



OUR ANTHOLOGY 2018

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Our Anthology 2018

An anthology of new works by writers from Belfast
Published by Start360 in partnership with Arvon

The McGrath Writers is a cross-community project providing opportunities for young people in Belfast to engage with creative writing. The project is generously supported by The McGrath Trust.

A big thank you

To Russ Litten and Caroline Bird
for their time and encouragement

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for their hospitality

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Thanks for an amazing time

David, Davina, Hannah, Jack, Louise, Matthew,
Sophie-Jane, Tara, Vickie and Zara.

Contents

Jaime Adams	7
Jack Brennan	10
David Bryans	11
Matthew Finnegan	13
Davina Hartley	15
Zara May Kennedy	17
Carmel Kernahan	30
Ciara McAlinden	31
Louise McReynolds	33
Victoria Morrison	36
Hannah Morrison Johnston	37
Sophie Jane Tweedie	38
Tara Vize	42
Billy Wilson	45

Introduction

In February 2018, 10 young people from Belfast came to Lumb Bank, The Ted Hughes Arvon Centre in West Yorkshire for a week of creative writing, tutored by novelist Russ Litten, poet Caroline Bird, and mid-week guest tutor, the playwright Ishy Din.

The week-long residential gave the young people an opportunity to get away from their chaotic lifestyles and learn to express themselves in a way they had not previously considered. Workshops led by writers, one-to-one support, and sharing their work helped them develop confidence in their ability to write and in their own self-belief. They developed new ways of communicating and new attitudes towards how to deal with difficult situations.

This anthology showcases some of the work that came out of the week and subsequent workshops; we hope you enjoy reading this selection of poems the group has shared.

Fighting Pride

It starts with a click

The anticipation builds like a fire bursting to life
nerves like a kick to the stomach
the rumbling energy of the crowd roars from the speakers
sends electric pulsing through my veins

Intimidation nose to nose
heated tension, me safe with you
proud like lions, fearless and strong
facing off glove for glove

It ends with a hand in the air

Jaime Adams

When the World's Not Watching

When the world's not watching
I talk to the man in the moon and ride on shooting stars
I sing like Mariah and dance like Diversity
I swim the sea with dolphins and run wild with a pride of lions

I jump from planes to plays with clouds
I eat hidden jellies and sneaky the chocolate cake
I ask a million questions, sometimes I get the answers
I remember how it started and wonder about the future

When the world's not watching I can be whoever I want to be

Jaime Adams

Life About Hope

Everything was as black as your boot, as cold as ice.
Including me, I was dark and cold.
No emotion, no remorse but full of both, it was just hidden
away like a bat during the day.
Coming out at night when the world would slumber and
things were quiet.
Emotion would eat me up like a black hole that devours an
entire universe.
I would feel so shit, so I'd cut myself and patiently watch
the tiny rivers of blood flood onto the floor. It was so
calming.

I'd fill my body with substances every day to suppress
thoughts and feelings. I didn't want to deal with life on
life's terms. I was like a computer without any electricity.
New days would come and go like a bright bolt of
lightning.
Each new day brought an outsider's flash of a different
way, a more convenient way.
I thought, how the fuck do they all do it? They must be
good at hiding things.
So I kept at it like a fox to a rabbit,
just existing and not living.

But when I was sick and tired of being sick and tired, I was
willing to give it my all.
Famished for difference I said fuck it and I did what I
thought I never could.
I transformed from a snivelling rat into a sturdy lion.
It was the best decision I ever made and ever will make.
Life is now as bright as the stars on a clear summer's night
and as colourful as a rainbow.
No more shards of glass stuck in my shoe

No more blood-stained trousers
The dusty veil has been lifted.

There will be bumps in the long road ahead but I'll ride
them out, they'll pass. Even the worst things do.
Now I'm going places, at least that's how I feel and it's a
nice feeling.

I want to get my qualifications, go to university and
become the nerd I always made fun of. I want to embrace
the geek life and reach for the stars of the stars.

