

## **BRIEFING SESSION – State Library Victoria, Melbourne 22 February**

### **You and OZCO – Working with Libraries**

Hello, I'm Nicola Evans and I'm a program officer at the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, which is based in Sydney. I'm here with my colleague, Brian Purcell, also a program officer, to talk to you about the Australia Council with particular reference to the Literature Board's past and potential involvement with libraries.

As you may know, the Australia Council is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. It directly supports young, emerging and established artists, as well as new and established organisations.

The Council provides over 1700 grants each year to artists and arts organisations across the country in the fields of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, dance, literature, music, theatre and visual arts.

In the last financial year the council invested more than \$151.5m in artists and arts organisations around the country. This support enabled 3472 artistic works to be written, exhibited, or performed over this period, 4110 new works to be created.

There are seven Boards within the ozco. These are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, Dance, Literature, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts and the Major Performing Arts Board. There is also an Inter Arts Office and a community partnerships and market development division.

Through the Boards, grants are awarded by peers – who are our Board members – who sit on a particular Board depending on their experience and background for up to three years. The Literature Board has seven board members and our chair is Imre Salusinszky. Other members include writers and academics.

As I work for the Literature Board, I'll go into some detail about what the Board does.

The Board has an annual budget of approx 4 million dollars to spend on individual writers and other writing/publishing/organisations.

Of this, almost half of our budget - approx \$1.5m is spent on direct support to writers to help them create new work.

The remaining money is spent on Australian and overseas book and literary magazine publishers, either in print form or online, on writers' centres in each state and territory, on literary festivals both large and small around the country, on training programs and initiatives for editors and publishers, and on other literary promotional activities.

The Literature Board also runs an initiative aimed at writers under the age of thirty who are working innovatively with language. This is the *Write in Your Face* initiative, which is funded out of special money the Australia Council receives from the Government's Young and Emerging Artists Initiative. *Write in Your Face* grants are highly sought after with an overall success rate of 19%. For this year, the Board has doubled the amount it spends on this initiative, as it has been very impressed with the quality of work undertaken by young writers.

The Literature Board's newest initiative is called the *Story of the Future*, which is targeted at supporting writers' engagement with new and developing technologies. *Story of the Future* seminars are being run around the country – a very well attended seminar was held in Melbourne late last year. To follow on from this, the Board is also running a seminar in Canberra for Australian publishers, looking at ways the Australian publishing industry is responding to developments in digital publishing and how publishers and writers can benefit.

The Literature Board receives around 800 applications a year and of these, the success rate to individuals is between 15-19%, and for organisations slightly higher at around 60-70%. Although not all organisations receive the amount of grant they applied for.

The Literature Board offers funding to writers and organisations under seven grant programs.

New Work, Fellowships, Skills and Arts Development and Emeritus Awards are for writers only. Presentation and Promotion, Program Grants and Triennial Grants are for organisations.

The Board supports promotional activities such as festivals and promotions of Australian literature under the Presentation and Promotion grant category and Brian will talk about this in more detail.

We fund Australian and overseas publishers, as well as the literary magazines and journals – you may be familiar with some of them – Meanjin, Overland, Reading Time, Quadrant, Australian Book Review, Heat and a few others through the Program Grants and Presentation and Promotion grant category.

Writers are funded to create new work under the New Work and Fellowships category; residencies at studios both here and overseas – in France, Italy, Ireland and the US -, with the aim of creating new literary work, are supported under Skills and Arts Development.

That's probably enough general information on the Board and the Australia Council, so I will now hand over to Brian, who will explain what sort of promotional activities the Board supports, and talk about past projects which have been supported that may be of interest to you.

Hi, thanks Nicola for that comprehensive introduction. You may be asking, well, how do libraries fit into the Australia Council's programs of assistance? One of the grant categories I look after, the 'Promotion' section of Presentation and Promotion, has, and continues to attract some successful grant applications from Libraries. The category 'Promotion' funds various projects, from radio programs featuring writers, to funding writers publicising their books overseas; but the main type of events funded are writers festivals, of all shapes and sizes.

In terms of libraries, the most successful applicant to Literature is the one we are in right now, the Victorian State Library, through its Centre for Youth Literature. We've supported its excellent programs and notably "Reading Matters for several years now.

Having worked in a library myself, I appreciate that a lot of the work libraries do is performed without fanfare. For example, we fund writers taking part in the Sydney Writers Festival, and my local library, Ashfield, features writers in an associated 'umbrella' event; but no matter how valuable and well-attended they are, people don't tend to think of such events when they think of the Sydney Writers Festival. But this is one example of how suburban and regional libraries can become involved in larger festivals.

