

I am pleased to present this report to members on behalf of the Board of the Hunter Writers Centre.

The current board members were elected at a Special General Meeting in August last year. The Special General Meeting came about when it was realised that some members of the board were not, in fact, members of the Hunter Writers Centre and a couple of subsequent resignations resulted in their being no board at all.

I would like to thank those members who stepped up at very short notice. I would like to specially thank those people elected in 2022 who have had to resign or who will not be re-nominating at this AGM because of health and work commitments. Those members are Ted Bassingthwaite, Liz Cameron, Christine Bramble and Chele Hardwick. I would also like to acknowledge those board members who have put up their hands for another year, Roseairi, Lee and David-Jack.

Late last year, our Director Karen Crofts resigned after ten years in the position and I would like to acknowledge Karen for all of her efforts, particularly during the last couple of years when COVID-19 presented us with a range of unique challenges. Following the resignation of Karen, the Board had to take a much greater role than might be expected in running the centre and our Secretary Roseairi Dawson took on a lot of additional work and on behalf of both the board and the membership I would like to thank Roseairi for all that she did.

I would also like to thank our amazing staff for also stepping up and going far and beyond for the first few months of this year. Keighley, Jasmine and Eleni are the lifeblood of the centre and I would also like to acknowledge Gina who has stepped down from the role of Exhibitions Coordinator at Lighthouse Arts. I would also like to express my thanks on behalf of the Board



to Judy Johnson for all the work she has done filling in a number of important roles, often at short notice and providing invaluable assistance to us at the HWC.

Of course, we now have a new Director, and I welcome Katherine Maclean to her first Annual General Meeting. Kat has really hit the ground running and we were so pleased to be able to employ somebody of Kat's calibre and commitment and I look forward to some exciting time ahead for the centre.

We have had a number of successes over the last year. Our writing groups have kicked off again as face to face sessions. A lot of members have told me how much they value these groups and how difficult many found trying to do them online. I'd like to thank all of the facilitators of those groups.

We continued to receive a high number of entries in the Newcastle Short Story Award and Newcastle Poetry Prize and while the launch of these two important prizes was delayed because of our staff changes, both prizes will have the winners announced towards the end of 2023.

We also celebrated ten years of Grieve in late 2022 with a moving event in Adamstown. Given all the pressures on getting our other prizes up and running this year, the Board took the difficult decision not to run Grieve as a competition this year but, in recognising how much value our members place in Grieve and role of writing in helping people with grief and loss, we will be running some workshops for members later in the year around the theme of grief and writing. A new audio-story telling dimension has also been added to Grieve.

Our activation of Nobbys Headland/Whibayganba continues to develop and has become quite popular over the last year. I know some members have expressed concern about us expanding into a multi-arts project but one of the common pieces of feedback I have received from writers, many of whom are members of the HWC, is that they have really enjoyed and benefited from spending time with other creatives. Over 190 writers and artists have taken



up residencies at the Lighthouse and have made that commitment to invest in developing their craft.

A successful melding of words and art enhanced audience experience in the Lighthouse Arts House of Stories exhibition space. Hunter Writers' Centre members were invited to submit written pieces in response to the visual storytelling of artists. This elevated the artistic interaction between writers and artists and added new dimensions to the audience experience.

One of our major challenges this year was losing access to the site for many weeks because of Supercars and we have expressed our dissatisfaction with the City of Newcastle as closing the Lighthouse to residencies and having the trading store closed loses us at least \$20,000 in potential revenue which, if we earned that money could be used to put on more events for members or increase our staff hours.

Some other challenges we faced this year included losing a large amount of corporate knowledge when Karen left and in the period between Karen leaving and Kat being appointed a key focus for both myself and other board members has been re-establishing old relationships and establishing new relationships and I believe some of these relationships and networks will bear fruit in the weeks and months to come.

A change of leadership within the organisation has also given us the opportunity to review a lot of our systems and processes, many of them unseen by members but vital to a functioning Centre and we are currently working on those improvements and refreshing our 'back end' systems.

Finally, and most importantly, this is a member driven organisation and so, as we move forward Kat, the rest of the staff and the Board want to hear from the members so that we understand what works for you, what doesn't work so well, what we could do more of, what



we could do less of and what new things could we be doing. We see this as being an important piece of work of consolidation and it will be out focus for the next twelve months.

I'd like to thank you all for the trust you have shown in us and I look forward to another twelve months as chair of this fantastic organisation.

Glenn Stuart Beatty

27th June 2023