

**Report to General Manager**

Attachments:

1. Writers @ Stanton Feedback 2019

**SUBJECT:** Writers @ Stanton Program - Review of 2019 and 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**AUTHOR:** Kate Stewart, Library Customer Service Coordinator**ENDORSED BY:** Martin Ellis, Director Community and Library Services**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Writers @ Stanton is Stanton Library's visiting author talk program, managed with the support of a local bookshop since 1990.

During 2019 there were a total of 42 Writers @ Stanton events, with 2,497 attendees. In 2020 we celebrate the thirtieth year of the program and anticipate a similar frequency of events, with authors already confirmed up to May.

In December 2019 Library staff conducted a survey of program attendees to seek their feedback. This is the first significant consultation in a series planned to continue in 2020 and will include several of Stanton's key public programs and services:

- "My Stanton" Library Lovers Day promotion
- Early literacy and children's activities
- Heritage Centre programs
- Library groups

Of the requests and suggestions identified in the Writers @ Stanton survey, the strongest view expressed was on the negative impact of the cost of parking and lack of parking close to the library for this short event. Comparisons were made with the discounted parking rates available to users of North Sydney Community Centre. Other suggestions such as the benefits a dedicated space for the program would deliver and an accessible path of travel from the car park are being addressed through in the Stanton Library Masterplan

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Minimal staff costs for set up and restoring the space to a reading and study area; and for preparation of flyers and doing the introductions. The authors receive no fee (unlike the Sydney Writers Festival). The Bookshop liaises with each author's publisher and agent, ensures stock are available for the day, and in return benefits from the sales.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**1. THAT** the Library's customer feedback surveys for 2020 be noted and identified improvements implemented where possible.

**LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

- Direction: 4. Our Social Vitality
- Outcome: 4.2 North Sydney is creative and home to popular events  
4.3 North Sydney supports lifelong learning

**BACKGROUND**

Writers @ Stanton is Stanton Library’s visiting author talk program, running in with the support of the Constant Reader bookshop since 1990.

Writers @ Stanton is one of the few free events of its kind running in greater Sydney and attracts high profile speakers. The program is highly regarded in the industry and Stanton is sought after by publishers as a venue for author book tours and promotional talks.

Events run for approximately one hour, starting at 1pm on level one of the Library. This includes time for the author to speak, as well as audience questions, book sales and signing. For very popular events, attendees arrive early and seats are often fully occupied thirty minutes prior to the event start time.

**CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS**

Community engagement will be undertaken in accordance with Council’s Community Engagement Protocol.

**SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT**

The following table provides a summary of the key sustainability implications:

<b>QBL Pillar</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promotion of the event is largely digital.</li></ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The regularity of the event and the conviviality of the occasion, as described in the Customer Feedback indicates the Program holds a special place in the social life of many residents and visitors</li></ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimal staff costs for set up and restoring the space to a reading and study area. The authors receive no fee (unlike the Sydney Writers Festival)</li></ul>
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bookshops other than the current partner, the Constant Reader have enquired if they could join the program and were told yes. Nothing has eventuated; almost certainly due to proximity issues. All WH&amp;S risks were identified and a Risk Management Plan is in place.</li></ul>

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## DETAIL

During 2019 there were a total of 42 Writers @ Stanton events, with 2,497 attendees.

The most attended events were:

**Niki Savva** on *'Plots and prayers: Malcolm Turnbull's demise and Scott Morrison's ascension'* (200 attendees)



**Kate McClymont** on *'Dead man walking: the murky world of Michael McGurk and Ron Medich'* (150 attendees)



**Adele Ferguson** on *'Banking bad'* (130 attendees)



Other authors were:

- Jane Caro on '*Accidental feminists*'
- Karen Viggers on '*The orchardist's daughter*'
- Geoffrey Lehmann on '*Leeward*'
- Kate Legge on '*Kindred: a Cradle Mountain love story*'
- Julienne Van Loon on '*The thinking woman*'
- Meg Keneally on '*The ink stain*'
- Kirsten Drysdale on '*I built no schools in Kenya*'
- Rebecca Huntley on '*Quarterly essay #73: Australia fair*'
- David Issacs on '*Defeating the ministers of death*'
- Sarah Maddison on '*The colonial fantasy*'
- Jessica Rowe on '*Diary of a crap housewife*'
- Blanche d'Alpuget on '*The lion's torment*'
- Troy Bramston on '*Robert Menzies: the art of politics*'
- Ava Benny-Morrison on '*The lost girls*'
- Tom Bamforth on '*The rising tide: among the islands and atolls of the Pacific*'
- Patrice Newell on '*Who's minding the farm?*'
- Peter Lewis on '*Webtopia*'
- Sarah Edelman on '*Change your thinking*'
- Erik Jensen on '*Quarterly essay #74: The prosperity gospel*'
- Ron McCallum on '*Born at the right time*'
- Homegrown Crime Writers panel featuring Nicola Moriarty, Wendy James, Anna Snoekstra and Sarah Barrie
- Patti Miller on '*The joy of high places*'
- Mike Munro on '*The last bushrangers*'
- Joy Rhoades on '*The burnt country*'
- David Crowe on '*Venom: vendetta's, betrayals and the price of power*'
- Tim Bowden on '*Larrikins in khaki*'
- Peter Goldsworthy on '*Minotaur*'
- Paddy Manning on '*Inside the Greens*'
- Tom Gilling on '*Project Rainfall: the secret history of Pine Gap*'
- Allan Fels on '*Tough customer*'
- Elliot Perlman on '*Maybe the horse will talk*'
- Favel Parrett on '*There was still love*'
- Charlotte Wood on '*The weekend*'
- Ian McPhedran on '*Where soldiers lie*'
- Mary Moody on '*The accidental tour guide*'
- Grantlee Kieza on '*Macquarie*'
- Heather Morris on '*Cilka's journey*'
- Nicholas Cowdery and Rachael Jane Chin on '*Frank and fearless*'
- Blanche D'Alpuget on '*Bob Hawke: the complete biography*'

Current events, politics and history remain the most popular topics, with attendance at these events being consistently the highest throughout the year.

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A survey was distributed in the library throughout December 2019 and online through Stanton eNews seeking feedback on the program. Overall respondents are very happy with the program and comments were overwhelmingly positive.

Among the feedback received, respondents identified several key aspects that were highly valued:

- The quality and variety of the speakers
- A chance to meet authors in person and ask questions
- The program is free
- The environment of the talks (intimate, welcoming, open to all)
- The program is interesting and varied

Some common issues were raised by respondents as potential areas for improvement:

- More frequent events

*Response- the goal in scheduling events is for one author per week, and two in very busy periods. This is a comfortable frequency for staff to manage and allows space in the library schedule for other programs.*

- A dedicated space to hold events

*Response- this is addressed in the Stanton Library Masterplan*

- Greater capacity and more chairs for large events

*Response- new chairs in the current space have made it possible to safely accommodate an additional 50 seats, bringing the maximum number of seats to 150. For large events, standing room is available for an additional 30-40 people.*

- Parking

The main issue identified as being a barrier to attendance was parking, both availability of spaces and time limits.

Despite issues with capacity and seating, survey respondents were not supportive of introducing bookings, and preferred the flexibility of the current “first in, first served” system.

A dedicated space for meetings and events including Writers @ Stanton forms a significant part of the Stanton Library masterplan, developed to address space requirements for the Library into the future. The plan includes expansion and changes to the floorplan of the library to create flexible spaces for library events and commercial hire.

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# Writers at Stanton Feedback 2019

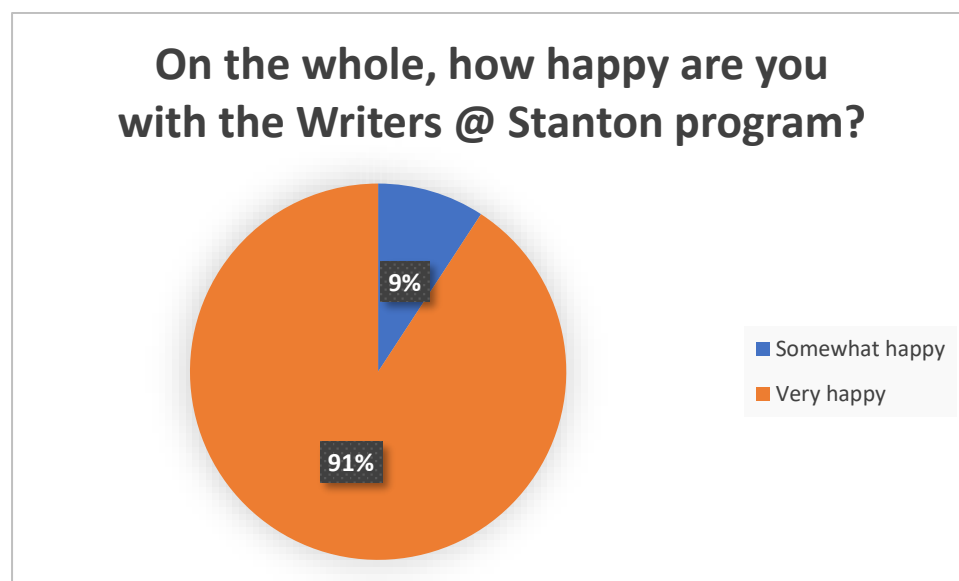
On online version of the survey was sent out with the December Stanton eNews and shared on the Library Twitter account. Print copies of the survey were distributed at the final Writers event for the year, and in the library throughout December.

