

‘We are a group of children and young people who live in the northwest of Ireland. What we have in common is that our families foster children.’

Kids’ Own Publishing Partnership is a children’s arts organisation and publishing house, and Ireland’s only dedicated publisher of books by children, for children. Kids’ Own offers a space for children and young people’s real experiences and voices to be shared through publishing and the arts.

This book shares the experiences and voices of young people whose families foster.

This project was commissioned by
The Foster Care Resource Service Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan



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A Bright *Light*

Stories and artwork by children from families who foster in counties Leitrim and Sligo



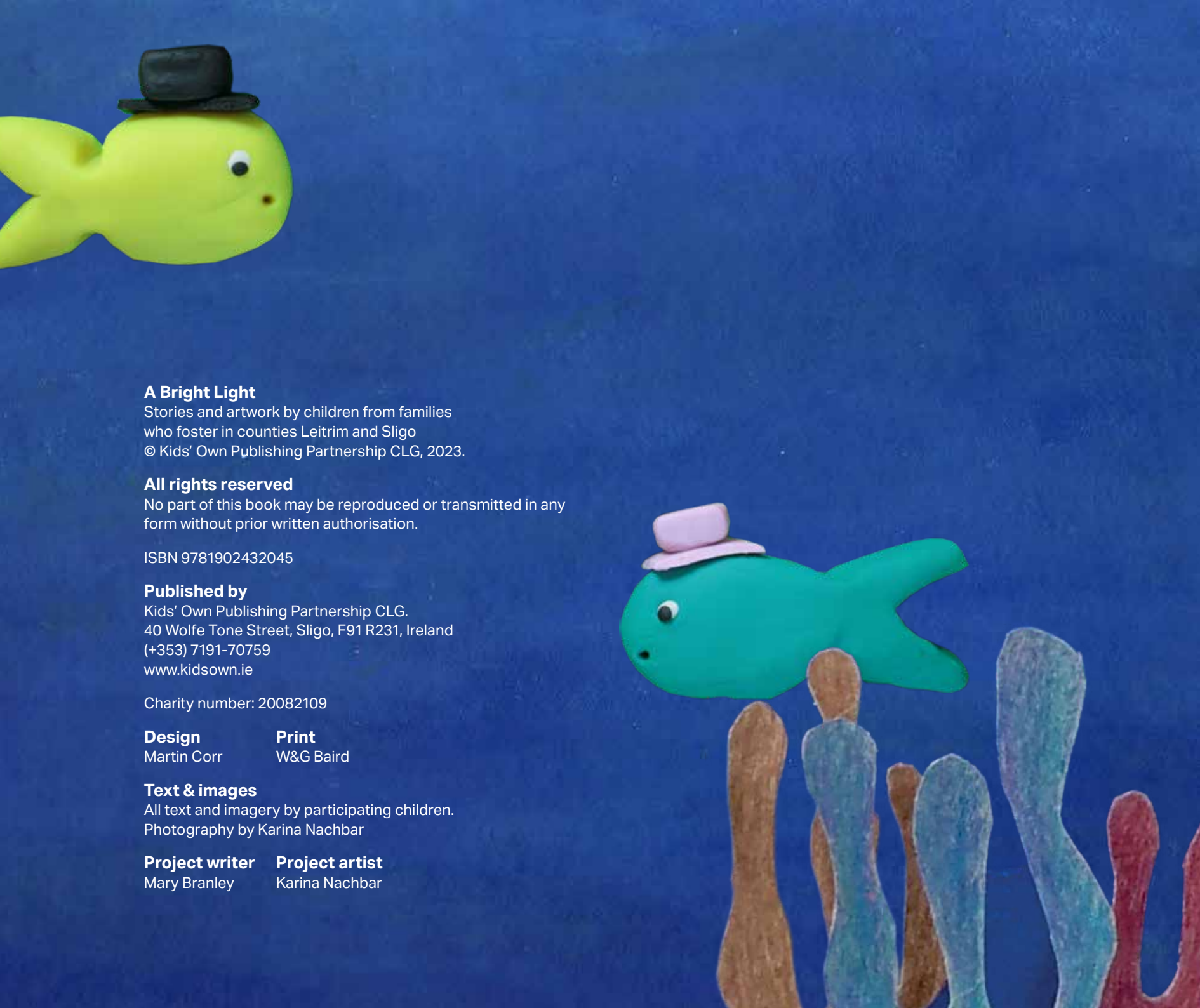


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kids'
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PUBLISHING PARTNERSHIP



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Project writer

Mary Branley

Project artist

Karina Nachbar

Introduction

Following the publication of the book *My Own Jungle* in 2022 with Kids' Own Publishing Partnership, which detailed the experiences of children in care in Sligo and Leitrim, the Foster Care Resource Service in the area sought to devise a companion book which would focus on the experiences of children whose families foster. Children who are part of families who foster make a valuable contribution to the lives of children in care and this partnership between TUSLA and Kids' Own afforded us an opportunity to listen to the voices of children who foster.

