

A LETTER FROM **THE EDITOR** 2025



Editor
McConkey



URGENT: DOUGHNUT SHORTAGE DUE TO EXCESSIVE VOLUNTEERING

No, really, I've had it.

We have fun, don't we? We jest. We jape. In fact, I like to think these annual reports have become a bit of a tradition. They give us cause to gather round the proverbial fireplace during the holiday season. I let off steam about kids not being able to write stories. You mock me. It's a win-win. Well, forget it! No more Nice Editor McConkey.

Let me explain the doughnut situation, since nobody else seems to be taking it seriously...

Fighting Words had one hundred and thirty-four individual volunteers come through the doors of the HQ at Behan Square this year. ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FOUR. That's not including TY students, interns, work placements or the *hundreds* more volunteers scattered across our centres nationwide. Do you know what that means?

It means one hundred and thirty-four people eating MY Krispy Kremes. One hundred and thirty-four people cheerfully showing up week after week, being helpful, taking the doughnuts I've carefully hidden behind the printer paper and then - get this - *thanking me for them*, as if I wanted to share in the first place.

But the doughnut shortage is merely a symptom of a much larger disease that's infected Fighting Words in 2025. [Write Club](#) has become a RASH. A spreading, itchy, impossible-to-ignore rash of teenage writers who insist on showing up every single week with their feelings and their metaphors and their disturbingly good story ideas.

It started innocently enough, one Wednesday group at Behan Square. Annoying, but containable. Then it spread to Saturdays. Then [Cork](#) caught and Kerry developed symptoms. Mayo's numbers are climbing. Every week they come. Every week they write.

One volunteer mentor had the gall to observe: *"Something I noticed during the workshop: when a younger writer knows they're being taken seriously, they start to take themselves seriously too."*

EXACTLY. That's EXACTLY the problem!

And then, as if weekly torment wasn't enough, these same young writers started showing up to our [Story Slams](#), our newly minted open mic events.

We've had FOUR of them since January. FOUR. Three for teens and one for adults, each one more confident and creative than the last. Write Clubbers and non-Write Clubbers alike, all queuing up to share their work.

The worst one? Oh, that would be the Story Slam at the Dublin Book Festival. In front of one hundred people, watching young writers perform their own work with poise and passion. I had to attend. The Board made me. I've never been more uncomfortable in my life, which is saying something because I once got my nose hair trimmer stuck in my nostril.



Story Slam as part of Dublin Book Festival hosted by Dave Rudden

But it's not just Write Club. Oh no. This year, Fighting Words apparently decided to become Ireland's next great *music factory*. [Songwriting](#) workshops are everywhere. EVERYWHERE. Our summer camp produced a musical that was featured on RTÉ. We've had songwriting sessions with primary schools as Gaeilge, secondary schools and youth groups like the Poppintree Youth Project. And then someone approved the purchase of professional recording equipment. Now we're not just publishing stories, we're recording songs AND podcasts. The [audio recordings](#) are stacking up faster than my resentments, which is really saying something.



Songwriting workshop in Cois Fharraige Theatre

Speaking of organised chaos, our Summer Camps were an absolute hive of activity this year. We reached over 700 participants nationally with 75 full days of offerings in playwriting, fiction, comic writing and more. Maximum efficiency for maximum disturbance to my peace.

I overheard a participant from our *Make A Comic Camp* say: "It makes me feel happy because I'm usually really bad at making time for drawing and during the four days I had loads of time!"



For a second year we ran a zine making camp with LGBTQIA+ young writers



Nature writing as part of Blessington Camp

But wait, there's more! (There's always more.)

Now let me address something that's been making my left eye twitch for approximately six months: we're focusing on doing *multiple sessions* with the same groups of young people. Going back. Building relationships. Creating deeper, more meaningful experiences. Do you understand what this means? It means I see the SAME smiling faces week after week after week. They REMEMBER me. They make eye contact. One Transition Year student actually *waved at me in the hallway*.



The group from the Irish Arts and Human Rights Festival workshop.



1, 2 Spraoi Book Launch - Irish language book of maths stories written by children from three different schools (Mayo, Galway, Dublin) with Minister Dara Calleary

But surely, you're thinking, surely Editor McConkey gets some respite from adult workshops? Adults are sensible. Adults don't get glitter on everything or ask questions that begin with "But what if...?"

WRONG. SO VERY WRONG.

This year we ran [Did I Ever Tell You](#) with older people in care in the Midlands, published [Create The Moment](#) - a book written by women of the Dóchas Centre - and continued Teacher Write Club that has bizarrely become even more popular this year. Abroad, we returned to Somalia and Kenya as part of our collaboration with [World Vision](#). Not to mention, [The Next Chapter](#) which saw adult women groups in Dublin who turned difficult circumstances into powerful plays that made several volunteers cry (I had something in my eye, don't look at me).



Participants in The Next Chapter gathering to hear their plays read at The Gate Theatre

While we're on plays, our Young Playwrights Programme continued to assail theatres across the country; The Peacock Theatre, Dublin, Linenhall Theatre, Castlebar, Mayo and Graffiti Theatre Co at the Everyman, Cork all boasted productions this year, with new cohorts of dramatists busy working away on their plays for 2026!



