



Editor
McConkey

A LETTER FROM **THE EDITOR** 2024



From Bad to Worse: A Fighting Words Story

Greetings readers. This is your resident Editor-in-Chief McConkey here, writing to you from the tinsel strewn office of Fighting Words. I myself am allergic to tinsel. It makes my eyes itch and gets tangled in my nose hairs. But did anybody ask me before deciding to festoon my one safe space with these... dangly monstrosities of glitter and evil?

I think not.

Anyway, I doubt any of you are interested in my woes (of which there are many) or my faults (of which there are none).

Moving on to this year's annual business.

First and worst, the children. Fighting Words facilitated 1333 workshops with 25000 participants during 2024, in English and as Gaeilge across the country free-of-charge.

This summer saw a burst in creativity, with 41 summer camps engaging 745 children, in places like Galway, Wicklow, Clare, Monaghan and Kildare. We had a creative writing camp at the Ukrainian Community Centre, and our first LGBTQIA+ zine camp. The summer camps covered a host of mediums film, songwriting, playwrighting and creative writing through Irish in our Dublin Centre. This level of uptake is unsurprising given that we had 174,293 visitors on our [website](#), 74,293 more than last year!



Campa Comics agus Spraioi i gConamara



Creative Writing Summer Camp in the Iontas Theatre, Monaghan

How can I possibly be expected to keep up with the demand? I have gangrene toenails that need clipping and nose hairs that need trimming. Luckily, I am not alone. Fighting Words has hundreds of volunteers who help run all our programs. This year we welcomed 154 new volunteers mentors, with training happening in Monaghan, Limerick and Tallaght, along with the HQ in Behan Square.



Fighting Words Volunteer Story Slam in Behan Square

We have also invested in a new recording studio, which allows us to record sessions from our Songs of Empowerment workshop series, as well as our new [Story Slams](#) where we host open mic nights for young people and volunteers. You can listen to the original songs [here](#). Apparently, despite Fighting Words' [mission](#) to help people harness the power of their imaginations and creative writing skills, staff have made the decision that certain Editors aren't allowed to use the studio to record their new EP, Red Pen of Doom: Mc Conkey's Rules. Speaking of unruly staff with questionable music taste, the Fighting Words team has grown. El has come on board in Limerick, Ann Marie in Cork, and Conner and Ola in Dublin. I do not venture outside the office, preferring the anonymity of shadows and the creamy filling of Krispy Kreme Donuts. However, I have heard reports of wonderful initiatives across the country. With the new Fighting Words centre on Pearse Street for schools in South Inner City Dublin, with thanks to IPUT, and workshops starting in Waterford, and expanded offerings like The Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland project in Louth and the adult book project in Westmeath, and the launch of a second [Story Seeds book](#) in both [Limerick](#) and [Offaly](#), it's been a busy year.



Young authors at the Story Seeds Cross Border Project celebration event in Belfast.

Ola, the new Comhordaitheoir Tionscadail Gaeilge, had this to say:

"Tá sé go hálainn nuair a fheicim gliondar ar n-aghaidh na bpáistí agus an leabhrán faighte acu ag deireadh na ceardlanna."

To all staff members, new and old, allow me to take this opportunity to say my office door is always open (I mean this metaphorically, of course, for I keep the door locked and barricaded at all times).

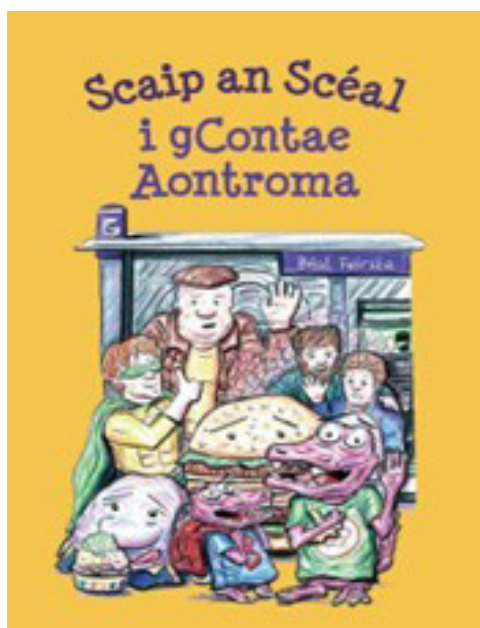
This year Fighting Words was a regular fiction mill, publishing [Analecta Issue Three](#), penned by members of Write Club from both Fighting Words and Fighting Words NI, [It Started In Croke Park](#), written by children in twelve DEIS schools, [Quantum Quest](#) and [Something's Missing](#), written in conjunction with Trinity College Dublin's AMBER research centre, and [The Magical Island Project Storybook](#), created by students in Fighting Words and Tatung University in Taipei! We had annual initiatives like the [Irish Times Supplement](#), [Chapters of Our Lives](#) – our Transition Year Book Project, and the Young Playwrights programs in [Cork](#), [Mayo](#) and in [Dublin](#).



