WiER Announces Suspension of Program—December 31, 2013

It is true that WiER has been in operation for more than 25 years, raising—and, crucially, paying out—more than a million dollars in writers’ fees, and engaging students and teachers with Canada’s authors online in WiER’s “electronic literary salons” in all parts of Canada.

It is also true that our ability to operate has often been year by year, normally the result of building good relationships between interested (and, it must be said, interesting) participants. Of course, everyone at WiER is thrilled to have managed to make this work for as long as we have.

What Happened—WiER depends on the voluntary support of teachers. During a dispute between the Province of Ontario and teachers in that province regarding retirement gratuities, teachers withdrew voluntary services in 2012/13. This meant that the WiER program could not be offered in Ontario during the dispute. This adversely affected our operating results for 2012/13, and, in turn, weakened our application for continued Ontario Arts Council operating funding, which has supported the program generously over the years. Ultimately, this resulted in a significant cut to their support of WiER.

What We Did—Many will know that WiER operates as both an educational initiative and as an arts initiative. When Ontario schools withdrew, WiER hired Ontario writers to serve participating schools in the rest of Canada.

Program Suspended—As the program is not sustainable under these circumstances, WiER’s Board of Trustees has taken the view that suspending the program, effective our fiscal year-end (Dec. 31/13), rather than closing outright, is the most prudent course of action at this time. Most of this work has been completed, or is under way; a few final items should be completed in January 2014.

I am pleased to report that even under these admittedly difficult circumstances, WiER managed to stretch the 50 per cent funding received—what would normally cover just half a year—over nine months.

WiER’s Plan—Under the circumstances, we have initiated discussions with other organizations that share interests in education and the arts. Of course, there is no way of knowing what direction these discussions might take, but “fingers crossed,” as they say.

Many Thanks—What is clear is that WiER has been well worth doing. Tens of thousands of students in schools from all parts of Canada (and, on occasion,
internationally too) have worked directly with hundreds of Canada's finest writers in thousands of WiER's online residencies.

And there have been many ancillary projects—from those involving student teacher candidates at several universities in Canada, to the creation of publications of student work in *The WiER Taps*, to our *Wired Writers Podcasts* and more. Content already created will continue to be available—free of charge—at WiER’s web site, http://www.wier.ca.

As one might expect, there are myriad supporters to thank, and only a few will be mentioned by name here; however, their work and contributions are noted at WiER’s web site.

On behalf of everyone at WiER, I extend my sincere thanks to all. In particular, I would like to acknowledge and thank the following:

- **R. Ian Niven** and **John Mott**, who served on WiER's boards, and **Ed Leslie**, *TechnoGuruHuman*, all for more than 20 years;
- **Luke Rodgers**, Webmaster, and **Bob Cook**, Chief Information Officer, University of Toronto;
- **Christine Uy**, Program & Research Assistant; online moderator (and WiER alumna), and **Nic Labriola**, writer and Relationship Development Officer (2011/12); and,
- **All** the writers, teachers, and particularly students and alumni, who have demonstrated so well each year that mentorship is reciprocal.

Again, many thanks.

Trevor Owen
Founder & Program Director