

National Cultural Policy Submission

Australian Young Adult Literature Alliance Ltd.

“LoveOzYA”



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About Us

The **Australian Young Adult Literature Alliance**, known popularly as **LoveOzYA**, is a national organisation promoting Australian youth literature, supporting diverse representation and ‘own voices’ in Australian YA. Our board comprises professionals from writing, publishing, education and libraries sectors.

LoveOzYA centres the experiences and aspirations of Australian teen readers and connects them with great Australian young adult (YA) books and authors. We do this by:

- promoting national and international awareness of Australian YA books and authors
- encouraging readers of all ages to discover and read Australian youth literature
- collaborating with organisations in the education and cultural sectors, including schools, publishers, booksellers, libraries, cultural organisations and communities
- advocating for Australian youth literature in all its diverse and varied forms.

PILLAR ONE: First Nations

- At a time when the nation prepares to decide on a Voice to Parliament, the need for First Nations narratives has never been more urgent. In this term of government, many young readers of YA who are teenagers now will become eligible to vote in the referendum. First Nations YA literature is a critical category of publishing that needs urgent support.
- We have minimal representation of First Nations people in mainstream literary institutions, particularly publishers and editors, reviewers or artistic directors of festivals and cultural programs.
- Arts funding should be prioritised for First Nations authors and self-determined organisations, for example, Magabala Books in Broome, WA, which has a strong diverse list of First Nations children and young adult titles

PILLAR TWO: A place for every story

- Our young people deserve to see themselves reflected in the books they read. Australian-authored narratives allow Australian teens to self-conceptualise and to explore and interrogate Australian identity.
- The US publishing industry is colossal in comparison to Australia. The book market for young people is crowded with US titles which dominate media coverage and shelf space.

- In crowding out our stories and our landscapes, international books are silent on Australian life. They provide little that resembles the experience of young people living in regional towns, or with disabilities, or in homes where English is the second language.
- The more diverse the stories that are published, the wider the scope of teen experiences captured. This supports young people to arrive at a nuanced and empathetic insight into the experiences of people from minority and diverse backgrounds.
- It's vital to not simply have good home-grown narratives, but to ensure the home-grown narratives authentically reflect the entirety of *who we are*.

PILLAR THREE: The centrality of the artist

- Writers are some of the lowest paid creatives across all artforms, and literature receives the least government funding.
- The average income of Australian writers is \$12,900.¹ To make a sustainable living, most authors supplement their writing income with teaching, speaking and events.
- This pattern of income is especially true of children's and YA authors who traditionally receive much smaller book advances and royalties than their peers. A meaningful portion of an Australian YA author's income derives from school and library visits.
- Public Lending Right (PLR) and Education Lending Right (ELR), an important income stream which helps stave off poverty, is especially key for children's and YA authors.
- Schools and libraries are an essential component of any meaningful plan to address the income security of Australian children's and YA authors, yet these sectors do not have an easy mechanism for engaging on a policy level with the arts and creative industries.

PILLAR FOUR: Strong institutions

- Public investment in Australian literature is cause for national shame. Total literature funding at the Australia Council decreased by 44% over six years from \$9M in 2013-14 to \$5M in 2019-20. Out of a total grants investment of \$187M, literature received just 2.6% from Commonwealth arts budgets.
- The poverty of literature funding affects all aspects of the Australian writing and publishing sector. It is not only felt in terms of fewer grants to support authors to write sustainably, the lack of funding also negatively impacts:
 - regional community writers festivals which actively engage young people
 - small, independent publishers, some staffed by volunteers, who take the largest share of risk for publishing new and emerging writers, and who collectively publish more Australian authors than their multinational counterparts
 - literary organisations who provide skills development, mentoring, audience engagement and advocacy
 - public libraries and schools supporting authors to engage with young people.
- A National Books and Writing Plan could provide a means for all sectors – not just arts, but also education, libraries, communities, health and regional development, to have a voice in how authors and readers are supported in Australia.

PILLAR FIVE: Reaching the audience

- Reading is the second most popular way Australians engage with arts and culture. 72% of the population aged 15 years and over read for pleasure (i.e., they read at least one book or audio book per year), an increase of 17 percent in three years.² Writers' festivals are proliferating and attendances growing with 22% of Australians attending a book group, writers' festival or event in 2019.
- Reading for pleasure has positive impacts on school achievement across all subject areas, including mathematics, and is positively correlated with finding jobs and career success.³
- Reading books helps teens in their social and emotional development. In reading for pleasure, teens gain insights into cultural identity, physical safety and security, mature relationships, personal values and aesthetic preferences. All these help teenagers transition from childhood to adulthood.⁴
- Despite this context, children and young people as audiences have little if any direct voice, or even effective representation, at state or federal level for distribution of arts funding, policy and strategy. Commonwealth and state arts agencies tend to focus on cultural production, primarily artists and institutions. Young readers have no effective advocate in these domains, neither do the schools and libraries sector who engage more extensively with young readers than cultural organisations do.
- Funded long-term residencies for writers in schools could offer direct engagement with young readers as audiences, but also the opportunity to foster artistic expression and practice and meaningful employment for authors.
- Libraries are hubs of connection and inclusion in urban and regional communities. Yet libraries are rarely represented in national arts and cultural policy because they are the province of regional government, which does not have a seat at the policy table.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Fund a National Books and Writing Strategy, on par with the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, Major Festivals Initiative and National Performing Arts Partnership Framework, to ensure the viability of the writing sector.**
- 2. Establish a Youth Reference Group to the Australia Council for the Arts to ensure the perspectives, experiences and voices of Australian young people inform policy, strategy and funding decisions.**
- 3. Develop an Art in Schools policy that values arts and humanities for children and young people at the heart of education, provides meaningful employment for writers through long-term residencies and promotes Australian literature for young people.**
- 4. Ensure local councils, the jurisdiction of our essential public library network and youth engagement programs, have a voice in the Cultural Ministers Council or any revitalized national cultural governance frameworks.**
- 5. Foster stronger cross-portfolio relationships between Arts and: Education, Health, Indigenous Australians, Skills and Training, Regional Development, Local Government and Territories, Youth and Early Childhood Education**

¹ https://research-management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/122625541/3_Authors_Income.pdf

² Australia Council for the Arts 2020, *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*.

³ Cited in Rutherford, Leonie, Merga, Margaret Kristin and Singleton, Andrew 2018, Influences on Australian adolescents' recreational reading, *The Australian journal of language and literacy*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 44-56.

⁴ Howard V. 2011, The importance of pleasure reading in the lives of young teens: Self-identification, self-construction and self-awareness. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*. 2011;43(1):46-55.