Fuck people's opinions on this and everything. They don't
matter, even though they do, though they really don't.

I'll keep on dreaming as big as Mount Everest until I get
exactly where I want to be.

There is nothing stopping me.

Nothing will get in my way and there are no limits.

Jack Brennan

When the World's Not Watching

We were all sat writing in the dining room
The snow piled up high outside
Everything was quiet, just the ticking of the clock
Suddenly the door blew open – and time stood still
I started to think about all the homeless people out in the
cold weather
I would go and rob the rich people of their money to help
all the homeless out
to open a place for them.
I would steal loads of food and help cook a meal for every
single homeless person.
I would go back in time to see my mum and dad to give
them a big hug
and say I love you.
I would go back and take all the pain my dad was going
through when he got cancer.
I would go back and help my mum, being stress-free
I would go back and change my childhood
I would just say “Why does God take all the good people
away from you instead of the bad people?”
The door slammed shut – time starts again – you’re back in
the room.

David Bryans

I Want to Be a Snow Flake

I Want to Be a Snow Flake

I am cold and I fall from the sky

There is loads of me sprinkled across the world

I make people feel the cold and make them sneeze

I'm just a Snow Flake that falls from the sky

I land on ground like great big fluffy feathers

Kids come and make a snowman out of me

I am used for all different things

I cover fields with lovely snow, I paint a picture for artists

I'm just a Snow Flake that falls from the sky

David Bryans

Reasons for Fighting

There are a lot of reasons for fighting,
some are good and some are bad,
But most of all they're just sad.

I used to fight over everything,
Big reasons, small reasons,
smart reasons, silly reasons,
Some even felt like treason.

I have lost friends due to arguments over girls and
hearsay,
I would say my stupidest reason for fighting would defo be
drink
(vodka and beer) I just never seem to think.

I have been down in the dumps with no friends there.
Where were they when I needed them most?
They must of just deserted their post.

I don't like my past, don't get me wrong,
Drugs, Drink, Violence, the whole works,
but now it's time to change my train of thought
and be the son my parents deserved.

I have fought over friends and family
even had fights over money,
I do not want to go back there,
I am happy with where I am now.
Hopefully, with the people that are in my life to stay.

I have given up a lot for stupid things
I have seen friends and family come and go,
They all remind me of the snow,

one minute they are there the next they are gone.

I ONLY HAVE FAMILY WORTH FIGHTING FOR NOW.

Matthew Finnegan

A Place We Call Home

Belfast I don't really know you but I know you have
everything I could want
Shop after shop, face after face
A dying place full of life
Many roam with different lives, hoping for a better life
Because I don't know you I can't say I love you
But I can't say I don't know you either, that's why I can say
I hate you
You feed off everyone, stealing the one thing we need
most to survive
MONEY
Like a piggy bank I continue to drop my money into you

Davina Hartley

You Were Never My Friend

Anxiety is a large room, dim, familiar and home
The chandelier's candles lit with light of a burning soul
Their life burning, melting before them

Faceless people passing in a blur
Monsters lurk in every corner, watching me like a predator
Anxiety feeds on me like a parasite,
Sinking its claws to the point of pleasure
Anxiety lives with me, not stalking
But walking with me

Like a smudge on a painting the suffering candle dripped
with despair
Like acid it burned holes
Walking without notice or care, the faceless people began
to melt
Holes everywhere, heads dissolving liquid like tar
Pouring, flowing and rising

Scared but not alone, eyes watch me as I begin to panic
Headless people walking by
Stomach tight as I try to find an exit as black liquid hugs
my body
Feeling tacky and cold against my skin, the smell of rotting
food made my skin crawl

I swim to stay afloat, seeing a window above
I try to reach
Anxiety hugs me from behind
"Don't leave me I'll be alone"
Anxiety sounds just like me
I feel the sadness in their voice

Davina Hartley

Isn't She Pretty?

Her hair is straw, so short, dry and dead
But isn't she pretty?