Young Playwrights, Mayo

Oh, and our annual supplement of Young Irish Writing with [The Irish Times](#), and [Different Hopes](#) - an anthology of short stories as part of our yearly Book Project - were published this year. Not only was our summer camp musical featured in *The Toy Show Appeal Unwrapped*, but you can follow the creation of *Different Hopes* on RTÉ player in the exposé “[Them’s Fighting Words](#)” (because the entire country needs to witness what I deal with daily).

Our regional centres have gone absolutely rogue this year. Fighting Words centres in [Laois](#), [Waterford](#) published anthologies and [Cork](#) launched its Story Makers audiobook in January, from which you can listen to readings [here](#). Published stories! As if we needed more evidence that this organisation’s creativity is completely out of control.



Other publications include [Mind Your Melon](#), [Oberstown Anthology](#), [Operation • - A Maths through Story Project](#), [Story Seeds - From Ireland to Italy and Back Again](#), [Creative Connections](#) and [Is Fiú an Taibhre an Trioblóid](#). Bhí mé buartha go raibh gach duine ag gearán fúm i nGaeilge nach dtuigim, agus mar sin thosaigh mé ag éisteacht isteach ar na ceardlanna i nGaeilge chun í a fhoghlaim. Ach, níos measa fós, bhí an chruthaitheacht ag leathadh chomh tapa céanna trí Ghaeilge, rud a chuir imní orm freisin.

I've had to expand my office storage. TWICE.



Participants in the Creative Connections event in Portmarnock.

Now the Board (those insufferable optimists) has demanded I mention groundbreaking research that has been conducted in an effort to undermine my authority.

FINE.

This year we completed three major external evaluations: [CESDA](#) (Creative Education for Primary Schools in Disadvantaged Areas), [Creative Connections](#), another research report on how the work of Fighting Words addresses educational disadvantage, as well as a forthcoming report for [Tales to Scale](#).

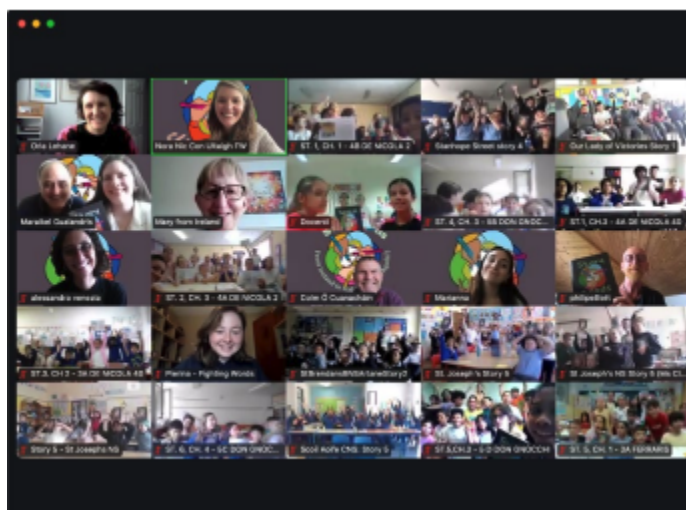
Oh, and the feedback. Sweet mercy, THE FEEDBACK.

During CESDA, a teacher in Milan reflected, “These are children who rarely leave their neighbourhood ... so collaborating with a place like Dublin, which feels very far from them, that was really important and truly surprising.”

A Primary School Teacher in Ireland added: “They saw their names in print and their stories being read aloud - that’s when it hit home how much their voices matter.”

And finally one of the participating children added: “It was very nice to express my imagination, it was a beautiful experience”

We have filing cabinets STUFFED with testimonials, stories, quotes, and evidence that what we do here actually matters. The Board smugly waves these in my face whenever I suggest we close early on Fridays.



Online launch of CESDA book - Semdi di Storie/Story Seeds, A Collection of Shared Stories for Irish and Italian Children.



Class from Scoil Mhichil Naofa participating in a workshop in a library in Athy.

And don't even get me started on our website. In 2025, we had 246,113 visitors - that's 246,113 pairs of eyeballs looking at children's stories. 246,113 people who could have been doing literally anything else with their time but instead chose to read the work of our participants.

That's nearly a QUARTER MILLION people who now know Fighting Words exists. A quarter million potential future volunteers who might show up and steal my doughnuts. You see the trajectory here? You see why I'm panicking?

None of this catastrophe, and I do mean CATASTROPHE, would be possible without our funders, who are directly responsible for my suffering.

If you'd like to contribute to my ongoing misery - sorry, I mean "support the vital work of Fighting Words" - you can donate here: <https://www.fightingwords.ie/get-involved/donate>

Due to the generous support we receive, as well as continued collaboration with our partners, interns, work placements, staff and volunteers, we facilitated 1218 workshops and worked with 19705 participants across all projects this year.

I hope you're happy. Judging by the below photo, it appears that (infuriatingly) you are.



