



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



I asked my child beneath a tree:
which one would you rather be,
a small slim reed or a strong oak tree?
Would you be the tree if the wind blows
that stands firm on the ground on which it grows
but maybe falls and maybe fails
if that wind turns out to be a gale?
Or would you be the soft green reed
that's prepared to give and prepared to bend
and survives that gale to stand again?

She said *no, neither one of those*
I want to be the wind
I want to be the wind.

- Cate Kennedy, 'Reed and Oak',
Joint winner, Middle of the Air 2025



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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Red Room Poetry acknowledges the Elders and Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters, skies and languages where we live, work, write and share poetry. We are grateful to collaborate with First Nations people, and respect their continuing cultures as we move across Country.

Our First Nations Wisdom Circle and Truth & Reconciliation Pledge guide us in our work.

OUR STORY

They tried to call this survival.
But we called it dancing.
We made drums out of ribcages,
hymns from the howls.
We wrote poems inside the smoke
and passed them like secret seeds.

- Rataj Abdullah, from 'A World on Fire',
commissioned as part of the Youth Ambassadors program 2025

Red Room Poetry is Australia's leading organisation for commissioning, creating, publishing, performing, and promoting contemporary poetry in all its forms. We make poetry vibrant, visible, relevant, and accessible for all.

Our program is available for everyone. We amplify First Nations voices, support emerging and developing poets, and collaborate with communities to make positive change through educational, environmental, and lived experience programs.

You can meet our poets and read their poems any time at redroompoetry.org

We present poetry events in every state and territory, offer free events and workshops online, and share poems with the nation through broadcast and digital technologies.

Over more than twenty years, we have produced hundreds of poetry events, published over forty-three thousand poems, helped launch the careers of several generations of writers, commissioned and paid well over a thousand poets, engaged over two hundred thousand students, and developed the world's largest library of contemporary Australian poetry.



Nardi Simpson performs at the Art Gallery of NSW during Poetry Month. Photo by Art Gallery of NSW

FROM OUR CHAIR



After two years serving on the board, it is a great honour to succeed Michael Pembroke as Chair of Red Room Poetry. Michael led the board through six years of immense change and growth, despite the challenges of the pandemic. As we enter 2026, our sector faces different pressures. Debates around freedom of expression, censorship and global politics have made the arts a fraught environment in which to create and work. Meanwhile advances in AI leave us wondering where the future of human creativity lies. Yet, even as these uncertainties grow, I am more certain than ever before that creativity is fundamental to what it means to be human, and that finding a path forward to sustain and protect it has never been more important.

Poetry may not save the world, but it does create a space of relative safety where we can make art, share our experience and views, and learn from others. A space where, so far, AI has little to offer. Every poem is an act of bravery and individuality, at a time when those qualities feel more important than ever. My role as Chair is to ensure that Red Room Poetry can continue its work firing the creativity of Australians young and old - established poets as well as occasional, have-a-go poets - and do so unimpeded by the fluctuating pressures of national politics and economics. At the heart of this is a commitment to bring poetry more vividly into the lives of all Australians, in ways that are accessible, unexpected and deeply engaging.

Red Room Poetry has managed to do this for 23 years. That is not luck. On behalf of the board, I want to thank the team for everything they do, and all the governments, foundations, donors and partners without whom none of it could happen. By supporting our program, you enable new generations to discover the joy and benefits of poetry.

Emma Maple-Brown



FROM OUR CEO

Breadth and depth. Those are the words I think of looking back on 2025 and my second year (and a half) with Red Room Poetry. On one hand, we expanded the media partnerships we developed through Contains Strong Language, ensuring wider national reach for our projects. On the other, we prioritised face-to-face workshops and sustained, nurturing engagement with students, poets and marginalised communities. It remains a source of immense pride for me to be involved in an organisation that speaks to millions while believing every voice matters.

Somehow, amidst a jam-packed program, we were able to step back and, with the support of Creative Australia, conduct dozens of consultation conversations and workshops to develop our proposal for a new Youth Poet Laureate scheme. I particularly enjoyed hearing young poets talk about the role poetry plays in their lives.

The same themes came up again and again. Poetry gives us a voice, helps us say things which can't otherwise be said, and makes us feel proud. It was a powerful reminder of what Red Room Poetry is here for.

The successes of the 2021-25 funding period have allowed us to build our reserves and ringfence funding to support the future Youth Poet Laureate scheme. None of this would be possible without the very many generous funders and donors who believe in what we do.

I want to thank the board and Wisdom Circle for their support throughout 2025. Our Chair Michael Pembroke stepped down at the conclusion of his second term, having navigated the organisation through a pandemic, unprecedented growth and the transition between CEOs. Emma Maple-Brown has been an energising force on the board the last two years and I know she will build on Michael's legacy. I am grateful that Red Room Poetry has a board that asks

pertinent questions but always respects the editorial independence and integrity of the organisation.

I also want to thank the First Nations employees, freelancers, Elders, contractors, poets and students who work with us. It requires trust, and we do not take that for granted. As we acknowledge in our Truth and Reconciliation Pledge, "We are aware of the importance of changing the ways in which we behave and operate in our journey of walking together."

Finally, I want to thank our incredible team for their dedication and brilliance. Their commitment to the art form is second to none. Whenever I want to know where poetry is at, I just listen to them as they talk about the week-in, week-out work of this busy company.

