



2016 Annual Report
Prepared by Edwina Johnson



2016 Annual Report

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

2016 was a historic year for Byron Writers Festival with several notable achievements and milestones:

- Chris Hanley, Festival Founder and Chair of 20 years chose to step down from the position immediately following the 2016 Festival. Jennifer St George replaced him as Chair with Adam van Kempen as Vice-Chair. We thank Chris Hanley and former Vice-Chair Lynda Dean for their extraordinary vision and service (Lynda remains on the Board.)
- Arts NSW multi-year funding (double the 2015 rate) commenced in 2016.
- TheSumOf branding specialist created a new identity marque (logo) revealed in May to coincide with Festival tickets on-sale date.
- Creation of a greatly refreshed and improved website; combining the previous (and confusing) two sites into one under: byronwritersfestival.com
- After many years of discussion, an office refurbishment was completed by year-end and as a result the staff have a far more attractive and comfortable working space
- All Festival performance figures increased again, resulting in a very positive financial position with a net surplus of \$93,209, and this, despite near cyclonic weather destroying much of the Festival site one day before opening.
- The net surplus for year-round operations (including annual Festival) for 2016 was \$121,470. Net assets of \$674,617.
- At year end we had a windfall of grants approved including Festival 2017 project funding from Australia Council and Catalyst Funding for StoryBoard amounting to \$300,000 over three years
- After years of planning (notably by Jesse Blackadder) our creative writing program for school children of the Northern Rivers region took to the road and the first StoryBoard sessions were held; co-ordinated by Coralie Tapper
- Purchase of a van for StoryBoard, which is being revamped to take to the roads of Northern Rivers NSW in April 2017. Children's Illustrator Justine Wallace has been commissioned to create new art for the exterior of the bus.
- The Committee agreed to extend and expand several positions in 2017:
 - Partnerships Manager (now 4 days a week until end August)
 - StoryBoard Coordinator (now employed full-time)
 - Marketing and Communications Manager (retained 3 days a week with publicist for Festival period)
 - Newly created position of Festival Administrator (9-day fortnight to coordinate ticketing, schools and the Residential Mentorship among other duties)

CORE FUNDING

In 2016 core funding from Arts NSW increased to \$125,000 (ex GST) after we successfully applied for multi-year funding in 2015 (for the years 2016-2018). Australia Council Festival funding also increased from \$25,000 in 2015 to **\$27,540 (ex GST)** in 2016. At the end of 2016 when many arts organisations unfortunately lost funding and in a round where approximately only 10% of organisations were successful in their application for project funding, Byron Writers Festival secured 2017 Festival funding of \$30,250 (ex GST).

BYRON WRITERS FESTIVAL

In 2016, Byron Writers Festival (Byron WF) marked its 20th year with an array of new developments including an exciting new visual identity, new site layout, revamped children's program and our strongest and best received program yet, with box office takings increasing by 14% and audience size by approx. 7.5%. Sessions were programmed on six main stages across the Festival weekend and were at capacity as people flocked to hear the important conversations and stories told by 150 exceptional and predominantly Australian writers and commentators. To quote participating author Tara June Winch, *Byron Writers Festival is a national treasure, an event like no other, where the audience can truly feel transformed and at the pulse of issues and letters.*

Since its inception, the vision for the Festival has been to promote Australian literature and ideas and enhance the skills of writers, as well as fostering a culture of reading and among all age groups in the Northern Rivers and beyond. There is no comparable event in the region.

The artistic vision of Byron WF is informed by a belief in the importance and power of literature in shaping our lives as represented in our new tagline: *Where Stories Take You.*

This statement strikingly recognises the courage, wonder, joy, creativity and transformational power of storytelling represented through the exchange of compelling ideas – the heart of our Festival programming.

As Australia's largest and leading regional celebration of literature and ideas, Byron Writers Festival 2016 presented more than 160 sessions, workshops, and special events during Festival Week in the renowned surrounds of Byron Bay. Byron WF once again showcased Australian writers as the core of its programming, with around 150 predominantly Australian writers and thinkers participating in the Festival, attracting more than 70,000 individual attendances across the week including approximately 3600 school students. Friday, Saturday and 3-day passes sold out as did most of the off-site feature events. The Festival continued to draw people from far and wide, as well as maintaining a strong local support base. This year, 52% of attendees came from the Northern Rivers area, and 48% came from elsewhere in Australia.

