

# VARUNA

The National Writers' House

ANNUAL REPORT 2019





# Message from the Chair

In our 2018 annual report I wrote about Varuna's exciting plan to build an accessible studio for writers. During the past year, plans were finalised, and the studio building was approved by Council. We were successful in securing funding from Create NSW's Creative Capital Fund, as well as from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal and the NSW Government. As the development consent and the desire to maintain Varuna's commitment to environmental sustainability placed added requirements on the building, we created a crowdfunding campaign to source the extra funds needed. This campaign was hugely successful, and we are truly grateful to our alumni and to our community for their support and

*... we are truly grateful to our alumni and to our community for their support and sponsorship*

sponsorship. As I write this report, the studio is taking shape with the frame constructed and windows in place.

We started 2019 with the launch of Varuna's new website that highlights the many new programs we are running, as well as our diverse and amazing alumni. We also took the big step of reviewing and updating our logo. We believe our new logo reflects our spirit and sense of place.

2019 has also been a year of partnerships. Our Blue Mountains community is such a strength for Varuna, with volunteers contributing to events such as our Festival, documenting and maintaining our heritage, helping in the garden, and much more besides. We have also been fortunate to partner with so many diverse literary and arts organisations in 2019, including ABC Radio Sydney, Affirm Press, Byron Writers' Festival, Griffith Review, Kill Your Darlings, New England Writers Centre, Scribe Publications, Sweatshop, WestWords, the Wheeler Centre, Writing NSW and Writing SA, with each organisation contributing to create new fellowships and opportunities for Australian writers.

This year we were again delighted to partner with the Blue Mountains Conservation Society to host the Mick Dark Talk for the Future. Our speaker was the award-winning climate scientist, Dr Joelle Gergis. We reflected on her message in December as we faced unprecedented bushfires close to our beloved Varuna. Thanks to our ever vigilant staff and our Rural Fire Service, the property, residents and staff remained safe.



As 2020 unfolds, there will continue to be considerable change and challenges. I am confident that Varuna's staff, alumni, friends and Board will continue to work together to find creative and positive ways to support the very best of Australian writing.

**Jennifer Scott, May 2020**

# Message from the Executive Team

As we write this, the staff at Varuna are all working from their home offices around the Blue Mountains. The doors of Varuna are temporarily shut, and in the eerie quiet remaining, there are no writers to appreciate this autumn's extraordinary display of colour.

For Varuna, this closure has occurred at the end of a long and difficult summer, where bushfires from every direction approached Katoomba in an ever-closer pincer movement over a period of almost two months. Now, as we find ourselves wrestling with the huge impact of Covid-19 on writers, Varuna and the arts in general, one could perhaps be justified in thinking that life may never return to normal again.

However, it is almost too easy to forget that 2019 was a tremendously productive year for Varuna. Perhaps our most significant achievement was hosting the first ever Blue Mountains Writers' Festival, an independent festival featuring over 50 writers, and which sold out almost every event. Byron Writers' Festival, Melbourne Writers' Festival and the Newcastle Writers' Festival collaborated with us to welcome international guests Tishani Doshi and Omid Tofighian, Behrouz Boochani joined us via video link from Port Moresby, and Tim Flannery and Markus Zusak

***As we approach our 30th birthday, we are proud that over 3,000 Australian writers have experienced the inspiration that Varuna provides.***

joined with many other high-profile Australian writers to deliver a fabulous four days celebrating writers and writing.

Our residency program continues to grow in strength and reputation. As we approach our 30th birthday, we are proud that over 3,000 Australian writers have experienced

the inspiration that Varuna provides. Varuna is the only artist residency in Australia devoted exclusively to literature, and one of only a handful in the world. For many, a residency at Varuna can be a pivotal moment in a writer's career, marking the first time they are acknowledged as a 'real writer'.

2019 also saw the expansion of our international program, including the first year of our international exchange program with the Edinburgh International Book Festival and the prestigious Cove Park residency in Scotland. We also established a new partnership with the Shanghai Writers' Association, and launched our residency exchange with the Shanghai International Writers' Program.



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. We are more reliant than ever upon writers, whose skills with the written word enable us to make sense of this world that we live in.

***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><b>Writing and creativity</b></p>	<p><b>Rigour and commitment to the writing craft</b></p>	<p><b>Respect and inclusiveness</b></p>	<p><b>Heritage and place</b></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 2019, Varuna:**

- Provided 190 writers from around Australia over 245 weeks as an artist-in-residence at Varuna.
- Received and professionally assessed over 810 fellowship applications across 15 different programs.
- Initiated new residency programs with Bankstown Poetry Slam, Mascara Literary Review, New England Writers' Centre, Sweatshop, The Finishing School, Western Sydney University, and Writing South Australia, and continued existing programs with Affirm Press, Arts NT, Griffith Review, KSP, Magabala Books, WestWords and Writing NSW.
- Held new mentoring programs and residencies with Kill Your Darlings and Scribe Publications.
- Printed and distributed our first ever full program booklet, with over 24 pages detailing our annual events and fellowships.
- Directly facilitated the submission of 24 draft works to 9 different reputable publishers, and submitted 6 finalised manuscripts to publishers.
- Reviewed and updated our manuscript consult services, co-ordinating 178 separate manuscript consultations.
- Provided speaking or workshop presenter opportunities for 102 writers.
- Facilitated a four-week international residency exchange with Cove Park in Scotland, and enabled presenter opportunities for Roanna Gonsalves at Edinburgh International Book Festival.
- Facilitated a four-week international residency exchange with Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Ireland, and initiated a new fellowship program with Shanghai, China.

