

COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER: NI638582
CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER: 105751

Fighting Words Northern Ireland
Company Limited by Guarantee
Unaudited Financial Statements
31 March 2024

Finegan Gibson Ltd
Chartered accountants
Causeway Tower
9 James Street South
Belfast
BT2 8DN

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Financial Statements

Year ended 31 March 2024

	Page
Trustees' annual report (incorporating the director's report)	1
Independent examiner's report to the trustees	11
Statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account)	13
Statement of financial position	14
Notes to the financial statements	15

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report)

Year ended 31 March 2024

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Charity registration number 105751

Company registration number NI638582

Principal office and registered office Connswater Shopping Centre
Bloomfield Avenue
Belfast
BT5 5LP

The trustees

P Connolly
R Craig (Resigned 7 September 2023)
P Crossan
A Drylie
AM Gallagher
T Newell
CT Ó'Cuancháin
B O'Neill (Resigned 15 February 2024)
C Thompson (Resigned 11 December 2023)
E Barron (Appointed 15 February 2024)

Independent examiner Finegan Gibson Ltd
Causeway Tower
9 James Street South
Belfast
BT2 8DN

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Structure, governance and management

Fighting Words Northern Ireland is a company limited by guarantee governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated 9th February 2016. Fighting Words Northern Ireland is a registered charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

The Board of Trustees meets four to five times per annum. Trustees are made aware of their legal obligations under charity and company law, the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the strategic and business planning documents and the financial performance of the charity. No trustee receives remuneration or other benefit from their work with the charity.

The Chief Executive, appointed by the Board, manages the day-to-day operations of the organisation. To facilitate effective operations, the Chief Executive has delegated authority for operational matters, within terms of delegation approved by the trustees, including the application and monitoring of strategic and operational objectives, finance, and direct charitable activities.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland has worked with 24,000 children since 2016. Fighting Words Northern Ireland was founded by our sister charity, Fighting Words, based in Dublin, at the invitation of writers and community and educational groups in Belfast.

While the ethos and services of Fighting Words are the same throughout the island of Ireland, the organisation is registered as an independent company and charity in Northern Ireland.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Objectives and activities

The vision of Fighting Words is simple - to give children and young people in Northern Ireland (NI) the opportunity to discover and harness the power of their imaginations and creativity through creative writing.

By focusing our resources on children experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage, Fighting Words NI creates at least three levels of impact for children: positive experiences of literacy, oracy, and numeracy; beneficial outcomes with increased resilience, confidence, self-efficacy; and the transformational results of creativity, aspiration, and of imagining other futures.

Our mission is driven by the cross-border Fighting Words partnership, uniquely placed in the UK & Ireland as two separate charities and companies operating in two jurisdictions towards the same vision, mission and aims. It is fuelled by our growth strategy, our academically evidenced model; a commitment to building a sustainable, robust organisation, and contributing to a resilient arts sector.

The Charity's object is to advance the education of children and young people in all aspects of the art of creative writing and the appreciation of the written word in all its forms through the provision of support, opportunities and related activities which foster their creativity, literacy and talent. The primary beneficiaries are children and young people aged 6-18 across NI. The benefits they enjoy can be evidenced in records of the number and development of participants, feedback from the participants, teachers and parents/carers, and independent evaluations of the projects and impact of Fighting Words Northern Ireland. No harm or private benefit arises from these purposes.

In shaping our objectives for the year and planning our activities, the Trustees have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit. The public benefits that flow from the purpose of advancing the education of children and young people in all aspects of the art of creative writing and the appreciation of the written word are that it:

- Encourages appreciation of, and enables active participation in, arts activities, leading to more fulfilled lives;
- Fosters enjoyment, creativity, articulation, inspiration and imagination in collective and independent writing;
- Develops reading and writing skills and therefore knowledge and capacity;
- Encourages ambition, builds potential and improves self-confidence;
- Facilitates co-operative endeavours for young writers, supported by volunteer mentors, creative writers and other artists.

The strategies employed to achieve the charity's aims and objectives are to:

- Provide a year-round programme of creative education activities, creative writing workshops and associated activities, facilitated with the assistance of trained volunteer mentors, for children and young people aged 6-18 years;
- Recruit and train adult volunteers and educationalists as creative writing mentors, supporting personal and professional development in arts education pedagogy;
- Deliver initiatives in the fields of literature and related endeavours to enhance accessibility for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), or for those experiencing socio-economic deprivation or other barriers to the fulfillment of their creative capacities.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance

Activity in the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Free at the point of access, for every school and every child, we expanded our programme of free tutoring, mentoring and publishing for children and young people across NI by growing our participation figures from 3,826 in 2022/2023 to 7,994 during 2023/24. We prioritised access to children and schools experiencing disadvantage, using creative writing as a tool to mitigate some of the educational consequences of social and economic inequality.

