



Arts Access® Aotearoa

WHAKAHAUHAU KATO A O HANGA

Level 3, Toi Pōneke Arts Centre, 61-63 Abel Smith St, PO Box 9828, Wellington 6141
T: +64 4 802 4349 F: +64 4 802 4357 E: artsadmin@artsaccess.org.nz W: www.artsaccess.org.nz

Big 'A' Winton and Margaret Bear Young Artist Award

Winner: Mary Dennis, Berhampore, Wellington

Judges' comment: "An outstanding nomination for a young writer who appears very clear about where she has come from and where she is going to. She has already won several competitions and had her work published, and clearly has great strength of character and generosity of spirit in wishing to help others overcome depression."

Some background: Mary Dennis is a published Wellington writer and has already won several writing competitions. In 2007, she won the secondary schools division of the Sunday Star Times Short Story Competition with a story called *Have You Tried Therapy?* There were more than 500 entries and the judge, writer David Hill, described it as "an emotionally powerful story of isolation and bleakness, nicely balanced by jet-black humour and moments of splendidly accurate observation." It was based entirely on her own experiences of trying different therapies – both here and Germany, where she lived between 2002 and 2005.

Mary has experienced depression since she was nine. She has struggled with an anxiety disorder, eating disorders and self-harm. She says: "Writing has saved me from defining myself by my mental illness. I have chronic depression and severe anxiety but I *am* a writer. There's a difference."

Mary is committed to using her own experience to help others. She works at Wellink Trust Te Hononga Ora as a youth advisor; advises on ways that policies can better serve mental health consumers; and is part of a team working on a school education programme to reduce stigma and discrimination towards people with mental illness. She is also developing workshops on therapeutic writing and aims to publish a collection of her poems based on her experiences as a young person with mental illness.

Mary completed the National Novel Writing Month Challenge (50,000 words in 30 days) in November 2008; won the youth division of the Whakatane Friends of the Library Short Story Competition in 2005 and then received a merit prize in the adult division in 2008; and has had a number of poems published in the annual poetry anthology, *Re-Draft*.