*We were proud to see four Varuna alumni and consultants shortlisted for the 2019 Stella Prize, and two shortlisted for the 2019 Miles Franklin award. We are also delighted when Vicki Laveau-Harvie won the Stella for her memoir The Erratics, which Vicki had worked on during several residencies at Varuna.*

Amy Sambrooke, Creative Director

## Goal 2: Diversity

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

### **In 2019, Varuna:**

- Finalised our new building plans to enable Varuna to be accessible for writers with disabilities.
- Held a new 'Rising in the West' residency program, partnering with five Western Sydney literature organisations to offer fellowships and mentoring to Western Sydney writers, culminating in a feature Festival event.
- Increased the number of applications from writers of diverse backgrounds from 12% in 2018 to 19% in 2019.
- Partnered with the Wheeler Centre to offer residencies to 9 writers from diverse backgrounds as part of The Next Chapter program.
- Provided festival opportunities for diverse writers, with 32% of speakers being from a culturally diverse background.
- Partnered with WestWords to support four 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.
- Continued partnerships with the ASA, Henry Handel Richardson Society and Writing NSW to support residency fellowships for young writers.
- Partnered with Arts NT to provide four two-week residencies and mentoring packages for writers from remote Australia.
- Provided judging and support for the Blue Fringe literature program, supporting 27 writers with mental health issues.



*Thank you for letting us join this Varuna family full of rust, stardust and fireflies.*

Sara Saleh, writer

*I am grateful for the time I have spent here, to learn to be with myself, but also bolstered by the knowledge that I walk in the footsteps of so many other writers before me.*

Eda Gunaydin, writer

## Goal 3: Indigenous writing

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

### **In 2019, Varuna:**

- Held the second year of our First Nations program, partnering with Magabala Press to welcome five writers on mentoring and residential intensives.
  - Held a full-day workshop for First Nations writers, facilitated by Peter Minter and Evelyn Araluen.
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- Welcomed a total of eleven Indigenous writers to Varuna in residence.
  - Welcomed Gangalidda political leader and elder Clarence Walden to our Blue Mountains Writers' Festival, in a film screening featuring Clarence's life, followed by a facilitated discussion with Alexis Wright.
  - Received 28 applications from Indigenous writers.
  - Provided individual feedback to 15 submissions from Indigenous writers.
  - Developed our Indigenous library, adding a large number of new titles so that we have a broader representation of First Nations writing.
  - Welcomed Indigenous writer Lisa Fuller to be part of our annual peer-assessed fellowship panel.

***At Varuna, I was given the space to find and listen to my creative voice. I leaned into the weird and kooky side of my creativity and learned to let go off some of the things that had been weighing me down. The new environment unleashed new ideas and allowed me to tap into a new creative energy – whether it was a muse or the spirit of Eleanor Dark watching over me, I don't know, but I enjoyed every part of it!***

Raelee Lancaster, writer

***Varuna enhances the creative writing space between thinking and doing.***

Yvette Holt, writer



# 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 2019, Varuna:**

- Launched our first ever independent Blue Mountains Writers' Festival, held over four days in August, with 27 out of 32 events selling out.
- Welcomed over 50 writers to participate in the Festival, with 38 per cent of these writers from culturally diverse or First Nations origin.
- Sold over 2,500 sessions to the Festival, attracting writers and readers from all around Australia. Our advertising reached over 85,000 people, and we managed to reach a younger audience (44 per cent under the age of 60) than in previous similar events.
- Held the second year of our Young Writers' Program, providing 48 high-school students with full-day writing workshops and a monthly writing 'club'.
- Held the annual Mick Dark Lecture, presented by Joelle Gergis and attended by over 180 people from all around the region.
- Presented a community program of writing workshops, almost all of which were sold out, as well as two week-long masterclasses, focusing on poetry and memoir. Our writing workshops included a 'regional reach-out' workshop in Lithgow.
- Sustained community partnerships with the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, 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.
- Participated as 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.
- Hosted or co-presented nine author events in the Blue Mountains, and two at the Newcastle Writers' Festival.
- Auspiced the Lanterns on the Lake event, which attracted over 2,500 people in a celebration of gratitude and ephemeral beauty.
- Provided opportunities for 54 volunteers to be involved in our programs.

*Skilful, intelligent interviewing which raised interesting issues and allowed the writers to give the audience so much insight into their work.*

Angie Gleeson,  
Festival audience member.

