

ALEXANDRA WRITER'S CENTRE SOCIETY



AWCS

2017/2018 ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by Natalie Vacha, Vice-President, Board of Directors | Sept. 5, 2018

Alexandra Writer's Centre Society

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In the 2017 strategic planning meeting held by the Board at that time, we identified a number of key areas for attention by the AWCS in the 2017-2018 operational year. Key points included getting a sense of the financial needs of the AWCS following the move to the cSPACE facility, generating feedback from the membership about their interests and needs from the AWCS, investing in our youth programming, and raising the profile and partnerships of the AWCS with external groups.

Now that we have completed the expenditures of moving into the new facility, we have been able to turn our attention to getting a picture of what our budget looks like currently. The short answer so far is that the budget is bigger. We have expanded our offerings and courses and both costs and revenues have gone up as a result. Expenses rose about 28%, once one factors out the costs of the move, largely as a result of greater expense for instructors and programs. Revenue increased about 23%, once the casino funds are factored out, again largely as a result of greater enrollment in programs.

We also ran a member survey, which we'll address more in a moment, and the survey gave us the best tool that we have had in years to help us make planning and programming decisions to better serve the membership. We made significant inroads with the youth programs, changing the programming, adding new elements, connecting with schools and the Calgary small press and zine communities, and negotiating a new and more rewarding contract with our youth director Kim Firmston, who has been a remarkable resource for the AWCS in terms of growing the youth programs and working to transition those members into our broader membership to guarantee the regeneration and sustainability of the AWCS.

The AWCS has also expanded its outreach and partnership with other organizations. Our participation in the Alberta Culture Days here at cSPACE gave us significant exposure outside of our own membership, with thousands of people encountering us for the first time. We have taken advantage of programming from the Rosza Foundation, and sent both the President and another director, Karen Lee, to a workshop on creating Board sustainability at the Calgary Foundation. Our youth programs have outreached with SPANc, the Small Press Action Network (Calgary), through participation in the inaugural Calgary Small Press Fair, and attended the annual Teacher's Convention, bringing further exposure to the AWCS and beginning to generate revenue for new in-school programming. We are also currently partnering with the Alberta Writers Guild and Loft 112 to create a new Borderlands Writing Circle for writing newcomers, and have recently registered to begin accessing funding opportunities through the Canada Council for the Arts.

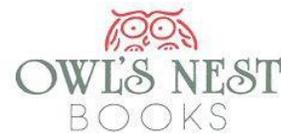
Going forward, we will draw from our 2018 strategic planning session and focus on improving our services and our financial sustainability, and by strengthening our outreach to like-minded organizations. In part, this has begun with the new membership structure passed this summer, and by reallocating funds from supporting FreeFall magazine to underwrite the administrative position now staffed by Ali Bryan. We also plan to begin creation of a strategic reserve fund, and are currently at work on a new marketing and outreach initiative in partnership with cSPACE and several of our neighbors in the building.

Colin Martin
President, Board of Directors

2017/2018 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President	Colin Martin
Vice President	Natalie Vacha
Treasurer	Nicholas Friesen
Secretary	Jill Thompson
Director-at-Large	Connie Donoghue
Director-at-Large	Carrie Mumford
Director-at-Large	Karen Lee
Director-at-Large	Margaret Brick

SPONSORS



PROGRAM DIRECTOR UPDATE

This past year has been one of learning. Learning what our members want and trying to adapt and create programming that meets those diverse needs.

We were lucky to have Heather Osborne with us from July 2017 to February 2018 as an intern from U of C. Having an intern helped us weather anticipated growth due to Alberta Culture Days and the growing exposure of the AWCS thanks to being part of the cSpace community. Heather has now completed her PhD and moved on to other endeavours. We hope to see her around sometime as an instructor or in some other capacity.