Her boobs could be perkier, her ass tighter and smaller
waist too
But isn't she pretty?

She smiles like she is being held against her will
Her eyes are perfected by window shields that disguise a
secret squint
Plain fingers, so plain maybe get a spray tan, maybe
change your name
But isn't she pretty?

Those thighs jiggle too much, put that burger down
Her face is invaded by tiny white-headed bombs that leave
her with red marks of shell shock
Paint all over it with a thick layer of slap, contoured
cheekbones, full fat red lips

As pretty as a painting
That's because she is
Her voice is rough and it kind of croaks
People hear her speak they make all kinds of jokes
But isn't she pretty?

I heard she has a boyfriend was engaged once too
Her tummy had a heartbeat but it all happened too soon
She doesn't wear her heart on her sleeve
Feelings kind of float past her
She never learned how to grieve
She laughs when she has to, cries a bit too

But she keeps it all to herself because she thinks she is no
good
But isn't she pretty?

Zara May Kennedy

I remember

When the sky was filled with cotton candy and guns were
only toys
Running around all over the place with other girls and
boys
Going around the corner was blasting off into outer space
Finding mummy's makeup and smearing it all over my face
Daddy's shaving cream was for redecorating all the
bathroom walls
I remember playing with dolls
Ken and Barbie were as romantic as it got
I remember being called cute and not hot
Chubby cheeks and sticky fingers
I'm not going to lie I don't miss school dinners
Bedtime at 9pm. 10pm on the weekends
I remember not being big enough to swim across to the
deep end
Eating veg was a chore, yuk! Gimme chocolate cake!
Seconds, I want more
Light up shoes were all that mattered
By the end of every day I played so much I was shattered
I remember falling down, scraped knees and bruises
I remember sand pits shovels and buckets
But I'm all grown up now.

Zara May Kennedy

Empathy/Sympathy

Empathy: the power of understanding and imaginatively entering into other peoples' feelings

Sympathy: the sharing of another's emotions, especially sorrow and anguish

Empathy and sympathy sound much the same
But one dresses up as the other and tries to steal its name
Empathy opens up the door and walks around inside
Sympathy cries into their sleeve and sympathy tries to hide
Empathy is naked, wears nothing but the truth
Sympathy wears a disguise and tries to impress the youth
Dressed up in gold to try and make you feel better
But empathy will write you a strongly worded letter
Sympathy looks from behind a veil of tears
Where everything is blurred
Empathy's gaze is clear and true
You never knew I cared.

Zara May Kennedy

My Goal

Sometimes I let you back into my head
And all those nasty feelings about wishing you were dead
go away
Not for long though maybe only for a day
Because I blame you for how numb I am
For years you made me feel so dumb and I can now tell
everyone
How you stood on my heart, watched me fall apart
How could you say you loved me 'cause when I was crying
you thought it was funny
You used me as an ashtray left burns on my soul
I'm content with feeling nothing for now
Because feeling emotions is now my goal.

Zara May Kennedy

Skinny Wee Bastards

Skinny wee bastards – How do they do it?
Skinny wee bastards – no food just pills
Popping like manna from heaven
They need it – we need it – who needs it?

The skinny wee bastards – who do they think they are?
Hoodies, hands in pockets, trackies hanging off their
skinny wee arses
Think they're God's gift – fuckin gods
Driving round, stepping out, hips disjointed, shoulders
hunched up
That certain look – a righteous scowl

The skinny wee bastards – who do they think they are?
They'd steal the eyes out of your head
Take your granny's last penny
Your knees from your legs

Your last warning – your note –
meet us round the back of the grotto – tea time –
well they don't eat – skinny wee bastards
What fuels them – angst, rage, pills
The skinny wee bastards

