



The Fellowship of Australian Writers (Western Australia)

With a new name, logo and location, writingWA is poised to pull WA's writing community up by the proverbial bootstraps. On the eve of her first anniversary as CEO, Sharon Flindell tells *Fellowship News* what we can expect from the former SLC's makeover.



There's a very literary atmosphere at the new home of the former WA State Literature Centre Inc. (SLC). Well, surrounded by the state's largest book collection at the Alexander State Library in Northbridge, it's little wonder. Patrons bustle past the spacious new office with literary purpose. Students, researchers, writers—and those who seek a good read—prowl amongst the stacks, tomes in hand. The foyer buzzes with activity and an air of promise, as if the words within will unleash all manner of possibilities and change. Thus, it's a fitting place for WA's most influential writing body to reside.

However, it seems faintly ironic that the SLC's move coincides with renaming itself to the less literary, writingWA. But as CEO Sharon Flindell explains, the lofty SLC title just didn't fit.

Sharon Flindell & John Hart outside writingWA's new office at Alexander State Library

"The name WA State Literature Centre was not accurate. The only thing that was accurate was the WA. State suggested we were a part of government, which is incorrect. Literature didn't embrace all the forms of writing that we support, and a Centre, we clearly were not. The name wasn't communicating appropriately what we do so we reviewed and changed it."

And what a difference a name makes! writingWA's modern, upbeat moniker reflects the new vision that our peak body has set for itself – to fully serve its sixty-plus member organisations to support writers and the

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Don't forget to

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writing industry, and effect real change.

"Our focus is very much on helping our member organisations grow and service the sector," says Sharon. "We're already doing that in a number of ways through a range of services including providing information, advocacy, specific programs such as festivals and supporting regional activities. And now, through the strategic planning process, we're reviewing all of our activities and setting the direction for the next three years."

Although many of the changes implemented over the last twelve months since Sharon became CEO seem sweeping and sudden, repositioning writingWA hasn't happened overnight. The new identity, reviewed purpose and better location are a culmination of months of hard work re-examining writingWA's purpose and redefining its goals.

"You can't just credit sweeping change to me," says Sharon, "but also the board, my coworkers, history, support of our funding bodies— there isn't any one factor, but the time was right to do it now."

In the thirteen years since its inception, writingWA has set about supporting WA writers and promoting their work. But with limited resources, minimal IT support, cramped and largely hidden offices at the Fremantle Arts Centre and a confused identity, the organisation struggled to be heard and recognised outside literary circles.

"Part of our problem was that unless you were already involved in the sector, you wouldn't know our organisation existed," confirms Sharon.

But as the state's peak body for writers and writing, a bold ap-

proach to change was required. The organisation adopted a new constitution in February 2005 and appointed a new CEO in June, after Finance and Communication Officer, John Hart, acted in the role for four months.

After securing support from their main funders, ArtsWA and the Australia Council, writingWA was finally ready to embark on the process of revitalisation.

And this all translates into good news for WA writers. With writingWA's new strategic plan set to be released, those who work in the WA writing industry can expect to see better com-

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munications and collaborations between organisations, increased opportunities for writers and a louder voice at the national and international level.

"Advocacy for writing is a critical role for writingWA," says Sharon. "Advocating for greater opportunities for writers is a significant part of our mandate. At the moment we're looking at how we can tackle that.

It's not just about increased publication opportunities— there are actually an enormous number of publishing prospects out there—but we have to look at the whole chain.

"It starts with nurturing writing activity, connecting writers to editors, script assessors and others who can assist with the process. Getting the work to the publishers, getting the work from the publishers to the distributors and getting it into bookshops and other points of sale... we have to look at that

whole process rather than just any one bit of it. And examine how all those things connect.

"There are a lot of organisations out there doing really good work in their areas. But we need to connect the dots... a more cohesive and coordinated effort across the sector. And that's a role for writingWA— to bring us together. I talk about our community of members and that's how I see it; we are all contributors to the sector. There are probably lots of opportunities for collaborations that we haven't explored— yet!"

