



**FIGHTING  
WORDS**

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# **Volunteering with Fighting Words**

**Policy for Volunteers and Interns**

**Thank you! As a Fighting Words volunteer mentor, you are vital to delivering our programme of workshops, summer programmes and other events. We couldn't do what we do without you.**

**Following is our formal policy about volunteering with Fighting Words, so you know what to expect from us during your time here.**

## **Our 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 a wide range of backgrounds – to be resilient, creative and successful shapers of their own lives.

## **Policy Statement**

Fighting Words offers free story-writing workshops for primary school students in the mornings, creative writing workshops for secondary students in the afternoons and other activities in the evenings and at weekends, in the summer and during school holidays. Volunteers are a major resource and make a vital contribution to help us deliver our programmes and projects.

The Board of Directors and staff of Fighting Words understand and appreciate the value that volunteers bring to the work of the organisation.

We acknowledge and value the contribution of volunteers and undertake to organise our volunteer programmes effectively.

The aim of Fighting Words' Volunteer Policy is to support Fighting Words volunteers in delivery of programmes for children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The policies of Fighting Words are established and overseen by the Board of Directors, which delegates responsibility for implementation to the staff, and through line management, to project co-ordinators and volunteers.

No policy within the organisation operates in isolation and as such, other policies (health and safety, child protection, equal opportunities, etc.) will influence the procedures addressed through this policy. The Volunteer Policy informs and guides both staff and volunteers involved in projects and programmes run by Fighting Words. It ensures that appropriate procedures are put in place to safeguard the welfare of volunteers.

Fighting Words accepts and recognises its responsibilities to volunteers and will endeavour to carry these out by:

- Valuing the involvement of volunteers in its work because they help reflect the interests, needs and resources of the community Fighting Words aims to serve and they bring a unique perspective to the organisation's work.
- Recognising volunteers as the most essential part of the team, with a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff.
- Benefitting from the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers and believing that volunteers should also be able to gain personal benefits from the experience.
- Committing to managing volunteers in a way that ensures that the needs of both parties are met.
- Striving to create a diverse and inclusive organisation within a diverse and inclusive community.

- Ensuring equality of access to high-quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for its volunteers in all policies and procedures.

### **Definition of a Volunteer**

For the purpose of this policy, the definition of a volunteer is as follows:

- Any person who assists in the delivery of workshops and other programmes on a regular basis and is not a paid member of staff
- Any person working in the organisation as part of an educational course or as work experience

### **Volunteers do not include:**

- Members of the Board of Directors attending the organisation in order to carry out the duties allocated to them in said capacities
- Visitors to the organisation
- People walking by who stop to look in the window

### **Definition of an Intern**

Interns are volunteers who commit 15-20 hours per week to the organisation for a period of 2-6 months. Interns are often, but not always, third-level or postgraduate students – or recent graduates - who take up the internship for academic credit and/or experience in working with children in a leadership role.

### **Why do we have a Volunteering Policy?**

- To differentiate between the role of paid staff and volunteers.
- To outline the supports provided for volunteers in Fighting Words.
- To ensure that those working with volunteers understand their responsibility to work within current policies and procedures.

- To ensure that volunteer involvement in Fighting Words is in line with best practice.

### **Implementation**

**Staff:** The policy will be implemented by all staff and volunteer supervisors using the summary practice guidelines and Fighting Words Guidelines for Volunteer Involvement (available from the General Manager).

**Board of Directors:** It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors to ensure that there is a volunteer policy.

**Volunteers:** Volunteers should be made aware of our policy and guidelines at induction

### **Review**

This policy will be reviewed in consultation with relevant staff and volunteers in annually – the next review will take place in September 2023.

We think that you'll enjoy volunteering with us. Our volunteers are **lovely, dedicated, handsome and helpful people**, but most of them are not here because they're selfless. They're also here because **they enjoy it**. **We hope that you do, too.**

**Please sign the confirmation page and return it to your local Volunteer Co-ordinator – thanks!**

## **Where We Can Use Your Help**

At Fighting Words, we firmly believe in two things: 1) learning should be **enjoyable** and 2) volunteering should be **straightforward** and **easy**. We've designed our volunteering programme to be as simple and flexible as possible. You can volunteer as much or as little as you like.