Over the last 12 months we have:

- Established a new creative writing hub and office space in Connswater Shopping Centre, East Belfast.
- Built new audiences and participants in creative writing.
- Set up new partnerships to co-deliver our innovative creative engagement methodologies in key areas in the border counties with our sister charity Fighting Words Ireland.
- Continued to secure financial resources to strengthen our organisation.

Key Outputs & Impact

Schools:

- We supported 1,912 pupils in 75 workshops with schools (an increase on 2022/23, when we supported 1,633 primary and post-primary pupils in 58 workshops).
- As part of our schools' partnerships, we worked with 337 teachers.
- New initiatives included running workshops in-school for the first time as we prepared for our move to new premises at Connswater Shopping Centre.
- With partners Solab at Bounce Culture, we ran the North Star Schools Programme, providing a key creative and educational platform for communities to engage with Black cultural expression. Working with 100 pupils from four Belfast schools, from different areas of the city, Year 9 pupils created written responses via Spoken Word, Song, Beats and Bars, to the question, "Does Belfast Feel Like Home To Me?". Our work with Solab at Bounce Culture contributes to a digital space for Black artists in NI to connect, create and collaborate, providing openings for everyone to engage in creative processes, through the lens of Black culture and creativity.

Out of School:

- 209 children and young people attended courses on our year-round after-school writing programme, which delivered 67 sessions over the course of the year.
- Through special events and community activities, we reached a further 458 children and 499 adults outside of our regular programmes, and 397 adults and family members attended 4 showcases of our young writers' work.
- Highlights included:
 - Two summer camps - True Stories in collaboration with Belfast storytelling event 10x9 and Scripted Mischief in collaboration with Accidental Theatre.
 - Megaphone, a 10-week playwriting course with 12 teenagers from cross-community backgrounds in Belfast which culminated in a showcase of their writing for an audience of 80 at the Lyric Theatre.
 - The launch of Starling Revival, our Climate Writing Group for teenagers.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance *(continued)*

Story Seeds:

- Thanks to a one-year grant from Creative Ireland towards our cross-border collaboration with Fighting Words Ireland, we supported an additional 2,912 pupils through 117 workshops in 34 schools, and 1,118 children, young people and adults through 50 workshops with 17 after-school clubs and community groups. The project connected children from different communities and traditions in schools and community groups in Newry, Armagh, Belfast, Derry-Londonderry & Coleraine and we published two zines, a podcast and an animated film of their writing and held a celebration event at our hub at Connswater.

Training and Development for Adults:

- We trained 76 new volunteers in training sessions run in Newry, Armagh, Belfast and online. Our volunteer mentors supported young people across all our activities, acting as guides and supporters in a safe learning environment. Together they gave 1,015 hours; we estimate this in-kind support to be worth £10,500.
- We trained 76 teachers from Stranmillis Teaching College and Queen's University Belfast School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work.

Publishing:

- We published 100+ stories written in our workshops on our website.
- Our young writers had their writing published in the 2023 Irish Times Fighting Words Supplement; 80,000 copies were circulated with The Irish Times newspaper, another 80,000 were given free to schools, and the supplement is free to view online.
- We invited submissions for the 2024 Irish Times Fighting Words Supplement and for our second zine, based on the theme of Happiness.
- The zines published on our website attracted 150,811 views over the period.

Our organisation:

- During this period, Fighting Words NI had a permanent staff team of 6.4FTE.
- We worked with 18 freelancers and 6 additional writers as guest artists; these generous, dedicated people help our young writers dive into new genres of writing and try something new, as well as giving them encouragement and support. We supported professional artists in paid work worth £33k in artist fees.
- On our Youth Advisory Panel we have 14 members, 7 of whom are from NI. They met regularly during the period, read and performed their work in public showcases, and participated with our staff team and Board strategy workshops.
- 100 guests helped us celebrate the opening of our new workshop hub at Connswater on 5th December.

