

AICW Receives Covid-19 “Relaunch” Grant  
by Giulia De Gasperi and Maria Pia Spadafora

In Spring 2021 the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers (AICW) received a grant as part of an initiative to help relaunch the arts and culture sector during and post Covid-19. The AICW used the grant to assess its activities and establish priorities going forward. The grant was provided by the Government of Quebec’s Secretariat for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers, with Quebec’s English Language Arts Network (ELAN) and *Accenti Magazine* as project supporters. Maria Pia Spadafora and Giulia De Gasperi were hired to manage the project, which consisted of three initiatives: a mentorship program and two surveys.

The first of these, the “Relaunch Your Passion for Writing” Mentorship Program, was developed within the context of the continuing climate of uncertainty around Covid-19. The aim was to benefit writers and aspiring writers whose projects were forced to the side because of Covid-19. Ten English-language writers in Quebec earned the opportunity to improve their writing skills by working with professional writers during the ten-hour remote mentorship. A public Call for Mentees was announced on the AICW site and circulated on social media, while AICW members were invited via email to send an expression of interest to be mentors.

Ten mentees were paired with ten established writers who are members of the AICW. Each pair of mentors and mentees agreed on the details of the mentorship between them. For fiction, the mentors/mentees were Chris DiRaddo and Anthony Portulese; Darlene Madott and Lea Beddia; Monica Meneghetti and William Wellman; Domenic Cusmano and Russell Fralich; Michael Mirolla and Jennifer Deleskie; Genni Gunn and Irene Aguzzi; for non-fiction, Licia Canton and Jessica Little; Jim Zuccherro and Andy Kozina, Liana Cusmano and Anna Maiolo; for poetry, Carmelo Militano and Jeanne Schoenwandt. Mentees who completed texts during the mentorship were invited to submit them to *Accenti Magazine* for consideration.

Comments about the “Relaunch Your Passion for Writing” Mentorship Program were very positive:

“It has been an absolute delight. I worked with a talented writer, mentor and coach whose insight gave me constant cause for reflection and growth. I have a better grasp on my writing approach.”

“I thank the AICW for having provided me with the opportunity for accompaniment in my writing process.”

“I appreciate my mentor’s expertise, judgement, and critiques. It was a pleasure working with her.”

“The mentorship was a genuine boon to me. My gratitude to the AICW.”

The second part of the project involved a survey sent to AICW members in August 2021. Members were asked to assess, among other things, pre-Covid in-person events, and current online activities, as well as the newsletter, website, and contests. They were also asked for suggestions on how to improve future AICW activities and events. Thirty percent of members responded. Among the highlights:

- a majority of respondents reported that they joined the Association to socialize with other writers, meet published authors, and read their works at public events.
- 86.2% of respondents were interested in reading their work at future public readings.
- 34.5% of respondents would join a volunteer committee.
- of respondents who follow the AICW on social media, 31% do so on Instagram, 27% on Twitter.
- most respondents find the AICW Newsletter a great source of information, though a majority also finds the newsletter format and design obsolete.
- the AICW’s most sought-after activities are:
  - conferences and workshops;

- “Books and Biscotti” events;
- “Shut Up and Write”;
- “4 chiacchiere in italiano”;
- a majority of respondents were satisfied with the “Venera Fazio Poetry Contest” and the AICW Bressani Literary Prize.
- there was equal satisfaction with the AGM on Zoom and with past in-person AGMs.

The third and final part of the project involved a more general survey about knowledge of AICW and its activities sent to the public at large in November 2021. The survey was circulated specifically among about 4500 readers of *Accenti Magazine*. The response rate was two percent. In general, respondents indicated that:

- they attended AICW events or activities to socialize with writers; to meet published authors, and to build on their writing credentials.
- respondents who were non-members of the Association or who have never participated in its events or activities reported that they would join mentorship programs, Zoom events, public readings and events, “Shut Up and Write,” conferences, book presentations and literary forums.
- activities and events that respondents would like to see in the future include readings, conferences, presentations by authors within and outside the Italian community, book reviews, and writing and editing workshops.
- respondents also reported that they would like to see future activities in hybrid form, a combination of virtual and in-person events.

Survey respondents were invited to enter a draw. Prizes included books and an AICW membership. The winners are Luigi Spadari, Rene Pappone and Giovanna Capozzi.

Since the AICW is managed by volunteers and has limited resources, establishing a list of priority activities was essential. The next step will be for the AICW Executive to review and analyze all the data and organize events that reflect the needs of its members.

