



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: using storytelling to help young people become resilient, creative and empowered individuals.

Policy Statement

Fighting Words offers free story-writing and creative writing workshops for children, young people and adults with additional needs. Volunteers are a major resource and make a vital contribution to help us deliver these programmes.

The Board of Directors and staff of Fighting Words We acknowledge and value the contribution of volunteers and undertake to organise our volunteer programmes effectively. This policy outlines our commitment to ensuring a positive, respectful and inclusive volunteer experience.

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, equity, diversity & inclusion, child and vulnerable adult protection, diversity and inclusion, 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 equity of access to high-quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for its volunteers in all policies and procedures.

In summary, Fighting Words commits to:

- Valuing and celebrating the involvement of volunteers
- Providing meaningful, flexible opportunities that reflect volunteers' skills and availability
- Ensuring equal access and inclusivity across all volunteer roles
- Providing clear roles, training, and ongoing support
- Ensuring volunteers understand the boundaries, expectations, and support structures in place
- Recognising and appreciating volunteer contributions
- Encouraging volunteer feedback and participation in continuous improvement

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 15-30 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.

Flexibility in Volunteering

We aim to offer flexible and accessible volunteer opportunities, tailored to individual availability, interests, and skills. We welcome volunteers from all backgrounds and work to remove barriers to participation.

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 Operations 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 annually – the next review will take place in January 2026.

Programmes at Fighting Words – What Do We Offer?

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.

School Workshops

Primary Schools: 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.

Secondary Schools: Fighting Words hosts secondary school students, who come to our centres for workshops for an introduction to creative writing. These sessions feature small group work in playwriting, songwriting and prose.

These workshops are one-off experiences for the students and are fast-paced and great fun.

Ongoing Programmes with Young Writers

Fighting Words offers programmes that welcome young writers the opportunity to come to our centres over the course of several weeks or months. 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.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Book Project: In Dublin, we work with a group of Transition Year every week for an six months to produce an anthology of short stories.
- Word Warriors: An afterschool programme for older primary school students to come to Fighting Words for a term of six or eight weeks and work on their own creative projects
- Write Club: Our community of teen writers who work on independent writing projects at our centres and online.

Outreach Workshops with Adults

Fighting Words creative writing workshops for adults are generally focused in the areas of memoir writing and short stories but we tailor programmes to suit the interests of any group.

To date we have worked with organisations that represent adults with disabilities, retired groups (dockers, musicians, postal workers), people in addiction recovery, nursing home residents, migrants' groups and many others.

These workshops can take place during the day or in the evenings.

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. These programmes might be aimed at any age range (including adults) and may be delivered in conjunction with a partner organisations.

Some are individual workshops while others 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

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 and filmmaking, 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.

Specialist Skills - the Creative Cohort

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

We maintain a list of volunteers with specialist skills in the database - the Creative Cohort.

Communication with Volunteers

Staying Connected with Us

Email - We communicate regularly via email to keep our volunteer team informed about upcoming opportunities, changes to procedures, and organisational updates in accessible and inclusive language.

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.

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

Text/WhatsApp: We also communicate with our team by text or WhatsApp, particularly if we are trying to reach you with important, time-sensitive information, such as the cancellation of a workshop.

Social Media – Follow Us and Share Your Experience

Please follow us – and tell your friends and family!

- **Facebook** - **fightingwordsireland**,
- **Instagram** - **@fightingwordsireland**
- **LinkedIn** - **Fighting Words**

Support, Supervision and Wellbeing

Each volunteer will have a designated contact person for support at each location and for each programme. This is usually the Volunteer Administrator (Dublin) or the local coordinator in locations outside Dublin.

Regular check-ins (formal and informal) help ensure volunteers feel connected, valued, and supported. We provide well-being resources and strive for open communication and flexibility.

Expenses

Fighting Words seeks to minimize financial barriers to volunteering. While we do not typically reimburse expenses, we will clearly communicate when reimbursement is available for specific roles or events, e.g. summer camps.

Online Calendar on the Fighting Words Website

Trained volunteer mentors in Dublin, Wicklow, Offaly, Cork, Limerick and Kildare can add their names to the rota of events they want to participate in via the Fighting Words website: <https://www.fightingwords.ie/volunteer-hub/workshops-calendar>

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 coordinators when workshops are scheduled.

Recognition and Appreciation

We appreciate and recognise the contributions of our volunteers through regular thank you communications, events, and social opportunities.

Join us at coffee mornings, open mic events, author talks and more!

Evaluation and Feedback

Volunteers are encouraged to provide feedback at any time. Structured opportunities for feedback will be provided at least annually through an anonymous survey.

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!

Leaving Your Role

Volunteers may step down at any time.

We ask for as much notice as possible and offer an optional exit survey or conversation to gather feedback.

Questions or Comments?

If you have a question or comment about the Fighting Words volunteer programme, you can contact the Operations Manager, Sara Bennett, at any time: sara@fightingwords.ie.

Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities: General Guidelines

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.

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 briefing.

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 coordinators at each of our locations.

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

Guidelines for Online Workshops

Fighting Words workshops also delivers workshops online via Google Meet, 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 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 the most important members of the Fighting Words team
4. Treat all volunteers equally in line with our Equal Opportunities Policy
5. Wherever possible, give volunteers advance notice of changes to any duties or cancellations
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 coordinator
3. Give Fighting Words staff/project coordinators 24 hours' notice – or as much time as possible - should they be unable to undertake their allocated duties, e.g. due to illness
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.
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

Volunteers can bring concerns to their local coordinator or the Operations Manager. Complaints will be handled sensitively, fairly, and in line with our procedures.

Volunteers are entitled to be heard and supported throughout the process.

Volunteer Complaints

If a volunteer wishes to make a complaint, they should be given the opportunity to discuss this with the local volunteer coordinator or Operations 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 coordinator and/or the Operations 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 Operations Manager (or to the Executive Director if the complaint relates in some way to the Operations 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 Operations 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 Operations 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

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, lift 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. Local coordinators 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 in 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 off site workshops, the Occupational First Aider is **Pierina Campbell**.

- o At Fighting Words Chonamara, the Occupational First Aider is **Bríd-Treasa Wyndham**.
- o 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 coordinator.
- 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 ²	Flammable liquid and electrical fires

Fighting Words and Your Data

Fighting Words respects your privacy. Personal data is handled in accordance with GDPR and used solely to manage the volunteer relationship.

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 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.

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

Data will not be shared without consent and will be deleted upon exit, unless otherwise agreed.

Support and Supervision

The Operations 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 Operations Manager also provides overall support and supervision and identifies training requirements. The Operations

Manager, other members of staff or local project coordinators 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.

Please contact the Operations Manager, Sara Bennett, about any aspect of the volunteer programme: sara@fightingwords.ie.

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 it 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 give your personal contact details or phone number to children or young people.
- Never accept personal contact details or phone numbers from children or young people.
- Never befriend children/young people on social media sites.
- 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 take a photograph/video of a child unless confirmed written permission from a parent/guardian is in place.
- Fighting Words will ensure photographic/video content is appropriate before publication online or in print.
- Fighting Words will avoid naming the child/young person in full 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: _____