Of course, as business has grown, so has the physical demand on contract staff. In February 2018 we contracted Ali Bryan to replace Heather and we have seen a marked improvement in processes and program development. We now have regular office hours Monday to Friday and occasional weekends which has been great as it turns out Fridays we see a lot of walk-in traffic.

Between Heather, Ali and I, we ran 4 successful semesters with full programming, cancelling far less than expected. We hope this trend will continue to improve.

Our youth programs continue to grow thanks to the dedication of Kim Firmston and all the youth instructors and volunteers. We couldn't do it without them.

Together, Ali and I have developed new processes for course proposals and program planning to allow us a larger view of offerings before they are confirmed. The bar has been raised for our instructor base which has allowed us to attract new talent and keep programs as fresh as possible.

Keeping in mind our mandate, the results of the survey from year 2018, the strategic plan and the known needs of members we developed the Author Development Program which will launch in October 2018 and run until April 2019.

In 2018 we spent some time and money to upgrade our website to increase functionality and create a better shopping experience for our customers. With that came the ability to offer coupon codes which helps us to incentivize some of our programming and streamlines back office procedures at the same time.

Now with the new open writing salon, we see people coming in and out of our facility all day—some coming to write, or meeting with friends to discuss writing—and so many volunteers have stepped up when needed. For that we are eternally grateful.

We tried some new programs over the year. The Mentor in the Loop Program started out strong but quickly dwindled, costing us far more than anticipated but we learned from it and are revamping the way the program runs.

We introduced a Roundtable Series of discussions. One for fiction writers and one for memoir writers. These have been running the 3rd Tuesday of every month to moderate interest. These will continue in the coming year with the introduction of another one to be announced later in September.

The Friday morning Free Fall Writing sessions continue to run at capacity every Friday, with anywhere from 8-20 people attending.

One of the highlights of my year was the opportunity for professional development through the Rozsa Executive Arts Leadership Program. I worked with other arts management professionals to expand on leadership tools and become a better leader in the arts community for our contractors and members. I look forward to being able to continue to serve our membership for many years to come.

Robin van Eck
Program Director

VOLUNTEERS

We are pleased to say we have seen a huge increase in volunteerism in the past year. Thanks so much to everyone who came out to help in one capacity or another, from the move, putting together furniture, cleaning, host/hostessing, party preparation, leading committees, casino volunteers or taking on larger roles. We could not have done it without all your help.

Special Thanks

Kim Firmston	Shaun Dubyts	Sue McLarty	Darren Flach
Amber van Dyk	Vivian Hansen	Sarah Johnson	Jennifer Svoboda
Anne Metikosh	Marilyn Letts	Sally Hatcher	Blair Svoboda
Kathy Seifert	Judy Paterson	Ingrid Littmann-Tai	Madelaine Wong
Julia Donoghue	Maraya Loza Koxahn	Patricia Paterson	Justine Cooke
Laurie Fuhr	Josephine LoRe	Erik Birke	Lorraine Erickson
Howie Erickson	Carrie Mumford	Karen Lee	Jill Thompson
Nicholas Friesen	Colin Martin	Natalie Vacha	
And many more.			

Thank you to all our volunteers. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Over the past two fiscal years, the operations of the Alexandra Writers' Centre Society (the "Society") have undergone a significant transition. The Society relocated to the cSPACE King Edward arts hub, providing its members with dedicated writing spaces better suited for its courses, workshops and programs. Additionally, the Society developed new offerings for its members and expanded its existing programs, such as increasing youth programming and establishing the annual writers' retreat.

To facilitate these changes, the Society incurred various expenditures. The cSPACE relocation resulted in a variety of expenses, including moving costs, increased rental payments and the purchase of furniture and fixtures. The Society's new and expanded offerings for members required additional instructors and contractors to supervise and administer the programs. Further, newer programs were often supported by other sources of revenue as they were being implemented and developed.

Some of these above costs were one-time in nature while other expenses will continue to be paid for by the Society into the future. These various expenses resulted in the Society utilizing much of its available revenues and cash.

