

FIGHTING WORDS

THE WRITE TO RIGHT



Mission Statement

*Our aim is to help children and young people, and adults who did not have this opportunity as children, to discover and harness the power of their own imaginations and creative writing skills. At its core, **Fighting Words** is also about something much broader and more inclusive: it is about using the creative practice of writing and storytelling to strengthen our children and teenagers – from all backgrounds – to be resilient, creative and successful shapers of their own lives.*

2020 REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Fighting Words is a free creative writing organisation whose headquarters is located beside Croke Park in Dublin's north inner city. Co-founded by Roddy Doyle and Seán Love in January 2009, we operate on the premise that creative writing is an essential part of every child's education: that giving children a real dedicated chance and space to explore the limitlessness of their imaginations does great things. The raw skills that are passed on here are some of the key ingredients for succeeding in life with marked improvements in self-expression, literacy, self-esteem and self-confidence. We have no purpose other than providing opportunities to engage their creative talents for as many children as possible, providing free workshops, programmes and publishing. 2020 was a very different year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools were closed for much of the year, and our staff and volunteers were all engaging with our programmes from home. At *Fighting Words* we were prepared for the lockdown that started in March, and we had all of our programmes ready to run online. Over the course of the year we engaged with more than 70,000 children and young adults, and since opening in 2009 we have worked with more than 200,000 participants.

Students

We work with primary schoolchildren in the mornings and second level students in the afternoons. We host dedicated sessions for children and adults with “additional needs” ranging from mental health issues to intellectual/physical disability to disadvantage and social marginalisation. We also send teams of tutors out to groups who cannot physically come to us, including places of institutional care, children’s hospitals and Oberstown campus.

We run free week-long summer camps in more specialised forms of writing for children. This includes fiction, prose, scriptwriting/film-making, playwriting, songwriting, poetry, graphic fiction, feature journalism, online media and documentary. We host Write Club, providing mentoring for teenagers who want to take their writing to another level and who come, in their own time, working on their novels and filmscripts.

As mentioned in the Introduction, because of the unprecedented circumstances in 2020 (which have continued into 2021), all of our programmes from 13 March 2020 moved online. We had a wide range of free programmes ready or primary and secondary school children to access via their teachers and/or parents/guardians. These included “How to” videos on graphic fiction, story writing, poetry, song writing, podcasting, film animation; and story prompts. We partnered with tv stations RTE Junior and TG4 to make the materials as widely available and accessible as possible. We published thousands of stories digitally over the course of the year in e-book formats. We also continued to publish in hardcopy.

Volunteers

Tutoring and mentoring at *Fighting Words* is provided by volunteers, of whom there are 1000 countrywide. All volunteers are subject to interview, reference checking, police vetting and training. Our Child Protection Policy is comprehensive and complies with best practice requirements. Anyone over 18 can apply to be a volunteer, If you are interested in getting involved as a volunteer, please see contact details below.

Demand

Since we opened in Dublin in 2009 students have been coming from every county on the island of Ireland. We are constantly booked out many months in advance. In order to try to meet the ongoing demand, more *Fighting Words* venues have been opening around the country. *Fighting Words* is now based in 18 locations around the island of Ireland.

***Fighting Words* around Ireland**

Fighting Words is now located in Belfast is located at the Skainos Centre in Belfast

Fighting Words in Mayo is based at National Museum of Country Life, Castlebar.

Fighting Words in Wicklow is based at Glenree.Centre for Peace & Reconciliation.

Fighting Words in Cork is based at the Graffiti Theatre, Blackpool, Cork.

Fighting Words in Galway is based at Galway Arts Centre.

Fighting Words in Kerry is based at the Seanchai centre, Listowel.

Fighting Words in Donegal is based at Bundoran & Ballyshannon libraries

Fighting Words in Wexford is based at Wexford Library.

Fighting Words in Kildare is based at Riverbank Theatre, Newbridge.

Fighting Words in Coleraine is based at Riverside Theatre, Coleraine,

Fighting Words in Conamara is based at Ionad Cultúrtha an Phiarsaigh, Ros Muc.

Fighting Words in Longford is based at Longford Town Library

Fighting Words in Clare is based at the county libraries

Fighting Words in Waterford is based at Waterford city library.

Fighting Words in Laois is based at the county library.

Fighting Words in Derry/Londonderry is based at the Playhouse Theatre.

Fighting Words in Limerick is based at the University Concert Hall.

