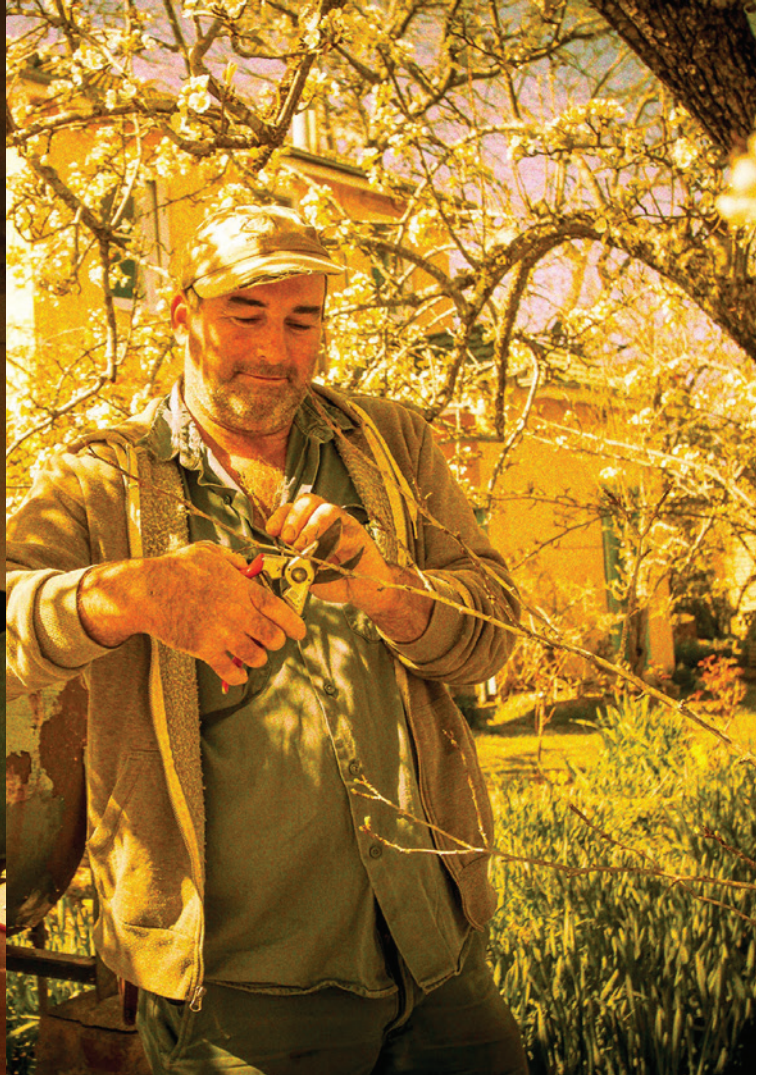




# Varuna the National Writers' House

ANNUAL REPORT 2018



# Message from the Chair

It has been an exciting year for Varuna. A year of change and growth, while still recognising the importance of tradition and heritage. A year of welcoming over 180 of Australia's best writers to be in residence at Varuna and participate in our events. And a year of community, building connections with local writers, volunteers, staff and Blue Mountains businesses. During this time, I have met personally with many of the people who care strongly about Varuna, all of whom have expressed excitement and enthusiasm about our new directions.

One of our core values at Varuna is inclusivity, and this has been a particular focus for the Board in 2018. For a long time now, writers with mobility challenges have not been able to stay in residence, and heritage constraints have precluded us from initiating major building modifications. For this reason, the Board has now approved the development of an additional custom-built studio for mobility-impaired writers. We have been successful in securing initial funding for this building and have completed the planning stage. All being well, we plan to commence construction in 2019.

However, inclusivity is not just about physical access. Our wonderful executive team, Veechi Stuart and Amy Sambrooke, has successfully developed several new partnerships and programs to reach a more diverse cohort of writers, and have

*... the Board has now approved the development of an additional custom-built studio for mobility-impaired writers. We have been successful in securing initial funding for this building, and have completed the planning stage.*

reviewed all assessor panels to better reflect cultural, gender and age diversity. Several new fellowships with literature organisations in Western Sydney and regional Australia have been established, and we are delighted to be offering new mentorship residences with Kill Your Darlings, Scribe Publications and The Wheeler Centre.

2018 also saw a sold-out series of creative writing workshops and author events, the first year of our innovative Young Writers' Program, and an enormously successful writers' festival with 18 events held over three days.



