

2016 / 2017

ANNUAL
REPORT

read

sing

talk

play

every day with your child

Acknowledgement:

Thank you to staff and families for allowing us to take these wonderful photographs and use them in this Annual Report.

Margaret Ives Community Children's Centre,
DECD Children's Centre – Cafe Enfield, DECD
Children's Centre – Karna Plains and Sturt St
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Raising Literacy Australia is a Registered Charity

raising
literacy
AUSTRALIA



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So they sent me a ...



Early childhood is a critical stage in a child's development and is shaped through their ongoing interactions and relationships with their immediate environment (family) and wider social environments (community). Dunlop 2002

Who is Raising Literacy Australia Inc?

Raising Literacy Australia is a not for profit organisation committed to enriching Australian lives through literacy. Through universal and targeted programs, we support families to **read, sing, talk** and **play** with their children from birth by providing books and resources to nurture young children's development and information for parents to encourage effective engagement with their child's learning.

Our vision

Enrich Australian lives through literacy and ensure that individuals are treated equally, with respect and supported in their pathway to social inclusion and lifelong learning.

Our mission

Build sustainable, high quality and accessible programs which educate and encourage individuals, families and the broader community. The outcome is to support effective change in programs and practices enabling Australians to achieve lifelong learning, improved life chances and the ability to participate in society.

Our priorities

1 Advocacy

Raise awareness nationally of the crucial importance of literacy and its role in our every day lives.

2 Partnerships

Work with likeminded organisations, individuals and governments. Celebrate, support and promote good practices.

3 Programs

Evaluate and grow our programs to enable positive practices and effective engagement between individuals, families and communities.

4 Knowledge

Provide opportunities to educate, inform, upskill and inspire through sharing of information and the delivery of the Building Foundations of Early Learning (BFEL) program.

A message from our Chair, Paul Lecher

The early years of life are the best opportunity to lay the foundations for a child's future. By getting it right in early childhood, we plant the seeds for tomorrow's engaged and active student, productive and skilled worker, and confident and loving parent (COAG 2009b).

In 2016, the Board and organisation have worked diligently to further achieve its mission of raising awareness of the importance of literacy in our every day lives.

Our continued partnerships with Child and Family Health service, Department of Education and Child Development (DECD), SA Health and Department for Child Protection help to support the organisation to reach its goals of providing resources, information and guidance to families with young children.

As any Board recognises, the main functions are to steer the organisation strategically and financially. In 2015, a fundraising strategy to support the long term financial stability of the organisation was implemented taking into consideration the competitive nature of the not for profit sector with over 48,000 registered charities in Australia. The five main streams identified include corporate, government, merchandise, philanthropic and donations. Reflecting on the year passed I'm pleased to announce that we have been successful in securing revenue and funds for the organisation via four of the five fundraising streams.

The state government continues to support the organisation with funding to deliver the Little Big Book Club Reading Pack and Read to Me projects. SA Health provided funds to support food literacy resources for the preschool reading packs. Variety SA and Cochrane's provide valuable in-kind support and grant funding for the Read to Me project and the Carthew Foundation has committed to the organisation for three years with funding to support the development of new resources.

The organisation also successfully tendered with State Library of Victoria to rollout seminars and training workshops for public libraries of Victoria on early childhood brain development and the implementation of effective library programs supporting early childhood literacy.

I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of the RLA Board and team to once again thank our two founding partners the Advertiser Newspapers Pty Ltd and the Government of South Australia, in particular the Department of Education and Child Development, Department of Child Protection SA and SA Health who continue to strongly back the organisation through significant in-kind and financial support.

Paul Lecher
Chair



A message from our CEO, Sue Hill

How the right book can open up a child's imagination and nurture positive engagement between a parent and child.

Our aims, when we started in South Australia in 2002, were to nurture the community's reading habits, to provide quality book recommendations and to challenge South Australians to explore different genres and titles. This was the start of The Big Book Club, a state-wide book club that selected an adult title each month and promoted the title and author across the state.

Research released in early 2000 by Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that only four out of ten families were reading with their children on a regular basis. We felt a responsibility, to not only share this information, but to understand the barriers that were stopping families reading with their children and to offer solutions. In 2005, we launched The Little Big Book Club program targeting families with very young children, early childhood practitioners, governments and other like-minded organisations.

Fast forward to 2016: with increased funding from the State Government of South Australia we are now in a position to produce and distribute sixty-three thousand reading packs FREE to families across South Australia. To further overcome the barriers and support families in their reading with their children we also operate a monthly Featured Stories project, working closely with Australian children's publishers to select and review age appropriate titles for families to read with their babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Since 2006, we have reviewed thousands of picture and board books and have over 500 titles, supported with educational resources, on The Little Big Book Club website.