Jonty Claypole MBE

FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

As we reflect on our second year as Artistic Directors, we hold a deep sense of responsibility and humility in a world that feels increasingly fractured and fragile. The spaces in which poetry breathes and speaks are under pressure, where truth-telling, the voices of the marginalised, experimentation and play, and the stories of community must be championed more fiercely than ever before.

In 2025, Red Room Poetry stood at a crossroads of urgency and hope. We operated within a social landscape shadowed by rising censorship, deepening divides, and the looming spectres of conflict and unrest. Yet, it is precisely in this moment that poetry's quiet power to heal, to connect, and to resist becomes indispensable. Our work is an invitation to listen deeply, to honour complexity, and to hold space for voices too often silenced.

To recollect the womb,
sink a fishing line down
the rain-darkened river.

- Eunice Andrada,
'Everywhere Mother',
Poetry Month

At the core of our practice lies a commitment to First Nations cultural sovereignty, embodied in the guidance of our Wisdom Circle and the ongoing development of our First Nations Engagement Strategy. This commitment is not only a foundation but a living, breathing promise to work in reciprocity with Country, community, and culture.

"Being in a room full of poets is a gorgeous and necessary way to spend an evening, particularly in a time of unending horror, hypocrisy and senselessness. There is something pure and expansive about the artform of poetry."

- Jan Fran, host, Poetry Month Gala

Our First Nations projects, particularly Baraya Barray - Whale Song, continue to be a beacon of intergenerational strength, carrying forward the sacred knowledge of Country and language through song, poetry, and dance. This work with and in communities is a testament to the resilience and renewal that arise when

cultural memory is honoured and shared.

Our environmental programs have evolved into a vibrant ecosystem of voices, growing in diversity and depth. Poem Forest's 2025 thematic focus on the *Understory*, the often unseen, yet vital layers beneath the forest canopy, mirrors our collective need to attend to the subtle, the overlooked, and the foundational stories that sustain us. Through expanded categories and culturally responsive workshops, this program has sought to dismantle barriers and invite participation from all our young voices.

One of our key remits is to continue to amplify poetry in all of its forms and to engage new audiences in new ways. In August we delivered our fifth Poetry Month, which included hybrid events, workshops and a raft of brilliant commissions, pushing the line of who gets to engage with poetry. It resulted in record media coverage and a developing advocacy

role in the publishing and bookselling sector, and saw us work with four brilliant Youth Ambassadors.

2025 was the year we brought poetry back to the air nationally. A partnership with the ABC meant Australian poems being recorded and broadcast weekly, as well as the successful launch of Middle of the Air, a public competition celebrating the intersection of poetry and song.

We have also faced challenges that reflect the precariousness of our moment, testing our adaptability and resolve, reminding us that the infrastructures supporting creative expression must be as resilient as the voices they carry. We are grateful to work with a team whose care and innovation have ensured connection and creativity endure, even when the ground shifts beneath us.

In a world that often feels fragmented, we are buoyed by the idea that poetry offers a path toward wholeness, and to imagine futures rooted in empathy and justice. We invite you to journey with us through the voices, stories, films, and songs of our 2025 programs. May they inspire reflection and action, and remind us that even in uncertain times, poetry plants seeds of connection that endure.

**Nicole Smede &
David Stavanger**



2025 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

700,000+

people watched, read or listened

15,624

people created poetry through our programs



3.3M

engaged online

100%

would participate again



336

First Nations students, Elders, custodians and poets involved across projects

6,700+

school students attended online workshops



3,743

student poems written and trees planted for Poem Forest



183

poets and artists paid, performing and engaged



85%

agreed the activity had a positive impact on their health and wellbeing

445

poems published or performed



[Visit our Poem Library](#)

OUR POETS

Rataj Abdullah
 David Adès
 Michael Mohammed Ahmad
 Munira Tabassum Ahmed
 Claire Albrecht
 Aishah Ali
 Eunice Andrada
 Evelyn Araluen
 Eric Avery
 Mualla Aydoğan
 Ferdous Bahar
 Julia Baird
 Timmah Ball
 Alison J Barton
 Tamryn Bennett
 Patrick Berryman
 Joni Boyd
 Bradley Bradley
 Charlee Brooks
 David Brooks
 Jarad Bruinstroop
 Samm Cameron
 Mahalia Charlotte
 Eileen Chong
 Caitlin Clark
 Dave Clark
 Maxine Beneba Clarke
 Cocoa the Conscious
 Coeee
 Alex Creece
 Amy Crutchfield
 Madeleine Dale
 Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon
 Luke Davies
 Yahya Tresor Djomani-Ousmane
 DOBBY
 Benjamin Dodds

Willo Drummond
 Winnie Dunn
 Isabella Eichler-Onus
 Theodore Ell
 Kate Evans
 Dakota Feirer
 Toby Fitch
 Jan Fran
 Alan Fyfe
 Claire Gaskin
 Jo Giles
 Mindy Gill
 Ross Gillett
 Barry James Gilson
 Madison Godfrey
 Peter Goldsworthy
 Stan Grant
 Eloise Grills
 Jarmal Haas
 Jaala Hallett
 Allis Hamilton
 Lamisse Hamouda
 Natalie Harkin
 Justin Heazlewood
 Hasib Hourani
 Andy Jackson
 Suren Jayemanne
 Jill Jones
 Joel Keith
 Cate Kennedy
 Sukhjit Khalsa
 Meyrnah Khodr
 John Kinsella
 Sime Knezevic
 Maggie Knight-Williams
 Manveen Kohli
 Luca Kronenberg