Director Lenny Abrahamson in conversation with Programmes Director Mark Davidson, giving advice to Transition Year writers from Coláiste Eoin, Finglas.

A special shoutout is owed to our publication as Gaeilge. Seoladh a togra nuálaíoch sa scéalaíocht mhatamataice, [Seoladh 1,2,Spraoi](#), i nGaelscoil Bhaile Munna, BÁC 11 le linn Sheachtain na Gaeilge 2024. Tá dhá scoil Ghaeltachta, i gConamara agus i Ráth Chairn, páirteach ann freisin. An aidhm atá leis an dtogra spleodrach seo ná deis a thabhairt do dhaltaí as na hardranganna forbairt a dhéanamh ar a dteanga agus ar a gcuid smaointeoireachta mhatamaiticiúil trí mheán na scríbhneoireachta chruthaitheach.

2024 also saw the publication of a whopping six editions of Scaip an Scéal, involving schools from [Acla](#), [Árainn Mhór](#), [Cois Fharraige](#), [Contae Aontroma](#), agus [Ceanntar Iorrais](#), and including a translated edition from Irish into Ukrainian by Nadia Dobrianska and her father Leonid from [Tuaisceart Dhún na nGall](#).



None of this is to mention our commitment to publishing work from every workshop we run with schools and libraries or in our centres, either in print or digitally.

Feast your eyes on our story archive [here](#)!!

Ahem. Excuse me. I lost the run of myself there. You see, I delight in words for they are the tools of an editor's trade. Many a day I've spent sitting at my desk coming up with new ideas for collective nouns. We've all heard of a crash of rhinos and a parliament of owls, yes? How about:

An overwhelm of children.

A firing of staff members.

A disappointment of McConkey's.

(That last one may or may not have come from my mother. And they say I'm the cranky one...)

On top of our publications, there has been a plague of projects and camps this year: [Tales to Scale, Story Seeds Cross Border Project](#), and [Neighbourhood, City, World](#) - a collection of stories from primary school students brought together by writing centers in Ireland, Italy and Austria.

Fighting Words' collaboration with the writing centre La Grande Fabbrica Delle Parole will continue in 2025 in conjunction with Léargas.



Fighting Words also works with adult groups and 2024 was no exception. Colm, Fighting Words' Development and Outreach Officer, worked with groups like the CRC, Bernardos and on an intergenerational playwriting initiative at CityWise, Jobstown. Our Education Director Nóra built on our partnership with [DCU](#) to work with Ballymun Youthreach and young international protection adults on a graphic novel, *Illustrating Change*. We also launched a new Write Club for teachers in collaboration with Oide.

Our work with the National Museum of Ireland was a particular highlight. The [Changing Ireland, Changing Stories](#) project gave us the opportunity to work with young people from the Irish Refugee Council, Fatima United and Ukrainian adults from SICCD. This year also saw new collaborations with the Dóchas Centre. We partnered with World Vision Ireland, and members of our team travelled to Puntland, Somalia to share our methods with a fantastic group of teachers.



Education Director Nóra Nic Con Ultaigh and Executive Director Colm Ó Cuanacháin in Puntland, Somalia.

As much as it pains me to admit, seeing our community build so much this year was...not terri-ble... Once, during our afterschool program [Word Warriors](#), when the racket was so disruptive I threw down my nose hair trimmer and resolved to quit right there and then, I marched to the door and overheard a conversation. Upon being asked by a mentor why they come week after week, one Word Warrior responded:

“This is the only place where I can be myself.”



I'm not crying, I swear. It's the tinsel. I told you I'm allergic.

Of course none of this would be possible without our volunteers, partners and funders. They are to blame.

If, upon reading this, you feel moved to donate to our Krispy Kreme Donut Fund – I mean *cough cough* to help support our stories, you can do so [here](#).