The Festival attracts impressive national and international literary talent and provides a platform for local writers to engage with audiences and meet with publishers and agents. This year's guests included Australians such as Magda Szubanski, Stan Grant, and Charlotte Wood, alongside international writers including Pulitzer prize winner William Finnegan and PJ O'Rourke. The Festival also had a small marquee dedicated to self-published authors.

In the words of some of the participating writers and guests from 2016:

Byron Writers Festival 2016 was the most incredible literary festival I have attended in the past decade. **Tara June Winch**

Byron Writers Festival is the highlight of the year for writers and readers... **Ceridwen Dovey**

Byron WF 2016 really was a standout; the program was brilliant... **Patrick Gallagher**

Byron Writers Festival is one of the most dynamic and engaging festivals I've ever had the pleasure of attending. **Sarah Holland-Batt**

At Byron Writers Festival we can find what is so lacking in many of our public arenas - true conversation without competitive point-scoring. Engaged, respectful discourse may be threatened in political and public life, but at Byron it continues to thrive. **Hooray! Ailsa Piper**

*I just wanted to add my voice to the many who have expressed their joy at being at your fabulous festival. I felt so privileged to be among such an amazing group of people...and how you all kept smiling and coping magnificently with the weather challenges, rising above everything with such imagination and good humour was just wonderful. The talk all around the Festival and every afternoon on the way home in the bus was so excited and electric, everyone lifted up to live on some other extraordinary plain for this extraordinary week. I had felt this year that I'd lost my sense of humour and wonderment - but maybe I found it again, up there with you in Byron. **Anna Fienberg***

In 2016 the Festival continued to collaborate with Melbourne Writers Festival, Bendigo Writers Festival, The Walkley Foundation, Griffith Review, NORPA, Sydney Opera House, Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Arts Centre, Screenworks Northern Rivers, Arts Northern Rivers, Word Travels, Byron School of Art and Lennox Arts Board. New partnerships were formed with The Centre for Independent Studies and National Library of Australia.

Other 2016 highlights included a new site layout incorporating the world-class conference facilities at Elements of Byron; the use of the indoor spaces at Elements meant we were able to expand our program to include sessions requiring A/V components, something we are unable to facilitate in the outdoor marquees. Together with the multitude of writers' festivals around the country, Byron Writers Festival can lay claim to contributing to a vibrant literary culture in Australia.

Total Festival book sales in 2016 were \$199,273.33 - an increase of 5% from the previous year. We know from our Festival survey that people were downloading books at the end of each session:

- 72% intended buying a book (or had already purchased) from the onsite bookshop
- 54% intended buying a book through the internet (a jump from 40% in 2015)
- of books bought online, 33% would purchase a printed copy, 11% an e-book, 7% would purchase both formats

BYRON WRITERS FESTIVAL COMPARATIVE TICKET SALES

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Type	Sold	Sold	Sold	Sold	Sold
3 day passes	1274	1580	1939	2158	2280
Youth passes	293	121	206	184	132
Friday passes	467	479	537	600	628
Saturday passes	503	360	867	879	729
Sunday passes	193	151	335	295	374
Workshop	184	189	189	205	206

FESTIVAL ACTIVITIES

- **AUSLAN** Accessible Arts NSW provided funding for AUSLAN translators for the 2016 Secondary Schools Day and the main Festival.
- **PEN** Empty Chair was reinstated at the 2016 Byron Writers Festival. The Empty Chair model was used on multiple stages with chair persons reading the statements of writers who are imprisoned for their writing. The Empty Chair acts as a powerful symbolic gesture and Byron Writers Festival will continue its ongoing support of PEN initiatives.
- **Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF)** For the third year running the ILF was the charity chosen for the 2016 Byron Writers Festival. ILF had a clear presence onsite and their volunteer staff were bold amongst the crowd. An ILF statement was read at selected sessions over the course of the weekend to help encourage patrons to support the cause. ILF raised just over \$5,000.00 to help support remote Indigenous communities.
- **Kids Big Day Out** Sunday's Kids Big Day Out at the 2016 Byron Writers Festival went off without a hitch. With The Farm as sponsors of the day Byron Writers Festival and The Farm

Kids ran a series of activities and workshops throughout the day to complement the programming. Spaghetti Circus stilt walkers lifted the spirits from the damp weather and the kids kept Anna Feinberg signing books for over 2 hours on the day.