Taking the experience gained from The Little Big Book Club and the Featured Stories initiative, we launched the Little Book Press, a publishing arm of Raising Literacy Australia. This new division of the organisation will support Australian emerging and established authors and illustrators, and provide families and the early childhood sector with high quality picture and board books and educational resources that underpin foundational literacy and numeracy skills in young children.

In 2015, State Library Victoria (SLV) and Public Libraries Victoria Network published Reading and Literacy for All: A Strategic Framework for Victorian Public Libraries 2015-18. This framework included recommendations for an early years literacy program that engages Victorian children and their families in building early literacy skills and encouraging a love of reading.

In 2016, SLV engaged RLA to develop a professional development package to support its strategic framework for Victorian Public Libraries. With our extensive knowledge and experience gained by writing Building Foundations for Early Learning and operating training workshops across Australia we were well placed to support SLV in its endeavours. Over the course of six months RLA held four conferences and twelve training workshops with 680 participants across Victoria. To further support the outcomes of the Reading and Literacy for All framework, RLA developed three supporting documents which underpinned the conferences, workshops and library programming.

Topping off a busy year, two staff members joined the State Government Business Mission to China. Nicole Marshall and Belinda Spry spent ten very hectic days in May 2017 meeting and presenting to Chinese officials and organisations in two major provinces. The visit has resulted in forming strong connections with Chinese educational businesses and institutions.

The next phase for the organisation is to further develop the Read to Me project to support vulnerable children and their families.

We are excited for the future of the organisation and look forward to sharing all the wonderful programs and endeavours we are undertaking to support literacy for all.

Sussan Hill
Chief Executive Officer



Advocacy

We closely monitor the release of national and international research policies and journals relating to early childhood development across government, health and education sectors. Reflecting on this wealth of information helps to inform our practises, develop our programs and resources and communicate to our national database of 15,000 members.

Our comprehensive communication strategy enables us to promote early childhood literacy and positive engagement between an adult and child via our key messages of reading, singing, playing and talking with young children every day across multiple platforms including print, TV, social media and electronic newsletters.

Our network of ambassadors also advocates the importance of early childhood literacy for all children.

Our ambassadors include:

Phil Cummings

Katrina Germein

Janeen Brian

Mike Dumbleton

Rosanna Mangiarelli

Annie Maynard

Kate and Jol Temple

Sean Williams

2016/17 Community Book Swap ambassadors:

Penny Wong

Kate Ellis

David Penberthy

Ali Clarke

Eugene Galakovic

Sean Williams

Our online and social media platforms include:

The Little Big Book Club – Website | Facebook | Instagram | Pinterest | Twitter | YouTube

The Big Book Club – Website | Facebook

The Little Book Press – Website | Facebook

Raising Literacy Australia – Website

Partnerships, funders and stakeholders

State Government of South Australia

Advertiser Newspapers Pty Ltd

Department of Education and Child Development

SA Health

Child and Family Health Service

Department for Child Protection

Variety SA, the children's charity

Carthew Foundation

Cochrane's

Australian Executor Trustee

Booktopia

Origin Foundation

Australian Publishers:

Affirm Press

Allen and Unwin

Berbay Publishing

Bonnier Publishing

Fremantle Press

Hachette Australia

Hardie Grant Egmont Australia

HarperCollins Australia

Magabala Books

New Frontier Publishing

Penguin Random House

Scholastic Australia

Simon and Schuster Australia

Walkers Books Australia

Working Title Press

Programs

Our programs and projects underpin our vision, mission and purpose.

Our key programs and projects are:

- The Big Book Club (TBBC) – an online program encouraging adults and youth to read widely and regularly
- The Little Big Book Club (LBBC) – an early childhood reading development initiative supporting families with children birth to five years of age and the early childhood sector
- Building Foundations for Early Learning (BFEL) – a professional development training package for the early childhood sector which teaches the importance of everyday literacy and how programs can fundamentally impact the wellbeing, lifelong learning and social inclusion of families.
- Read to Me
- Community Libraries

The Big Book Club

The Big Book Club Facebook page had 1200 likes and the TBBC website had 15,112 visitors and 45,120 views.

The website promotes and reviews three adult and youth titles every month with a dedicated page for each title and numerous reviews from one of our team of eighteen TBBC volunteer reviewers.

The Little Big Book Club

- Baby, Toddler and Preschool Reading Pack project
- Featured Stories project
- Read to Me project

Reading Packs

Throughout 2016/17 we have worked closely with a number of authors and illustrators in the production of four new picture and board books.