There were 73 respondents in total.

## On the whole, how happy are you with the Writers @ Stanton Program?

100% of respondents were **Very happy** or **Somewhat happy** with the program

91% of respondent were **Very happy**



## What do you like about the Writers @ Stanton program?

Among the top things identified by respondents:

- The quality and variety of the speakers
- A chance to meet authors in person and ask questions
- The program is free
- The environment of the talks (intimate, welcoming, open to all)
- The program is interesting and varied

## What do you think could be improved about Writers @ Stanton?

The majority of respondents to this question indicated that there was nothing to be improved, and that they were happy with the way things were.

Some of the common suggestions or improvements identified were:

- More frequent events
- A larger, dedicated space to hold events
- More capacity and chairs for large events
- Allow more time for authors to speak, including questions

## Are there any barriers for you attending Writers @ Stanton, or attending more often?

The key barriers identified by respondents were:

- Parking
- Time and other commitments

Some of the comments about parking:

*Extremely difficult parking, both spaces and time limits*

*Wish free parking would be available to library users, maybe with under two hours parking time free?*

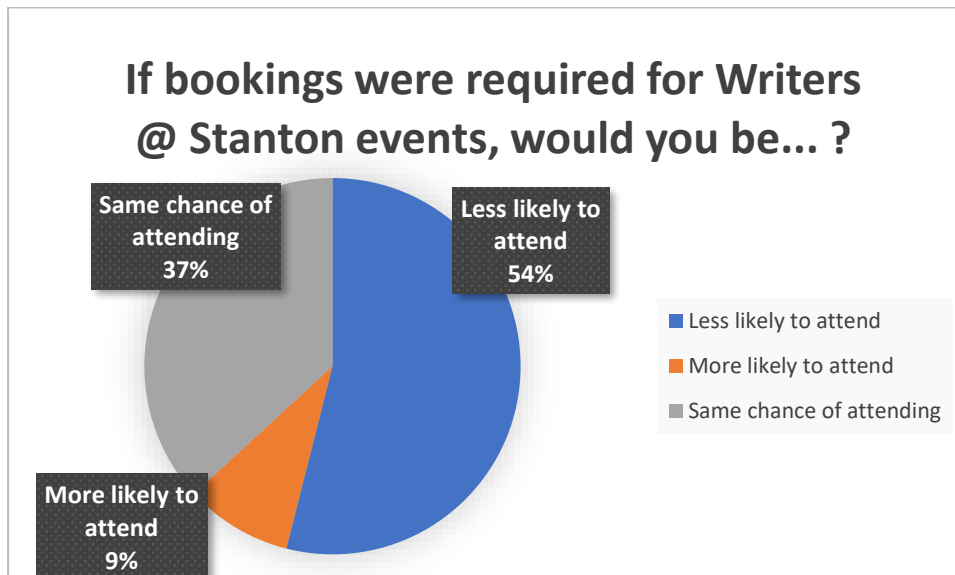
*Free car parking would be nice.*

## Bookings

We regularly receive suggestions from the community and publishers about taking bookings for Writers @ Stanton events, and included 2 questions on this topic to see what attendees to the program thought about it.

54% of respondents indicated that they would be less likely to attend if bookings were required.

37% indicated they would have the same chance of attending.



Comments on the topic of bookings were generally negative. A sample of these is listed below:

*Is an additional layer of admin beneficial? Would this be the first step to introducing fees?*

*I think you would need to oversubscribe the events to ensure all the people who don't turn up could have their seats taken by drop-ins.*

*I am concerned that you may require a Library Card to make a booking, I travel from Penrith area and am not a member of Nth Sydney Library speaking to other people who attend many others travel outside of Nth Sydney area*

*Sometimes I only decide to attend on the day or may have to cancel sometimes*

*Don't change the formula- it works. Bookings can be onerous.*

*Attracted to flexibility*

*Nice to be able to attend if free at the last moment*

*It seems to work as it is*

*Online bookings always seem to be complicated*

*I cannot see the need for from our perspective. Another chore- discourages last minute decision to come. Privacy concerns with booking systems*

*We are so lucky at Stanton- turning up has always been okay*

*What's the problem with just turning up? How does booking work? Extra work for someone.*

*Not interested in having to book on internet*

### **How do you usually find out about Library activities and programs?**

Respondents were able to select multiple options for this question.