- **Susie Warrick Young Writers Award 2016** Gabe Francis was the winner of the 2016 SWYWA. He represented the Northern Rivers next generation with passion and confidence in a panel with other generation Y professionals. His short story engrossed the judges and audience. SWYWA supported by ADFAS, Bangalow Lions and Brian Warrick year after year shows the Northern Rivers potential and creative flare.
- **Pitch Perfect** – the pitching session was held at the 2016 Festival

PARTNERSHIP ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Appointment of Emma Keenan as Partnership Manager on a year-round basis at the end of 2015 led to a vast improvement in partner relationships, evidenced by Festival feedback
- Increase in Festival cash sponsorship from \$100,000 in 2015 to \$130,000 in 2016
- Moving previously in-kind partners to cash partners including Ballina Airport, Brookfarm and Byron Shire Council
- New partners included Yellow Brick Road, Greenstone Partners, Captain Honey, The Farm, Mgallery, Australian Bureau of Statistics and Copyright Agency
- 5-year MoU in place with Council, including annual cash contribution of \$5000
- Introduction of best-practice processes such as long-form contracts for cash sponsors, post-event reporting and debriefs, development of sales collateral
- Byron Echo on-board as a media partner for “Byron Writers Festival Presents” events in 2017 (including complimentary advertising).

BYRON WRITERS FESTIVAL YEAR ROUND OPERATIONS

As part of the rebranding roll-out, the following explanatory sentence is employed wherever possible in external communications: *Byron Writers Festival is a non-profit member organisation presenting workshops and events year-round, including the annual Festival.*

ORGANISATION RE-BRAND

Kevin Finn of TheSumOf, a Brisbane branding and design firm, delivered a new identity marque for the organisation which has a fresh contemporary feel and positions the organisation for the future. Since May 2016, the organisation has been known simply as Byron Writers Festival. This is similar to Sydney Writers’ Festival and Adelaide Writers’ Week that present year round programs under their well-recognised Festival banners. The Board agreed to the merging of the two names. This is the new identity marque:



MEMBERSHIP

During 2016, Byron Writers Festival provided services to thousands of people in the Northern Rivers area. Membership increased moderately in 2016, with a year-end total membership of 617 (10 organisation memberships = 50). Generally, membership surveys reveal high levels of satisfaction with Byron WF activities and affirm the quality of the services provided.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- The **year-round program** for 2016 was well received. Overall, the workshop program for 2016 delivered 11 workshops to a total of 139 participants, at a net surplus of \$2733.
- There were 11 **out-of-season events in 2016**, four of which were free for members. There were 6 'In Conversations' with authors and the second year of live-streaming sessions of Sydney Writers' Festival: 'Live and Local'. The event program surplus was \$2570 reaching approximately 1465 attendees. Both members and non-members attended these events in 2016. We continue to liaise closely with publishers and other partners to ensure an interesting and engaging calendar of events for our members throughout the year. The 2016 out-of-season events were:
 - Sarah Marquis 'Wild by Nature' free member event
 - Kate Tempest in partnership with SWF
 - Sydney Writers Festival Live Stream 'live and local'
 - Hugh McKay
 - Bronnie Ware – held at Byron Library
 - Yann Martel
 - Lionel Shriver - in partnership with NORPA; held at Lismore City Hall
 - The Best of Insiders with Barrie Cassidy, David Marr, Nikki Sava and Katherine Murphy
 - David Hunt (cancelled)
 - William McInnes - hosted by Mary Ryans
 - Members Christmas Party
- **Mentorship sessions:** There were 8 Firsthand feedback sessions and 4 block mentorship sessions throughout the year. On top of these, members sought support and advice regarding their manuscripts on a regular basis, often meeting with Festival staff to discuss their projects at length. There is scope to expand this program.
- General enquiries are frequently logged, with four-plus enquiries regarding skills development, publication and **services** received every week (sometimes many more).
- In total, **approximately 3800 people accessed Byron WF services** in 2016 (either in person by attending meetings, workshops, events, accessing the library, or via phone or email enquiries). This figure does not include Festival enquiries.
- The **Writing Hour** group has now moved permanently to Byron Library.