The development of a picture book can take anywhere between 12 to 24 months from the selection of a manuscript, matching and engaging an illustrator to bring the story to life, and then finally to designing and printing the finished works.

Four new titles will be included in the 2018 Baby and Toddler Reading Packs. Titles include *Jump and Shout* by Mike Dumbleton and Peter Carnavas, *Wilbur, Grace and Joe* by Phil Cummings and Amanda Graham, *Lullabies for Bed Time* (compilation) illustrated by Doris Chang and *Busy Little Creatures* written by the RLA team and illustrated by Fiona Bowden.

To meet extra demand, the preschool reading pack numbers have increased to 23,000. The baby and toddler reading packs remain at 21,000 packs per age bracket.

Five further resources are under consideration and development for inclusion in 2019 and 2020 Baby and Toddler Reading Packs.



Building Foundations for Early Learning

Building Foundations for Early Learning is the organisation's professional development training package which is offered to organisations nationally and internationally who operate family based programs or organisations and services wanting to establish literacy rich programs for families with young children.

The training team are in the throws of creating three new modules which support cultural diversity, children with additional needs and engaging families through outreach. These three modules will be launched in early 2018 with workshops first delivered in South Australia and Victoria.

We are also exploring the establishment of a suite of professional learning sessions that delve into specific stages of early childhood development. These bespoke sessions will be designed to support practitioners across multi-disciplinary practices and families.

Read to Me project

Research tells us that healthy brain development forms the foundation for all future learning. It is not uncommon for children who are living in out of home care to have been objected to adverse experiences such as exposure to trauma, abuse and neglect. As experiences lay the pathway for strong healthy brain development the Read to Me project aims to support children and their care families by providing literacy rich resources and information enabling positive engagement and experiences between the care adult and child.

Each child aged birth to six years in out of home care receive a start-up library of ten books and then quarterly delivery of three picture/board books. In addition, play adjuncts are created to complement each story.

The collaboration with Department for Child Protection and DECD Distribution Centre has been instrumental in the success of the delivery process allowing children to directly receive their Read to Me libraries. Variety SA and Cochrane's continue to support the project through significant in-kind and grant funding which helps to underpin the acquisition, storing and collating of the start-up and quarterly libraries.

Furthermore, the Australian publishing industry provide valuable assistance in the acquisition of titles which are carefully selected to match the children's ages and personal circumstances at a much-reduced cost.



Community Libraries project

Our Community Libraries project aims to establish picture book libraries in communities that have limited access to books and early literacy resources.

Through our yearly fundraising efforts (Little Big Book Swap campaign), we are able to provide selected organisations with their own library of children's board and picture books and a folder of related activities and templates to extend the learning experiences of young children. The libraries are designed to support families with young children from birth up to 8 years of age.

Library recipients in 2016/2017 included:

- Darlington Children's Centre
- Balaklava Community Children's Centre
- Inner North Community Health Service
- Parafield Gardens Children's Centre
- St Josephs – OLSH
- Mypolonga Primary School
- Parks Children's Centre (Uniting Care Wesley & Paint the Parks READ)
- Centacare Catholic Services, Mt Gambier

"The library provides positive role modelling and highlights the importance of reading books to children as well as fostering a genuine love of books to enhance future engagement in education. Our aim is that this library will continue to grow and become a sustainable part of our program."

Centacare Family Connections Program, Mount Gambier, South Australia.

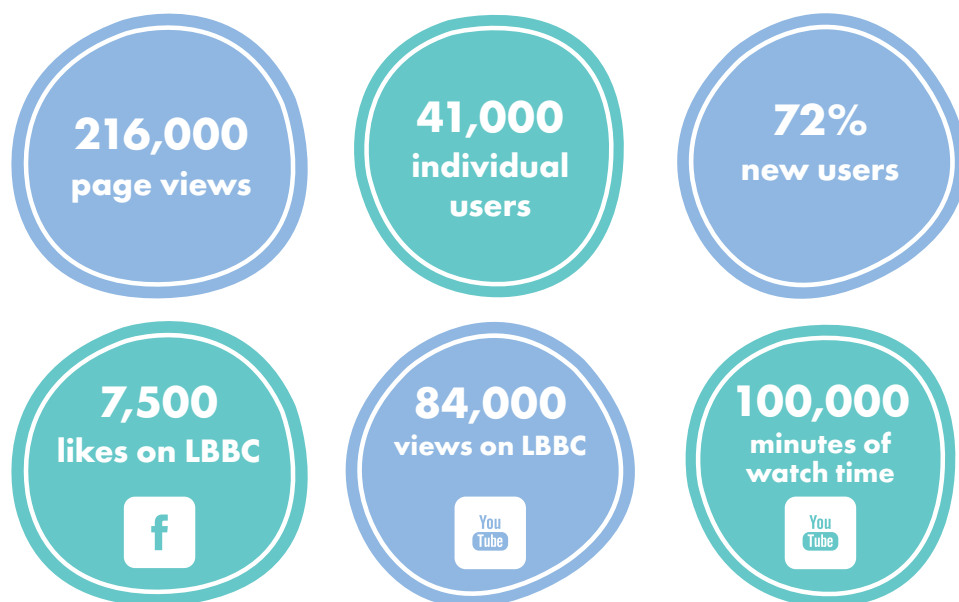
Learning to read and write doesn't start in kindergarten or first grade. Developing language and literacy skills begins at birth through everyday loving interactions – sharing books, telling stories, singing songs, and talking to one another.