Finally, in order to ensure ongoing best governance practice, the Board commissioned a performance review facilitated by an external consultant. We have identified a number of matters to be addressed over the coming year, which will lead to an improvement in board skills, diversity, and decision-making processes.

Varuna truly is a national treasure. Our Board is proud to be steering it on its journey.

**Jennifer Scott, March 2019**

# Message from the Executive Team

Every week at Varuna is different. As new writers arrive and others are farewelled, different conversations and connections emerge. Sometimes the house is full of laughter, other times it radiates that quiet intensity so distinctive to Varuna.

Constant however is the commitment from the writers to their writing. Writing that enriches and shapes our culture, and writing we are confident will inspire a new generation of readers and thinkers.

In 2018, we were delighted to welcome several Indigenous writers in residence to Varuna for the first year of our First Nations program. We welcomed Dias Novita Wuri on our first international program with Indonesia, and in exchange, Australian

writer Annee Lawrence headed off to Ubud and Jakarta. Later in the year, as part of The Wheeler Centre's Next Chapter program, nine emerging writers came together at Varuna, in a week celebrating diversity, artistic excellence and the importance of being given space just to write.

*We were extremely proud that when surveyed, 96% of writers in residence felt that Varuna helped to improve their artistic skills.*

The 2018 Blue Mountains program of the Sydney Writers' Festival was a particularly successful one, engendering lively debate and attracting many people who had never been to our festival before. In exciting news, we will build on this success in 2019, when Varuna will host the first ever independent Blue Mountains Writers' Festival.

We were extremely proud that when surveyed, 96% of writers in residence felt that Varuna helped to improve their artistic skills. Such artistic outcomes are crucial – Varuna is not just a place where writers come to find 'a room of one's own', but rather is a centre for professional development, providing dedicated mentoring, masterclasses and networking opportunities.

We remain grateful to Create NSW and the Australia Council for the Arts for their ongoing core funding, and for contributing to the wonderful richness of Australia's literary landscape.



**Veechi Stuart, Executive Director**  
**Amy Sambrooke, Creative Director**

# Our Vision, Pillars, Goals and Values

*Our vision is to inspire the creation of Australian writing that enriches and shapes our culture*

<p><b>Artistic Practice</b></p>	<p><b>Diversity</b></p>	<p><b>Indigenous</b></p>	<p><b>Community</b></p>	<p><b>Finance and Systems</b></p>	<p><b>Infrastructure and Heritage</b></p>
<p><i>To support artistic excellence and the creation and publication of new Australian works</i></p>	<p><i>To cultivate, encourage and promote diverse writing and writers</i></p>	<p><i>To support excellence and innovation in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and literature</i></p>	<p><i>To create a hub for writers and skills development that is well loved by our local community, and which brings economic benefits to our local region</i></p>	<p><i>To establish resilience through diversification of funding sources, and to leverage technology to ensure wise use of limited staff resources</i></p>	<p><i>To value and nurture our heritage, while consolidating our future viability through the construction of additional buildings</i></p>

**OUR PILLARS**

**OUR GOALS**

<p><i>Making writing and creativity matter</i></p>	<p><i>Bringing rigour and commitment to the writing craft</i></p>	<p><i>Building a respectful and inclusive community</i></p>	<p><i>Valuing heritage and place</i></p>
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**OUR VALUES**

# Goal 1: Artistic practice

*To support artistic excellence and the creation of new works through a unique program of fellowships and residencies.*

## **In 2018, Varuna:**

- Provided 190 writers from around Australia over 245 weeks as an artist-in-residence at Varuna.
- Received and professionally assessed over 850 fellowship applications across 13 different programs, an increase of over 100 applications from 2017.
- Initiated new fellowship partnerships with Bankstown Poetry Slam, Mascara Literary Review, Sweatshop, The Wheeler Centre, Urban Theatre Project and Western Sydney University.
- Created a new partnership with Kill Your Darlings, funded by the Copyright Agency, to offer a week's mentoring in residence for KYD shortlisted writers.
- Initiated new publisher relationships with Allen and Unwin, Curtis Brown, HardieGrant and Scribe Publications.
- Directly facilitated the submission of 31 draft works to 8 different reputable publishers, and submitted 9 finalised manuscripts to publishers complete with consultants' reports and recommendations.
- Co-ordinated 133 separate manuscript consultations.
- Provided speaking or workshop presenter opportunities for 68 writers.
- Initiated, and secured private funding for, a new international fellowship with Cove Park in Scotland, one of the most prestigious artist residencies in the United Kingdom.
- Hosted an Indonesian/Australian international exchange in partnership with AsiaLink.
- Set up a new literary fellowship prize with Western Sydney University.