Carmel Kernahan

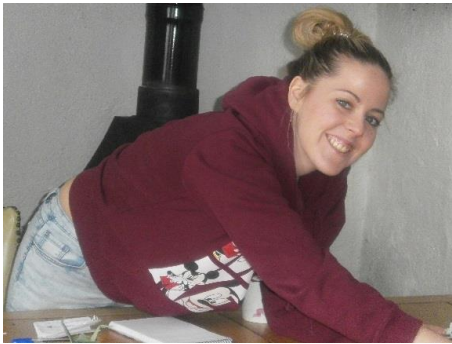
















Note to My Home

Drumaness you made me and raised me
You gave me family and friends
Drumaness you showed me safety and shelter
Why have you stopped doing this?
Why are you no longer my home?
We spent hours on the bench sipping
Goldschläger from bottle caps
Why have you let the outsiders in?
You have lost your accent,
Your name, your identity
I rolled down the back lane
Tore holes in my tights
You provided rocks on waterfalls
Where I soaked in fantasy
You guided me to gaps in trees
Where I felt innocent caresses
Why did you flatten the park?
Why did you get rid of the skittles team?
You created excitement on summer days
Where I played Red Rover
But now you leave needles lying about
I wanted to raise children with you
Stamp my mark on generations
But Drumaness you are lost
Been swallowed up by the expansion
Cumber Park never used to exist
Your chimney provided a place for a base
But now it's bus stops and melted bins
Despite all this Drumaness
I still want you.

Ciara McAlinden

Reply to Note From Drumaness

Here, you chose to leave
Don't put your shit on me
I offered you a home
A way to be with your people
You pissed off to bigger and better things
Headed to the big smoke
You blame me for the dirt, the damage, the drugs
Don't play innocent, you played your part
Did you expect me to wait?
For all your kind to return?
Empty homes, un-played-with parks
Is that what you want?
I done what I had to do
Opened my doors
You say how wonderful I was
Don't be a selfish bitch
Other people deserve beauty too
Safety and shelter
I lost my accent! Listen to you
Do you even remember what you sounded like?
You want to come back despite what you say?
Well I'll have to have a think,
See if there is a place for you.

Ciara McAlinden

Devil's Drug

I don't how to explain what I'm feeling but it doesn't feel good.
It feels like there is a dark cloud hanging over me, constantly.
I can't get out of this dark place,
I look at the scars on my arm and beg God not to take me back to that evil place.
Every cut on my arm tells a different story
I'm hurting but I don't why I'm hurting.
I look back on my past and wonder "why me?"
Why did I have such a low darkened past?
What have I done wrong?
Is it my fault?
Losing a mummy for such a long period is the most hurtful thing.
Seeing her one day as the most amazing person,
Who would do anything for me and would do anything for her kids
Then being taken away from me at such a young age.
Not seeing my mummy being healthy for so long,
I forgot what she would be like healthy.
Would she still love me without the drugs?
It's mental torture walking past families that are so perfect.
It annoys me.
I get jealous of how perfect and happy they look.
And I know I shouldn't get jealous, I just didn't think it was fair
Being in foster care, where you are meant to be loved and happy,
I never felt it. That feeling not knowing if you were loved,
Because I was not at home.
Losing my mummy and family for such a long time has affected me in so many different ways.

Finally, my mummy decided that enough was enough,
She couldn't see us hurt anymore.
She went to rehab for 12 months to break her addiction to
heroin.
I wasn't allowed to see my mummy for a full year, not even
in a Contact Centre.
No contact at all!!
Honestly, I was terrified because I couldn't remember a
time that I have ever seen her sober.
My heart was broke.
I just wanted my mummy back!
I wanted to be home.
12 long months dragged in, I was counting the days, not
long now, not long now.
3 more days, 2 more days, 1 more day.
The day arrived.
I could remember my mummy weighing 6 stone,
Everything about her that made her my mummy and best
friend.
I just seen her standing there, 12 stone, colour in her face,
all my prayers had been answered.
God is real, and he listened to me
I had my mummy and best friend back.
I felt on top of the world.
My mummy was never leaving me again.
13 years in care finally felt like nothing.
My mummy was finally able to take me home.
2 and a half years later my mummy has got my wee family
back.
I have my wee brother back,
I have my baby sister back.
I have that little family that I was so jealous of.
My mummy has got her own little home with her family
back,

My mummy has been clean for two and a half years now she's on medicine to keep her away from heroin and for me not to lose my mummy again

I am getting help with my anger and mental health but I've had the support of my family and friends and they have helped me get through so much.