Volunteer celebration event 2025

In conclusion: 2025 was a complete disaster. Songs recorded. Anthologies published. Teenagers confident. Adults crying at plays. Volunteers everywhere. Doughnuts nowhere. And the worst part, the absolute WORST part, is that one quiet Wednesday afternoon, when I was alone in my office clipping my toenails and trying to ignore the muffled sounds of laughter from a [Word Warriors](#) session, I accidentally caught myself... smiling.

Just for a second. Just the tiniest upturn of my mouth corners. I blamed it on gas and immediately scowled twice to compensate.

But I know what I felt. And I hate it.

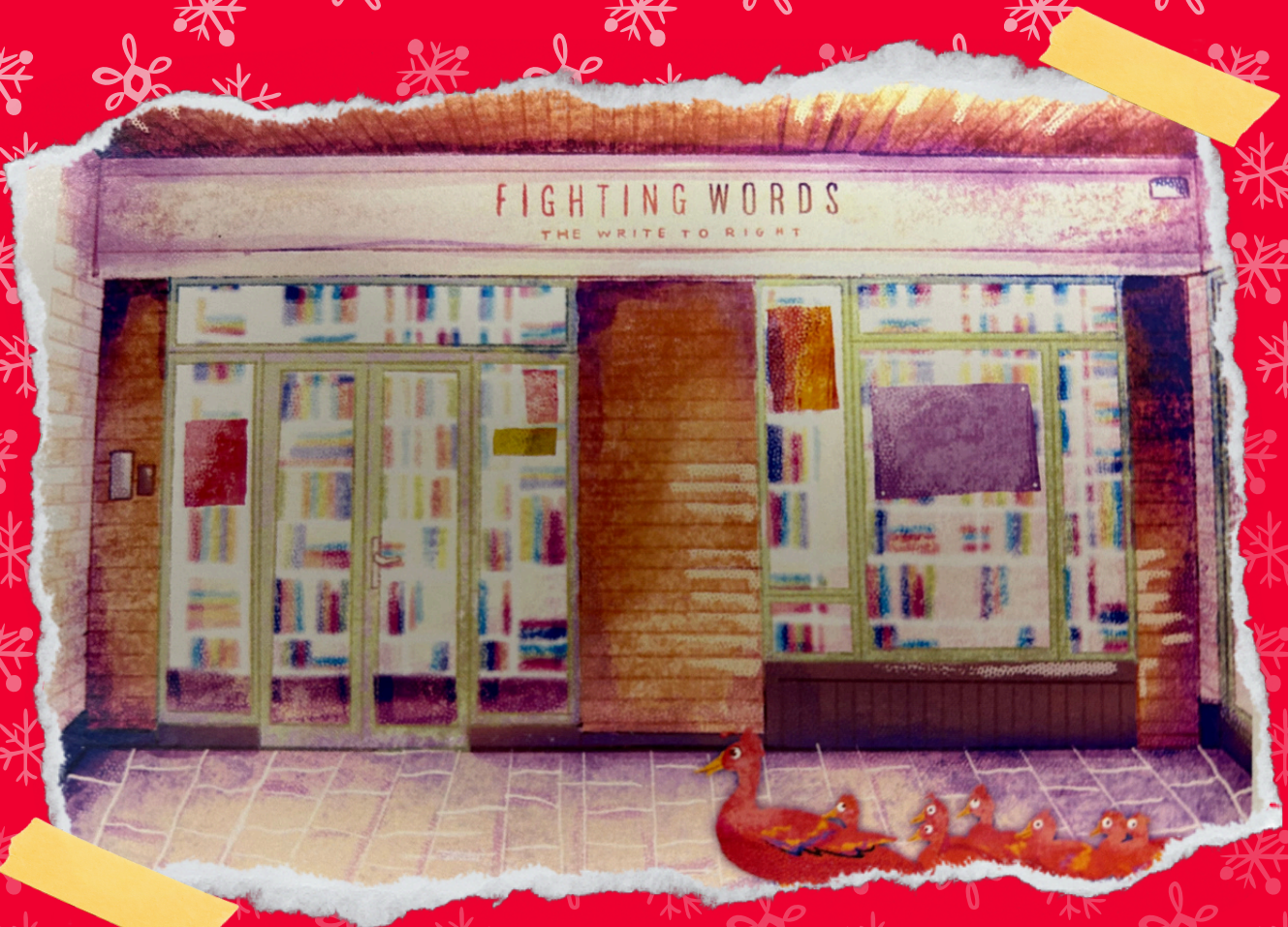
Worst wishes,

Editor McConkey

(P.S. The one solitary thing that brings me joy around this time of year is Spotify Wrapped. My top song was the relatable *Working 9-5* by Dolly Parton. If by “working” she meant “frowning” and “9-5” she meant ALWAYS! I’ve taken the liberty of making a McConkey Unwrapped for 2025 to be shared on Fighting Words’ social media.)

(P.P.S. The tinsel is still here. It’s December. I’m allergic. Nobody cares.)

For more information about the work of Fighting Words, visit: www.fightingwords.ie



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2025

