



Introducing the Women Poets' Network

Why do we need a Women Poets' Network?

In June 2021 we gathered together two focus groups of women poets at different stages of their careers, and asked them about what **life as a poet** was like for them, **what success might look like**, and **what they most** needed to sustain their own practice. Here are some of the insights that came out of those conversations, and which now inform our work in developing a Women Poets' Network.

“Motherhood changes everything”

33% of the 734 applicants to our 2020 #WomenPoetsPrize listed themselves as **carers for others**. Motherhood, and other caring responsibilities that predominantly fall to women, is one of the main reasons why women poets may find themselves **struggling to write, publish, or stay connected** to a wider world of poetry peers. Events and courses are scheduled at bath time, at bed time, clash with the school run, or are simply too long to be manageable. The **demands on time and energy** erode our ability to stay in the loop, knocking us off the treadmill of a professional cycle determined by publisher and prize schedules. Taking a break to focus on family can be done, but how then to get back into circulation when we are older, and all the attention and opportunity seems to be for **‘emerging’ poets** (where ‘emerging’ inevitably means ‘young’)? Time-poor and often feeling like an imposter, we arrive at a place in our lives where we are always **juggling multiple roles**, always facilitating other people before we prioritise our own practice.

“A stable, affirmatory structure”

Most of us know where to go for tuition on our craft. From high-visibility (often high-cost) organisations to informal writing groups, we aren't short of workshops to attend or How To... books to read. What is often harder to find is the particular **tribe of peers** with whom we can connect and be vulnerable about what we're



saying, how we're saying it, and why. It seems the network most needed is one where **time and space is given to supporting and validating one another**, whether we're struggling to write from trauma, or to cope with everything from magazine rejections to post-publication malaise. Within this space, all network members should feel themselves equally able to give and receive expertise and insight. With a focus on **reciprocity and peer-led** activity, the #WomenPoetsNetwork becomes the complement to the #WomenPoetsPrize. Where the Prize focuses on achievement and competition, the Network will hold space for **joy-in-process** and **long-lasting connections**.

“Don't look at socials!”

One of the most valuable things we can offer each other as poets and as women is honesty. We're **seeking connection** through a vast machine of digital communication that relentlessly glosses over people's lived truth, and it is difficult to remain anchored to our authentic selves from within in. Our focus groups expressed a real hunger for ways to maintain **good mental health** about our practices – how to celebrate our work **without shame or embarrassment**, how to ride the life cycle of creativity from writer's block to publication high, how to understand the public world of poetry without being drawn away from inner measures of success.

Next steps

As a result of talking to women poets we're excited to embark on a Women Poets' Network with a range of engagement routes. Expect Zoom and non-Zoom, **scheduled events** and play-back recordings, **accessible times** for care-givers and **accessible formats** for disabled poets, all underpinned by a growing library of web resources created by experienced women poets **to provoke, inspire, and comfort**. We hope that the relationships that arise in this space are long-lasting, and inspire new collaborations. We intend that our relationship with network members should continue to inform the Foundation's activities as advocates for women in poetry, and that members' needs will always be the force that shapes what we do.



We'd love for you to join us!

Join the Network by looking out for updates on the [Rebecca Swift Foundation website](#) or by signing up to our [newsletter](#). We will be soft-launching a series of digital resources in Autumn 2021, and launching the Network 'proper' in early 2022. A private Facebook Page will be available to join shortly, so that you can be first in the queue for access to the Network.

Support the Network by giving either a one-off or monthly [donation](#). 100% of the Foundation's income comes from individual donors, so every donation counts. Your donation will go directly towards supporting women poets and their work, and advocating for them within and beyond the industry.