With this transitional period mostly passed, the Society is now focused on its financial resilience and sustainability as long-term goals. The Board collaborated with the Program Director and Youth Program Director to review revenues and expenditures in detail in order to identify opportunities for cost savings and improved efficiencies. Certain offerings were modified to better structure their associated costs or increase their value to members. Some expenditures were discontinued if they were found to offer insufficient cost recovery or provided limited value to members. The financial viability of new programs is being assessed by the program directors to help ensure these programs are supported by sufficient revenues, whether that be in the form of fees, grants or some other source of revenue.

Going forward, the financial risk facing the Society is its ability to sustain its cash position until the next Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission proceeds are received, which is currently expected to be during the last quarter of the 2018/2019 fiscal year. Further, the Society currently intends to establish a resiliency fund to better ensure a certain level of cash is maintained in order to mitigate any unforeseen financial or funding issues. This will require continued monitoring of the Society's cash, revenue and expenditures. The Society must also actively work to generate additional sources of revenue and identify further possible reductions in its expenditures.

Steps have been implemented to help achieve these goals with the above mentioned cost reductions and program revenue assessments. The approved membership rate increases have also been enacted for the 2018/2019 fiscal year. Further, funding obtained from certain annual grants has increased for the 2018/2019 fiscal year and new potential grants are being applied for. Finally, the program directors are focused on increasing membership and program enrollment while also developing new programs to meet the demands of the Society's members. Though additional work is still required, the Society is striving to achieve its financial goals and mitigate potential financial risks.

Nicholas Friesen
Treasurer

MEMBERSHIP

In 2017/18 we saw an increase of 64 new members joining the AWCS.

2017/18 Membership Rates

Regular Membership	\$60.00
Youth Membership	\$40.00

2018/19 Membership Rates (as of July 1, 2018)

Adult Membership	\$70.00
Youth Membership	\$50.00
New Membership Options:	
Student Membership	\$50.00
Seniors Membership	\$60.00

Current Membership Numbers

(As of June 30, 2018)

Regular Members	435
Honourary Members	5
Youth Members	62
Total	502

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

W.O. Mitchell Writer's Retreat

In June we held our second annual Writer's Retreat at the W.O. Mitchell Retreat Centre just north of Cochrane. Twenty participants and 2 facilitators (Marcello DiCintio and Jenna Butler) joined us for a weekend of writing, workshops and camaraderie. Overall the weekend was a great success and we look forward to doing it again next year.

Writer in Residence 2018

This year we welcomed Sarah L Johnson as our Writer in Residence. From March to May of this year, Sarah invited us to join her in the Literary Playground. She presented three workshops and completed 45 manuscript consultations as well as some fun game nights for writers to socialize. Thanks to Sarah for all her work. The next Writer in Residence will be announced at the AGM in September.

Adult Programming

We offered four semesters of classes from July 2017 to June 2018.

We invited Kelley Armstrong to host our Feature Workshop held at cSpace King Edward. We had about 30 people in attendance.

A couple of opportunities came to us that were not part of the planned programming. Literary Agent, Sam Hiyate contacted us to offer a workshop which we knew our members would love and couldn't pass up. This was held in March 2018. He offered some additional one-on-one consultations which filled up within a day.

We continued our partnership with Owl's Nest Books and held several events at the local bookstore. Our open mics continue to be well attended and have become a regular event that members and the public look forward to.

Community Collaborations

As the AWCS becomes more established within the community, we are working hard to expand current relationships and adopt new collaborations/partnerships. We have continued to work with Prospect PDD Services and The Loft 112 to promote literacy and arts to the community through Prospect's initiatives.

In May 2018, AWCS and the WGA came together in a Wine and Poetry event which saw approx. 40 guests and 5 talented local poets. We continue to foster and grow this relationship and look forward to some exciting new opportunities coming our way in 2018/19.

