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Poets find voice through festival

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It is poetry, Jim, but not as we know it . . . or at least that is the hint from Wanaka wordsmiths supporting the inaugural Outspoken Festival which on Tuesday brings musings from the town's youth.

The festival, which got under way on January 12, is presenting weekly performances from a range of artists until February 18.

Last week veteran New Zealand poet Sam Hunt entertained at three sold-out shows and Lake Hawea wordsmith, festival co-organiser Liz Breslin, also delivered to a capacity audience, with Sue Wooton, fellow organiser Julia Le said.

The pair were thrilled with the success and that the six-week event had gained financial support from the Upper Clutha Community Arts Council (UCCAC).

Ms Le said the council had especially supported Tuesday night's "Wanaka Showcase" which would feature three local teenagers.

Ceilidh Johnston (18) and Kasper Humphrey (17) would deliver *Dear Society*, a poem they had written together and performed at the Mount Aspiring College senior prizegiving last month, and



Outspoken team . . . Outspoken festival co-organiser Julia Le (left) is thrilled the Upper Clutha Community Arts Council has thrown its weight behind the inaugural festival by funding performances and workshops for Wanaka's youth. Ms Le is pictured with (from second left) Mount Aspiring College teacher Annabel Wilson, college year 11 pupil Acacia Murray and UCCAC representative Susan Turnbull ahead of next week's "Wanaka Showcase" performance.

PHOTO: CRIS JOHNSTON

15-year-old Acacia Murray would recite her award-winning poem *Child of Mine*.

"It is great that the council is encouraging young talents in our community to find their voice and also for others to be exposed to performers. It [the council] has funded some free and discounted tickets for college pupils," Ms Le said.

The grant had also enabled John Carr to perform at local primary schools and rapping hip hop poet Tourettes to hold a "from the page to the stage" workshop at Mount Aspiring College.

"Poetry sometimes gets a

bad rap as being hard to engage with, but festivals like this help change that image," college senior English teacher Annabel Wilson said.

Year 11 pupil Acacia said she had "always liked writing" but did not read a lot of poetry. Two of her poems had won national awards but the Wanaka Showcase would be her first live recital.

Ms Le said "The Lyttelton Poets" (Helen Crystall, Rebecca Nash, Ciaran Fox, Ben Brown and Andy Coyle) would share the bill at Tuesday's event at Cinema Paradiso.