This push for improvement marks an exciting time for writing in WA. While agreeing that it is getting harder to be published by mainstream publishers, Sharon feels that there are "a whole range of new media opportunities" for writers.

"Perhaps the challenge is about adapting to those opportunities and shifting the focus," she explains. "If you can't go through that door, go through this one. For example, there's the potential for online publishing— digital publishing is only going to grow. It's wide open in that area."

As organisations including the Literature Board and Australian Society of Authors grapple with national issues such as overseas domination in the publishing industry, the push to sell mainstream books that guarantee profits and the ominous threat of the "death of the novel," writingWA represents the state at those discussions and advocates for positive outcomes.

Ideally Sharon hopes these debates will result in "clearly identified career pathways for writers" and "improved income and employment opportunities." In terms of WA writing, Sharon

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would like to see "WA writers being published and read in the broadest possible marketplace."

With many years working in arts management both here and overseas, Sharon is well placed and amply qualified to be the driving force behind writingWA's next phase. She helped establish Fremantle's SWY theatre which later became Perth Theatre company. In 1992, whilst working as a producer in London, she initiated Hungary's first contemporary arts festival—post communism—which encompassed music, live art, theatre and some visual art.

"That was interesting working across currencies, language and distance," she says wryly.

After returning to Australia in the late 90s Sharon spent a few years doing independent production and project-based event management including work with the Perth Festival and PICA.

Immediately prior to writingWA she worked as the City of Swan's Cultural Development Officer, achieving major milestones such as establishing the Bank Gallery and three festivals: the international arts festival, The National Review of Live Art; the ArtRage collaboration, Urban Edge; and an indigenous arts festival, Respect. Running those festivals three times each and writing Swan's cultural development strategy kept Sharon very busy indeed.

And now she has her work cut out at writingWA. But Sharon is excited about the possibilities of what the organisation can achieve and derives a lot of satisfaction from contributing to improving the writing industry.

"Continuous improvement is a personally motivating goal. It's really rewarding when you see new opportunities emerging,

processes being improved. That's what we're here to do, support the sector to develop to a level of maturity and strength that people are happy with." And those involved in writing in WA—literary or otherwise—won't argue with that.

—Tanya Dewhurst

writingWA...

Ground Floor, Alexander Library Building, Perth Cultural Centre WA 6000
Tel: +61 8 9228 9908
Fax: + 61 8 9228 9907
Email: info@writingwa.org
Web: writingwa.org

The 2006 TAG Hungerford Award for Fiction closes 30 June 2006

This award for an unpublished work of fiction is open to Western Australian writers who have not been published in book form.

It is co-presented by New Edition Bookshop, the *West Australian* newspaper, writingWA and the Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

The winner will receive a \$6000 cash prize from New Edition Bookshop and a publishing contract with Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

Get guidelines and entry forms from www.writingwa.org

Know someone creative?

Be creative in your gift giving.

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\$55/\$44 pa.

Application form inside.

Juice 2006

WA's premier residential writing retreat is on again.

Suitable for all levels of experience (including none) you can spend three days of creative writing in a nurturing, non-competitive environment at the lovely Peace Be Still Retreat in Chittering, just an hour's drive from Perth. Maximum 24 participants.

Highlights include:

Creative kick-starting writing exercises with well-known local writer Jenny de Garis.

-An evening in conversation with entertaining novelist and Weekend Australian columnist Susan Maushart.

-A workshop with international scriptwriter and novelist John Harman, who will discuss creating a synopsis to send to publishers.

-An opportunity to have your work critiqued by Janet Blagg, editor at Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

-A session with WA writer Christina Houen, editor of *Hidden Desires*, an anthology of women's writing.

Plus plenty of time for self, chocolate and camaraderie with fellow writers.

When: 4pm Thurs 10 to 4pm Sunday 13 August

Where: Peace be Still Retreat, Chittering

Cost: \$450 including all meals, accommodation and tuition.

Secure a spot with a deposit of \$200 to Jane Cornes, 17 Wisbech Street, Bayswater WA 6053. Or email jcornes@iinet.net.au for direct deposit info. Balance due end of June.

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