I had my first Christmas with my little sister who is 5.

Knowing my mummy isn't spending money on drugs but on her kids has to be the best feeling in the world.

My mummy told me every day when I was getting help "Just remember it's a bad day not a bad life my princess".

Louise McReynolds

I Know What Love Is

Love is a trap, feeling lost in that one person, thinking no one else matters, not even yourself.

Feeling battered and bruised emotionally and physically, love is forgiving over and over, it doesn't matter how many times you think it'll change it won't.

That's NOT love!

Love is when someone comes along when you are broken and shattered, putting all the pieces you thought you'd never get back, back into their correct place making you feel whole, not again but for the first time.

Love is being yourself with the person you not only love but you're in love with.

Love is uncontrollably laughing with them until your lungs almost burst.

It's not being judged or being put down but feeling full and complete, that's what love is.

Victoria Morrison

Insomnia

As soon as the silence lures me to sleep,
My demons come to play,
My heart chases, my head races,
But I can't keep them away.

My dreams await but the gates of fantasy
are locked up tight,
Sleepless nights are an atrocious sight,
But I can't seem to store them away.

My demons fight, they bite with razor-sharp teeth,
I am their toy for the night, but I do not want to play,
They cause thunder and wonder.
Will I be able to have my slumber

Hannah Morrison Johnston

Moving on

I don't know how long I sat staring at the scenery, but it was just so beautiful. Although, this time it was that bit different, I don't know, but I feel a lot more alive this time. Realising this is me in recovery, but the best is still yet to come. The trees on top of the mountain are facing the window where I sit on the floor on a bean bag by the fire in the living room. While writing this I'm looking at them and their branches look like wings of an angel begging to save me and set me free.

The snow lying all around it, it's so fluffy unlike back home it's so yucky. You don't often get a Robin that flies beside you, and sits for as long as you do. Well to me it's the most comforting thing to happen while being here. I am just so grateful to be here today, in fact to be alive and getting the chance to experience all of this, it really has opened my eyes.

Sophie-Jane Tweedie

Magic

I never believed in magic until I met this guy in a valley in Yorkshire.

He played me a chilled out track, and told me to believe.

Even though I don't know or understand how it is done, but it obviously does happen.

Like, even the Hindus believe in many gods.

I would love to be more creative, and find out more about other religions, and how other people live their lives.

I would then just find myself in some sunny country, say California, living with my husband, and bringing up our children in a far better place for us all – that would just complete me.

Sophie-Jane Tweedie

Belfast

Belfast I was sick last night and where were you?

Belfast you're worse than my shite, I don't even like you.

Belfast where is the help?

Belfast I can't cope.

Belfast it's snowing in Yorkshire and you don't even know.

Belfast I hate you even though you're my first home.

Belfast you need to be helping people more with their
mental health before we all explode.

Belfast I just don't know

Belfast take me home

Belfast I don't want to go

Belfast I just need a smoke, so let me go.

Sophie-Jane Tweedie

I am who I am

As much as it seems impossible, I do believe anything is possible.

I like to dance, it puts me right where I belong,

I find myself in my element,

I just want to dance my life away.

I want to swim with the mermaids,

Sing with the birds,

Fly with the butterflies,

Eat like a horse.

I just want to have a smile that is as bright as a diamond that could light up the biggest castle.

I want to be the inner me,

but this is me,

I am who I am,

I hope you understand.

Sophie-Jane Tweedie

In Defence of Painkillers

In defence of painkillers, they did not mean to make you worse,
They only tried to help you and take away your awful curse
They said they did not know of all the pain you felt inside
They only tried to fix what was seen by naked eyes
They said they did not fall in love, but caring is their job
They never meant to make you sore
They never wanted you to sob.
If only he had listened and done his fucking job
They never meant to hurt you, this is a twisted fairytale
And now their job is over, they didn't want to fail.