Dorianne Laux
 Nam Le
 Jeanine Leane
 Charmaine Ledden-Lewis
 Tessa Leon
 Tim Loveday
 Lay Maloney
 Amuor Malou
 Atoc Malou
 Sara Mansour
 Shey Marque
 Laurie May
 Rachael Mead
 Shaine Melrose
 Heather Mitchell

Audrey Molloy
 Jazz Money
 Rebecca Moran
 Sam Morley
 Adrian Mouhajer
 Melanie Mununggurr
 Claudia Nicholson
 Lucy Norton
 Blake Nuto
 Nyaluak Leth (aka NMMWL)
 Ifeoma Peace Obiegbu
 Bebe Oliver
 Rania Omar
 Nathanael O'Reilly
 Kaya Ortiz
 David Ishaya Osu
 Shele Parker Black

Luke Patterson
 Nancy Pattison
 Indrani Perera
 Felicity Plunkett
 David Quirk
 Aunty Anjilkurri Rhonda Radley
 Vidya Rajan
 Noelia Ramon
 Erin Reedie
 Kendrea Rhodes
 Izzy Roberts-Orr
 Izzy Russell

Theresa Sainty
 Omar Sakr
 Sara M Saleh
 Joyce Saunders
 Pam Schindler
 Anna Schneider
 Leah Senior
 Nathan Mudyi Sentance
 Sez
 Beejay Silcox
 Nardi Simpson
 Ali Jane Smith
 Evie Snowden
 SOLCHLD
 Barrina South
 Svetlana Sterlin
 Robert Sullivan
 Andrew Sutherland
 Dominic Symes
 Mei Szetu
 Salote Tawale
 Heather Taylor-Johnson
 Richard Tipping
 Kara Tuck
 Sophie Tyrell
 Megan Ugle
 Ellen van Neerven
 Dženana Vucic
 Tais Rose Wae
 Ben Walter
 James Walton
 Giles Watson
 Kaitlen Wellington
 Troy Wong
 Fiona Wright
 Grace Yee
 Tyson Yunkaporta
 Zafty
 Xiaole Zhan





BARAYA BARRAY - WHALE SONG

Baraya Barray Bundjalung.
Photo by Andrew Kainerder

Baraya Barray (Sing Country) - Whale Song is a First Nations-led cultural project within our Poetry in First Languages program. It is about teaching First Nations kids the songlines of their Country, giving them the power and agency to create their own stories through poetry, language, song, dance and art, and showing them how these can connect us all.

The program was established in 2024 to revitalise language and strengthen cultural connection among young Indigenous people, using creative expression grounded in whale stories and Sea Country.

In 2025, the program delivered immersive three-day workshops

across Gumbaynggirr, Birrbay and Bundjalung Country, bringing young people together with their Elders to explore their Whale songlines. The workshops offer a chance for intergenerational knowledge transfer across poetry, dance, song, visual art, and cultural practice, connecting communities through shared storytelling, language, and creative collaboration. The program commissioned new multi-artform works by First Nations artists reflecting the commitment to cultural storytelling through poetry, sound, and movement.

Along the way, the activities of the program were documented by filmmaker Tad Souden, who is creating a short film capturing the voices, stories and performances that celebrate the living culture

“There’s a lot of trauma with the silencing of language historically, and when we’re in a movement of revitalisation and renewal of language then there’s healing.”

~ Arelene Gili Mehan, Birpai and Dughutti galban and custodian

of whale song, Country and language. The film is scheduled for release in early 2026, with plans for festival screenings and community presentations.

The 2024 Djeera Gadhu program with Waminda and Coomaditchie Aboriginal Corporation continued with a two-night camp for students involved at Bundanon on 2nd June, and we presented a session on *Baraya Barray - Whale Song* at the Sydney Writers' Festival in May.

Bulgarr (mountain) says:
Ngatha (I am) watching over Barray (Country)
I answer:
I look up to you.

- 'Harney, 'Country Says', Baraya Barray Biripi

Baraya Barray - Whale Song was showcased nationally at the PULiIMA Indigenous Languages & Technology Conference in Darwin to language custodians and practitioners from across Australia, including a women's poetry workshop for over 400 Aboriginal women, many writing their first poems inspired by whale song. This national exposure strengthened Baraya Barray's network, fostering new partnerships with Elders and custodians from Bundjalung, Lower Yuin, Darkinjung, Awabakal, and Torres Strait communities, ensuring the program's continued growth and cultural relevance.



Baraya Barray Bundjalung.
Photo by Andrew Kainerder

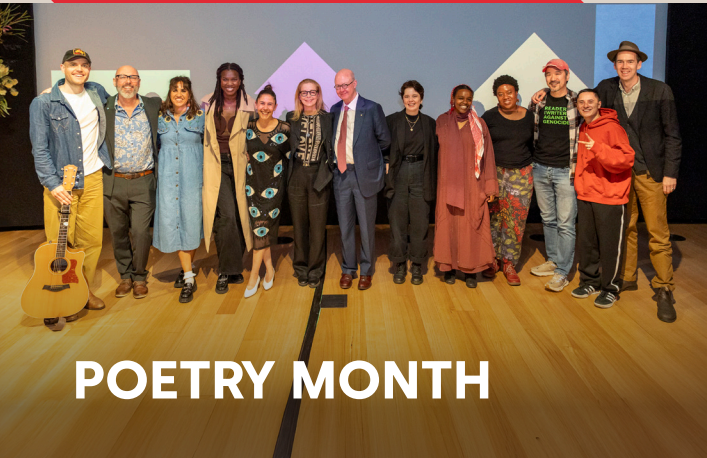
“Ancient Languages is good medicine for the Country. That’s why we sing it, dance it, paint it.”