### **Primary School Workshops**

We welcome an entire class of primary school students to our centres for a morning of story writing at locations around Ireland. The students - together - create and write their own books in two hours or so and leave Fighting Words with their own copy of the book.

These workshops are fast-paced and great fun.

### **Secondary School Workshops**

Fighting Words hosts secondary school students, who come to our centres for workshops for an introduction to creative writing. Each student produces a finished piece of work at the end of these sessions.

In Dublin, we also work with one class every week for an entire school year to produce an anthology of short stories. The mentors have the chance to work one-to-one with students on their projects, teasing out ideas on, say, dialogue and plot, pace or character.

This type of mentoring is ideal if you like the idea of establishing a working relationship with a particular student to help him or her produce a piece of work.

### **Evening and Weekend Workshops**

We offer occasional workshops in the evenings and on weekends on a wide range of literary topics and genres of writing. Most of these are offered to young people between the ages of eight and 18 although some are open to adults, usually those with additional needs. Some are individual workshops while other are a series or an ongoing project in a particular genre.

Mentors work with individuals or small groups on their own work. As these workshops are held on weekends and in the evenings, they are perfect for mentors who have day jobs.

### **Summer Camps and School Holidays**

At some locations, Fighting Words offers three- or four-day writing camps aimed at primary or secondary school students on a variety of topics, e.g., graphic novels, play writing/performance art and film script writing during the summer. The camps are led by experienced subject matter experts and practitioners and mentors are needed to bring the camp to life, working one-to-one or in small groups to help the students bring their writing to life. Mentors usually commit to the entire week for the summer camps, although we can be flexible about this, depending on individual mentors' schedules.

We also offer half-day and whole-day workshops to primary and secondary school students during the October, February and Easter school holiday breaks, covering different aspects of writing.

### **Staying Connected with Us - Email**

As a Fighting Words volunteer, you will be getting lots of emails from us telling you about the many opportunities available to you as a mentor. There will be emails about workshops at your location, special projects and other important mentor activities.

You may find it useful to create a separate folder for Fighting Words emails.

These are emails for your information only. If you cannot attend something, there's no need to reply to a general email.

If you have signed up for an event using the online calendar, you will receive an email confirming your booking and a reminder email two days ahead of the event.

### **Social Media – Follow Us and Share Your Experience**

Please follow us – and tell your friends and family!

Celebrate your volunteering experience by adding it to your experience. Share your experiences of the fun and magic by tagging us. Telling your volunteer story on social media helps us to recruit additional volunteers and lets schools and groups find out about us.

- **Facebook (fightingwordsireland),**
- **Twitter (@FightingWordsIE)**
- **Instagram (@fightingwordsireland)**
- **LinkedIn Fighting Words**

### **Volunteer Facilities and Information**

As of September 2022, Fighting Words workshops are delivered in over 15 locations on the island of Ireland.

The head office is located at Behan Square, 12-16 Russell Street, Dublin 1 D01 WD53.

### **Socialising**

Throughout your time with us, there will be opportunities for you to get together with other volunteers and staff. Friendships are



made and interesting conversations arise when everyone is relaxing.

### **Access to Fighting Words Events**

Trained volunteer mentors in Dublin, Wicklow, Wexford, Galway, Cork, Limerick and Kildare can add their names to the rota of events they want to participate in via the Fighting Words website: [www.fightingwords.ie](http://www.fightingwords.ie). Additional locations will be added in the future.

When you sign up for an event, you will receive a confirmation email immediately and then two days before the event is scheduled.

Volunteers in other locations will be contacted by the local project co-ordinators when workshops are scheduled.

