

P.A.C.E.

POET-IN-RESIDENCE



This compendium brings together the voices of people living with persistent pain, through poems created through Gold Coast Health's Poet-in-Residence program. Delivered in partnership with Gold Coast Health's Creative Health Hub and Interdisciplinary Persistent Pain Centre (IPPC), with support from Everybody NOW! and poets Angela Peita and Sarah Temporal, the evidence-based program creates space for patients to process, explore and share their experiences through poetry.



Each year, poets work with patients in sessions combining play, humour, creative writing and reflection. These sessions invite people to find words for experiences that can be difficult to describe, making room for frustration and loss alongside humour, connection and hope.

Gathered here and thoughtfully presented as visual works, these poems honour each writer's unique perspective.

These works reveal not only the emotional depth of the individuals who created them, but also the evidence-in-practice of creative expression as a therapeutic tool. Patients have learned techniques to help them process and cope with pain, finding language and imagery for experiences that are often invisible or misunderstood. These words and artworks stand as reminders that healing is not always about a cure – sometimes it is about being witnessed and understood.

Through honesty,
courage and creative
exploration, these
poems ask us to listen
more closely, feel more
deeply and recognise
the humanity within
every pain story.

2026

POETRY SHOWCASE

POETICS OF PAIN

Transforming the unseen realities of chronic pain into language, imagery and connection. Honouring lived experience, creative courage and the many ways we learn to live with pain.

This exhibition showcases poetry written by patients of Gold Coast Health's Interdisciplinary Persistent Pain Centre (IPPC) over the past twelve months. Developed in collaboration with the Creative Health Hub, it demonstrates how creativity has become a vital companion for people navigating the daily realities of persistent pain.

Through the P.A.C.E. program, participants worked alongside a poet-in-residence who offered guidance, techniques and gentle encouragement to explore writing as a way of expressing, understanding and responding to the experience of pain. What emerged is a body of work that is deeply personal yet universally resonant - a testament to the power of creative practice to illuminate, soften and transform.

Presented during National Pain Week, the exhibition acknowledges the millions of Australians living with chronic pain and celebrates the strength, vulnerability and insight of those who choose to share their stories. Each poem and artwork offers a window into the lived experience of pain: its weight, its complexity, its unexpected moments of clarity, connection and hope.



This program was delivered with Angela Peita and Sarah Temporal (poets) who facilitated sessions that created a safe, positive space for our patients to express themselves.

Thank you to Everbody NOW! for ongoing program support, as well as Brody Smith and Daniele Constance who designed the visuals for the patients' poems.

SUNRISE

BY MERYL

My pain is like a sunrise
rising with rays of
inflammation

It wakes me every morning

LIGHTNING

BY ANN

My pain can be like lightning
striking when and where it chooses.
Sometimes the muscle contractions are so strong
all I can do is freeze,
and pretend
to be admiring the view.

Oftentimes it's like a million needles stinging.
But not to worry, I know it will pass,
and my sun will shine again.

WAVES OF SAND

BY BARBARA

Take me there:
wet / soft / hard / hot
it is you that shifts,
weaves the shape
of time. I am grateful
you support my feet.
As the waves roll in
I dive in deep.

I WISH I WERE AN EAGLE

BY SIMON

I feel I am an eagle
not because I soar like one, but
because I used to be one.
Now let me explain.

I love eagles therefore I used to love myself,
but not now.
I felt peace when I saw them
and now I feel nothing.
Where is my eagle?
One day I'll find him.

FULL MOON

BY AMALIA

My wheelchair is a full moon
It guides me safely
in my darkest day
It shines a light
on what independence can be
It emits rays
to ease my discomfort
It shines a pathway
to where my life can go

CLOUD

BY ANGIE

My body is like a cloud.
Sometimes it is light,
white and bright.

The sun shining through,
warming my back.

Otherwise, it can be angry, grey.
The thunder and hail surging
through my veins.

As a cloud,
I can fly through the sky
and see all,
or I can be full, dark and
weighed down by too much.

RECIPE FOR PAIN

BY PAULA

First, you need to gather past and present trauma
Add in some emotional upheavals
Sprinkle in some injuries
To spice up the experience
Simmer with other health issues
Combine with financial burdens
Beat until it all combines
Bring it to the boil until it thickens
Bake at a moderate heat for 51 years
until golden-brown, and soft to touch.

Finally, ice with preferred toppings
That your body requires
Notice the changes you have achieved
Be mindful, you are doing well
You are always changing
What you have been through
Has made you the person you are.

You've got this.

RAIN

BY RILEY

Pitter Patter Pitter Patter
On my glass door
This pain rains down
Like a storm
With little light coming through
Peace and sadness wrap me
Putting me to sleep
In a blanket tightly

BIG ANGRY DOG

BY DANA

My pain is like a big angry dog,
That bails you against a brick wall,
It barks and growls, baring its teeth,
It's intention to make me fall.

It's fangs both intrigue me and fill me with fear
They are jagged, sharp and huge!
With spit trailing down, it still gnashes those spikes
Snarling, without any refuge.

My body quakes as my heart stutters and jumps,
I'm frozen in time in this place.
My nerves are on fire, tense like this dog,
We are both stuck in this hurting space.

And that's when I realise, that's when I truly do
know,
If I treat this dog kindly, allow my joy to just be,
I can find a zone outside of pain,
A sanctuary where I am free.

VOLCANIC

BY PENNY

My pain is like volcanic rock.
It has been fractured
and been broken.
It has stood the test of time.
With strength at the core
(and chips off the exterior and
weakened jagged edges)
The base remains strong.