*When surveyed, over 97% of our 2018 writers in residence felt that Varuna was one of the best examples of artists' residencies they had seen, 92% reported that Varuna helped build connections with other artists in their field, and 96% reported that Varuna helped to improve their artistic skills.*

Culture Counts survey, 2018.

## Goal 2: Diversity

*To cultivate, encourage and promote diverse writing and writers.*

### **In 2018, Varuna:**

- ➔ Increased the number of applications from writers under 35 for our programs from 14% in 2017 to 18% in 2018.
- ➔ Partnered with the Wheeler Centre to offer residencies to 9 writers from diverse backgrounds as part of The Next Chapter program.
- ➔ Created a new 'Rising in the West' program, partnering with five Western Sydney literature organisations to offer fellowships and mentoring to Western Sydney writers.
- ➔ Provided festival opportunities for diverse writers, with 22% of speakers being from a culturally diverse background.
- ➔ Partnered with WestWords to support four young emerging culturally diverse writers from Western Sydney to spend a week at Varuna with a writing mentor.
- ➔ Welcomed a culturally diverse writer from Western Australia, in a flagship fellowship with Katharine Susannah Prichard writing centre.
- ➔ Profiled young culturally diverse writers from Western Sydney in a showcase event as part of our festival program.
- ➔ Continued partnerships with the ASA, Henry Handel Richardson Society and Writing NSW to support residency fellowships for young writers.
- ➔ Provided judging and support for the Blue Fringe literature program, supporting 24 writers with mental health issues.
- ➔ Engaged consultants to develop infrastructure plans that will enable Varuna to be accessible for writers with disabilities.
- ➔ Reviewed the diversity composition of staff, volunteers and Board members.



*It was wonderful to be in an environment that was totally focussed on writing, and to be with people who are interested in writing and able to discuss aspects of writing with them.*

Rosanna Licari, writer

*Varuna has been a life-changing experience; I will carry these learnings and feedback into the rest of my writing career.*

Zoe Ghani, writer

# Goal 3: Indigenous writing

*To provide enduring and meaningful assistance for the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and literature.*

## **In 2018, Varuna:**

- ➔ Held the first year of our First Nations program, partnering with Magabala Press to welcome six writers on mentoring and residential intensives.
- ➔ Welcomed a total of ten Indigenous writers to Varuna in residence (an increase of eight from 2017).
- ➔ Received 29 applications from Indigenous writers.
- ➔ Provided individual feedback to 18 submissions from Indigenous writers.
- ➔ Developed our Indigenous library, separately cataloguing all Indigenous writing in the Varuna library and identifying the gaps where additional works need to be added.
- ➔ Welcomed Indigenous writer Kim Scott to our Blue Mountains program of the Sydney Writers' Festival.
- ➔ Invited Indigenous writer Lisa Fuller (who won our 2018 Eleanor Dark Flagship Fellowship) to be part of our annual peer-assessed fellowship panel, and to feature in our Young Writers' Program.
- ➔ Facilitated the introduction of a YA manuscript by an emerging Indigenous writer to Magabala Press.

***The impact of Varuna on my confidence as a writer has been immense and exposed me to numerous opportunities.***

Lisa Fuller, writer

*Lisa Fuller*



# Goal 4: Community engagement

*To create a hub for writers and skills development that is well loved by our local community, and which brings economic benefits to our region.*

## **In 2018, Varuna:**

- ➔ Launched the first year of its Young Writers' Program, providing 48 high-school students with full-day writing workshops and a monthly writing 'club'.
- ➔ Presented one of our most successful festival programs ever, with 18 events and over 1,500 ticket bookings. 95% of the audience reported that they would recommend the Festival to others. We also applied for, and secured funding for, an independent Blue Mountains Writers' Festival to be held in 2019.
- ➔ Hosted an Open Day at Varuna with a day-long program of events, attracting 230 visitors. Held the annual Mick Dark Lecture, presented by Charles Massy and attended by over 200 people from all around the region.
- ➔ Presented 13 writing workshops, almost all of which were sold out, as well as three week-long masterclasses, focusing on poetry, short stories and memoir. Our writing workshops included a 'regional reach-out' workshop in Lithgow.
- ➔ Initiated new community partnerships with the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, Blue Mountains Food Co-op, Lyttleton Stores, Platform Gallery, Science at the Local and deepened our partnerships with Blue Mountains City Library, Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre and Megalong Books.
- ➔ Became a supporter and judge of the What Matters? Writing Competition, run by the Whitlam Institute, which reaches all schools and which attracts over 4,000 entries from young people across NSW, VIC, WA, TAS and the ACT.
- ➔ Donated judging expertise to the Penrith Eisteddfod, and provided both judging and a prize for the Central West Banjo Paterson Poetry Prize.
- ➔ Hosted or co-presented six author events in the Blue Mountains, and one at the Northern Territory Writers' Festival.
- ➔ Provided opportunities for 36 volunteers to be involved in our programs.