### **Evaluation**

Everyone is asked to help to gather feedback from people attending events but also to contribute their thoughts and impressions of working with Fighting Words. Feel free to give feedback during the debrief at the end of workshops.

- Are there things you noticed that could be done better?
- Have you a simple idea that you're burning to suggest?
- Did you get enough information and did you feel that we took care of you?
- Did you have a good time?

Fighting Words strives to achieve the highest standards in the delivery of its activities and volunteers will be asked for their feedback and opinions to ensure we maintain these standards.

You will be asked about all aspects of volunteering with Fighting Words and your honest opinions are appreciated!

## **Specialist Skills**

Volunteers with specialist skills such as filmmaking, photography, workshop facilitation and illustration are most welcome. If you have a skill that you would like to offer, please contact us.

## **Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities**

Fighting Words identifies roles for volunteers, which extend the work of the organisation. Volunteers are involved in roles that complement, but never substitute, the work of paid staff. Role descriptions, outlining the purpose, tasks and main requirements of each role, are included on the following pages.

## **General Procedures for Volunteering at Workshops or Other Events**

Volunteers will be briefed about specific tasks prior to events by Fighting Words staff. It is important that you arrive at the scheduled time for this.

Below are some general considerations when volunteering at workshops or events. Volunteers should:

- Engage in the spirit of the event being bright, energetic, approachable and helpful
- Be aware of the nature of the event and be able to explain it to others, e.g. students, teachers, parents
- Observe and act on any behaviour that might be risky

**Further information on health and safety and child/vulnerable adult protection are provided in this document and the Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy.**

## **Line Management**

Volunteers are responsible to Fighting Words local co-ordinators. At the end of the workshop or other activity, or before you go on a break during the activity, please advise the local co-ordinator that you are leaving.

This is very important because, for example, if there is a fire in the venue it would be assumed that you are still inside if you haven't told us you are leaving! If you have to leave early, please notify the local co-ordinator as soon as possible.

Overall line management of volunteers lies with **Sara Bennett, General Manager.**

## **Guidelines for Online Workshops**

Fighting Words workshops also delivers workshops online via Zoom and other platforms. These sessions allow us to welcome participants and volunteers from all over Ireland.

### **Important points to remember include:**

- Always dress appropriately (no pyjamas, please!)
- Ensure that you are in a public/common area of your home, or at least that you are not obviously in a bedroom. Use Zoom filters to obscure your background if you like
- Keep your microphone muted unless you are in a speaking role to keep down on background noise
- Turn off your video if your attention is needed elsewhere during the workshop
- Please do not use your mobile phone during workshops

## **Fighting Words Volunteer Agreement**

The expectations of both Fighting Words and you as a volunteer are outlined below. This is of course a voluntary arrangement – it is binding in honour only and you are free to withdraw at any time.

### **What You Can Expect From Us**

Fighting Words will:

1. Offer training and familiarisation to all volunteers undertaking work
2. Listen to volunteers and deal effectively and fairly with any concerns
3. Value volunteers as important members of the Fighting Words team
4. Treat all volunteers equally in line with our Equal Opportunities Policy
5. Wherever possible, give volunteers at least 24 hours' notice of changes to any duties
6. Fighting Words reserves the right to require volunteers not to attend the centre or any Fighting Words off-site events pending any steps the organisation deems necessary, including investigation. Please refer to the Complaints Policy and Procedure in this booklet.
7. Hold your personal data in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### **What We Expect From You**

Volunteers will:

1. Report to the lead Fighting Words member of staff/project co-ordinator at each event at the specified time and follow all instructions given by them
2. Be available for the full duration of the time specified for each event, except in cases of emergency or where

- previous arrangements have been made for cover with Fighting Words staff/project co-ordinator
3. Give Fighting Words staff/project co-ordinators at least 24 hours' notice – or as much time as possible - should they be unable to undertake their allocated duties.
  4. Carry out the required duties at each event as specified in the Volunteer Role Descriptions
  5. Comply with the Fighting Words Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy. All volunteers are subject to Garda vetting
  6. Be aware of their own health and safety and of others in carrying out their duties

**We look forward to working with you and hope that you find the voluntary work rewarding and positive!**

## **Complaints Policy and Procedure**

### **Volunteer Complaints**

If a volunteer wishes to make a complaint, they should be given the opportunity to discuss this with the local volunteer co-ordinator or General Manager or such other person as appropriate.

