

Fighting Words Belfast

Takes Off

“A story is just imagination on a page.”



Fighting Words Belfast is part of a growing informal network of creative writing centers for children and young people across the world that share a common ethos; a belief that creativity can and should be fostered as part of the education of every child and that this task is the responsibility of the whole community. Fighting Words received a Flagship Grant from The Ireland Funds and is now reaching 2,000+ children in Northern Ireland.



In Belfast, writing a new story, a story of their very own, is an opportunity every young person should be given. The aim of Fighting Words Belfast does just that. In the words of Belfast novelist Glenn Patterson, a patron of Fighting Words Belfast, its aim is “to enable children and young people to become the authors of their own lives.”

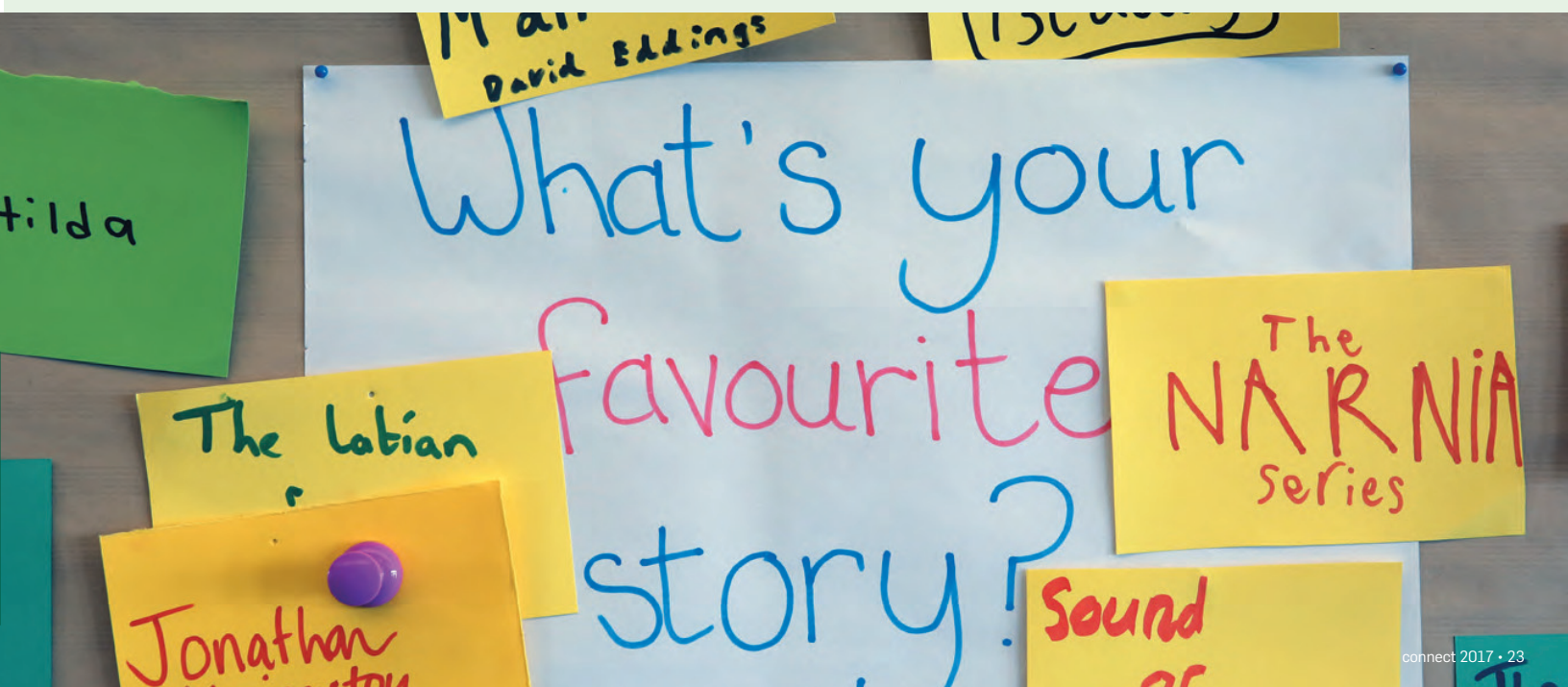
Fighting Words first opened in Dublin in 2009 with great impact. Sean Love and Author Roddy Doyle founded Fighting Words Dublin inspired by Pulitzer prize-winning author Dave Eggers’ 826 Valencia creative writing project in San Francisco. Over 50,000 children and young adults came for free creative writing classes in Dublin and soon it became clear that an expansion to Belfast was in high demand from teachers