In August 2022 the children participated in workshops facilitated by writer Mary Branley and artist Karina Nachbar, supported by link social workers Niamh Duffy and Rachel Walshe.

The children shared their stories of fostering through art, writing, conversation, animation in what was a fun-filled, relaxed, interactive space.

This book has created an awareness and deeper understanding of both the joys and challenges inherent in fostering. We would like to thank the children who took part and so willingly shared their stories. We are very grateful to them. We hope you enjoy.

**Foster Care Resource Service
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan**

**Niamh Duffy
Rachel Walshe
Mark Miller
Breeda Goulding
Jacqueline Gallagher
Anne Mc Gloin**



**Five years ago, my
family fostered my
baby brother and he's
turning five today.
— Wilbur**

Foreword

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the children and young people who participated in the development of this book, *A Bright Light*. This unique book provides an important insight into the lives of children whose families provide foster care in Sligo/Leitrim. A heretofore untold story, this colourful and enchanting book articulates the lived experience of children and young people whose families foster. What emerges through the artwork and narratives in this book and the accompanying animation is the very positive experience and sense of warmth, love and caring exhibited by these children towards the children and young people who come to live with them. Bonds and attachments develop between all the children and this is clearly evident through the stories told.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the involvement and contribution of Kids' Own Publishing Partnership, Writer Mary Branley and Artist Karina Nachbar for steering this wonderful project to conclusion. A special word of thanks also to the Tusla Fostering Team; Anne McGloin, Niamh Duffy and Rachel Walshe who fully supported the children in completing this very special project and bringing the book together.

Dr Liam White
Area Manager – Sligo Leitrim West Cavan



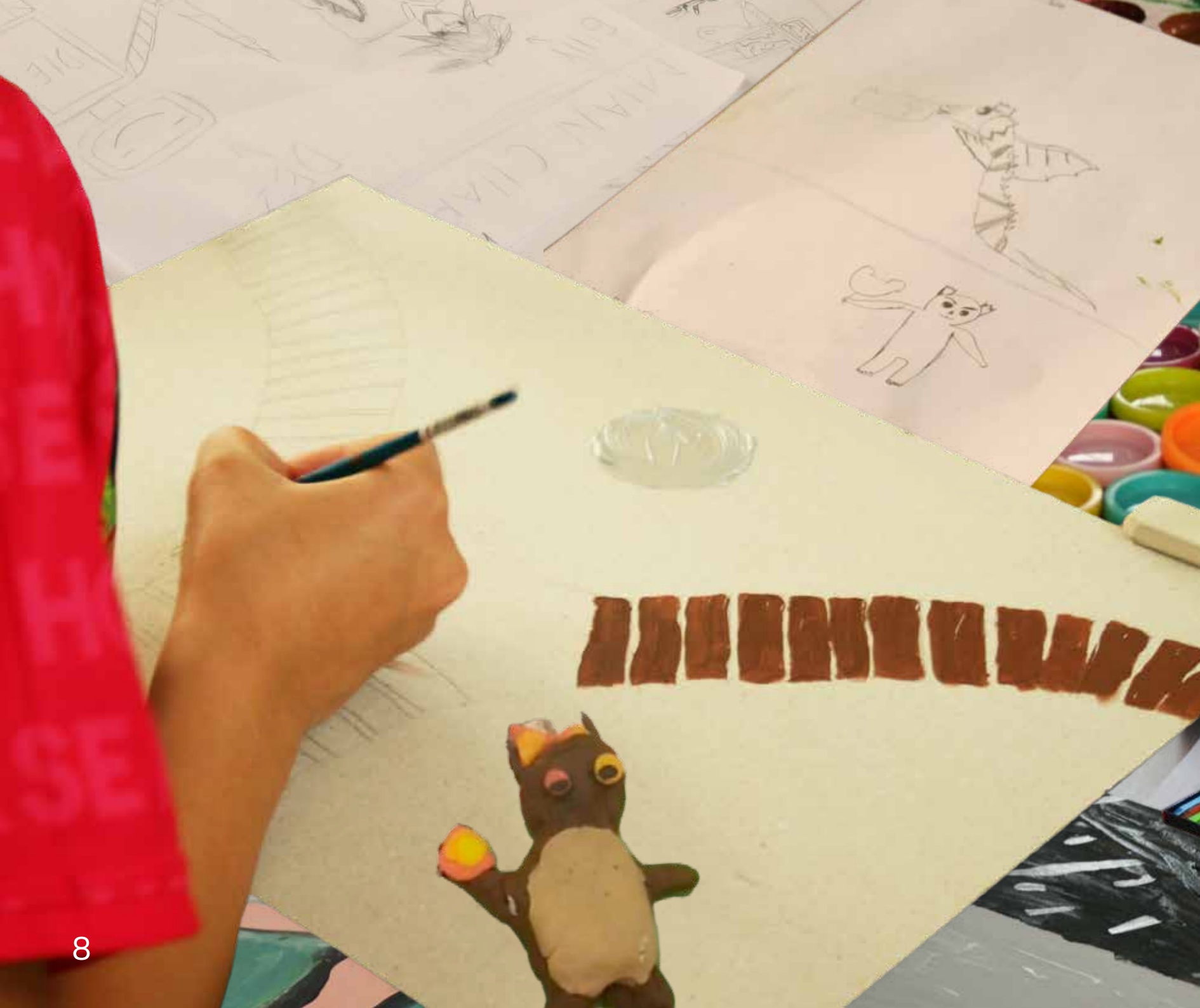
Who are we?