Impact

We prioritise our work towards schools located in the areas of highest deprivation in NI, ensuring we reach those with least access to opportunities such as these. In 2023/2024, 44% of our workshops were with schools with 40%+ pupils entitled to Free School Meals and 38% were with schools located in one of the 20% most deprived areas in NI. We also evaluate our success along measurements such as:

- Participation rates - our in-depth projects and courses regularly see over 95% attendance rates.
- Geographic spread of participants.
- Feedback from teachers and volunteer mentors.
- Feedback from participants.
- Signposting and supporting participants to opportunities.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance *(continued)*

Young people tell us the difference Fighting Words NI activities and opportunities make to their lives:

"I might write stories to be stories, but the more I look into them, the harder I squint at the words, I realise they all have meanings and messages. Subtext I didn't realise I'd written. It told me more about myself than I thought I was going to find."

"I discovered the importance in sharing my voice ... even when I don't feel confident in it."

"I discovered that it's good to have a message but to frame that message in a way people can relate to and understand is a really understated but fundamental part of sharing your message to lots of people."

After our True Stories Summer Camp, participants told us:

- 71% felt more confident speaking in a group
- 86% felt more confident in their writing skills
- 57% felt more confident in public speaking
- 57% felt more confident in themselves
- 86% said they made new friends during camp

Teachers also tell us what impact they observe in the children they work with:

"The non-judgemental attitude of the volunteers and the wisdom with which they guided discussions and writing."

"It was great that all the children were encouraged in a sensitive way to contribute their thoughts and ideas. The children loved getting positive feedback on their stories when read aloud. Having an adult at every table, with an ear to listen and stimulate discussion and ideas, was extremely effective as even the weakest or most reluctant writers had help and encouragement. This boosted confidence levels and encouraged engagement. Some of the highlights were when the artist revealed her illustration of chapter one and when the children saw that their writing had already been published on the website and they were able to show it to parents at home. I included the link to this on the class dojo to enable pupils and parents to share what had been achieved."

"I can honestly say the boys and girls are eager to continue their story! Even my more reluctant writers have a newfound enthusiasm for writing! Many thanks again."

"The pupils loved that there were lots of volunteers to help. Some were very reluctant and I found that the reluctant ones were the most engaged. The children wanted to continue writing when we got back! They loved it!"

Audiences & Readers:

"So inspiring, entertaining & brilliant. These writers made me feel excited & hopeful for the future of the arts!"

"My daughter has been so happy, it has given her a real boost. She said she felt amazing and brave after reading to the audience."

"My son is very quiet, and to speak in front of a room of strangers so confidently made me so proud! Tenx9 was a wonderful night and all of the children did a fantastic job. They should be very proud of themselves! Each story was unique, some were humorous and some brought tears to my eyes!"

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance *(continued)*

Profile and Partnerships

During the year, we have continued to develop our partnerships with key donors including: the Reconciliation Fund through the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs; the Arts Council of Northern Ireland through their Lottery Project Fund; Arts & Business NI through their Blueprint programme; Belfast City Council; Future Screen NI's Artwork Fund; and the Dormant Assets NI Fund through the National Lottery Community Fund. Two new funders - The Clothworkers' Foundation and the RTÉ Toy Show Fund through the Community Foundation of Northern Ireland - generously supported the refurbishment of our new creative writing hub and office space at Connswater Shopping Centre.

Schools across NI continue to be active and highly engaged partners of our work. We work with primary and post-primary schools from all sectors of education including Controlled, Maintained, Integrated, Voluntary and Irish Medium schools. We have continued to develop our partnership with B. Ed lecturing staff at Stranmillis University College, delivering training in our creative writing methodology to trainee teachers.

We continued to collaborate with partners from across the NI creative industries and arts sector including esteemed theatre companies The Lyric Belfast and Accidental Theatre, The Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University Belfast, and the Me Him Her design agency.

We established strong partnerships with fellow tenants at the Connswater Shopping Centre including Arts Care and Strand Arts and during our first six months in Connswater hosted a range of local community events that drew new participants into our workshop hub to engage with writing.

The monthly average of page views of our website grew 7% and we continued to grow our profile across all broadcast and digital media.

Investing in our team

As a charity that focuses on creativity, community and connection and that offers our activity free at the point of access, our business-critical supports are our team. With the appointment of Liz Barron as a new Board member in this period, we enhanced the trustee skills base further, adding her deep experience from the community sector. Two trustees are resident in Ireland, ensuring that the sharing of knowledge in arts and education on the island that Fighting Words demonstrates at a programmatic level is also reflected at governance level.

We secured funding during the year to invest internally to strengthen our systems, processes, staffing and workplace practices.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Financial review

Fighting Words Northern Ireland ended the period with a deficit of (£53,378) (2023: surplus £114,622). At 31 March 2024 the total funds of the charity amounted to £205,333 (2023: £258,711), comprising of £58,955 in Restricted Funds and £146,378 in Unrestricted Funds. This reflects the receipt of multi-year restricted grants in full in FY 2023-24, with planned expenditure of those grants in full during FY 2024-25.