~ Mudjai, Descendant of Nganyaywana, Gumbainga, Dughutti peoples, Yuin Gurangi, Gamilaraay Bingai



This photo and right: Baraya Barray Biripi. Photo by Andrew Kainerder





POETRY MONTH

Red Room Poetry created Poetry Month (1-31 August) to celebrate Australian poetry in all of its forms and perspectives. It is a welcoming experience for poets, readers and audiences of every age.

Our fifth Poetry Month in 2025 saw a sparkling array of high-profile commissions, ambassadors, national and digital events, readings, residencies, showcases, publications, professional development, public initiatives, workshops, competitions, community-led

“There are precious few places in our world to find a language of silence. Red Room Poetry offered me a chance to speak again; even better to listen again.”

~ Stan Grant, Poetry Ambassador

activities, and delivery of our fifth live and live-streamed Poetry Month Gala.

New live event highlights included the “Hatred of Poetry” debate in Melbourne, a poetry panel focused on wellbeing at State Library of South Australia, ekphrastic commissions connected to the AGNSW collection, and a co-curated Poetry Film Night with Sydney Opera House in early September, as a final coda to this year’s Poetry Month activities.

We published a newly-commissioned poem every day in August, created by a prominent poet or public figure. As always, these commissions were a creative highlight of the year. Each was accompanied by a writing prompt to kindle the creativity of our community and the public, who were invited to contribute short

“It was an incredible evening of collective joy, tears, hope and community - the best of our shared humanity and a reminder that words are not failing us - they are necessary to guide us through darkness and remind us of our light!”

~ Audience response, National Poetry Month Gala survey

poems for our daily online competition.

We welcomed Dymocks as our writing competition and bookstore partner, and expanded Phone-a-Poem to include ten new regional Victorian commissions and installations at festivals and Dymocks sites. In partnership with The Guardian, we republished four commissioned poems resulting in an extra 123,200 online readers across August.

Finally - and excitingly - we debuted a Youth Ambassadors program as a pilot for the Youth Poet Laureate program. The four Youth Ambassadors - Rataj Abdullah, Charlee Brooks, Maggie Knight-Williams, and Jek Oladipo, aka Zafty - took part in commissions, performances, broadcasts and festivals during and beyond Poetry Month. They also advised Red Room on our proposed Youth Poet Laureate program.

See how our heavenly bodies silhouette in the moonlight, under streetlights, in the limelight; in hindsight? —we stay steady, vibrating at the most heights!

~Nyaluak Leth, ‘Silhouettes of a Revolution’, commissioned for 3oin30

OUTCOMES

43 poets commissioned and published

54 artists professionally engaged

19 Red Room events, plus community events across the country

5000+ participants and audience, live and online

85 media features including poems published in The Guardian which reached 123,000 people

1,250 Australian poetry books added to Dymocks shelves nationally

95% of participants and poets surveyed rated their experience as Good-Excellent

Left: National Poetry Month Gala. Photo by Jason Nicholas
This photo: Vidya Rajan performs at The Wheeler Centre during Poetry Month. Photo by James Henry

▾ [About Poetry Month](#)

Biliirr, singing sweet symphonies
Music to my ears,
Constantly completing albums of the
sweetest sounds,
Biliirr.

- Adon P, Year 5, 'Biliirr', winner of Primary First Nations category, Poem Forest



This photo and left: Poem Forest Winners' Ceremony. Photos by Tad Souden

OUTCOMES

3,700+ student and teacher poems created and published

3,700+ trees planted with Wollongong City Council

5,000+ students attended 10 workshops and events

350+ schools participated, from every state and territory

POEM FOREST

Poem Forest is a positive climate action program that encourages students and teachers to write nature poems. For each poem received, a tree is planted on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Country in partnership with Wollongong City Council to restore endangered habitats and address critically low canopy cover.

The 2025 program celebrated its fifth year with significant growth and innovation under new First Nations co-producers Nicole Smede and Luke Patterson, broadening competition prize categories and introducing an annual theme.

The theme this year was *Understory* - a focus on the vital yet often overlooked lower forest ecosystem. This was an invitation to students and teachers to slow down, listen deeply, and give voice to the vibrant life beneath the forest canopy.

Red Room Poetry's digital resources and free online workshops offered poetic inspiration, environmental knowledge and poetic techniques to inspire students, many of whom are writing poetry for the first time. Online workshops engaged thousands of primary and secondary students nationally, and aligned with key environmental observances such as International Day for Biological Diversity,

"It feels amazing to be able to turn our words into planting trees and creating something real. Poem Forest shows that our writing can make a difference, our ideas can grow, help nature, and become part of something living!"

~ Teacher feedback, Poem Forest survey

World Environment Day, Science Week, and Threatened Species Day. In-person community workshops and drop-in sessions at Wollongong Botanic Garden and the Illawarra Nature Festival integrated First Nations pedagogical approaches, encouraging participation and connection to Country. Expanded prize categories for 2025 included new First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) Primary and

Secondary prizes. These have supported greater inclusion and participation from underrepresented communities, while maintaining high-quality creative engagement across all ten categories.

Of the 3,742 entries received from students and teachers nationwide, 3.87% were First Nations entries and 22.47% CaLD entries — strong representation for the first year of these new categories.

The 2025 judging panel included Tyson Yunkaporta, Aurora Liddle Christie, Blake Nuto, and Jennine Primmer (Wollongong City Council).