We are a group of children and young people who live in the northwest of Ireland. What we have in common is that our families foster children. Some of us met up in April as an introductory.

We think it's important that everyone understands what this is all about, what the experience is like and to give us a voice as well.

We were invited by Tusla to spend a few days with Kids' Own Publishing Partnership, an artist and writer, sharing our experiences and making art.






How we made this book

We met up in August 2022 to make art, talk about ourselves and our experiences as foster families. We did one-minute portraits of each other, painted, and used pastels to do warm-up activities. Stop motion animations are fun to make. You have to decide on characters, backdrop, and plot.

We used playdough to make our characters and you set up each scene and photograph it. Then you move the characters a little bit and photograph that as well. Then when you have all the photos taken, the app creates the animation.





**A lot has changed
since we took in our
little sisters.— Eleanor**

Our animations

Check out our animations online
by scanning this QR code



To make this book, the young people worked collaboratively with artist Karina Nachbar and writer Mary Branley through a creative process. Young people participated in a range of arts activities, including making stop-motion animation videos with Karina. The young people created their own storyboards for the animation, created the characters and sets with modelling clay, and then filmed and edited the scenes. Scan the QR code to watch these fun and quirky animations!



Bellatrix

I'm a mad Potter head, hence Bellatrix, she's the woman with the mad curly hair, she's a death eater, a baddie. She's cool and if I had her wand, I'd cast a load of spells on my brother Wilbur.

I'm going to secondary school soon and I'm looking forward to that because I'm going to meet new people and learn new subjects like German, Home Economics, maybe Woodwork might come up in my extra subjects. I've picked Music because my Dad's family are into music. He gave me his guitar for my birthday and now I've two. I'm doing vocal lessons every Monday and I like singing. I've been singing since I could talk, about age 2. In the shower I can sing really loud. I play basketball in school.

I thought it was going to be difficult to have another sibling, challenging to look after, but it's actually really fun. We play together with his cars and blocks, him and my younger sister get along really well.

We are going to Spain next week, and my best friend is coming with us. I'm so excited. We will definitely get good weather. The hotel is providing mocktails and snacks and all the meals. There's a swimming pool, an adults' area, and a kids' area.



Bellatrix's Story

My story has two characters, a dragaserpasorus called Adam, a dragon serpent dinosaur hybrid, and the other character is a fire bear called Jerry.

They meet in the woods. Adam invites Jerry in for tea. Jerry shares how he got lost in the woods and couldn't find his way back home, and Adam suggests he look from the top of the mountain to find his trail back.

Jerry finds the trail he left behind. And Adam flies him over to his home. Jerry sees his family and thanks Adam.