If the volunteer is unhappy with the response, they should be advised that they can put their complaint in writing to the Executive Director (or such other person as appropriate), who will decide on further appropriate action, following consultation as appropriate.

If a volunteer has a concern about the abuse of a child the Fighting Words Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and procedures should be adhered to immediately.

### **Complaints Against Volunteers**

In the event that a complaint is received against a volunteer, the complaint should be assessed by the person who receives the complaint to assess its validity, in most cases the local volunteer co-ordinator and/or the General Manager.

Complaints may come from staff members, other volunteers and members of the public.

All complaints or concerns related to child protection must be investigated in line with the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy.

#### Nature of Complaints:

Complaints may:

- Relate to a specific incident on one or more occasions by a particular volunteer.
- Be generalised expressions of concern not aimed directly at one volunteer.
- Be independently witnessed.
- Be made by someone unwilling or unable to substantiate their claims by either personal testimony or other means of corroboration.
- Be verbal or written.

Response to complaints:

- The local co-ordinator or staff member who receives the complaint should pass it on to the General Manager (or to the Executive Director if the complaint relates in some way to the General Manager) and a written record noting the facts of the complaint should be recorded.
- If the complaint is made by an external person, e.g. a teacher accompanying their class, the name and contact details should be recorded. The person should also be asked to put the complaint in writing.
- The volunteer supervisor should consider the complaint and if the complaint is valid but not sufficiently serious to warrant formal action, the supervisor should interview the volunteer and discuss the complaint with him/her, advising if necessary and amending procedures and practices if appropriate.
- If the complaint is of a more serious nature, e.g. stealing, inappropriate use of organisation resources, or the use of and/or attending a Fighting Words event under the influence of alcohol or drugs, it should be referred to the General Manager (or to the Executive Director as appropriate). If an allegation of child abuse is made against a volunteer the procedure as outlined in Fighting Words Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and procedures should be followed.

- The General Manager (or other person designated as Investigating Officer) will lead an internal enquiry to investigate the complaint, if warranted.
- The volunteer may be required to cease their voluntary activity until the incident is investigated.
- The volunteer will be interviewed and made aware of the complaint made against him/her. The volunteer should be asked to comment and such comments should be noted.
- Any member of staff/volunteers/external person with information relating to the complaint should also be interviewed.
- All the facts relating to the incident should be given, avoiding superfluous comments and opinions.
- The Investigating Officer will write a report as soon as the investigation is completed. The report should include all the relevant information that will enable a decision on further action to be taken. The report should be sent to the Executive Director (or such other person as may be appropriate), who will decide on further action.

### Further Action

- Investigation may reveal that there are no cause or grounds for action, in which case the volunteer should be notified. If the investigation reveals that the complaint was warranted the volunteer may be required to discontinue their voluntary work with Fighting Words.
- If the complaint refers to an incident of an illegal nature, e.g. stealing, misappropriation of funds, etc. the complaint may be forwarded to the Gardaí.



## **Health and Safety – Dublin Only**

Being aware of health and safety issues for yourself and those around you is incredibly important for everyone involved in Fighting Words. The following pages outline some of the risks you should be aware of and how to deal with them.

**Please be aware of any health and safety guidelines that are specific to your location and follow all rules and guidelines provided.**

### **Definitions**

- **Hazard** – anything that can cause harm
- **Risk** – the chance, high or low, that someone will be harmed by the hazard

### **Basic Checklist**

1. Familiarise yourself with the specific location and its individual procedures
2. Preparation – double-check everything for potential hazards
3. Be constantly vigilant throughout (go through list of topics below)
4. Have a calm, effective and quick response to incidents
5. Report and record the incident

### **Slip, Trip, Fall**

- Will floors be slippery if wet?
- If spillage occurs, is it dealt with quickly? Where are mops, paper towels, etc?
- Could cables, etc cause a trip hazard?
- Are areas kept tidy and clear?
- Walk – please do not run

### **Heights**

We take every precaution at Fighting Words to avoid working at a height. If it is necessary, however, always make sure that the ladder is placed at the right position at the right angle and cannot slip.