MUD

BY LYNDA

Pain is like sinking in a soft muddy bog
Slow, restricting, hard to move, constant, all encasing

Slippery to the sides
Slippery underneath
Slippery and sinking downwards
Sinking ... sinking ... sinking

Feet trying to find something solid
But bottomless

Can't see
Can't breath
Can't grip onto anything
Constant pressure

Struggling makes you sink further
No hope of rescue
Slipping into unconsciousness
Dying

And no one else can see me ... or so I think
Suddenly I remember deep down inside
Hand reaching down from above to gently grab my hand, my heart
Giving me strength, pulling me up, giving me hope
Anchoring with something solid, trustworthy, never changing
and pointing north
Onwards and continuing upwards

Giving me purpose
Reminding me to try to be thankful, positive
and even in pain, to refocus on other things, to encourage and
to help others with what I know.

RUBBER BAND

BY FAIRLEIGH

My body is like a rubber band
When its new, it's flawless and strong
But life will always find a way
To make it stretch
And bend in different ways
When stretched too far
The cracks become visible
It never quite snaps back
But if it stretches just enough
It can hold things together

MY BODY IS A HOME

BY ASPEN

My body is like an old Victorian House
It creaks and groans
It needs a lot of work to maintain
It always has problems
Seemingly popping up out of nowhere
It might be slightly haunted
By a grumpy old person
Who wants to be left alone
But for all its faults and problems
It has strong foundations
It stands through harsh weather
Through bright sunny days
Without crumbling down to dust and ashes

BIG SKY

**BY CREATIVE CONNECTIONS
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

As soon as the sun comes up
My feet touch the ground
It's like pushing through to the
Freedom

I've got to move
I've got to move

There's a sense of triumph
There's a sense of arrival, of leaving

It's a big sky
Patches of blue, patches of cloud
It's a big sky
It's a big sky

As soon as the sun goes down
My feet touch the water
It's like pushing through to the
Freedom

ONION

BY ANGELIQUE

My pain is like a rotting onion
It stinks
It has many layers
And needs to be cut with a knife
No one wants to be around
To cry when it is cut
But once rotten
It is soft and squishy

2025

POETRY SHOWCASE

From bubble wrap to dragon fire, popcorn to petals, these poems offer honest, surprising and inspiring reflections on living with persistent pain, and how tuning into Safety In Me messages (SIMs) can help.

SIMs are things that make us feel safe and supported. They help the brain worry less and the body feel more at ease, making it easier to manage pain in everyday life.

The idea of SIMs comes from pain science research and is used in pain management to help people re-train how their brain and body respond to pain. By focusing on feelings of safety rather than danger, patients can gently shift their pain experience over time. Through writing, patients were able to connect with their values, memories, humour and hopes – all of which can act as SIMs. In this way, expressive writing becomes a practical tool for shifting attention away from fear and towards safety, connection and meaning.

This digital poetry exhibition shares the experiences and voices of people living with persistent pain. The works were created by patients in the P.A.C.E. (Pain + Activity + Coping + Education) program at Gold Coast Health's Interdisciplinary Persistent Pain Centre (IPOC), as part of a Poet-in-Residence initiative delivered in partnership with Everybody NOW!, the Gold Coast Health Creative Health Hub and IPPC.

Facilitated by poet Angela Peita from Everybody NOW!, the sessions combined play, humour and creative writing to support emotional expression and self-reflection.

Now, their words are printed and with care, transformed into visual works that honour each patient-turned-poet's unique experience.

Pain may be persistent, but so is creativity.