Ruby

Ruby is 14 hands 3, a chestnut thoroughbred mare. She's highly strung, so you have to try and make her calmer. Handle with care. Seven years old and she likes to jump but she's only learning. If she's getting hyper you keep doing walk to trot transition, and if she tries to take off you pull her into really tight circles. She's a lot of work but I love taking care of her and when she first came to the stables she was underfed and not treated right. She still doesn't fully trust people. She's out to grass at the moment for her holidays. She loves that.

Bailey is 8 and she is a Collie Labrador, and I take her out cycling with me. She doesn't like other dogs but she loves other children. That's a good thing. She's protective of our house, and she barks if other people come. She's good with the postman because he pets her. We've had her since she was a puppy and she's our second dog.



Two months ago, my mum and dad talked to us because my mum is in the guards and she sees loads of children who need homes, and she decided we would become one of those homes. We got accepted and our new sister came to live with us. She's 10 and loves animals, she has two brothers and a sister who live with another family and one of them lives with the mum.

We got accepted and our new sister came to live with us. She's 10 and loves animals.

It's going good. We went on holidays two weeks ago to Spain, and it was her first time on a plane and she was very excited. Alicante was very hot and on one of the last days it was 38 degrees, so hot you just melt. We had a swimming pool beside us, so we went in the water everyday. We had 2 ACs, one in my parents' bedroom and one in the sitting room. But the one in the sitting room broke. On the last night the AC fixer man came and put in two new ACS.

Ruby's Story

Phil the donkey is at the table eating spaghetti.

As he is getting through the spaghetti, the plate is afraid that her face will be revealed.

Phil is extremely shocked to find out that his plate has a face.

"Please don't smash me," begged the dinner plate called Caroline. "I beg you."

Five days later and Phil and Caroline are living happily together. They throw a disco to celebrate and Caroline wears a dress.



Wilbur

I'm a creative, adventurous sort of person but with no filter and who always gets into trouble with my mates. I like drawing, love video games, and love making video games. He likes to put his self into the game or show. He enjoys Marvel, DC, a parallel universe, and comics.

I'm a big geek for superheroes. My favourite ones are Spider-Man, Shazam, and Flash. My cousin Jay got me into this about ten years ago. He's three years older than me.

Five years ago, my family fostered my baby brother and he's turning five today. The parents felt that there was a child in need of a family and they took him in. They have fought for a lot of his rights, like getting into preschool. It took a lot of court dates to get him started in preschool. My Mam sleeps on a mattress in the same room as him because he has no self-awareness about safety. We have six in our family altogether, so it's a busy house. It's really good to have a baby brother to hang out with and talk to and worry about and care for. I was expecting a new brother, and new surroundings, challenges, and difference. What I wasn't expecting were the barriers to our baby brother getting access to preschool, that took two years.

Before my brother came, I used to just stay in my room and wouldn't come down, but now I'm down in the living room a lot more, because we need all eyes on him. He's going into his senior year in preschool. He's got a few needs and has to have special care. He's non-verbal but he knows how to express himself. He drags my mam to the cupboard if he's hungry or if he wants to watch something he grabs his tablet. Word party is his favourite, it makes him happy, and sad because there's a character in it who is sad and he cries too. If he's tired, he just climbs into his buggy. Or has a meltdown. Then we get him a bottle, his soother or a blanket, and his tablet sometimes and he slowly falls asleep.

I love writing and often write stories in the back of my copy, but unfortunately they were put in the bin. Lucky I'm on a story on the laptop. It's about a boy that gets powers and it's inspired by Shazam. It's also about a foster home, and I put myself into Shazam.

I have a novel app on the phone, on Novelcat you can publish your own work. You can make it as long as you want, and people can come in and comment and support you.



Wilbur's story

Three main characters: Billy, Bob and Dez. Dez is a highly trained AI that has the ability to shape shift. His life's goal is to hunt down Bob the symbiote. A symbiote is like a parasite and spreads through the host and need to find other hosts to survive.

One day Billy is walking down the street and comes across a rock in a field and it's broken and glowing. He goes to investigate, and the magical glow attaches to his body and spreads all over and disappears.

A few days later Billy starts to hear voices in his head; oh no, it's symbiote the parasite and it can't be detached or both of them will die.



Eleanor

I love makeup and doing hair. I practise on my little cousins, they love the attention, getting their hair and makeup done. I do this every week when I go to visit them. I like to have pamper days with my little cousins that we foster. I start with the skin wash and put on a face mask, then wash that off and put on different creams, moisturiser, toner and foundation.