(National Centre for Infants, Toddlers and Families, 2012)

I personally don't enjoy reading but reading to my baby is very enjoyable. He really loves the Let's Play book especially when I change my voice to meet the different pages. Since I've read to him at a young age, he absolutely loves being read too and gets upset when I stop.

Estelle and baby, August 2016, SA

LBBC website



The next five years

The financial stability of the organisation continues to be a key focus of both the RLA Board and the RLA team.

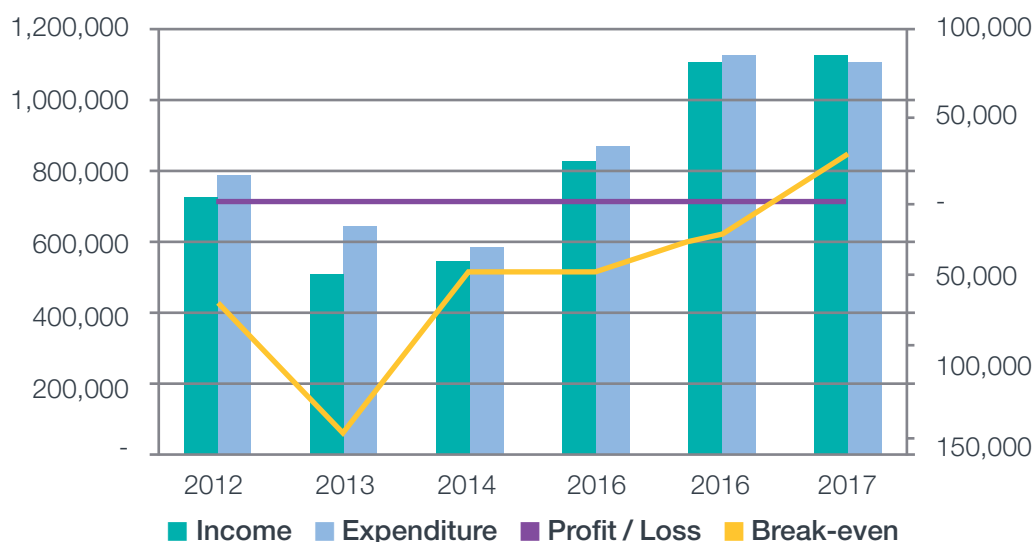
The forthcoming years hold many opportunities for the organisation including

- Targeted literacy program for children aged 18 to 36 months
- Little Book Press – establish trade distribution for national and international markets
- Continue to develop BFEL supporting tailored stages and elements for multidisciplinary practitioners, programs and families
- Produce culturally diverse resources to support families, communities and programs
- Potential expansion of The Big Book Club program through development of online shop and the investigation of a youth based program aimed at 12 to 15 year olds.



Treasurer's report

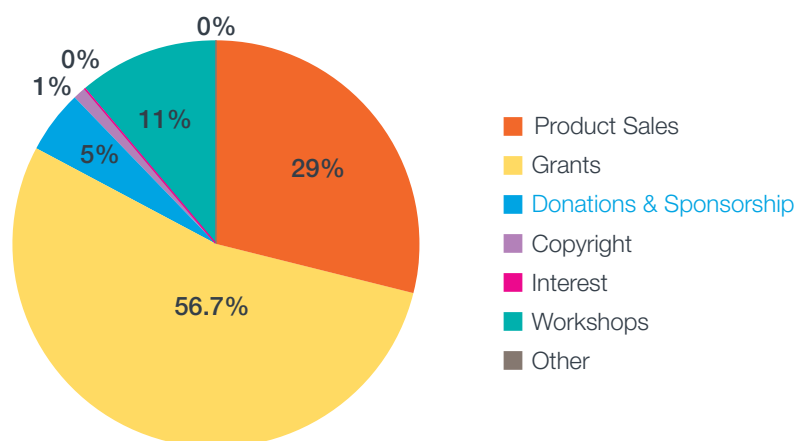
It is my great pleasure to provide this Treasurer's Report for Raising Literacy Australia Inc for the financial year end 30 June 2017 and it gives me great delight to advise that this financial year saw the organisation record it's first accounting profit in 5 years of \$91,779.