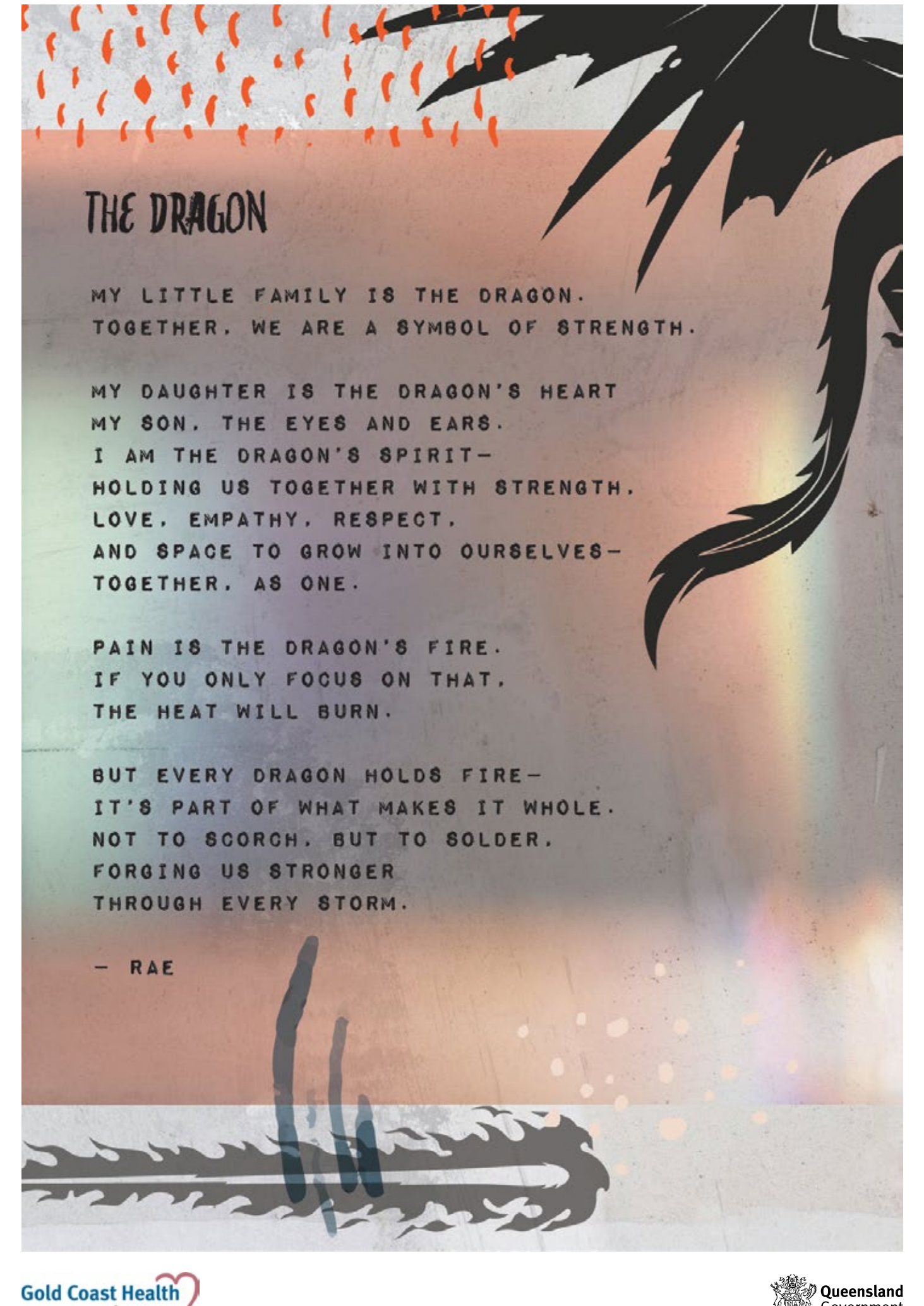


This program was delivered with support from Everybody NOW! who helped facilitate sessions that created a safe, positive space for our patients to express themselves.

Thank you to Zoe Ryan and the QUT Design Lab for transforming our patients' poems into powerful visual artworks. Your thoughtful design brought their words to life in the most meaningful way.

EVERYBODY NOW!

QUT Design Lab



THE DRAGON

MY LITTLE FAMILY IS THE DRAGON.
TOGETHER, WE ARE A SYMBOL OF STRENGTH.

MY DAUGHTER IS THE DRAGON'S HEART
MY SON, THE EYES AND EARS.
I AM THE DRAGON'S SPIRIT—
HOLDING US TOGETHER WITH STRENGTH,
LOVE, EMPATHY, RESPECT,
AND SPACE TO GROW INTO OURSELVES—
TOGETHER, AS ONE.

PAIN IS THE DRAGON'S FIRE.
IF YOU ONLY FOCUS ON THAT,
THE HEAT WILL BURN.

BUT EVERY DRAGON HOLDS FIRE—
IT'S PART OF WHAT MAKES IT WHOLE.
NOT TO SCORCH, BUT TO SOLDER,
FORGING US STRONGER
THROUGH EVERY STORM.

— RAE



I WANT TO BE HAPPY

I WANT TO BE HAPPY.
I LIKE TO BE HAPPY.
I LIKE THE PEOPLE AROUND ME TO BE HAPPY, TOO.
SO I DO THINGS TO MAKE THEM SMILE—
AND THEIR CHUCKLES MAKE ME SMILE RIGHT BACK!

MY WHOLE FAMILY'S THE SAME.
WE SHOULD'VE BEEN BORN IN A CIRCUS—
A FAMILY OF CLOWNS IN BIG, OVERSIZED, COLOURFUL
CLOTHES.

BIG RED PUFFY PANTS
THAT BALLOON OUT IN THE WIND,
SLOPPY SHIRTS, BOW TIES,
AND OF COURSE...BRACES OR SASHES
TO HOLD IT ALL TOGETHER.

BIG FLOPPY HATS,
PLAYFUL MAKEUP—
LOTS OF COLOURS,
LOTS OF NOISE,
LOTS OF FUNNY TRAINING:
FLIPPING, FLOPPING, JUMPING, SPINNING

NOW MY ONE-YEAR-OLD GRANDDAUGHTER
GIGGLES WITH GLEE,
COPYING US THE BEST SHE CAN.

SHE'S THE FUNNIEST CLOWN OF US ALL—
THE JOYFUL PRODUCT
OF A HAPPY FAMILY.

— LYNDA

TUMULTUOUS OCEAN

MY PAIN IS A TUMULTUOUS OCEAN.
IT ALWAYS HAS THE POWER
TO OVERTAKE ME AND DRAG
ME UNDER.

BUT SOMETIMES,
IF I STUDY THE EBB AND
FLOW OF THE WATER,
I CAN RIDE THE WAVES.

EACH DAY I SET SAIL—
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE
WEATHER BRINGS. BUT...
EACH STORM I WEATHER,
I AM GUARANTEED THAT
EXPERIENCE BUILDS
CHARACTER—
AND MY KNOWLEDGE
OF THE SEAS.

— GRACE

Uninvited Guest

My pain is an uninvited guest
that keeps showing up.
In fact, my pain is the uninvited guest
that won't leave—

despite how much
I try to ignore, push past or
through—
they keep jumping out ahead,
always arriving before I show up.

The more I resist them,
the more they get on top of me.
As I reduce how far I can go
and what I do,
they smother me more and more.

But now I realise—they will always
be there.
I don't exclude them or ignore
them as much.

I include them.
I make accommodations
and let them walk beside me.

Not in front.
Not behind.
Just beside me,
in silence,
as I grow my strength
and consistency
each day.