Get someone to hold the ladder steady while you are on it.

### **Sprains, strains, pains**

Take care when lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving loads, whether by hand or other bodily force.

- Lift in the correct manner, using arms and legs to lever weight, keeping the back straight at all times – get a good grip, left smoothly and close to your body
- If you feel you have hurt yourself, report this immediately and do not force yourself to continue
- Only lift or carry what you can easily manage and get help if you are not sure you can lift or carry something by yourself.
- If moving heavy objects, wear steel toe cap boots.

### **Hazardous Substances**

Are there any chemicals (including cleaning agents) lying around? If so, keep them out of reach and contained.

### **Electricity**

Electricity can kill or cause severe burns – treat it with care. Always switch off electrical items before connecting or disconnecting any other electrical appliance.

### **Work Equipment**

Make sure you know how to operate equipment safely.

### **Prevent Fire or Explosion**

For a fire to start, fuel, air and a source of ignition are needed. Make every effort to control these and thus prevent potential fires.

## **First Aid**

- First aid means treating minor injuries and giving immediate attention to more serious casualties until medical help is available. There is a First Aid kit located in the kitchen of the Fighting Words Dublin centre. Project co-ordinators in other Fighting Words locations can advise the whereabouts of first aid kits in other Fighting Words venues.
- For activities taking place at Fighting Words Dublin, a member of staff looks after the First Aid kit, takes charge in an emergency and calls an ambulance if required.
  - The current Occupational First Aiders at Fighting Words in Dublin are **Sara Bennett, Mark Davidson, Colm Quearney and Emmy Lugoye.**
  - At Fighting Words Wicklow and Kildare, the Occupational First Aider is **Pierina Campbell.**
  - At Fighting Words Chonamara, the Occupational First Aider is **Brid-Treasa Wyndham.**
  - Please ask your local co-ordinator about the person with responsibility for first aid outside these locations
- For activities taking place in other venues, this will be the responsibility of an appointed person in the venue in the majority of cases but for outdoor events and some venues this will be the responsibility of the lead Fighting Words member of staff or project co-ordinator.
- If someone has been hurt or fallen ill, it is important to report it to the person responsible for first aid immediately and make the area safe, if possible, without causing harm to yourself or others.
- Reporting accidents and ill health is a legal requirement.

## **Emergency Procedures – Fire and Evacuation**

Familiarise yourself with the fire evacuation procedure of the venue, make sure you know and obey the rules and guidelines posted in each location.

Events take place in many different venues and locations, so fire exits and assembly points will vary for each one.

Keep any access ways for emergency services and all escape routes clear.

Locate the fire extinguishers and use as appropriate:

Red	Water	Wood, paper, fabrics
Beige	Foam	Flammable liquids, oils, fats, spirits
Blue	Powder	All fires including electric, flammable liquids and gasses
Black	CO <sup>2</sup>	Flammable liquid and electrical fires

## **Fighting Words and Your Data:**

Per the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Fighting Words acknowledges:

- Everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her.
- Such data must be processed fairly for specified purposes and on the basis of the consent of the person concerned or some other legitimate basis as provided down by law.
- Everyone has the right of access to data that has been collected concerning him or her, and the right to have it rectified.

Our commitment to all our volunteer mentors is that we will only use and hold your personal data in line with the requirements of the GDPR, i.e. for the purposes of managing the volunteer relationship.

Your personal data will never be shared with third parties without your clear and explicit consent.

If and when you cease volunteering with Fighting Words, your personal data will be deleted from our database and paper files.