Read the poems

ABC COLLABORATIONS



Rotaj Abdullah records Line Break for ABC Radio National. Photo by Jonty Claypole

MIDDLE OF THE AIR

“‘Collaboration’ and ‘poet’ don’t often go into the same sentence, but this experience showed me what fertile and unexpected territory this can be, and I loved the ‘relinquishing of control’ it required to make something new and unexpected from the material.”

~ Cate Kennedy, winning poet, Middle of the Air competition

Middle of the Air is a new Red Room Poetry program that celebrates the intersection of poetry and song. An open competition, launched on ABC’s The Music Show during Poetry Month, invited the general public to submit a poem or lyric. Two winning poems would then be interpreted and professionally recorded in an ABC studio by leading contemporary songwriters.

We received over 1,000 entries. Acclaimed musicians DOBBY and Leah Senior adapted the winning poems into songs which were recorded and performed on ABC Radio National’s The Music Show as part of Aus Music Month, and then across Double J and the broader ABC network. The winning poets also received a \$1000 commission.

▼ [Poems and tracks](#)

LINE BREAK: ABC WEEKLY POEM

“I loved being part of Line Break. It was an absolute privilege to have my work broadcast for a national audience. Everything about the experience furthered my development as a poet”

~ Troy Wong, commissioned poet

Line Break is a new partnership with ABC Radio National that brings poetry back to the national airwaves. Beginning in February, ABC Radio National recorded a poem for broadcast each Wednesday. The program, which was curated by Red Room Poetry, included poets whose work we had commissioned, poets with recent collections, and spoken word artists. Forty-two artists were showcased across 2025, with an average of 15,000-18,000 listeners per episode.

▼ [Listen to the poems](#)



POETRY MONTH COVERAGE & TOP POEMS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

“Thank you again for working with us for the Top 100 Poetry event at the State Library the other week. It was really terrific, with so much heft to the discussion”

~ Kate Evans, ABC RN Book Shelf host

ABC Radio National covered Poetry Month with artist interviews, readings and discussions on various shows, as well as broadcasting Poetry Month commissions. We also partnered on and curated a live event, Top Poems of the 21st Century. It was recorded for broadcast, then aired as part of ABC Radio National’s Top 100 Books poll.

OUTCOMES

49 poets and artists paid and broadcast

42 poems broadcast for weekly segment

600K+ listeners to poem broadcasts

1,200+ entries in lyric-writing competition

▼ [Listen to the broadcast](#)

MAD POETRY

Try calling it an adventure.
Imagine every unfinished project
as a celebration of process
because nothing rushes its finish.

- Lamisse Hamouda, 'Instead of ADHD'

MAD Poetry creates a safe writing space for emerging voices with a lived/living experience of mental health issues to express how they see the world, to define themselves through their creativity not their diagnosis, and explore by pen and page their experience of illness, institutions, recovery, self-care, and beyond.

Our national online MAD Poetry Zoom workshop series ran successfully across October in partnership with Wellways, led by four lived experience facilitators, overseen and supported by the project's producer David Stavanger.

We also published six new poetry commissions by lived experience poets through October as part of Mental Health Month.

"It has been a great series and I am so glad I happened upon it via a Red Room Poem. The community and team/facilitators embraced everyone in a safe space, and creativity flowed. It was a powerful experience and one we all wished was able to continue."

~ MAD Poetry workshop participant

"The MAD Poetry project has provided me with a safe and welcoming space to explore my experiences with mental health, not simply as diagnosis nor definition but as meter & sonic, lineation & enjambment – forces that have shaped and reshaped me both on the page and beyond it. It was a pleasure working with the team – I couldn't think of a more enriching opportunity."

~ Tim Loveday, commissioned and workshop poet

▼ [About MAD Poetry](#)

OUTCOMES

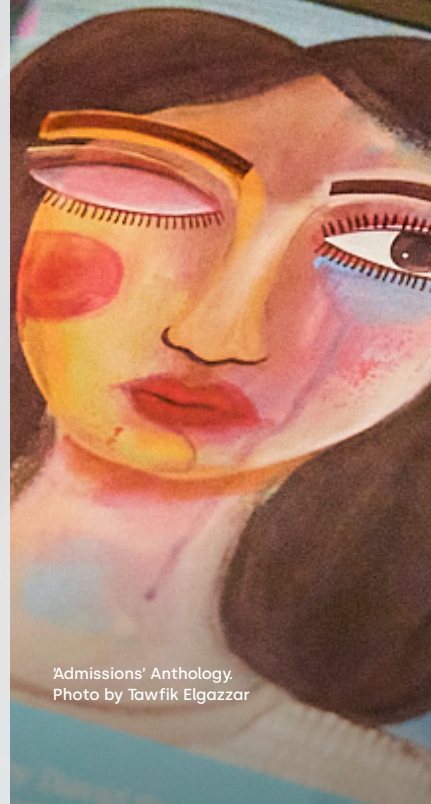
6 lived experience poets commissioned or engaged

4 online national workshops delivered

175 workshop participants with lived experience

91% strongly agreed it had **improved their sense of wellbeing**

92% said it **enabled them to access an activity** they would not otherwise have been able to attend



Admissions' Anthology.
Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar

RED ROOM FELLOWSHIP

Each year, in partnership with Varuna - the National Writers' House, the Red Room Poetry Fellowship offers a week-long residency that gives six poets creative space to deeply engage with their practice, develop their craft, and build a community with each other. In 2025, five poets joined in person, and a sixth remotely. All received a paid stipend, and one-on-one mentoring.

