



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2024-2025

Creative Writing for All – how Fighting Words’ priorities, plans and resource allocation will increase the number of marginalised children and young people that can access creative opportunities in Ireland.

1) Strategy

Fighting Words has a strategic commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Ethos statement:

At Fighting Words, we love stories and creative writing. We work with children, young people, and adults who haven’t had a chance to write.

Creativity is unbound, with the spaces and scope for storytelling, imagination and invention.

Joy and positivity are fundamental, with an emphasis on self-esteem, empowerment, confidence, and affirmation.

It is always child/participant centred, and child/participant led.

Available to all, free of charge at point of access, with an inclusive and participative approach focussed on equity and diversity.

It is a community endeavour with volunteer mentors, partners, and staff working collaboratively.

Our Core Values:

- *Creativity and imaginative. We are dreamers and storytellers.*

- *Positivity and excitement. We always look on the bright side and treat everyone we work with positivity, unconditionally.*
- *Audacious and curious. We unlock the power of creativity and engage on difficult issues.*
- *Participative and collaborative. We are all about people, engagement, partnership, and community.*
- ***Equity and fairness. We want equality, dignity, and the same opportunities for all.***
- *Supportive and nurturing. We want to listen and give everyone a voice.*

2) Policies

Fighting words has a policy on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, agreed by the Board.

Other related policies in place include Autism Friendly Charter, Equal Opportunities Policy, Positive Behaviour Policy, Volunteer Policy, and our Scaling Education Strategy on addressing educational disadvantage.

All policies are on our website. <https://www.fightingwords.ie/about/governance-policies>

3) Our approach to EDI

We root our planning for non-discrimination and inclusion in a human rights approach, where we set out to make creativity and the arts accessible, acceptable, affordable for all children. As set out in Article 15 of the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, we recognise the right of everyone to participate in the cultural life of their community. We also acknowledge, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the participation rights of children and young people. These rights encompass children's freedom to express opinions and to have a say in matters affecting their own lives. Creativity and expression are both a right in itself, and also an enabler that allows children to claim and enjoy all of their rights.

4) Baseline

Fighting Words works primarily with children, where the vast majority engage with us as groups from schools, youth groups or community projects. In 2023 we worked with 36,500 participants. As such we do not keep data on individual participants. It is impossible to provide a breakdown of participation levels across the non-discrimination grounds set out in equality legislation. We do not have data on areas such as disability, ethnicity, or LGBTQIA+ as examples.

Because we work with approx. 400 schools a year, across the country, we are engaging a fair cross-section of the population. In 2022, 25% of the schools we worked with were DEIS. This increased to 33% in 2023, and the targets are 40% for 2024 and 50% for 2025. This reflects a deliberate strategy decision to prioritise educational disadvantage.

We partner with specific groups and NGOs working with diverse groups to design and deliver relevant and targeted projects. In 2023 we ran over 40 specific projects in this way.

Disability – in addition to working in a number of special schools, mainly in Dublin, we partnered with CRC, AsIAm, Dyslexia Ireland, and similar groups.

LGBTQIA+ - we collaborated with rainbow libraries, TENI, GAZE and other LGBTQIA+ youth groups. New initiatives such as an LGBTQIA+ summer camp have been very successful.

Ethnicity – we ran a number of projects specifically for young people seeking international protection, refugees and migrants. We partner with the and Irish Refugee Council, Ukrainian Action Ireland, Rathkeale Traveller Group among other groups.

Religion – we ran a specific all-island project with cross-community engagement between children of different traditions as a specific goal.

4) Addressing barriers to participation

Everything we do is free of charge at point of access – children, families, schools, volunteers never pay and are never asked to fundraise.

We strive to recruit mentors, facilitators from different communities.

We always work with partner groups linked directly to the communities.

We run projects and activities targeting specific groups.

We seek to locate our projects in different areas, rural, suburban and urban.

We access and review our work from a diversity lens.

5) Focus for 2024 and 2025

In 2024 and 2025 our aims and objectives are:

- 1 Increase our work with DEIS schools and the focus on educational disadvantage.
 - 1.1 In 2024 work with 50 DEIS schools that have had no prior engagement with Fighting Words and 200 DEIS schools that have had prior engagement with Fighting Words
 - 1.2 In 2025 work with 70 DEIS schools that have no prior engagement with Fighting Words and with 250 DEIS schools that have prior engagement with Fighting Words

1.3 In 2024 and 2025 focus on DEIS schools in Dublin West, Tallaght, Dublin south inner city, Limerick, Clare, Tipperary Limerick, Waterford, Louth, Monaghan and Donegal

1.4 Map and initiate new creative engagements with early school leavers through online services and training centres across Ireland including iScoil, Youthreach, Citywise, Limerick Learning Hub, etc.

2 Prioritising projects focussed on ethnicity and reaching ethnic minorities.

2.1 Increase from 3 to at least 10 the number of workshops we run annually in partnership with Traveller groups

2.2 Implement an adult memoir project with a Traveller group.

2.3 Build on the partnership with IRC, Ukrainian Action Ireland, and other groups to run at least ten projects or summer camps with ethnic minority groups annually.

2.4 Implement an all-Ireland creative writing project aimed at shared outcomes across the religious traditions on the island.

3 Expand projects specifically designed for LGBTQIA+ young people.

3.1 Develop and implement a summer camp specifically for LGBTQIA+ teenagers

3.2 Initiate a new collaboration with Shout Out to reach and work with LGBTQIA+ young people in schools

3.3 Pilot a writing club for LGBTQIA+ participants, with the possibility of publishing their work as a compendium

3.4 Collaborate with Rainbow Libraries, GAZE and other potential partners on specific creative writing initiative.

4 Training

4.1 Continue and expand training and support for staff on EDI

4.2 Convene a community of practice sessions are a space for staff to consider/review policies for EDI and related areas

4.3 Review and strengthen the training for volunteers related to EDI

4.4 Ensure EDI is on the agenda for at least one meeting with regional centre coordinators annually.