PREMISES

The Byron Writers Festival office remains at Level 1, 28 Jonson Street, Byron Bay. The Deputy Chair extended our lease for three years from December 2016. Refurbishment took place in October and into November and as a result we now have a more appropriate and improved workspace.

northerly (the bi-monthly magazine for Byron Writers Festival)

In January 2015 Barnaby Smith was appointed Editor with Finola Wennekes assisting with design and layout - they have produced each edition since May/June 2015. Barnaby and Finola have managed to create a magazine of excellent quality on a very limited budget and there is much satisfaction with the work they do to make it such a fine publication.

FINANCIAL

Once again, the Festival staff worked as a cohesive team as they strove, successfully, to contain expenses, as outlined in the Treasurer's Report. The net surplus for year-round operations (including annual Festival) for 2016 was \$121,470. Net assets of \$674,617 at year-end.

STAFFING

As referenced above, the Board made a clear commitment to improving the staffing of the organisation once again in 2016. The sound EOY2015 financial position allowed the creation of several more permanent positions. This will have a powerful impact in continuing to create a more professional organisation over the next 20 years.

By the end of 2016, staffing levels were:

- Director – full-time position (37.5 hrs per week)
- Operations Manager – full-time position (37.5 hrs per week)
- Special Projects Coordinator - permanent part-time position (37.5 hours per week until August)
- Partnerships Manager - permanent part-time position (30 hours per week)
- Marketing and Communications Manager - permanent part-time contract (22.5 hours per week)
- Book keeper – permanent part-time position (3 hours per fortnight)
- Magazine editor and designer – contract position
- Festival Administrator - permanent part-time position (9-day fortnight) **Commencing 6 March 2017**

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers remained an integral part of Byron Writers Festival throughout 2016. They offer assistance to the Operations Manager during *northerly* mailout, as well as ongoing administrative support throughout the year. The staff and Board of Byron WF continue to be enormously grateful to our volunteers for the time, energy and enthusiasm they bring to the organisation.

YEAR-ROUND SERVICES

As noted in the summary, more than 3,800 people (both members and non-members) availed themselves of activities and services during 2016. This included attendance at workshops and events (see below for a breakdown), as well as through mentorships and requests for information.

YEAR-ROUND ACTIVITY

In 2016 the organisation ran a series of workshops featuring topics of interest to the diverse cultural groups who make up the Northern Rivers, as well as the keenly contested residential mentorships.

WORKSHOP PROGRAM (ex Festival)

Workshop	Host	Total participants	Income	Expenses	Surplus
Poetry Slam	Sam Turnbull	7	\$180.00	\$385.00	-\$205.00
Winning Submission	Marele Day	15	\$660.00	\$92.50	\$567.50
NRWC Business Writing	Russell Eldridge	4	0	\$280.00	-\$280.00
Narrative Structure	Melissa Lucashenko	6	\$1,020.00	\$1,600.00	-\$580.00
Travel	Louise Southerden	16	\$1,515.00	\$560.00	\$764.00
Blogging website	Finola Wennekes	12	\$1,240.00	\$780.00	\$460.00
Writing Safari	Tristan Bancks	20	\$1,035.00	\$370.00	\$665.00
How to get your book on SMH front page	Sussanna Freymark	17	\$790.00	\$370.00	\$420.00
In My Opinion	Mandy Nolan	11	\$999.20	\$689.00	\$310.20
Memoir	Alan Close	16	\$1,305.58	\$714.00	\$591.58
Crowd Funding	Mairead Cleary and Roz	14	\$320.00	\$300.00	\$20.00
TOTALS		139	\$9,064.78	\$6,140.50	\$2,733.28

RESIDENTIAL MENTORSHIP WITH MARELE DAY

In 2016 Byron WF hosted its 16th annual Residential Mentorship for four new and emerging writers, marking Marele Day's 16-year involvement as mentor. The aim of this project is to provide a context in which new and emerging writers can be identified and guided in the development of their work. It also provides an understanding of the practice and business of writing and publishing. In 2016, the Residential Mentorship attracted 20 submissions.

The Residential Mentorship is one of our flagship annual events and it is a **proven pathway to publication**, with approximately 20% of mentees achieving publication post Mentorship, and it deserves centre stage.