Raising Literacy Australia Inc continued to strengthen its financial position on the back of the successful implementation of strategies around diversification of income, cost discipline and focus on key areas for growth.

Sources of Income

Breakdown of 2017 Revenue



As with previous years, the bulk of revenue for RLA came from Grants, particularly Government funding, which accounted for \$645k of overall revenue of \$1,139k, or 56.7%.

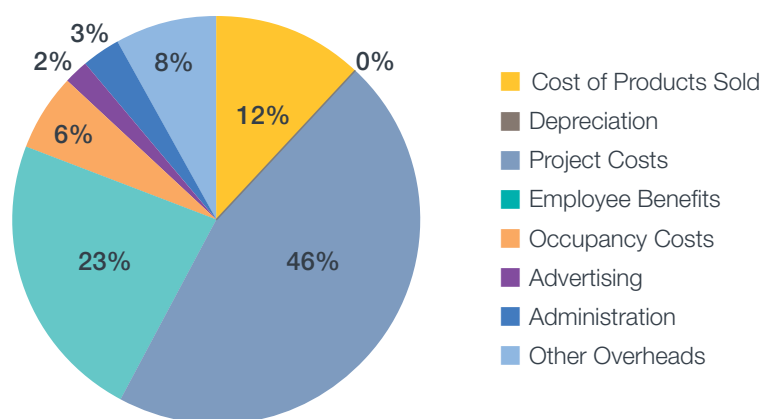
Proactive work has been undertaken to secure this funding into the future, with successful results and the focus of the board and executive on maintaining the key relationships driving this income provides comfort that future years will see similar revenue amounts.

Last year saw a large increase in Product Sales and this year consolidated this revenue stream, recording almost break even Sales results compared to last year.

This year we are recognising revenue from Workshops as separate from other income, due to the increasing importance of this revenue stream to the organisation. After being identified as a key strategic area for growth in prior years, it is pleasing to see the growth in this area and it growing in a manner which is contributing a positive cashflow for the organisation.

Areas of Expenditure

Breakdown of 2017 Expenditure



Overall, expenditure of the business decreased from last year. This is a result of the ongoing cost discipline exercised by the team.

Direct Project costs continue to be the major area of expenditure which is understandable given the high level of associated income and the nature of some of this income requiring matching expenditure.

Cost of Products Sold has reduced which is a great result considering the Sales levels have remained consistent from the previous year.

Employment Benefits have risen slightly, due to additional resources required. The board has also recognised the need to reward its loyal team and ensure their remuneration is appropriate given the success to which they have contributed. This remuneration increase has contributed in a small way to the overall increase.

Having recently moved to new premises, changes to Occupancy Costs will be reflected in next year's financials and it is expected there will be some one-off costs in moving and establishing the new workplace.

Other costs, such as Advertising, Administration and Other are consistently low and monitored to ensure wastage is minimal.

Overall, the organisation has shown tremendous financial discipline to achieve the growth it has while keeping costs under control, and Sue and her team should be congratulated on this.

Financial statements

Raising Literacy Australia Inc.
ABN 74 051 182 680
Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income
For the year ended 30 June 2017

	Note	2017 \$	2016 \$
Sales Revenue		339,828	344,670
Other revenue	3	863,568	767,787
Total Income		1,203,396	1,112,457
Cost of sales		(136,262)	(158,904)
Depreciation		(3,059)	(3,861)
Project Costs		(518,114)	(557,110)
Employee benefits		(251,523)	(223,699)
Occupancy expense		(64,640)	(59,168)
Advertising expense		(17,954)	(33,452)
Administration expenses		(30,043)	(32,261)
Other overheads		(90,022)	(63,094)
Total Expenses		(1,111,616)	(1,131,550)
Surplus/(deficit) for the year		91,780	(19,093)
Total comprehensive income for the year		91,780	(19,093)

Raising Literacy Australia Inc.
ABN 74 051 182 680
Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2017