*This was such an amazing experience and I'm so glad and grateful that an event like this was brought to the mountains. I will continue to support this event in the future.*

Judy Pinn, Festival audience member.



## Goal 5: Finance and governance

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

### **In 2019, Varuna:**

- Increased revenue by over \$68,000 when compared to 2018.
- Increased organisational resilience by diversifying our funding sources, attracting additional project funding from The Bridge Awards, Blue Mountains City Council, Building Better Regions, the Department of Heritage, the Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal, Western Sydney University, and Create NSW Capital Fund.
- Secured \$28,832 in corporate sponsorship (of which \$12,950 was in-kind) for our 2019 festival, compared to \$14,900 in 2018.
- Initiated a new partnership with ABC Radio Sydney to become media partners for the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival.
- Mounted our first ever crowdfunding campaign, which raised over \$27,000 from our alumni and community supporters for our new accessible studio.
- Created a new, more accessible, website for Varuna, contributing to a 17 per cent increase in website traffic during 2019.
- Commissioned and implemented new logo designs, both for Varuna the National Writers' House, and for the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival.
- Revised and updated our risk matrix for both residencies and events.
- Conducted a governance skills training workshop for Board members.
- Undertook staff training for social media.

*This was my second visit to Varuna and I had a very intense and productive week, completing the redraft of my novel. The company and advice of my more experienced fellow writers was invaluable and the atmosphere as lovely as always. It is so good to give yourself a week in an environment where writing is the most important thing, not just to you but to everyone around you. Thank you, Varuna.*

Alison Gibbs

## 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 2019, Varuna:**

- Finalised development applications 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.
- Contracted a disability consultant to review plans for improved accessibility for mobility-impaired writers.
- Undertook a major green energy upgrade of the house, funded by the Department of Heritage, installing a new boiler, hydronic heaters, LED and sensor lighting and new insulation.
- Commenced work on a database inventory of heritage assets.
- Completed our image library archives project.
- With the help of volunteers, continued to progress weed management on the property.
- Conducted essential tree work on the property to protect heritage and increase safety.
- Painted the weatherboards and roof of the office 'shed'.

***This residency, along with others, has been crucial to my development as a writer. Time to write and think, natural beauty and vibrant conversation make this an unbeatable experience.***

Tracy Sorensen, 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>
Writing and creativity	<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>
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>
Respect and inclusiveness	<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>
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 LTD

### STATEMENT OF PROFIT & LOSS AND COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

for the year ended 31 December 2019

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Revenue</b>	642,490	574,464
<b>Expenses</b>		
Employee benefits expense	238,859	222,488
Depreciation and amortisation expenses	5,354	8,067
Administration expenses	57,281	52,050
Facility expenses	102,184	81,279
Program and fellowship expenses	227,016	207,848
	<u>630,694</u>	<u>571,731</u>
<b>Net surplus for the year</b>	11,796	2,733
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>	-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<u>11,796</u>	<u>2,733</u>

**THE ELEANOR DARK FOUNDATION LTD**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION**  
as at 31 December 2019

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	529,473	594,283
Trade and other receivables	14,953	6,100
Other current assets	30	4,626
<b>Total current assets</b>	<u>544,456</u>	<u>605,009</u>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Intangibles	-	-
Property, plant and equipment	1,565,418	1,554,673
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<u>1,565,418</u>	<u>1,554,673</u>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<u>2,109,875</u>	<u>2,159,681</u>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	32,189	37,702
Provisions	10,305	15,303
Other current liabilities	88,292	49,673
Government grants	164,412	251,704
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<u>295,198</u>	<u>354,383</u>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	37,149	39,568
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<u>37,149</u>	<u>39,568</u>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<u>332,348</u>	<u>393,951</u>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<u>\$ 1,777,527</u>	<u>\$ 1,765,731</u>
<b>FUNDS</b>		
General funds	559,887	548,091
Reserves	1,217,640	1,217,640
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<u>\$ 1,777,527</u>	<u>\$ 1,765,731</u>

**THE ELEANOR DARK FOUNDATION LTD**

**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**

for the year ended 31 December 2019

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>		
<b>Receipts</b>		
Receipts from customers	256,850	249,700
Receipts from donors	928	7,243
Receipts from sponsorships	28,214	18,105
Receipts from appropriations/grants	255,916	478,904
<b>Payments</b>		
Suppliers and employees	(595,053)	(545,460)
<b>Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities</b>	<b>(53,145)</b>	<b>208,492</b>
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>		
Interest received	4,438	6,205
Payments for plant and equipment	(16,101)	(16,054)
Proceeds on disposal of plant and equipment	-	-
<b>Net cash outflows from investing activities</b>	<b>(11,663)</b>	<b>(9,849)</b>
<b>Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents held</b>	<b>(64,808)</b>	<b>198,642</b>
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year	594,281	395,639
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year</b>	<b>529,473</b>	<b>594,281</b>



## **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 2019 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 2(a), 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 2(a) 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**

# 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.



WRITING AND SOCIETY  
RESEARCH CENTRE



WestWords  
Sharing the wealth of words

PLATFORM



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