We are actively working with the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association (AMPA) to advance our programming in the area of magazines and freelance writing.

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

We had a wonderfully successful year and seen tremendous growth in our youth programs. Not only did we find a way to stem the initial loss of revenue from these programs, in the coming year all our programs will break even or even make a slight profit which will go towards helping the AWCS in general.

The clubs grew in size and we worked with a few organizations on projects and creative endeavours including Girls Rock Camp, the Calgary Public Library, Ramsay Robots (Beakerhead), and the Can Zine festival. We celebrated Freedom to Read week with a stop motion animation and an open mic (we had three during the year). Our Rogue Poets poetry team won Spirit of the Slam for the second year in a row at the Can You Hear Me Now Provincial High School Poetry Slam and published two anthologies. Looking to next year, we have revamped our program structure to better serve our youth and to make our clubs more self-sustaining.

Our AWCS Education programs which include Home School, AWCS in the Classroom, Homework Help (Tutoring), and Workshops/Classes did nothing but grow this year. It was the first year for a lot of these programs and although we had no idea what would happen, we were very pleased when they all became successful. We will continue to grow all of these next year through promotion and word of mouth. This year we were at both the Inspire Home School Conference and the Teachers' Convention.

Our camps grew as we had our first successful spring camp, increased numbers in our youth summer camp, and had two new individual one day camps. Our summer camps nearly tripled in size compared to last year. We are also expanding into all ages PD Day intensives for the coming school year. We expect to see slow growth in this as it is a new program.

We have many ideas based on our lessons from this year, and as usual, will be continuing to involve the kids in the decision making processes and idea creation. The AWCS Youth Programs have and will continue to be youth driven and quick to respond to the needs of our members and we know that next year will be as successful in years to come.

Kim Firmston
AWCS Youth Program Director

2018 AWCS MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Results Are In!

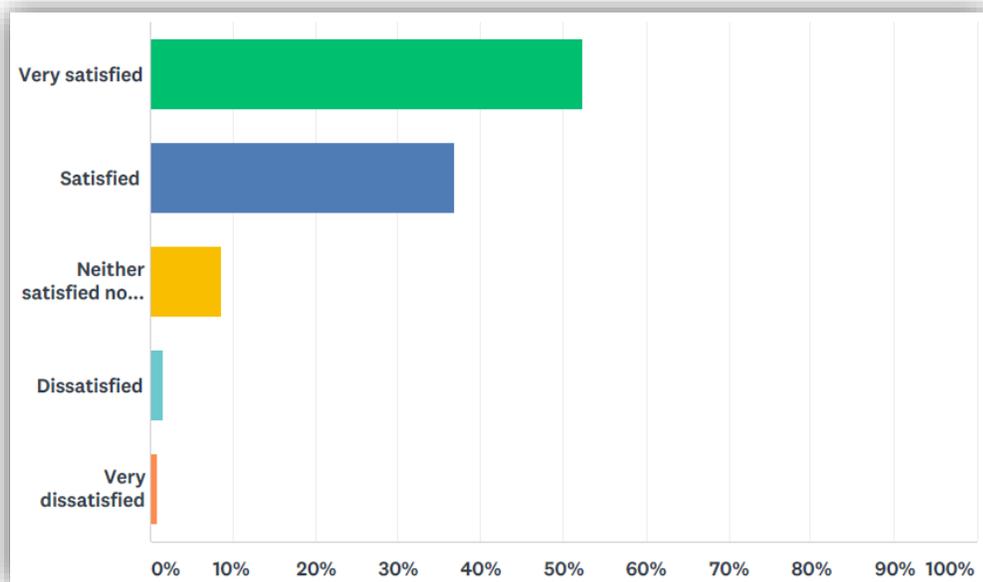
Earlier this year the AWCS conducted a survey to assess member satisfaction and our services and courses.