—Arna

Living in a Box

Chronic pain is like living in a box—
restrictive and cramped.
Hard to breathe, pressure intense,
the suffering so ramped.

The silence is deafening.
Left with my own thoughts,
and it can get dark—so very, very dark.
I feel disconnected.
I feel such pain.
No one can see in, to know what's really there.
Does anyone even really care?

But—
Dare I venture out?
If I can just manage to tear through,
I might find some space,
feel my muscles working—
if I can just get out of this place.

Fresh air, at last.
Hope for the future.
Leaving debilitating pain in the past.

A little quality of life.
New beginnings.
And help from friends—
the extra trimmings.

— Lynda

THE BUBBLE WRAP

I was sitting in the car,
waiting for my wife to drive us to my appointment.

Across the road,
a young girl was getting into her new old car.
She looked over and smiled.
I smiled back.

Then she hopped in,
hit the throttle too hard,
and veered straight into the post across the road—
leaving a big dent in the side.

I pretended I didn't see.

That night,
I took a little bit of bubble wrap
and taped it to the post.

The next day,
she came out to inspect her car.
She noticed the bubble wrap,
paused for a moment,
then smiled—
and quietly cleaned the mark.

— Michael





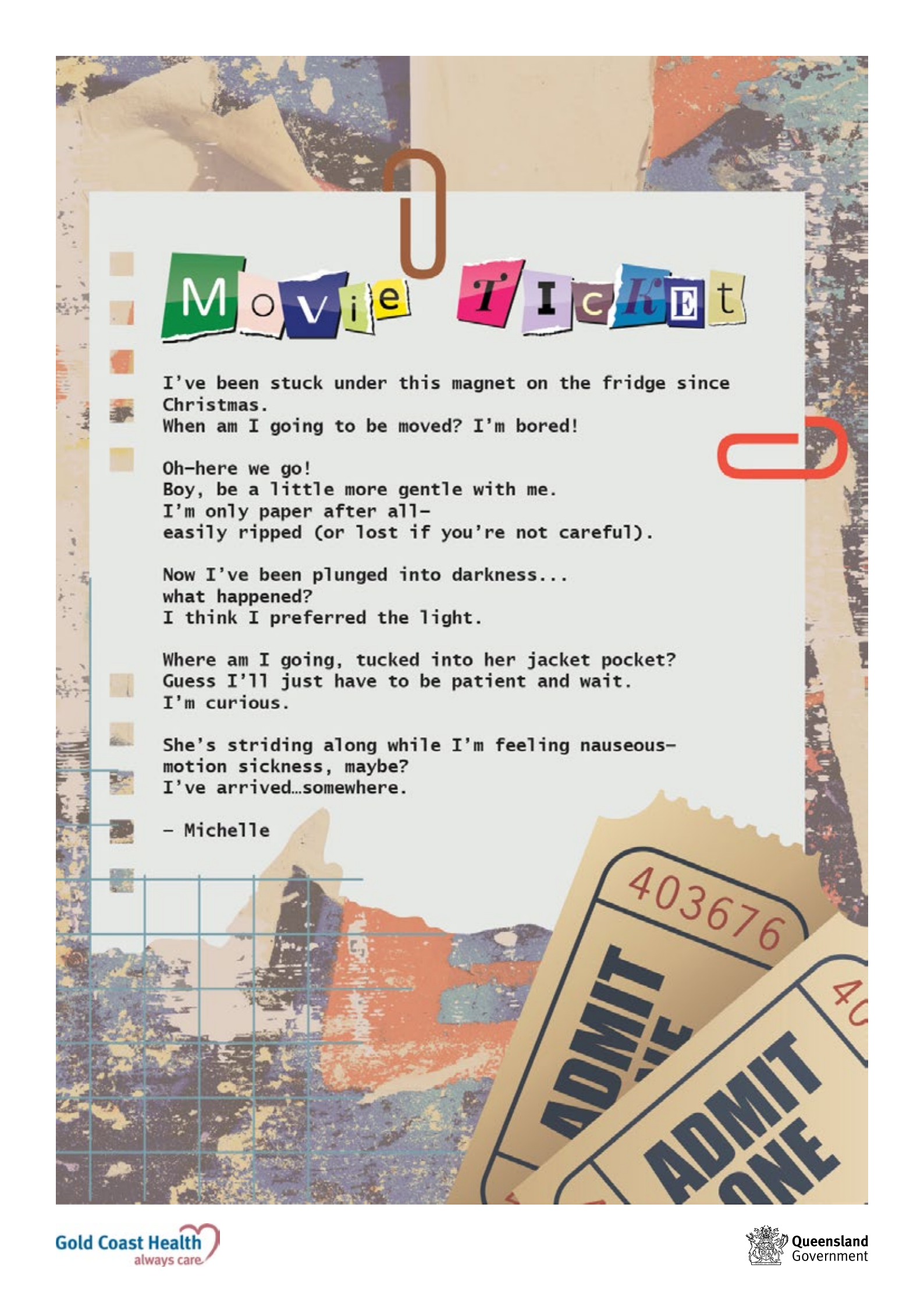
I Started to Jump and Float

I started to jump and float—
and with practice,
I can now fly great!

I found a beautiful long-stemmed flower
that became magical,
and now I can spread my sparkle
and smiles over everyone.

My granddaughter will think
I'm her hero now.

— Lynda



Movie Ticket

I've been stuck under this magnet on the fridge since Christmas.

When am I going to be moved? I'm bored!

Oh-here we go!

Boy, be a little more gentle with me.