Improved financial processes identified funds historically designated as restricted funds which were fully used in prior periods. A series of transfers have been recorded to provide the updated closing balances for every funder. During the uncertain funding climate during the periods 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, in light of the financial crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and as a newly independent company and charity, the organisation took a conservative fiscal position, and budgeted strictly, cautiously recording funds as restricted to secure staff salaries. Transfers from unrestricted funds have been used to correct negative balances of grants from prior periods. Where we identified funds previously designated as restricted and confirmed they have been fully used, we used transfers between restricted and unrestricted funds to ensure all closing balances correspond exactly to the funding position.

Reserves policy and going concern

The Trustees assess on an ongoing basis the financial requirements of the charity to ensure sufficient funds to operate. As a significant proportion of the company's funding is received periodically, the charity maintains reserves to meet the ongoing cashflow requirements. This is the seventh full year of trading for Fighting Words Northern Ireland. We achieved a deficit of (£53,378) leaving us with unrestricted cash reserves of £146,378.

From unrestricted funds the charity intends to build an appropriate level of reserves able to meet its commitments during short-term difficulties, to respond to opportunities, and to contribute to the long-term financial resilience of the organisation.

The Board, in line with its legal fiduciary responsibilities, considers it necessary in terms of financial prudence and good governance that the company should build a reserve sufficient to cover the majority of running costs for a 3-6 month period, in addition to planned non-recurring expenses, and recognising the volatile grant funding environment as well as allowing for the payment of any liabilities which would arise should the charity cease to operate.

- The Board agrees it is advisable to build a reserve designated to meet 3-6 months staff salaries for the continuation of the service in the event of funding being no longer available, and;
- The Board agrees it is advisable to maintain surplus reserves to cover potential losses and to maintain working capital to bridge the timing gap between spending and receiving of income and to mitigate against the risk of unplanned temporary shortfalls in income should they arise.

Whilst the Trustees feel the current level of unrestricted reserve is adequate to deal with any unforeseen financial issues, project development or transition periods in gaps between funded activities, the Trustees are committed to increasing the levels of unrestricted reserves to mitigate against future risk, 'cost of living' inflationary factors, and challenging funding climate.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Plans for future periods

Over the next three years, we will:

- Build closer strategic, programme and funding partnerships with Fighting Words in Ireland and our peers in youth writing centres across the UK
- Develop purpose-driven earned income opportunities that also deliver our programme aims
- Continue to facilitate creative experimentation and risk-taking with our young people
- Cultivate new donors and strengthen our reserves to ensure long-term viability.

In 2024/25 we have a target to reach 3,500 participants/creative engagements. We will work in new ways with partners and participants, exploring new ways to deepen impact for our participants:

- In September 2024, we will start a partnership with three Belfast primary schools located in disadvantaged areas and with high proportions of pupils with special educational needs, to pilot a new writing residency, working in-depth with a teacher and their class across two school terms. This approach will enable us to deepen the impact we make in the classroom, providing richer learning opportunities for pupils and supporting teacher education.
- We are part of a SEUPB-funded consortium, led by Youth Action NI, that will design and deliver a four-year cross-community project in NI that supports young people aged 11-25 years, youth organisations, youth workers and volunteers to promote good relations and enhance young people's skills to contribute to a shared and cohesive society.
- We are working with Fighting Words Ireland and Graffiti Theatre Cork to deliver an 18-month programme that gives young people aged 15-24 who are in seldom heard groups the opportunity to take part in a creative writing project with their peers across the border.
- In partnership with Fighting Words Ireland we will deliver workshops with Irish medium primary schools in Northern Ireland.
- We will expand our partnership with the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queens, running workshops for their local schools and training students as volunteer mentors.

Thank you

The Board and Staff at Fighting Words NI would like to acknowledge the many organisations and individuals who make our work possible, particularly during 2023/24:

- Arts & Business NI
- The National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- Belfast City Council
- Department of Foreign Affairs, Strategic Partnership Scheme, Reconciliation Fund
- Dormant Accounts Fund NI, delivered by the National Lottery Community Fund
- The Foyle Foundation
- Future Screens NI and Department for Communities
- Garfield Weston Foundation

Small company provisions

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies entitled to the small companies exemption.

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

The trustees' annual report was approved on 11 December 2024 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



AM Gallagher
Trustee