I'm a Traveller so I like to educate them about the truth about Travellers, in case they hear false stories or misinformation about Travellers. I tell them how Travellers lived in the old days, with wagons and moving around all the time. I explain that some people think that if you're a Traveller you have to live a certain way, but I always tell them to be themselves. I see that as very important, it's no good to pretend to be someone you're not. I teach them Cant, simple sentences, like *lakín* is a girl, and *súbhla* is a boy and *comera* is a dog.

Most of the time Travellers are shut out or pushed aside over being Travellers. Not everyone is painted with the same brush. All Travellers are not the same, there's nothing special about us, I want to be treated equally for who I am, not for where I come from. That's the same for everyone. It seems to be socially acceptable to discriminate against every minority

group here. But when it is a minority group it's really important to have a voice, to say what needs to be said and be heard. There's no point having a voice if no one is listening. That's why it's so important that Senator Eileen Flynn, a Traveller herself, speaks out. I'm going in fifth year in September and I've picked all my subjects: Irish, English, Maths, Spanish, French, Biology, and Chemistry. I'd like to be a community development worker like my mother, so I'll go to college in Galway hopefully. Most of my family live in Galway.

I hadn't any expectations, but we were hoping it would work out for all of us.

It was hard in the beginning, but what I wasn't expecting is that the children became a big part of our family so soon.

A lot has changed since we took in our little sisters. Because for most of my life it was just me and my twin sister. It was a big change, but we wanted to help out our family, but ever since they've come it's like a bright light in the family, having them there.