We received a record 219 eligible applications. The 2025 Fellows (announced on World Poetry Day) were Dzenana Vucic (VIC), Nam Le (VIC), Kaitlen Wellington (ACT), Madison Godfrey (WA) and Xiaole Zhan (VIC), and Shaine Melrose (SA) who received the Anywhere Remote Residency. The judges for 2025 were Theresa Sainty, Sara M. Saleh, and Kent McCarter.

"The Red Room Fellowship at Varuna was transformative for me, very much a 'volta' moment of my life. Being able to work hard at writing within a community of other poets also working hard at writing challenged me and inspired me in ways I hadn't experienced before. As a young writer, I'm still searching for examples of what it means to build a livable, meaningful life, and I've never really dared to think much about how writing or poetry might factor into this, beyond doing my own thing privately on my laptop in my room. So this week was very special, being able to catch a glimpse of other possibilities, to dare to imagine more."

~ Xiaole Zhan, Emerging Fellow

▼ [Read or listen to the poems](#)

Not homes but housing — high rise —
slum-reclaimed, stacked in virgin skies
with killer views.

- Nam Le from 'Richmond'



OUTCOMES

5 fellows in residence

1 Anywhere Remote fellow

6 new commissioned poems published

Nam Le performs at the National Poetry Month Gala.
Photo by Jason Nichol

YOUTH POET LAUREATE PROGRAM

In 2025, Red Room Poetry secured a Creative Futures Fund grant to plan and pilot a national Youth Poet Laureate program. The intention is to honour the creative talent of young Australians, create new opportunities for early-career poets and give the public a chance to hear the voices, perspectives and creativity of young people.

Over the course of the year, we piloted the scheme through Poetry Months Youth Ambassador program, consulted dozens of young poets both individually and through roundtable discussions, set up partnerships with organisations across Australia, and established networks with similar Youth Poet Laureate programs in the USA and UK.

We ended the year with a proposed model for the program. Every two years,

“I want this program to be able to tell anybody that they belong, that their voice matters, even when it shakes. Especially when it shakes.”

~ Zafty, 2025 Youth Ambassador

Red Room Poetry will create and support a cohort of eight State/Territory Youth Poet Laureates aged 18-25, of whom one will become National Youth Poet Laureate. The 8 poets will be offered paid commissions, mentoring opportunities, public performances and media appearances.

As part of our educational mission, Red Room Poetry

will also support schools around Australia to create their own School Poet Laureates. In time some of those School Poet Laureates will become Youth Poet Laureates in the adult program. Our intention is to create a clear pathway for poets from school-age to early career and professional practice.



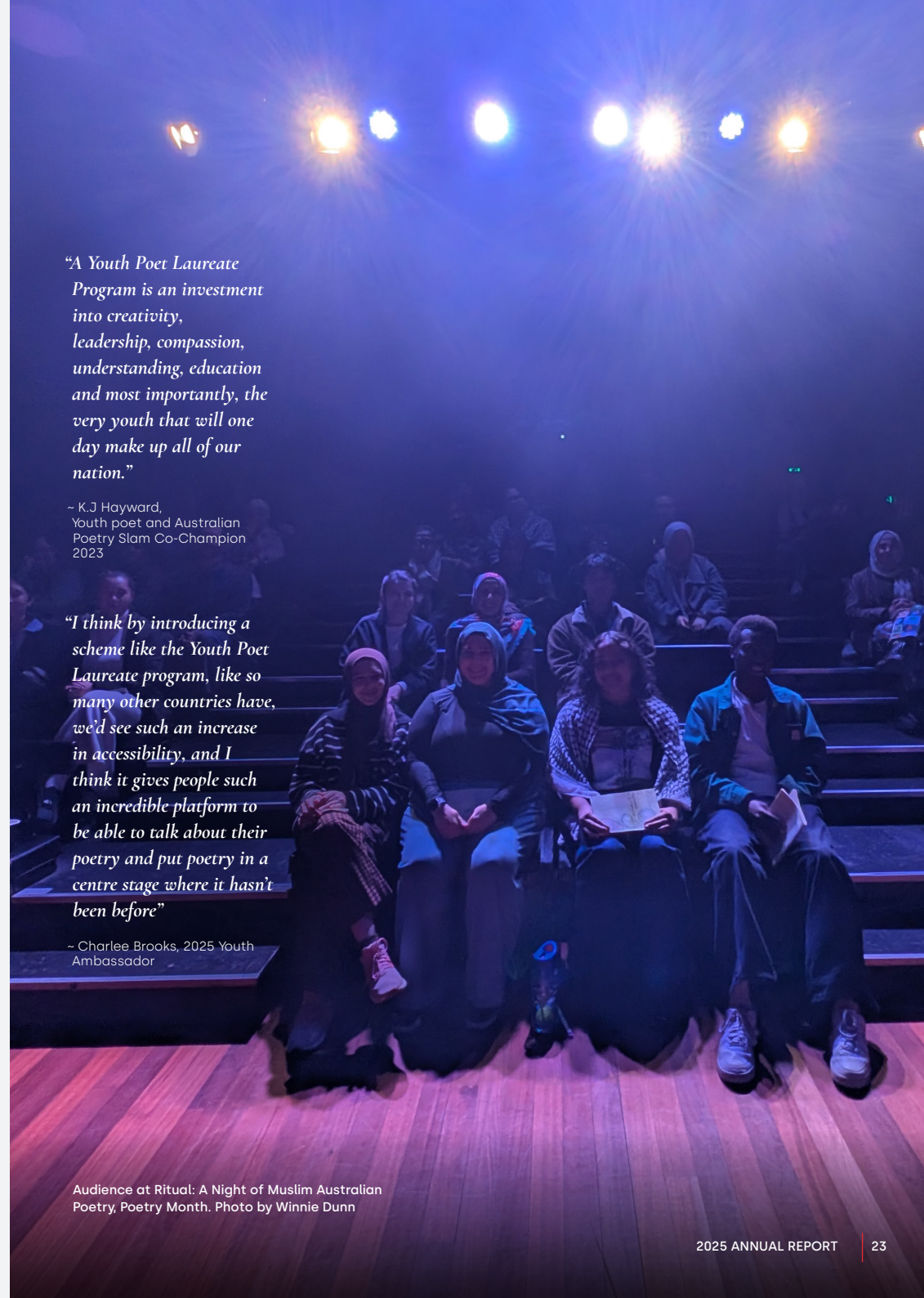
2025 Youth Ambassadors. Photo by Esem Studio