	Note	2017 \$	2016 \$
Assets			
Current Assets			
Cash assets	3	449,852	424,271
Receivables	4	30,131	158,287
Inventories	5	73,441	74,491
Other	6	23,865	41
Total Current Assets		<u>577,290</u>	<u>657,090</u>
Non-Current Assets			
Property, plant and equipment	7	12,097	10,743
Total Non-Current Assets		<u>12,097</u>	<u>10,743</u>
Total Assets		<u>589,387</u>	<u>667,833</u>
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities			
Payables	8	34,394	49,277
Provisions	9	54,875	23,076
Other	10	234,895	421,995
Total Current Liabilities		<u>324,164</u>	<u>494,348</u>
Total Liabilities		<u>324,164</u>	<u>494,348</u>
Net Assets		<u>265,223</u>	<u>173,485</u>
Members' Funds			
Retained surplus		265,223	173,485
Total Members' Funds		<u>265,223</u>	<u>173,485</u>

Raising Literacy Australia Inc.
ABN 74 051 182 680
Statement of Changes in Equity
For the year ended 30th June 2017

	Accumulated Surplus \$	Total members funds \$
Balance as at 1 July 2015	192,578	192,578
Deficit for the year	(19,093)	(19,093)
Total Comprehensive income for the year	(19,093)	(19,093)
Balance as at 30 June 2016	173,485	173,485
Balance as at 1 July 2016	173,485	173,485
Surplus for the year	91,780	91,780
Total Comprehensive income for the year	91,780	91,780
Prior Period Adjustment	(42)	(42)
Balance as at 30 June 2017	265,223	265,223

Raising Literacy Australia Inc.
ABN 74 051 182 680
Statement of Cash Flows
For the year ended 30 June 2017

	2017 \$	2016 \$
Cash Flow From Operating Activities		
Grants and other	1,326,848	1,291,544
Payments to Suppliers and employees	(1,305,971)	(1,265,398)
Interest received	4,704	9,287
Net cash provided by (used in) operating activities	25,581	35,433
Net increase (decrease) in cash held	25,581	35,433
Cash at the beginning of the year	424,271	388,838
Cash at the end of the year (note 3)	449,852	424,271

Raising Literacy Australia Inc.
ABN 74 051 182 680
Statement of Cash Flows
For the year ended 30 June 2017

2017

2016

Reconciliation Of Cash

For the purposes of the statement of cash flows, cash includes cash on hand and in banks and investments in money market instruments, net of outstanding bank overdrafts.

Cash at the end of the year as shown in the statement of cash flows is reconciled to the related items in the Statement of Financial Position as follows:

Cash at bank	449,752	423,721
Cash on hand	100	550
	<u>449,852</u>	<u>424,271</u>

Reconciliation Of Net Cash Provided By/Used In Operating Activities To Net Surplus

Operating surplus/(deficit)	91,780	(19,093)
Depreciation	3,059	3,861
Changes in assets and liabilities		
(Increase) decrease in trade debtors	128,156	(137,984)
(Increase) decrease in finished goods	1,050	(45,359)
(Increase) decrease in prepayments	(23,060)	-
(Increase) decrease in other assets	(806)	14,704
(Increase) decrease in property plant & equipment	(4,413)	-
Increase (decrease) in trade creditors and accruals	11,841	(15,967)
Increase (decrease) in other creditors	(213,824)	231,635
Increase (decrease) in employee entitlements	31,799	3,636
Net cash provided by operating activities	25,581	35,433

Raising Literacy Australia Inc.
ABN 74 051 182 680
Statement by Members of the Committee
For the year ended 30 June 2017

In the opinion of the Committee the Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Financial Performance, Statement of Changes in Equity, Cash Flows and Notes to the Financial Statements:

1. Presents fairly the financial position of Raising Literacy Australia Inc. as at 30 June 2017 and its performance for the year ended on that date in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards, mandatory professional reporting requirements and other authoritative pronouncements of the Australian Accounting Standards Board.

2. At the date of this statement, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the association will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

The Committee is responsible for the reliability, accuracy and completeness of the accounting records and the disclosure of all material and relevant information.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee and is signed for and on behalf of the Committee by:







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Raising Literacy Australia Inc.

ABN 74 051 182 680

Independent Auditor's Report to the Members

Report on the Audit of the Financial Report

We have audited the financial report of Raising Literacy Australia Inc. (the association), which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2017, the statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the certification by members of the committee on the annual statements giving a true and fair view of the financial position and performance of the association.

Responsibilities of the Committee for the Financial Report

The committee of the association is responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and Associations Incorporation Act 1985 and Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012 and for such internal control as the committee determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the committee is responsible for assessing the association's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the committee either intends to liquidate the association or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial report.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial report. The Procedures selected depend on the auditors judgement, including assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, the auditor considers internal control relevant to the associations preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the associations internal controls.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Independence

In conducting our audit, we have complied with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 and any applicable code of professional conduct.