I'm only paper after all-
easily ripped (or lost if you're not careful).

Now I've been plunged into darkness...

what happened?

I think I preferred the light.

Where am I going, tucked into her jacket pocket?

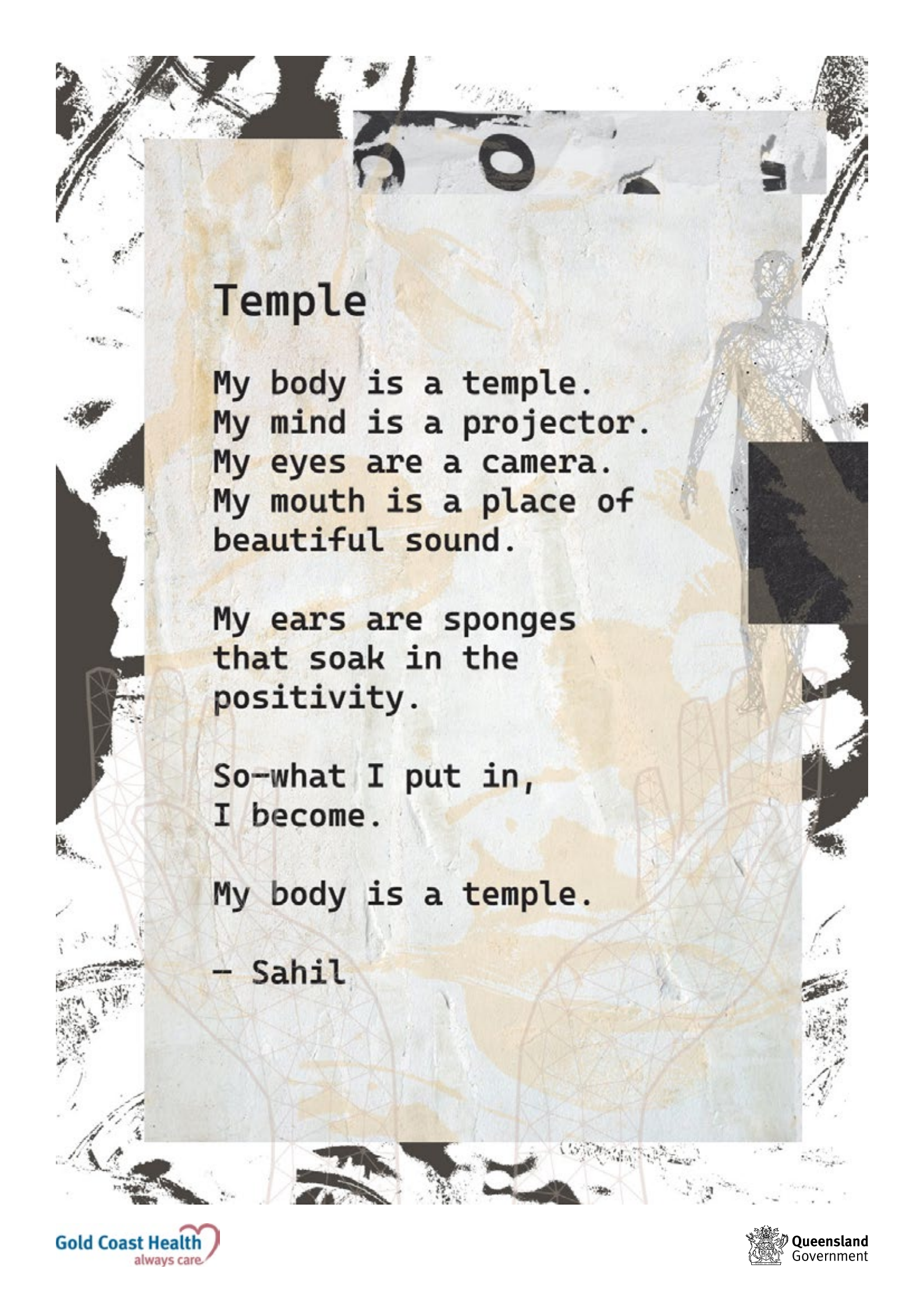
Guess I'll just have to be patient and wait.

I'm curious.

She's striding along while I'm feeling nauseous-
motion sickness, maybe?

I've arrived...somewhere.

- Michelle



Temple

My body is a temple.
My mind is a projector.
My eyes are a camera.
My mouth is a place of
beautiful sound.

My ears are sponges
that soak in the
positivity.

So-what I put in,
I become.

My body is a temple.

– Sahil



Petunia Petal Tree

My name is Petunia Petal,
I live in my backyard,
down where the vegetables grow.

When I grow up,
I wish to change
from a petal to a lovely tree,
so I can sway in the breeze,
and let the birds make nests in my branches,

I will see all the baby birds,
hear them chirping
and then watch them fly away
to their new homes
in other trees.

My name is now
Petunia Petal Tree.

— Margaret



Microwaveable Popcorn

My pain is like a microwaveable bag of popcorn.
Sometimes it pops beautifully—
it tastes delicious and buttery.
Other times, it burns,
and I find a lot of unpopped kernels.

Just like it's hard to eat those kernels,
it's hard to manage the pain sometimes.
I just have to find the proper
temperature and time in the microwave
to try to get the best popcorn.

— Everlaine

2024

POETRY SHOWCASE



The Gold Coast Health Creative Health Hub teamed up with local arts organisation Everybody NOW! to deliver an innovative artist-in-residency program with patients from The Interdisciplinary Persistent Pain Centre's PACE Program.

The PACE (Pain + Activity + Coping + Education) Program is an intensive 4-week period focused on improving physical, emotional, and social wellbeing and quality of life, despite the persistence of pain.