“A Youth Poet Laureate Program is an investment into creativity, leadership, compassion, understanding, education and most importantly, the very youth that will one day make up all of our nation.”

~ K.J Hayward, Youth poet and Australian Poetry Slam Co-Champion 2023

“I think by introducing a scheme like the Youth Poet Laureate program, like so many other countries have, we’d see such an increase in accessibility, and I think it gives people such an incredible platform to be able to talk about their poetry and put poetry in a centre stage where it hasn’t been before”

~ Charlee Brooks, 2025 Youth Ambassador



Audience at Ritual: A Night of Muslim Australian Poetry, Poetry Month. Photo by Winnie Dunn

“I am so grateful that you have provided access to so many wonderful free workshops. Finances are a major barrier for me, so I am grateful for the opportunity and access. Thank you!”

~ Workshop Participant, Poetry Month survey

CREATIVE EDUCATION



Baraya Barray - Whale Song workshop. Photo by Tad Souden

The cost of an arts degree now exceeds \$50,000 a year. This doesn't just impact university enrolment, but the way the arts are perceived in schools and public life more broadly. The once-celebrated democratisation of the arts since the Second World War is now under threat, with careers in the arts becoming - once again - an option only for those with significant financial support.

Responding to demand from the schools and students we work with, Red Room Poetry has pivoted over the past ten years to place creative education at the heart of our mission -

▼ [Learning Resources](#)

“Thank you for this opportunity. It's the first time my girls were engaged with poetry (outside of my efforts) and since then we have been able to extend our work”

~ Teacher feedback, Poem Forest Workshop survey

from school age to old age.

In 2025, we delivered 19 creative learning workshops across our program, many of which prioritise communities for whom the financial cost of an arts degree is an impossible obstacle. Over 6,700 school students attended our online poetry workshops, and we responded to the defunding of NSW's DART Learning program - formerly the digital host of Poem Forest - by pivoting to our own platforms. Our many learning resources were visited and downloaded

by teachers, parents and students across the country.

Baraya Barray - Whale Song continued its passage along the East Coast, connecting students with Elders and language custodians over three days of structured workshops. Other workshops focused on individuals who identify as disabled or with lived experience of mental illness.

For the first time, we made the strategic decision to expand our learning output beyond our core programs, developing two new video formats - Blak Bites and Grow-a-Poem - to launch in 2026. Working closely with the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), we developed a School Laureate education program to sit alongside the Youth Poet Laureate scheme when it launches.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Our social impact mission is shaped by two beliefs. The first: everyone should have the opportunity to participate in poetry. The second: we operate within an unequal society.

Most of our programs are free. While many strands are designed for the broadest possible audience, we also support projects which target communities historically underrepresented in the arts. These include Baraya Barray - Whale Song and MAD Poetry, but

also the commissioning principles within mainstream projects like Poetry Month and Poem Forest. In consequence, 87% of engaged poets in 2025 identified as either First Nations, CaLD, regional, d/Deaf or Disabled, or under 25. As the pre-eminent poetry organisation in Australia, this constitutes a significant intervention in the overall tone and profile of poetry as an art. [Learn more](#)

“Wonderful to see that story telling across our beautiful multi-cultural community is being promoted and is thriving”

~ Audience Survey, Poetry Month



Ritual: A Night of Muslim Australian Poetry, Poetry Month. Photo by Winnie Dunn

“I wish there were more opportunities like this! Art/creativity is so healing and it feels amazing to have the opportunity to share poetry with others who have lived experience of mental health challenges. I feel less alone in my experience and I can create beautiful things from my pain.”

~ Workshop participant, MAD Poetry

Through the 500+ responses to our surveys, we know that Red Room Poetry is valued because it:

- contributes to a diverse and inclusive arts sector (**98%**)
- makes all participants and audiences feel welcome and included (**100%**)
- strengthens cultural pride (**100%**)
- supports and celebrates First Nations poets and collaborators to create, self-determine and share new work in multiple languages for and with community (**95%**)
- focuses on inclusive programming and engages with marginalised voices experiencing incarceration, mental illness, disability, aging, regional isolation (**96%**)



OUR AUDIENCES

Red Room Poetry's primary purpose is to 'make poetry highly accessible, visible, vibrant and relevant for all'. We make sure that there are many ways to get involved, from anywhere in the country.

Our audiences can read, watch or listen to poetry on the page, on film, on air and online; attend performances, exhibitions and events around the nation; or participate in our many public programs, including workshops, competitions and open mics.