***One teacher wrote to us saying that her student, who had just attended our Young Writers' Program, had been so inspired he went home and wrote all night. When he told her this, she was motivated to return to her own creative writing practice, for the first time in many years.***

Rebecca Goosen, Program Co-ordinator.



# Goal 5: Finance and systems

*To establish resilience through diversification of funding sources, manage expenditure prudently, and leverage technology to ensure wise use of limited staff resources.*

## **In 2018, Varuna:**

- Increased revenue by over \$34,000 when compared to 2017.
- Increased organisational resilience by diversifying our funding sources, attracting additional project funding from Arts NT, Blue Mountains City Council and Create NSW.
- Secured additional funding for 2019, including \$27,500 in federal funding for hosting an independent Blue Mountains Writers' Festival in 2019, green energy funding from the Department of Heritage, and three-year funding from the Bridge Awards Foundation for a new international residency program.
- Secured \$14,900 in corporate sponsorship for our 2018 festival, compared to \$4520 in 2017 and \$2620 in 2016.
- Implemented new software for receiving and reviewing applications, making it easier for writers to apply for our programs, and easier for staff to administrate.
- Participated in a trial of the Culture Counts survey software, digging deeper into the measurement of artistic and cultural outcomes for our programs.
- Implemented new mailing list software, improving the cost-effectiveness, readability and appearance of our email communications.
- Commenced the redesign of our website using the SquareSpace platform.
- Reviewed our backup systems, and increased data security by mirroring data in the cloud.
- Revised and updated our risk matrix, and developed a new risk matrix for events.

*I was able to complete a staggering 20,000 words in just five days – Varuna has yet again given me a nurturing and positive environment to feel inspired, to be productive, and to meet incredible new peers and friends; gorgeous dinners for all the residents to share around the table, bringing us together.*

Zoya Patel, writer.

# Goal 6: Infrastructure and heritage

*Our goal is to value and nurture our heritage, while consolidating our future viability through the construction of additional buildings.*

## **In 2018, Varuna:**

- Finalised plans for two new buildings, the first being a new community/meeting building in the Varuna car park, the second being a new residency studio that is accessible for mobility-impaired writers.
- Commissioned Heritage Reports and Bushfire Reports from expert consultants regarding the new buildings and their recommended location and structure.
- Commissioned a carbon energy audit and participated in green energy training, resulting in a successful funding application to the Department of Planning for upgrading our heating systems and insulation.
- Worked with historian Margo Beasley to produce a 16-page booklet about the early years of Varuna.
- Continued the process of library cataloguing and the organisation of our archives and image library.
- With the help of volunteers, made significant progress managing weeds on the property, and implemented a weed management plan.
- Upgraded the furnishings and paintwork in the main living area and studio bedroom.
- Had the rear façade of the Varuna main building painted.

*It's the deep silence. It's the history of work. It's the support — not having to think of anything but writing and tea. It's the spaciousness of the time. It's a miracle.*

Ailsa Piper, writer.



# The Varuna Way

*Each of our four core values is demonstrated by a set of behaviours that bring the Varuna culture to life.*

<b>Our values</b>	<b>Our behaviours</b>
Making writing and creativity matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ We provide developmental opportunities to authors from across the nation and at all stages of their careers</li> <li>→ We always prioritise the creative process for writers in residence</li> <li>→ We broaden our reach by working in partnership with other leading organisations</li> </ul>
Bringing rigour and commitment to the writing craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ We continually review the selection process to ensure the highest standards, including regular rotation of all assessors</li> <li>→ We look outside of our organisation to establish best practice</li> <li>→ We award residencies and fellowships on a competitive basis only</li> </ul>
Building a respectful and inclusive community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ We proactively seek diversity at all levels within our organisation</li> <li>→ We treat all stakeholders with empathy and respect</li> <li>→ We are actively involved in our Blue Mountains community</li> </ul>
Valuing heritage and place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ We formally acknowledge the Dark's legacy at public occasions</li> <li>→ We consider carefully the heritage implications of any building alterations or improvements</li> <li>→ We continually innovate and seek ways to further support the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers</li> </ul>