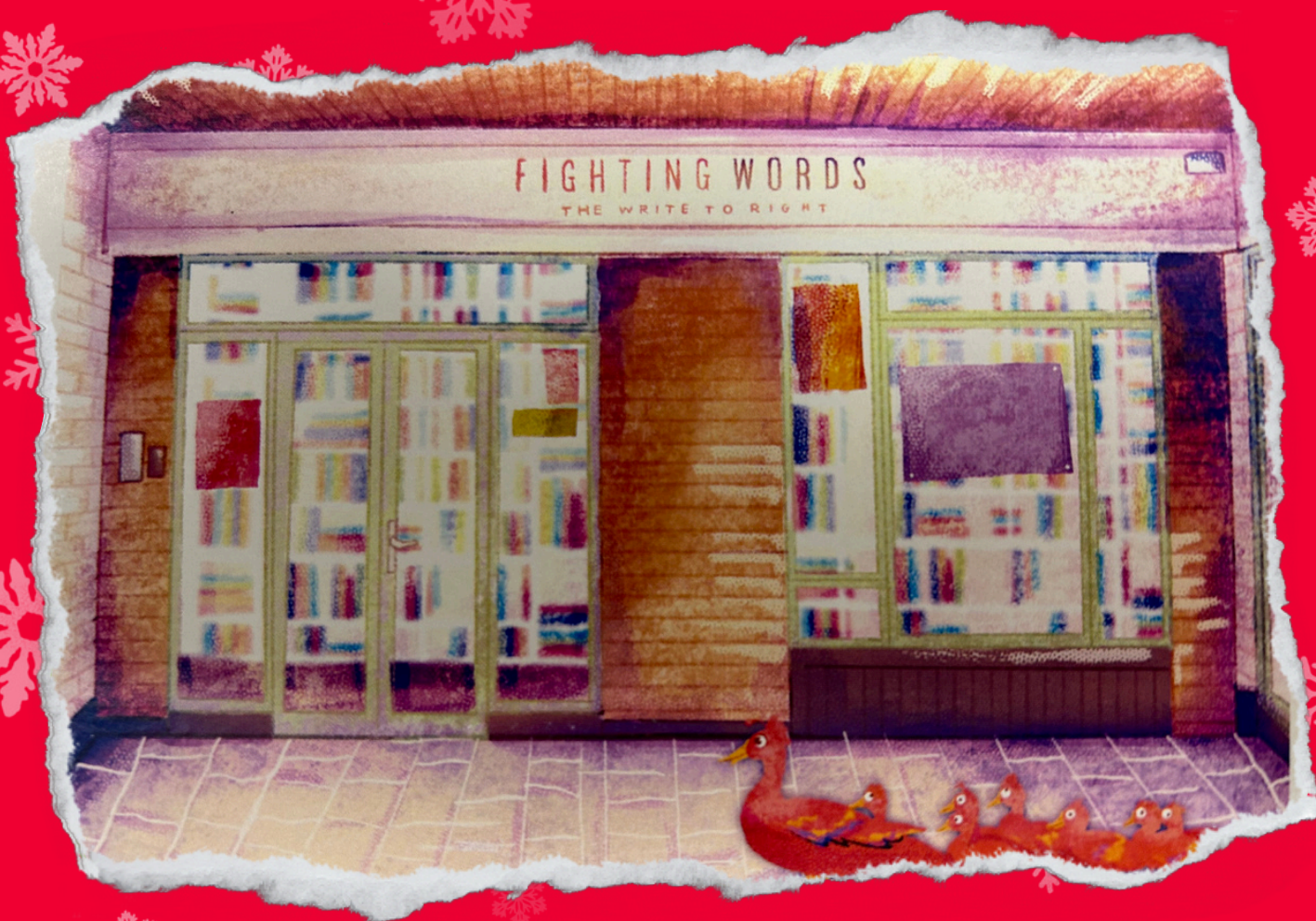
Writing this report has made me reflect. And you know what? I have changed my mind. This year was so remarkably outstanding, our participants so exceedingly extraordinary, that it's made me question my whole life's philosophy. I have seen the error of my ways. No longer will I be a cranky Editor. I have been convinced kids can, indeed, write stories.

NOT!!!

Better luck next year.

Worst wishes,

Editor McConkey



www.fightingwords.ie

2024