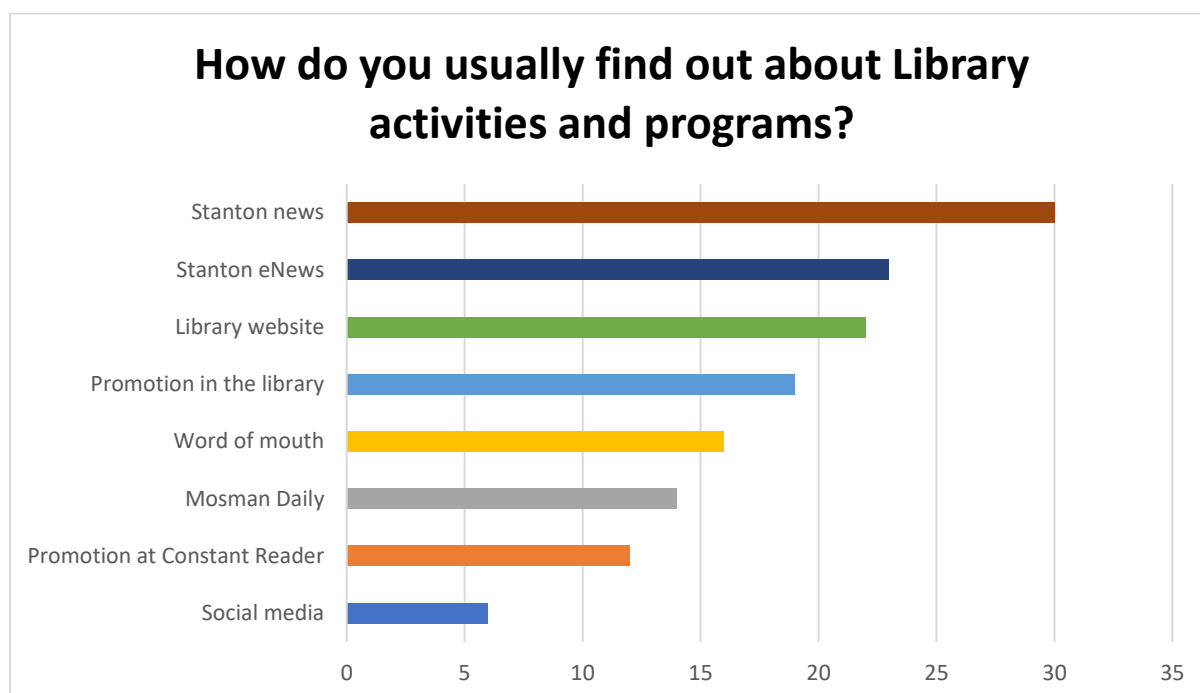
The top sources for information about Library programs were:

Stanton news (print newsletter)

Stanton eNews (email newsletter)



## Library website

**Any other thoughts?**

In general, comments in this section were positive and complimentary about the library and the Writers @ Stanton program. A sample of these is listed below:

*Big thanks to the Stanton staff making this program possible. Your efforts much appreciated.*

*I live on the Northern beaches but always love coming here*

*I prefer the non-fiction sessions*

*Improve acoustics! Seating so you can see speaker.*

*Just keep it up, it is wonderful 100/100*

*Keep up the good work*

*Very happy please don't change*

*Overall, I think 2019 has had a fabulous programme of speakers so thank you to the library staff that organise this programme.*

*A discount on books that are purchased after the author talk.*

*Please don't change it! Maybe use the council hall for expected large groups*

*Program is excellent, thank you*

*Thank you for doing great work*

*Thank you for hosting so many community events.*

*Thanks for giving me the chance to hear these interesting people talk*

*The continuation of an excellent event/ program for the community on the North Shore*

*Very grateful to have this still happening and still free. This is a really great library and I am lucky to be a member.*

*Wonderful opportunity offered by Stanton*

*Your efforts are most appreciated- where else could we meet up with these people and their views.*