Opinion

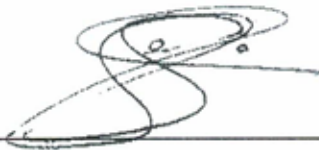
In our opinion, the accompanying financial report of Raising Literacy Australia Inc. is in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Act 1985 and Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012 including:

(a) giving a true and fair view of the association's financial position as at 30 June 2017 and of its performance for the year then ended; and

(b) that the financial records kept by the association are such as to enable financial statements to be prepared in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards.

Without modifying our opinion, we draw attention to Note 1 to the financial report, which describes the basis for accounting. The financial report has been prepared to assist Raising Literacy Australia Inc. to meet the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Act 1985 and Australian Charities and Not-for -profits Commission Act 2012, and the needs of the members.

Signed on : 24th October 2017



Jack Liubinskas, Partner

LBH Accountants Pty Ltd

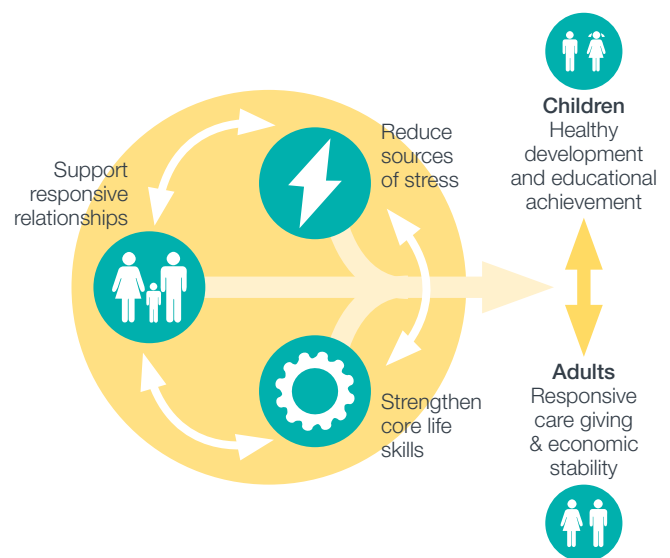
Science to policy and practice

3 Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families

Recent advances in the science of brain development offer us an unprecedented opportunity to solve some of society's most challenging problems, from widening disparities in school achievement and economic productivity to costly health problems across the lifespan. Understanding how the experiences children have starting at birth, even prenatally, affect lifelong outcomes – combined with new knowledge about the core capabilities adults need to thrive as parents and in the workplace – provides a strong foundation upon which policymakers and civic leaders can design a shared and more effective agenda. The science of child development and the core capabilities of adults point to a set of “design principles” that policymakers and practitioners in many different sectors can use to improve outcomes for children and families. That is, to be maximally effective, policies and services should:

1. Support responsive relationships for children and adults.
2. Strengthen core life skills.
3. Reduce sources of stress in the lives of children and families.

Source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2017). Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families.
<http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>





What it is to be a children's writer by Janeen Brian

Some children know they want to be writers when they grow up.

Others are 'accidental authors'.

I'm that sort.

For many years I was a teacher and only wrote a few poems for my young daughters. I once tentatively attended a weekend writing course and that's when I made a discovery.

I knew nothing about writing.

But I began writing a little more. And borrowing 'How to write' books from the library.

Was I hooked?

If I'm interested in something, I tend to pursue it to see if the initial appeal is sustainable. But I was interested. And I did love words – and language – and reading.

Luck also played a part. An ex-writing colleague became an educational publisher. That's where I got my start to write for children. Writing something that's not necessarily of your choice, to a strict brief and word length is good training ground.

I was being published.

But I still felt as if I was floundering and a fraud. Was I really a writer?

Spurred on by some awards and publishing successes with trade publishers, I wrote. And kept writing. And was rejected. Hundreds of times. However, an important truth is that writing is a craft. Persevere and you can improve.

I wrote to succeed. I wrote to learn. I wrote to enjoy myself and to discover the stories and poems within that would've lain dormant, never revealed. I tried always to write from the heart and to connect honestly with my feelings.

I entered dozens of prose and poetry competitions gaining a number of successes or shortlistings.

In 1990, I left my part-time teaching job and became a fulltime writer.

As I tell children in schools, I consider writing hard fun. It is a tough gig almost at every stage and disappointments abound. But the pay off, when what you wanted to say resonates with your readers, is truly wonderful.

I now consider myself, first and foremost, as a children's author, although occasionally I write

poetry or short stories for adults. I write widely, from picture books to novels, poetry to short fiction and sometimes, non-fiction.