Tara Vize

How to Tame a Lion

Take your lion off the washing line
and wring out until nearly dried
Put him on the ironing board
and fold him over with drawn-on lines
Tell him to balance a teapot
and then five books on his head
Take him to a petting zoo
and let him pet children in their beds
Teach him lots of lullabies so he knows when he goes to
sleep
not to make a roaring lion sound but start BAA-ing like a
sheep.

Tara Vize

To the Man Who Didn't Have to Love Me.

To you I could thank a million times and then a million more,
You never had to love me when I left things on the floor.
You took me on with all my flaws you never had to care,
now I bare my scars for you, I lay them down on cobbled tar
You are an inspiration like the glowing lake of spring
A simple peaceful nurture, a father daughter thing.
You took on a lot of baggage too, a heavy load to trail.
See we don't share DNA, our blood doesn't intertwine
A father daughter thing that I never really thought I'd find
How could you be my father you to me were just a man
Now 16 years later I am your biggest fan.

Tara Vize

Holy Orders

Left right, left right
No talk, just walk
In line, straight ahead
Don't be different.

Tie straight, laces tied
Trousers neat, shirt white
Socks grey, hair combed
You must obey.

Shoes off, white trainers only
Clean socks, clean ears
Brushed teeth, arse washed
Make us proud.

Books backed, homework signed
Pens in right, no left-handers here
Six of the best, hurt is here
We will enjoy it.

Humiliated, intimidated
Do not be happy
Learn or not
We don't care.

Billy Wilson

Part 2

We were ruled by the holy orders
Their new school
Don't do this, don't do that
The army arrived on our streets

Lunch time, relax
Coincidentally, an army patrol arrived
Two Saracens
Tension was palpable

All the four-inch tiles on the front of the building
Were ripped off
The holy orders stood between us
Waving their arms, frantically
No! No! No!
Within seconds they were on the ground
Waving their arms, frantically
No! No! No!

Who fucking rules now????

Billy Wilson

Belfast

Belfast, Belfast I love you
Three pints for a pound and 10p change
All those gates and security searches
Why are we kept apart?

Why do we have so much religion?
Who cares if someone is Catholic, Protestant, Muslim or
Rasta
Everyone wants a bit of craic
Or whatever floats your boat

Our traffic is a joke
300,000 people and we can't get home
Flegs everywhere and no respect
I'm gonna knock your fuckin ballix in
Aye, fuckin dead on.

Billy Wilson



Start360

Start360 is Northern Ireland's leading provider of support services to young people, adult offenders and families in the community.

We provide a range of services and interventions in the areas of health, justice and employability.

Our mission statement is that 'Change Starts Here'. We have offices across Northern Ireland – in Belfast, Ballymena, Lurgan, Derry/Londonderry, Enniskillen, Glengormley and in the three prisons – Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank College. We currently employ 120 people, delivering 26 services.



Arvon is England's leading creative writing charity, celebrated for its unique ability to discover and develop the writer in everyone. It has been described by Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy as 'the single most important organisation for sharing and exploring creative writing in the UK'.

Arvon runs an annual programme of residential courses at three writing houses, in Devon, Shropshire and Yorkshire. The week-long courses, led by highly respected authors, include a powerful mix of workshops, individual tutorials and time and space to write. Covering a diverse range of genres, from poetry and fiction to screenwriting and comedy, Arvon courses have provided inspiration to thousands of people at all stages of their writing lives. Grants are available to writers on a low income to help with course fees. We also offer non-residential city-based creative writing courses.

At the heart of Arvon is the desire to encourage anyone, regardless of their background, to find their voice through writing. About a third of our activities are with groups from schools, youth and community groups and arts organisations, many from the most disadvantaged communities in the UK.

www.arvon.org