We would like to thank you for taking the time out of your day to complete the survey. Your feedback really makes a difference as it directly helps us to plan courses and improve services for all members.

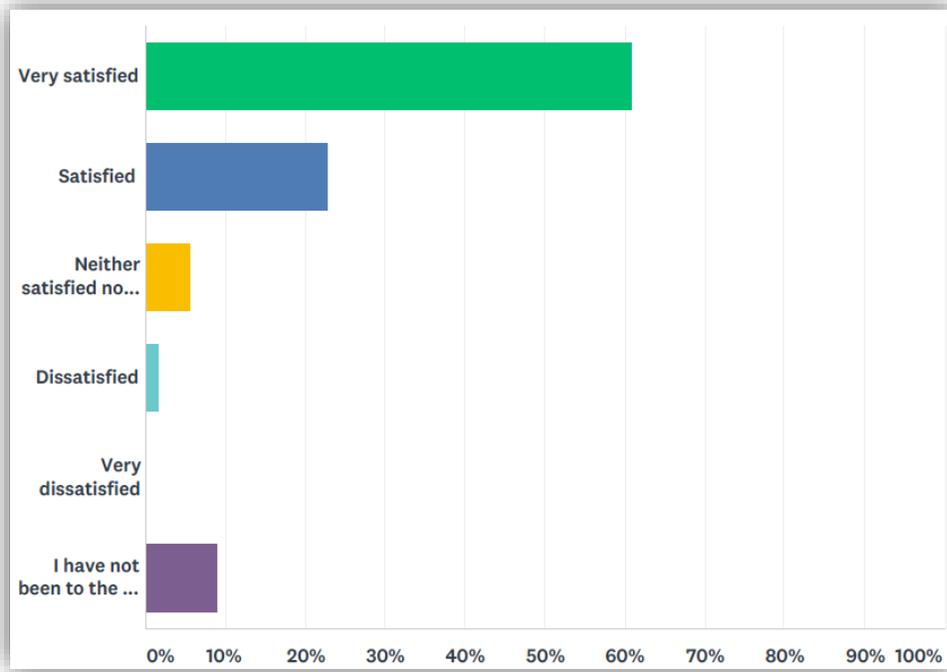
Survey highlights are below, and are using the full survey results in our program and course design for the 2018/2019 programming year and to inform the future focus of the AWCS.

Survey Highlights

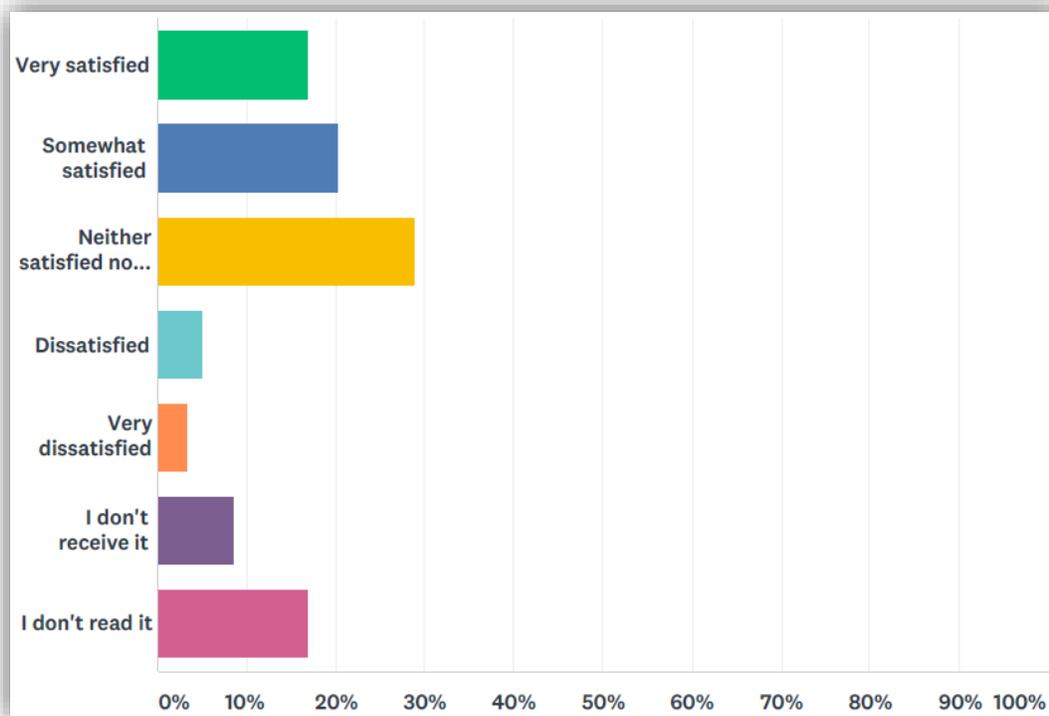
- 90% of people were satisfied or better with the AWCS.