## **Support and Supervision**

The General Manager is responsible for the overall management of volunteer involvement, including overseeing the implementation of the Volunteer Policy and dealing with any complaint or grievance relating to volunteers. The General Manager also provides overall support and supervision and identifies training requirements. The General Manager, other members of staff or local project co-ordinators will provide support and supervision during events.

All staff required to undertake such duties are provided with training in the management, supervision, support and training of volunteers.

Fighting Words is committed to improving the personal and professional effectiveness of volunteers. In addition to the volunteer induction training, some events may require specific training and volunteers will be notified of this in good time if training is required.

### **Insurance**

Volunteers are fully protected by the organisation's public and employer's liability insurance at all Fighting Words events. Please note that drivers using their own cars in connection with voluntary work must inform their own insurance company to ensure adequate and continued cover.

### **Dress Code**

Fighting Words is an organisation that works with children and young people. During working hours, we expect staff and volunteers to dress in a manner consistent with their responsibilities.

Inappropriate words, images or overtly political messages on clothing and other personal items are not acceptable.

All other forms of creative self-expression regarding your appearance are most welcome!

### **Inappropriate Behaviour**

Some of this may seem obvious but is important that we are explicit about what is inappropriate behaviour around the students.

A good rule to follow: if you think the child's parents would be uncomfortable if they were present, then you are in inappropriate territory. This means no cursing/swearing and no talking about sex, drugs or violence (unless it relates directly to fictional work with a student at secondary school level) or conversations of adult nature.

There should be no talking about students within earshot of other students. Never ridicule, insult or make little of anyone during an activity.

You **must not** set up appointments with any students outside the centre or offer lifts to children.

You **must not** ever attend Fighting Words programmes under the influence of alcohol or drugs OR use alcohol, tobacco or drugs in the company of children.

If you ever feel uncomfortable in a situation with a student, speak to a staff member immediately.

**Please see the Code of Behaviour in the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy booklet for more information.**

### **Technology – Code of Behaviour**

It is very important to maintain a safe environment for all participants. Fighting Words has implemented the following regarding technology and our volunteers and participants.

- Never send/receive private calls or texts while supervising children or young people
- Never contact children or young people (e.g. by phone, text, email) without prior parental consent or without the knowledge of Fighting Words staff

- Never give your personal phone number to children or young people
- Never befriend children/young people on social media sites
- Never take a photograph/video of a child without prior documented parental consent
- Fighting Words will ensure photographic/video content is appropriate
- Fighting Words will avoid naming the child/young person when using the photograph/video unless documented parental consent is confirmed

### **Use of Mobile Phones**

It's very important to show the students and their creative processes the utmost respect – **to pay attention to the story**. We therefore ask that you do NOT use your mobile phone during workshops.

If you need to take a call or send a text, excuse yourself and do so away from the children.

***By volunteering, you agree to abide by these guidelines.***





## Media and GDPR Consent

Fighting Words seeks **permission to take and use images and written or filmed feedback from the workshops of participants**, as a part of promotional material. This will include online, in print and audio-visual media, for archives, fundraising, to demonstrate project impact and promote engagement and events on via online, social media, television and radio-media formats.

**Fighting Words and Your Data:** Our commitment to all our volunteer mentors is that we will only use and hold your personal data in line with the requirements of the GDPR, i.e. for the purposes of managing the volunteer relationship and running Fighting Words programmes. Your personal data will never be shared with third parties without your clear and explicit consent. If and when you cease volunteering with Fighting Words, your personal data will be deleted from our database and paper files within a year or any time at your request, unless you wish to remain on the mailing list.

## Confirmation of Receipt

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby confirm that I have received and read the Fighting Words Volunteer Policy.

I UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO THE USAGE OF MY DATA AS STATED ABOVE

I CONSENT TO MEDIA OF MYSELF BEING USED FOR THE PURPOSES AS STATED ABOVE

I understand that this policy, together with the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, form my volunteer agreement with Fighting Words.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_