and students in Northern Ireland. Today the program is active across Ireland with classes taking place in Dublin, Belfast, Mayo, Galway, Cork and Wicklow.

Fighting Words Belfast was launched at Queen’s University during Young at Art’s Belfast Children’s Festival in March 2015. It originated as a project of Young at Art, one of Northern Ireland’s leading providers of children’s arts experiences, with the active support of the Rev. Bill Shaw of 174 Trust and Duncairn Centre in North Belfast and Rev. Margaret Ferguson and others at Skainos Square, an urban regeneration project with a focus on peacebuilding in East Belfast.

A Flagship grant from The Ireland Funds was critical in getting the project established, and subsequently The Ireland Funds has continued support for the initiative through the award of additional grants.

The choice of location for the Fighting Words Belfast workshop base at Skainos Square is especially important, as is the ongoing relationship with the Duncairn Centre of Culture and Arts in North Belfast. The cross-community focus of both organizations is consistent with Fighting Words’ commitment to the development of strong community links in those parts of the city. The remit extends beyond the Belfast city limits and school groups are welcomed from as far away as Donegal. All young people from all communities are welcome and the mind-expanding empowerment of creative writing is now spreading across Northern Ireland. School groups and individuals come to these spaces every day for free, two-hour creative writing workshops facilitated by volunteer mentors.



IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS FIGHTING WORDS BELFAST HAS ENGAGED WITH 2,350 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

Outreach activities have also taken place in partnership with a range of community and other organisations including Children's BBC, the children's charity Barnardos and the new Seamus Heaney HomePlace in Bellaghy.



The principal role of the volunteers is to engage with and support the children and young people in their imaginative journey. Volunteer mentors are the heart of the work and over 150 volunteer mentors have been recruited and trained to date.

The Duncairn Write Club is for teenagers from 13 years up who are into creative writing and want to meet others with similar interests from the large number of secondary schools within easy reach of the Centre. The club provides a space for young people to 'hang out' and to pursue their own writing projects in the company of adult writers.



The Skainos Square Write Club invites children aged 7- 12 to create a weekly drop-in space where they can engage in a range of informal story-making and illustration activities.

All workshops take place outside a classroom setting, with the intention of 'de-schooling' the creative writing experience. Feedback after each workshop by students and teachers consistently show that levels of engagement are high and that the work is valued.



WHAT DO TEACHERS IN BELFAST HAVE TO SAY ABOUT FIGHTING WORDS?

*"The less able writers had great exposure to language and modeled writing and they could see how to edit work. The children who usually sit back got the chance to get their say and engaged with story telling. All the children took part and had an input in the story starter. Then they got to finish their own ending. **It was fantastic.**"*



10-11 YEAR OLDS FROM AN INNER-CITY EAST BELFAST SCHOOL SAID THEY LEARNED THAT....



"I'm able to get lost in my stories because I can write what my mind wants."



"A story is just imagination on a page."

"Writing stories isn't scary!"

"To blast out ideas!"

"Sometimes the most un-sensible ideas can make the best stories."

Want to read stories from the young people of Fighting Words?
Visit The Irish Times collection of new writing at
<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/fighting-words-2017>

Studies show that children who participate with Fighting Words are not just increasing their creative writing abilities, they are more collaborative, enjoy higher self-confidence and show more motivation in other areas of their lives. Thanks in part to support from The Ireland Funds, this creative project is expanding and thriving in Northern Ireland and young people are telling new stories, their own stories, with newfound voices.