Everybody NOW's Poet-In-Residence project provided a professional poet, writer and performer, to work with participants once a week over duration of their program.

Lead poet Angela Peita shared poetry and creative writing skills and explored the poetic form as a medium and tool for processing emotional and psychological aspects of pain, as well as elevating the visibility of peoples lived experiences of persistent pain through their written expressions.

This exhibition of poetic text is a selection of poems curated from the writings of the participants, created into visual artworks by Eddie. Design Studio.

We hope you enjoy reading them.

ABOUT EVERYBODY NOW!

EVERYBODY NOW! reate participatory arts projects that generate joy.

Proudly based out of the Gold Coast, as a HOME Company at HOTA Home of the Arts, Everybody NOW! work across the City and Australia to create high-quality, community-engaged arts projects with high-impact community benefits.

Our work extends across art-forms; from slam poetry for seniors, inter-generational radio stations, roller skating rock shows, artists-in-residencies, storyteller programs, large-scale dance projects, to community workshops and talks.

We believe that joyful acts of togetherness, alongside optimistic and artful distribution, can Move Communities to feel more connected, empowered, and valued.

At the heart of all our work is REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES, EVERYBODY NOW!



EVERYBODY NOW!



CONSUMPTION OF PAIN

By Michael Wilkins

The pain that you feel it gets in your head
A lot of the time you think you're better off dead
You hold on to the morsels of pleasurable things
Memories from the past of happier times
A morsel of pleasure caught up in your mind
That morsel of time you keep in your brain
That sweet morsel of peace that keeps you from going insane

You'd try if you could but it just doesn't help
others see you as broken
To be put back on the shelf
That's probably why I keep to myself

But I'm not that broken that I cannot feel
And it doesn't help when you're trying to heal
You push others away cause you think that's the best
When deep down inside you want to pull them to your chest

DON'T STOP DREAMING

BY AADHIRA VELLALA

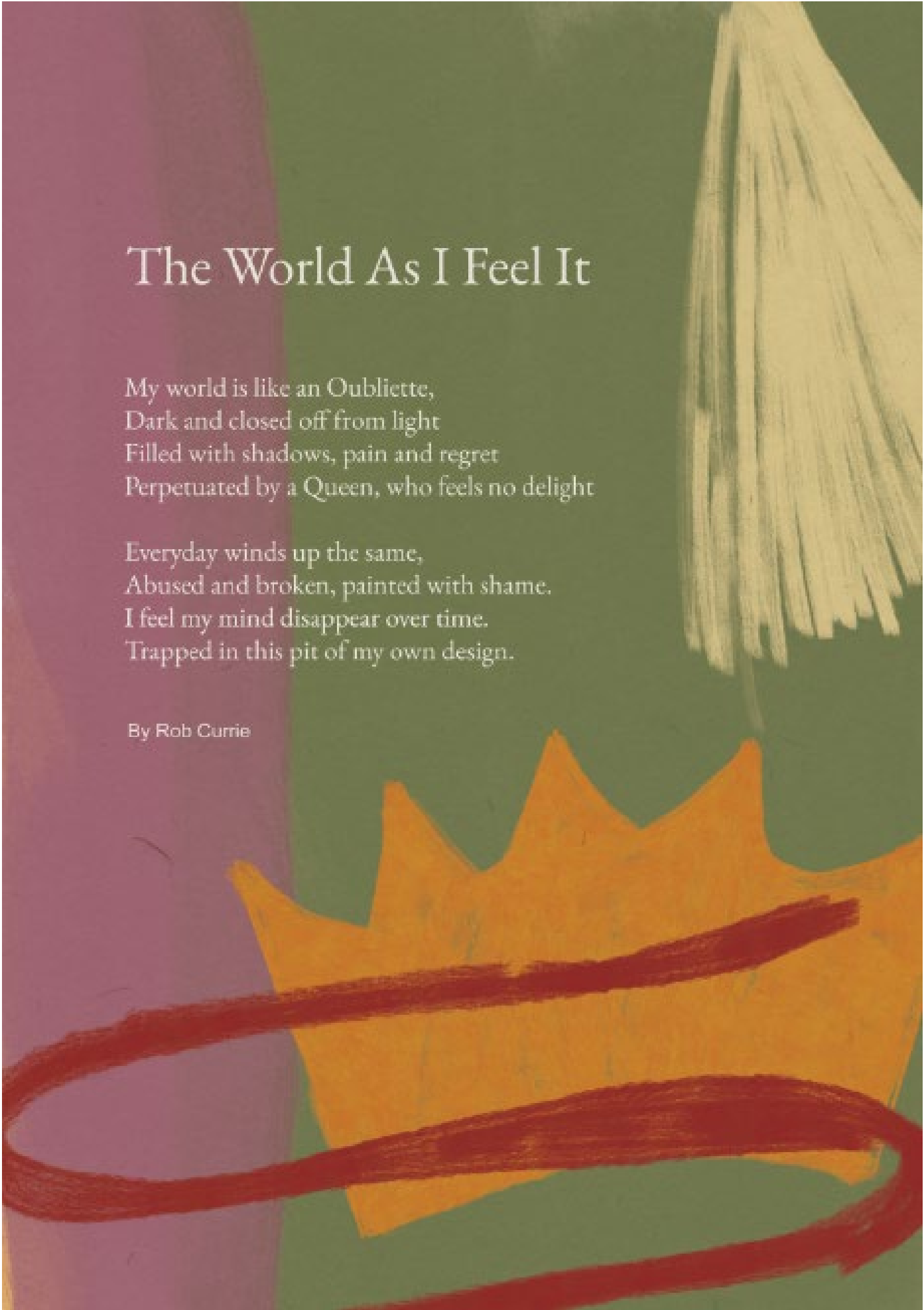
Stop! Keep the cascade of tears running. After all, that is what defines one of the laws in this new world. Ruled by the dictator known as pain. The living conditions here will break you. There's heavy work for little pay. Simply getting through to the end of each day will leave you with fatigue and aches. The air here feels so heavy to breathe. Even the corner of your lips is dragged down by the intense gravity.