One notable example of how regional libraries can get involved directly is the work of the Kununurra Community Library in initiating and staging the Kimberley Writers Festival. Kununurra is literally at the top end of Australia, close to the border of Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and quite isolated as you can imagine. On its website the library claims it is 'frequently described as the cultural hub of the town – a reputation we are proud of!' – and I'm sure this is true of many regional libraries.

Anne Devenish, the library manager, has described the passion with which the audience engages with the festival, and that it promotes the whole town's cultural development, tourism, and alleviates the town's cultural isolation. Helping regional development in the arts is one of the Australia Council's policies.

On the screen you can see some images from the 2006 festival. I find that each literary festival has its own strengths and ways to involve the community – wine and food is a big favourite. In 2006, as well as visiting authors, the Kimberley festival included an art exhibition, musical entertainment, a celebrity author literary lunch, wine and cheese opening evening, a "Blues on Sundown" music concert, a literary boat cruise on the Ord River and a celebrity chef literary dinner. It had a lyric-writing workshop and a school day where the children got involved with illustrating picture books, aided by visiting illustrators. The festival also engages well with the indigenous community, inviting local writers and storytellers.

In 2005, the year of the first Kimberley Writers Festival, numbers were estimated at 500; last year this had climbed to 940. The grant we provided last year was \$7,500, which was mostly a contribution to the cost of fares, fees and accommodation for the writers. Bringing 11 or 12 writers and musicians out to a remote area is a considerable cost, so like many smaller festivals, they apply to other bodies for help, such as writing WA and Country Arts. The manager would be likely to consult, and if necessary co-ordinate with the NT Writers centre, if say, there are visiting writers whose costs they could share.

Before everyone gets inspired to organise their own writing festivals, it is necessary to say that not all Literature Board applications are funded – our budget has limitations. Most festivals cultivate other sources of income, and have contingency plans if the funds don't come through.

Our funding is specifically targeted at fares, fees and expenses for participating writers. As you can see, there are two closing dates for Presentation and Promotion: March 15 and October 1, which has been pretty constant the last few years. In the most recent Promotion round, grants ranged from \$3000 to \$32,000. The larger festivals such as Sydney and Melbourne receive \$20-\$25,000. You can find out more information about grant recipients and general comments about making grants in the 'Resources' section of our website, where you can pull up Assessment Meeting Reports for the last few years.

There are other examples of ways in which the Australia Council is working with libraries as partners and stakeholders in various projects, especially through our Community Partnerships and Market Development section. This Division operates a little differently to the artform Boards, as you can't apply for grants. It works on projects with partners and stakeholders.

One of the main partners it has been working with is the Big and Little Big Book Clubs, but Fiona has given you all the information you need about that. The Australia Council through the CPMD is providing \$330,000 over three years to The Little Big Book Club for its development as a national initiative. The Literature Board has also been providing grants to help participating writers through separate applications to the Promotions category.

Last but not least I'd like to tell you about Books Alive, which is an Australian Government initiative aiming to encourage all Australians to experience the joys of reading. Every year Books Alive runs a nationwide campaign to 'ignite the country's passion for books and make it easier to choose a great read'.

This year, Books Alive starts on the first Wednesday in July.

Libraries are increasingly signing up to participate in Books Alive, engaging their local communities and readers of all ages. Several hundred libraries participated in the 5-week

campaign in 2006 by ordering the '50 books' selected for *The 2006 Books Alive Great Read Guide* and promoting these titles and the giveaway title for 2006, which was *Odd One Out* by Monica McInerney, specially written for the campaign.

The campaign launches in July in time with the release of the August edition of *The Australian Women's Weekly*, as the Weekly also distributes the Guide – so it's a very prominent initiative.

Books Alive authors, both the author of the 'giveaway title' and Australian authors with titles in *The Books Alive Great Read Guide* tour to libraries as part of the national campaign. For example, Matthew Reilly drew a record crowd at Palmerston Library in Darwin in August 2005. The library presence is particularly significant in South Australia due to the relationship between the Big Book Club and the SA library network.

In 2006 a sample measure of the library borrowing of titles in *The 2006 Books Alive Great Read Guide* was collected with assistance from Public Libraries Australia (PLA) with encouraging results. Books Alive will work with PLA and ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association) to gather more information on library borrowing in 2007.

Books Alive is calling on libraries to register their interest in the March edition of inCite magazine, via [booksalive.com.au/library](http://booksalive.com.au/library) or email [info@booksalive.com.au](mailto:info@booksalive.com.au)

Thank you for allowing Nicola and I to talk to you about some of the programs and initiatives of the Australia Council, and we hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.

*Nicola Evans and Brian Purcell*