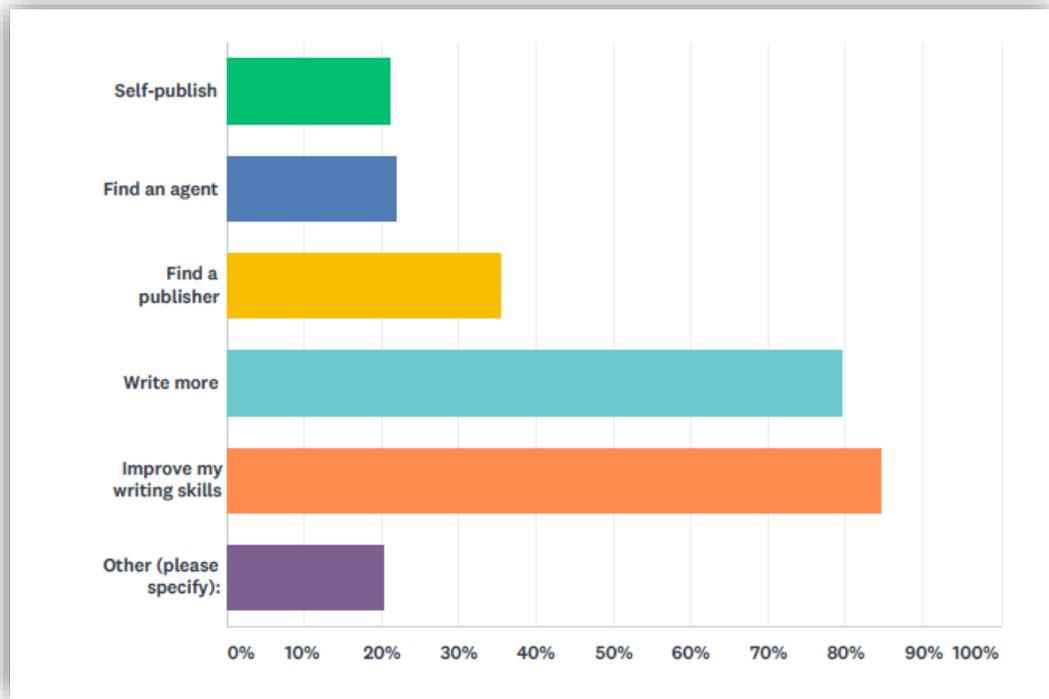
- 84% of people were satisfied or better with the new space.



- 37% are satisfied or better with FreeFall Magazine; 25% don't like it or don't read it; 29% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 8% don't receive it.



- The most frequently stated personal goals for writing are, wanting to improve writing skills (85%) and wanting to write more (80%). Finding a publisher came in third.



Continuing to provide you with relevant programs and services is important to us and to the future success of AWCS. Thank you again for making your voice heard. We hope you continue to get involved with AWCS to “start your story and hone your craft”!

CONTACT INFORMATION

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