# Summarised Financial Statements

## THE ELEANOR DARK FOUNDATION LIMITED

### STATEMENT OF PROFIT & LOSS AND COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

for the year ended 31 December 2018

	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>
	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>Revenue</b>	574,464	539,725
<b>Expenses</b>		
Employee benefits expense	222,488	191,685
Depreciation and amortisation expenses	8,067	8,042
Administration expenses	52,050	60,950
Facility expenses	81,279	89,929
Program and fellowship expenses	207,848	185,219
	<hr/> 571,731	<hr/> 535,825
<b>Net surplus for the year</b>	2,733	3,899
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>	-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income/(deficit) for the year</b>	<hr/> <hr/> 2,733	<hr/> <hr/> 3,899

**THE ELEANOR DARK FOUNDATION LIMITED**

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION**

as at 31 December 2018

	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>
	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	594,283	395,639
Trade and other receivables	6,100	452
Other current assets	4,626	2,992
<b>Total current assets</b>	<u>605,009</u>	<u>399,082</u>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Intangibles	-	-
Property, plant and equipment	1,554,671	1,546,685
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<u>1,554,671</u>	<u>1,546,685</u>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<u>2,159,680</u>	<u>1,945,767</u>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	37,702	22,148
Provisions	15,303	5,594
Other current liabilities	49,672	44,535
Government grants	251,704	65,500
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<u>354,381</u>	<u>137,777</u>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	39,568	44,992
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<u>39,568</u>	<u>44,992</u>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<u>393,949</u>	<u>182,769</u>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<u>\$ 1,765,731</u>	<u>\$ 1,762,998</u>
<b>FUNDS</b>		
General funds	548,091	545,358
Reserves	1,217,640	1,217,640
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<u>\$ 1,765,731</u>	<u>\$ 1,762,998</u>

**THE ELEANOR DARK FOUNDATION LIMITED**

**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**

for the year ended 31 December 2018

	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>
	\$	\$
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>		
<b>Receipts</b>		
Receipts from customers	249,700	251,030
Receipts from donors	7,243	10,911
Receipts from sponsorships	18,105	10,720
<b>Cash flows from government</b>		
Receipts from appropriations/grants	478,904	280,852
<b>Payments</b>		
Suppliers and employees	(545,460)	(526,297)
<b>Net cash inflow from operating activities</b>	<u>208,492</u>	<u>27,216</u>
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>		
Interest received	6,205	4,009
Payments for plant and equipment	(16,054)	-
Proceeds on disposal of plant and equipment	-	-
<b>Net cash outflow from investing activities</b>	<u>(9,848)</u>	<u>4,009</u>
<b>Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents held</b>	198,643	31,225
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year	<u>395,639</u>	<u>364,414</u>
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year</b>	<u><u>594,283</u></u>	<u><u>395,639</u></u>

## **INDEPENDENT AUDIT REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ELEANOR DARK FOUNDATION LIMITED (Cont'd)**

### **Opinion**

In our opinion, the financial report of The Eleanor Dark Foundation Limited has been prepared in accordance with Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012, including:

- (a) giving a true and fair view of the Company's financial position as at 31 December 2018 and of its financial performance and cash flows for the year ended on that date; and
- (b) complying with Australian Accounting Standards to the extent described in Note 1, and Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013.

### **Basis of Accounting**

Without modifying our opinion, we draw attention to Note 1 to the financial report, which describes the basis of accounting. The financial report has been prepared for the purpose of fulfilling the responsible entities' financial reporting responsibilities under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012. As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose.

### **Trumans Chartered Accountants**

**Jeffrey Partridge**  
**Partner**  
Katoomba

**Dated**        *I*        *I*

# Our Sponsors and Funders

We have received an incredible level of support from individual donors, community members and local businesses this year.

Thank you to Create NSW and the Australia Council for the Arts, who provide the core funding so essential to our ongoing support of Australian writers.

Thank you also to our program partners who include Arts NT, the Australia-Indonesia Institute, Blue Mountains Library, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre and the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.



3P Learning Corporation



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