But please, keep pushing through. Through hard work, we can slowly change this place. One pixel at a time we can paint a dream with vibrant colours. A dream where everything doesn't feel so heavy. Where even light can have a safe space to shine. So please, don't stop dreaming. The air may feel lighter than you realise. Where you can feel the gentle breeze soothing your cheeks as you inhale the taste of salt and sand by the soft beach. Lightened up by the warmth of a golden globe. A place, where you may finally be free.

DEALING

The wolf is at the door
He is creeping up on me
I feel him now prominently
On my back
I sit
Breathe
Wait
The wolf is slipping away
He is receding into the
Shadows of my mind
Fresh thoughts start to
Abound
Life begins again

By Anna Lorcan



The World As I Feel It

My world is like an Oubliette,
Dark and closed off from light
Filled with shadows, pain and regret
Perpetuated by a Queen, who feels no delight

Everyday winds up the same,
Abused and broken, painted with shame.
I feel my mind disappear over time.
Trapped in this pit of my own design.

By Rob Currie

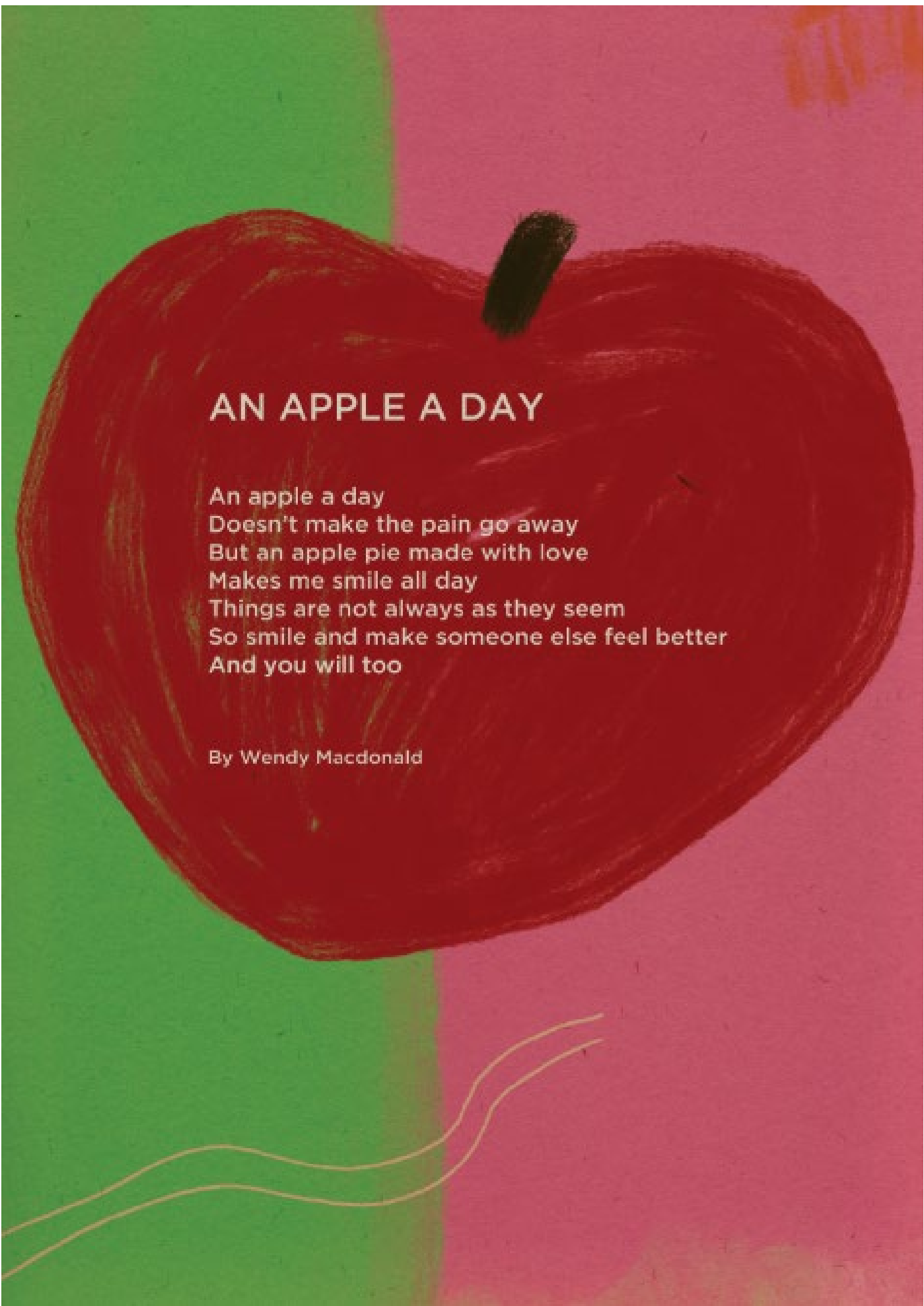
ROTTING

in pain?