One festival organizer told me she didn't know where to 'slot' me!

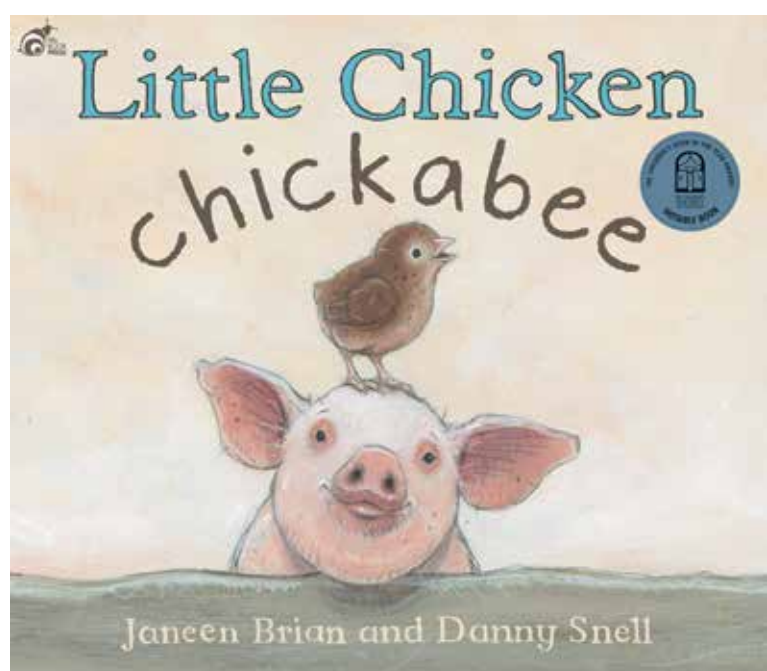
Self-doubt comes with the territory of creating and often I'm concerned about finding the next idea. I keep a notebook and I write something every day; sometimes I give myself a word length if I'm struggling, just to get myself over the next hump.

I know now that writing nourishes me. That I have to write; otherwise I feel I'm living only on the surface.

I'm happy that I've now have over 100 children's books published; poetry accepted in 20 anthologies and hundreds of poems and stories published in national and international children's magazines. I have won many awards, including CBCA and Speech Therapy of Australia Awards and numerous titles have been translated throughout the world.

Having a good relationship with editors and publishers is important to me. Writing is a business and I try to work hard and play fair in this business. My agent of eight years deals brilliantly with many aspects of the publishing industry and has been a great help to me.

There is a joy in crafting and creating, and I feel lucky and privileged that the world of children's literature is such a warm and wonderful place in which to live.





What it is to be an Illustrator by Danny Snell

Whenever I'm asked what I do for a living I'll say, "I'm an illustrator." There's inevitably a pause and a quizzical look and so I'll go on to elaborate further. This usually clarifies things, but not always. Illustrating is one of those professions that often slips under the radar. And although everyone has read a children's book, we don't often consider who or how they are created.

Illustrating for me always felt like a natural fit. That's not to say that I necessarily find it easy. But I do enjoy it. I've always liked drawing and making things. I tell kids that when I was little I wanted to be a pilot and fly aeroplane. But I soon realised that I enjoyed drawing them more. So first and foremost, illustrating is something that I enjoy doing. And to be able to share that with others is just as pleasurable.

There's also the excitement of what I call 'the possibility of what could be.' That's the feeling that you get when you first sit down to a new project and imagine what is possible, what you could potentially create. Like a sculptor with a block of stone, imagining the form that lies within.

I think all creators of children's books strive to make something for kids to get lost in, something that will

feed their imagination. Ron Brooks describes the picture-book as like a kind of theatre, where a world is opened up there in front of the reader. So, an illustrator has to do more than just copy what they see, or copy what the text says. Your metaphorical block of stone holds more than just a form, it contains a narrative. Illustrations should be telling us something. And this is what both excites and terrifies me – how best to tell the story? You want to be true to the text while adding another layer to the reading, and at times leaving room for the reader to add something for themselves. Getting it just right, that golden mean, lies somewhere between that initial flutter of excitement and labouring over an idea. The hard part is recognising when it's just right.

One of my favourite illustrators is Ezra Jack Keats. I still have his book 'Goggles' from when I was about 5. His use of collage and paint helped to bring to life the gritty urban environments of his stories. It's the freshness and ease of his images that inspires me. And that's where I am right now – learning to free things up, making marks in the moment and hopefully spilling some paint along the way – remembering first and foremost to enjoy what I'm doing.





