



Fighting Words Northern Ireland



Photo: Johnny Frazer

Fighting Words Northern Ireland is part of a growing 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 thousands of children in Northern Ireland.



Here, Founding Patron Glenn Patterson shares an update on their work and goals for Fighting Words in Northern Ireland.

The Next Chapter



From the moment I heard that my friends Roddy Doyle and Seán Love had set up Fighting Words in Dublin in 2009, I thought how badly we needed something like it north of the border. It took us until 2015, but we managed it eventually, thanks to a Flagship grant from The Ireland Funds that enabled us to employ a team of two based at Skainos Square, East Belfast.

Since that time, Fighting Words Northern Ireland has provided over 10,000 creative writing opportunities to children and young people aged 6-18 right across the region. We've worked with schools and theaters, teachers' unions and community charities, running workshops, projects and after-school Write Clubs for independent teen writers, while also training over 350 volunteer mentors who give the one-to-one support that helps young writers realize what they're capable of, that they have the words at their disposal to be – as we always say – the authors of their own lives.

The murder of Lyra McKee in April 2019 was a devastating moment for Northern Ireland. But from that came the extraordinary gift from The Ireland Funds of the AWB Vincent Literary Award in honor of Lyra. I accepted the award at a memorable

event in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, with Lyra's partner, Sara Canning, and with a young writer from one of our programs who took the mic from me and (as anyone there will tell you) took the room by storm. Since then, Sara has become a Patron of Fighting Words – along with fellow 'Derry Girls' Bronagh Gallagher and Lisa McGee – and they are all helping us set up a brilliant new program of workshops in their home city.

If that wasn't already reason enough for us to be grateful, your COVID-19 Emergency Grant in early 2020 enabled us to go digital and to reach hundreds of young people and their families in their homes when they needed our support.

The pandemic has forced us to adapt and has even given us the opportunity to accelerate our growth and expand our reach. We're running Zoom workshops with schools, an online project with ten local libraries from Fermanagh to County Down, a new radio script-writing project with Riverside Theatre in Coleraine and The Playhouse in Derry-Londonderry and a new film-writing project with Derry's Nerve Centre.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland is an ambitious, creative force for the future of NI that is aiming to reach thousands of young people every year through wide-ranging partnerships.



Of course, there are challenges besides the pandemic – Brexit, and our own home-grown political uncertainties – but we are determined to rise to them. We're poised to expand our cross-community and reconciliation engagement, working with partners such as Youth Action NI, and of course we're working with Fighting Words in other parts of Ireland to bring together children and young people north and south to imagine and create new stories. To achieve all this, we need to expand our team and specifically, with the support of donors to The Ireland Funds, we're recruiting a Director to lead our expansion in a sustainable, strategic way.

Our priority is to continue to build a growing family of donors committed to our vision and values who will help us build our team and capacity so that we can continue to expand and reach the young people who need us most - those with mental health issues and those from poorer backgrounds with access to fewer opportunities.

Our goal is to reach every child in Northern Ireland with a creative writing experience by 2025. To achieve this (with around 350,000 students across 1,800 schools) we aim to provide 70,000 creative writing experiences per year by 2025.

We're here now, for the long term, broadcasting loud and clear the reality that young people on this island are all equal, creative beings.

— Glenn Patterson was born, and lives, in Belfast. A founding patron of Fighting Words NI, he is Director of the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University, Belfast, a writer, novelist, journalist and playwright.



Support from The Ireland Funds has now enabled over 10,000 creative writing opportunities for young people.

In a Recent Survey:

68%

OF PARENTS/CARERS SAID IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THEIR CHILD HAD EVER TAKEN PART IN A CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT.



72%

OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEIR CHILD WAS MORE EXCITED ABOUT WRITING AS A RESULT OF TAKING PART IN A FIGHTING WORDS PROJECT.



60%

OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY SAW A CHANGE IN THEIR CHILD'S MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AS A RESULT OF TAKING PART IN A FIGHTING WORDS PROJECT.



40%

OF CHILDREN ASKED MORE QUESTIONS &

71%

APPEARED HAPPIER.