In 2025 we continued to build ever larger audiences for poetry through:

- Content partnerships with major national (and international) organisations like the

ABC, The Guardian and Dymocks which enable us to introduce a vast, mainstream audience to contemporary poetry - using their data, we know that we broadcast to well over 600,000 people in 2025, and that 123,000 people read poems in The Guardian.

- Our focus on digital events, workshops and publication, reducing barriers to participation across Australian society - 75% of our activity is free and online.
- Our investment in digital marketing, not only to promote our program but as a publishing platform in itself for new poetry. The vast majority of our campaigns and posts, like the Friday Poem, put poetry first, achieving far greater

reach than traditional publishing forms. In 2025, we grew our social media audience by over 20%.

- Collaborative partnerships with major cultural institutions and energetic, on-the-ground groups who connect us with audiences and artists from a spectrum of communities. Through the combined platforms of our many partners we reached over 3 million people online in 2025.

And our research shows that we are gaining traction: of the 500+ individuals who responded to our surveys this year, 99% believe Red Room Poetry increases the profile of Australian poetry as "a vital, relevant and respected artform".

OUR TEAM

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Artistic Director - First Nations
Nicole Smede

Artistic Director
David Stavanger

Learning Producer
Daniel Townsend

Marketing & Communications Coordinator
Annie Yoshida

and our dedicated interns and volunteers

OUR SUPPORTERS

Our warmest thanks to the supporters, partners and communities who keep the poetry flowing. We salute you all.

Government Supporters



Red Room Poetry is assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, and proudly funded by the NSW Government in association with Create NSW.

Principal Supporters



Bret Walker AO SC

Media Partners



Major Donors



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OUR PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

Red Room Poetry works with poetic partners and collaborators across the country to make poetry vibrant, relevant and accessible. We thank you for inspiring and encouraging us.

Art Gallery of NSW
ANCORS
Australian Association for the Teaching of English
Australian Society of Authors
Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan
Australian Poetry
Botanic Gardens of Sydney
Byron Writers Festival
City of Fremantle
Corban & Blair

Sydney Opera House
Sydney Writers' Festival
The University of Sydney
Varuna The National Writers' House
The Writers' Centre
The Wheeler Centre
Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Wellbeing Aboriginal Corporation
Wellways
Wollongong Botanic Garden
Writers SA
Writers Victoria

Emerging Writers Festival
Magabala Books
Melbourne Writers Festival
Miromaa Language and Technology Centre
MONA
National Young Writers Festival
Pan Macmillan
PoetiQ Honesty
Imprint Press
Red Dirt Poetry Festival
State Library of NSW
The Suburban Review
Sweatshop

Kirli Saunders performs at National Poetry Month Gala. Photo by Jason Nichol.



▼ [Donate to Red Room Poetry](#)

▼ [Supporters & Partners](#)

FINANCIALS

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

For the year ended 31 December 2025

	Year ended 31 December 2025 \$	Year ended 31 December 2024 \$
Donations and non-government grants	414,022	438,754
Government grants	756,533	594,345
Income from partners	79,450	105,866
Finance income	49,681	49,315
Other revenue	20,341	9,857
Total revenue and other income	1,320,027	1,198,137
Employee expenses	(341,498)	(349,327)
Business development expenses	(111,149)	(93,450)
Artswoker employee expenses	(264,254)	(240,325)
Marketing employee expense	(80,719)	-
Education employee expense	(32,038)	-
Poetry commissions and appearance fees	(89,263)	(94,222)
Production costs	(114,215)	(98,928)
Contractor expenses	(34,457)	(46,911)
Consumables and office expenses	(18,149)	(10,294)
Publicity and promotion	(60,226)	(20,751)
Accounting and audit	(20,190)	(20,827)
Insurances	(17,784)	(17,47)
Travel costs	(53,182)	(46,031)
Depreciation and amortisation expenses	(18,303)	(5,995)
Interest expense	(1,759)	(106)
Other expenses	(65,722)	(42,018)
Total expenses	(1,322,908)	(1,086,332)
Total comprehensive income (loss) for the year	(2,881)	111,805

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

As at 31 December 2025

	As at 31 December 2025 \$	As at 31 December 2024 \$
Assets Current		
Cash and cash equivalents	928,546	928,344
Trade and other receivables	19,186	215
Prepayments	7,389	20,721
Other financial assets	756,045	720,110
Total current assets	1,711,166	1,669,390
Non-Current		
Plant and equipment	11,738	10,206
Right-of-use assets	31,053	-
Intangible Assets	9,242	14,142
Total non-current assets	52,033	24,348
Total assets	1,763,199	1,693,738
Liabilities Current		
Trade and other payables	96,246	80,837
Deferred revenue	241,600	254,725
Lease liabilities	6,120	-
Provision for Employee entitlements	66,269	35,248
Total current liabilities	410,235	370,810
Non-Current		
Lease liabilities	25,756	-
Provision for Employee entitlements	12,576	5,415
Total non-current liabilities	38,332	5,415
Total liabilities	448,567	376,225
Net assets	1,314,632	1,317,513
Equity		
Accumulated surplus	1,314,632	1,317,513
Total equity	1,314,632	1,317,513

Full financial report available on request, including notes which should be read in conjunction with these statements.



Red Room Poetry

Level 3 The Arts Exchange
10 Hickson Road
The Rocks NSW 2000

T: 1800 POETRY

contact@redroompoetry.org
redroompoetry.org