Publishing

Every primary school child who comes to write a story at *Fighting Words* receives their own book of their story. Until the covid-19 lockdown these would be printed inhouse for the children to receive as they finished their workshops. Since March 2020 these stories are published only on our website. In 2020 we also published our award-winning 10th annual magazine in partnership with the Irish Times newspaper of new writing by children and young adults, in both hardcopy and digitally. We published 2 anthologies of short stories by 4th Year students: *The Mind's Penumbra* from Dunshaughlin Community College, Co. Meath and *To The Future and Back Again* from Moyle Park Community College, Clondalkin – our seventeenth and eighteenth anthologies of stories by teenagers. We published *Visions and Revisions*, a collection of short stories by Junior Cycle Teachers. We published our ninth collection of plays by teenagers. Digitally, we also published *Young Storykeepers*, a collection of stories in 5 volumes about lighthouses, written and drawn by primary school children; and *Dear 2030 Me* – a letter to the future in partnership with RTE HomeSchool Hub; *Near and Far are All The Same These Days* – a global writing lockdown project in partnership with 8 international partners; and *That One Time* – a collection of poems and stories by frontline families, with submissions by adults, teenagers and younger children.

Dublin City University Partnership

Our partnership with Dublin City University's Institute of Education continued to develop. The purpose of this partnership is to introduce the *Fighting Words* model into teacher training; to further develop the already multi-faceted number of creative collaborations between the university and *Fighting Words*; and to research the model in order to see if it can be adapted for use beyond creative writing into other areas of the curriculum. A key development in this programme has been the creation of a FW online module for use in the formal teacher training programme at DCU.

Creative Collaborations

Another way in which we have continued to expand access to *Fighting Words* services has been through creative partnerships with more arts, media and educational organisations. These collaborations allow a substantial number of children to take their interest to another level, with greater resources, facilities and expertise generously made available to us. During 2020 these creative partnerships have included Dublin City University, Great Lighthouses of Ireland, RTE Junior, TG4 Cúla 4 ar Scoil, Croke Park Museum, Abbey Theatre, Everyman Theatre (Cork), Irish Times, National Print Museum, Lyric Theatre (Belfast), Linenhall Theatre (Mayo), Mermaid Theatre (Wicklow), Riverbank Theatre (Kildare), Riverview Theatre, Coleraine, Playhouse theatre, Derry. National Libraries, Central Remedial Clinic, AsIAM, Neurodivergent Society (DCU), Dublin Arts & Human Rights festival, Anam festival, Cruinniú na nÓg, Traidfeist, and several more. We have received many prestigious awards over the years for the creative output arising from some of these collaborations.

Finance

Our 2019 audited accounts are available on our website beside this document. Our 2020 audited accounts will be available by July 2021.

Fighting Words is funded by philanthropic individuals and organisations, as well as the Department of Education & Science, Creative Ireland/Department of Culture & Gaeltacht, Dublin City Council and the Arts Council.

We work with thousands of children, young adults and people of all ages with “additional needs” every year, providing a completely free service for all. Demand for the service is such

that we are constantly booked out a year ahead. There are now eighteen *Fighting Words* venues in Ireland, and a large range of programmes available online that are also being used by the diaspora. If you are interested to help us keep the current show on the road, or interested in getting involved as a volunteer, please get in touch.

Governance

We are registered with the Charities Regulator, and our governance information is all available on our website on the same page as this document. Policies on Child Protection, Equal Opportunities, Data protection and privacy are available on our homepage.

Feedback and Complaints

Fighting Words is committed to ensuring that all our communications and dealings with the general public and our supporters are of the highest possible standard. We listen and respond to the views of the general public and our supporters so that we can continue to improve.

Fighting Words welcomes both positive and negative feedback. Therefore we aim to ensure:

- it is as easy as possible to make a complaint;
- we treat as a complaint any clear expression of dissatisfaction with our operations which calls for a response;
- we treat it seriously whether it is made by telephone, letter, fax, email or in person;
- we deal with it quickly and politely;
- we respond accordingly - for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, and information on any action taken, etc;
- we learn from complaints, use them to improve, and monitor them at board level.

If you have feedback or a complaint

If you have a complaint about any aspect of our work, you can contact Mr. Sean Love, Executive Director, in writing or by telephone, who will deal with your complaint in the first instance. Write to:

The Executive Director
 Fighting Words
 12-16 Behan Square
 Russell Street
 Dublin 1

Tel: 353 1 8944576

Email: info@fightingwords.ie

We are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm.

What happens next?

If you complain in person or over the phone, we will try to resolve the issue there and then. Similarly, if you complain by email or in writing, we will always acknowledge your complaint within 7 days and do everything we can to resolve it within 21 days. If this is not possible, we will explain why and provide a new timeframe.

What if the complaint is not resolved?

If you are not happy with our response, you may get in touch again with the Chairperson of *Fighting Words*. The Chairperson will ensure that your appeal is considered at board level and will respond within 2 weeks of this consideration by board members.

Roddy Doyle & Seán Love
FOUNDERS

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