EVENTS PROGRAM (ex Festival)

Event Name	Total Participants	Total Income	Total Expenses	Surplus/Loss
Sarah Marquis	205	\$0.00	\$690.00	-\$690.00
Kate Tempest	246	\$4,688.00	\$3,198.00	\$1,490.00
Sydney Writers Festival Live Stream	60	\$460.00	\$300.00	\$160.00
Hugh Mckay	80	\$1,131.00	\$580.00	\$551.00
Bronnie Ware	94	\$300.00	\$150.00	\$150.00
Yann Martel	122	\$1,288.00	\$3,195.00	-\$1,907.00
Lionel Shriver	320	\$901.60	\$2,610.47	-\$1,708.87
The Best of Insiders	247	\$7,616.67	\$3,091.00	\$4,525.00
Members Christmas Party	81	\$0.00	\$420.00	-\$420
TOTALS	1465	\$16,385.27	\$14,234.47	\$2,570.13

2017 FUNDING CONFIRMED

\$125,000 (excl GST) ARTS NSW

\$30,250 (excl GST) AUSTRALIA COUNCIL – for ByronWF 2017

\$51,700 ANZAC grant funding from Federal Ministry of Arts (ongoing)

\$300,000 (excl GST) CATALYST funding for StoryBoard over three years

STORYBOARD

The pilot project successfully achieved its goals for 2016. The project exceeded a number of goals, particularly in fundraising, which was extremely successful. Project achievements (completed during or shortly after the end of 2016) include:

- Appointing Coralie Tapper as project coordinator.
- Making 22 visits to 16 local schools, with 31 workshops reaching 988 students
- Raising \$70,000 to fund the purchase of the StoryBoard Bus (\$50,000 from Arts NSW and \$20,000 from Stronger Communities)
- Researching and coordinating the purchase of a suitable vehicle and starting the process of fit out in time for the 2017 program. Researching options for decorating the vehicle, planning the decoration process and briefing artists to submit concepts
- Achieving a substantial multi-year grant of \$100,000 per year for three years from Catalyst to run the program
- Producing marketing and promotion materials including a logo, promotional videos and a sponsorship presentation

Overall, the pilot project was extremely successful in setting a strong foundation for StoryBoard to expand as a significant and long-term program of Byron Writers Festival from 2017 onwards. 2017 progress involves working with Kevin Finn (TheSumOf) for branding and identity (see below), building and sustaining a strong collective of both local authors and volunteers. Workshop bookings with regional schools for Term 1 are full and StoryBoard Masterclasses are in place with Lismore and Ballina Libraries.



BOOKS-2-SCREEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

2016 was the pilot program: Jesse Blackadder and Penny Leonard worked with Screenworks to create the program. The Festival administered the author promotion and applications and three authors were selected. Screenworks promoted and administered the call out for script writers interested in joining with the selected writers. Jesse and Screenworks worked on creating a weekend of training for the three groups. These three groups then pitched to industry professionals at a Festival session, which went very well. Discussions regarding a modified version for 2017 have commenced.

BOARD

Chris Hanley stepped down from the position of Chair and the Committee after the 2016 20th Festival. It is impossible to state the enormous impact Chris' leadership and endeavours have had on our community and across the publishing world over the past two decades. Chris has been awarded an Order of Australia Medal as well as being named Byron Shire's 'Citizen of the Year 2017' in recognition for his work. Jennifer St George took over as Chair and Adam van Kempen took over as Vice Chair with Lynda Dean remaining on the Board. I would also like to acknowledge Teresa Walters and Emerald Moon who did not stand for re-election at the 2016 AGM.

APPRECIATION

In summary, 2016 was a most exciting year headed by a definitively successful Festival and interspersed by a range of profitable out-of-season events ensuring 2017 started on a financially sound footing. Plans for the 2017 Festival are well advanced. Budget pressures are vigilantly monitored to minimise the impact of increased Festival site and accommodation costs, and staff salaries. Board imposed reduction of author invitations to the Festival will go some way to addressing this. Retained profits can provide a buffer if required.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the enormous efforts made by all current Board members. Jennifer St George (Chair), Adam van Kempen (Vice Chair), Russell Eldridge (Secretary), Cheryl Bourne (Treasurer) and committee members Jesse Blackadder, Kate Cameron, Marele Day, Lynda Dean, Lynda Hawryluk and Anneli Knight. All gave generously of their time and wisdom, as ever.

Byron Writers Festival will continue to focus on its core values to support writers (and readers) in the world of words and big ideas and share the knowledge and experience within our organisation to all who seek it.

Edwina Johnson
DIRECTOR