My future rots away while I live with chronic pain
Thinking of the passage of time, I'll never say
My wisdom improves with every sunrise
As the suffering I've endured shows
That pain has infected my mind
And so it's naive to believe
I can cure this situation
Since I realise how
Unhappiness
Inverses
Hopefulness
As I'm convinced
I'm shackled by agony
It's therefore foolish to say
My mind's potential has no limit
By using mindfulness, I understand
I'm too fragile to march into more battles
Having been seared by pain, I'll never believe
My life can blossom while I live with chronic pain.

Now read each line again, beginning with the bottom line.

BY AADHIRA VELLALA



AN APPLE A DAY

An apple a day
Doesn't make the pain go away
But an apple pie made with love
Makes me smile all day
Things are not always as they seem
So smile and make someone else feel better
And you will too

By Wendy Macdonald

MY HOME

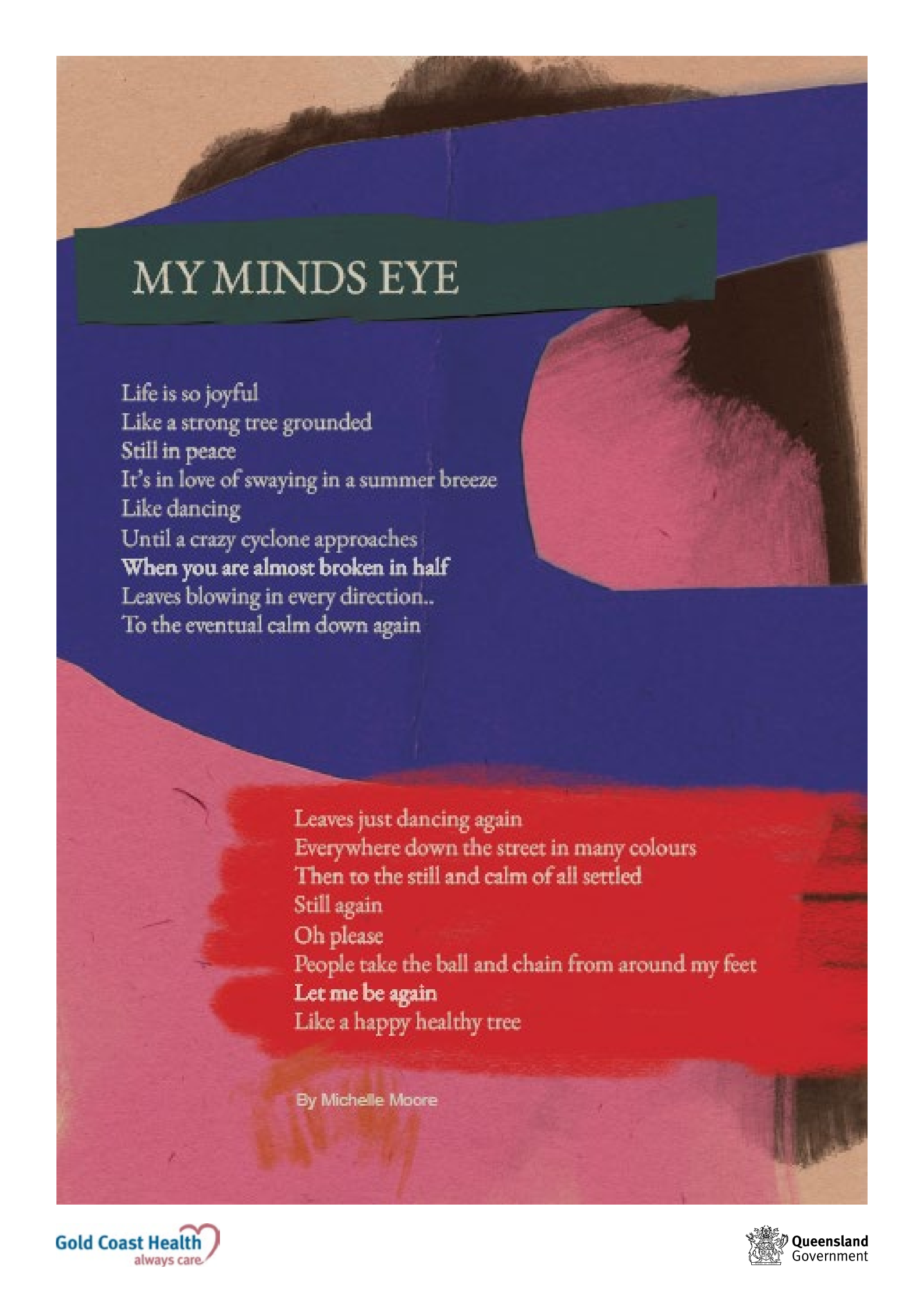
BY MARIE BROWN

My home is my prison
The only time I leave it when
I see my Dr or I have an appointment
I don't have friend
I don't have family
My start to the year
Has been dramatic

THE WOLF

Feelings of attack the wolf on my back
Dragging me down
World on my shoulders
Everybody wants a piece of my time
Overwhelmed, not coping, need my space and
time to myself
Lovely green apple, new life, juicy beautiful taste
Im on the mend
Freedom

By Susan Davies



MY MINDS EYE

Life is so joyful
Like a strong tree grounded
Still in peace
It's in love of swaying in a summer breeze
Like dancing
Until a crazy cyclone approaches
When you are almost broken in half
Leaves blowing in every direction..
To the eventual calm down again

Leaves just dancing again
Everywhere down the street in many colours
Then to the still and calm of all settled
Still again
Oh please
People take the ball and chain from around my feet
Let me be again
Like a happy healthy tree

By Michelle Moore