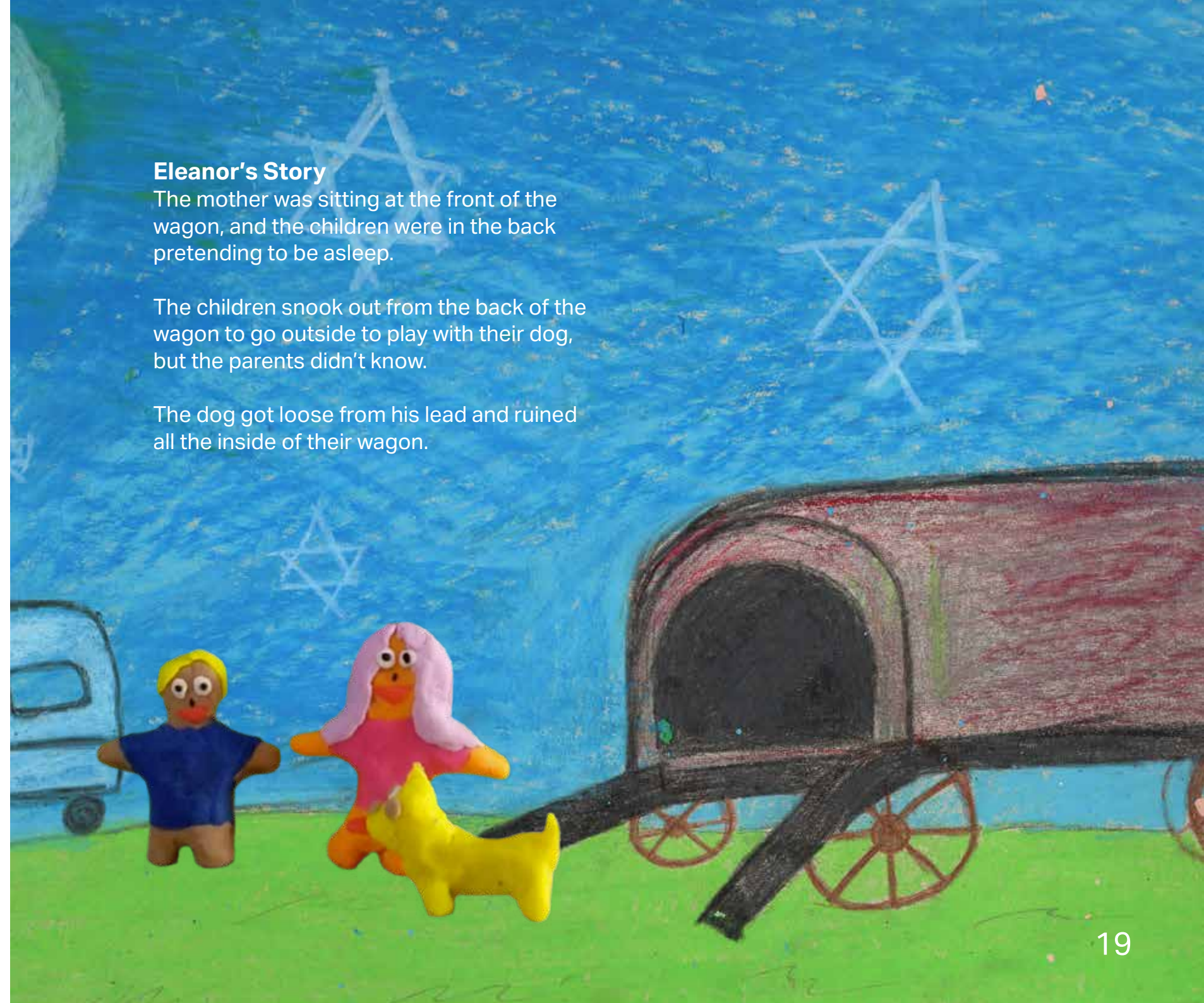


Eleanor's Story

The mother was sitting at the front of the wagon, and the children were in the back pretending to be asleep.

The children snook out from the back of the wagon to go outside to play with their dog, but the parents didn't know.

The dog got loose from his lead and ruined all the inside of their wagon.



Julia

I love music, both listening and playing. My favourite kind of music is 70s and 80s, Beatles, Cream. I do singing lessons. I'm on grade 8 in singing and piano. I will do all the exams but I don't know if I want to teach. I'm home schooled at the moment but I'll be going to the secondary for 5th and 6th year. I was in my local primary school all the way and started home schooling for first year.

We started fostering 4 years ago. I was an only child for 11 years before that. We have had children who need respite (short break from their foster family).

We have also had longer-term children in our family. We have the same kids for 3 years now, but they are very little, the older one is going to start primary school in September.

We were accepted for fostering and in less than a week we were given two children.

I'm not sure what I want to be when I grow up, but I want to study criminality. I'd like to solve mysteries. I love watching murder mysteries. You can do a lot of jobs in the criminality sector, or become a lawyer and work for the criminals.

I busk in different places, like outside with the ukulele, the keyboard and I sing as well. For my birthday I got a huge speaker and microphone. I play Scott Joplin on the piano, and Mia and Sebastian's theme from La La Land. The singing brings in more money. Busking is a very enjoyable way of sharing your music, you get nice compliments, and it's less stressful than being on stage in front of people.

Julia's Story

A little fish is swimming.
A bigger fish comes along and eats him. An even bigger fish comes along and eats him. Then an even bigger fish comes along and eats him. And then an even bigger fish comes along and eats him.

The last big fish starts to feel sick, and spits out the fish he ate.

Then the next fish spits out the fish he ate, and each fish spits out each other until we are back to the baby fish in the beginning.

I'm a sporty person. I love Gaelic, soccer, and basketball. Teams are my favourite, you get to meet new people and do different stuff. We travel for away games. I've been all over Mayo: Belmullet, Kilmeena, Breaffy, Ballina, Castlebar for a start. These are all Gaelic clubs in the the county. For soccer we go to Roscommon town, Ballinasloe, Boyle etc. Our parents have to bring us. For the boys in Gaelic they get a bus but not for the girls!

I'm stressed going into Leaving Cert, I'd like to continue my life after secondary school doing a course to work with children in some way. Maybe primary teaching, and I prefer younger kids. I'll go anywhere I can get in for college. I have a summer job, minding four children who are all under 3. You just play with them or go for a walk with the double buggy, so the baby goes in the front, and one of the boys sits in the side. The small twin fits into the handbag part of the buggy. The three-year-old rides his bike alongside us.

They have a long back road at the back of their house that loops to the back of my house, and there's never any cars so they are safe.

Five years ago, my family got accepted to be a foster family. You make an enquiry with Tusla and then

In the five years since we became a foster family, we've become closer as a family because we talk more, and get on with each other better.

you do training. My parents did a course on the foundations of fostering. It's an intensive course dealing with behaviour and challenges, and working with Tusla social workers and how to care for the children who come to your family. After that you apply and decide if you really want to be a foster family and you send in your application and an assessment takes place.

Then the good part, the kids come. Some might stay for a short while and others for longer. In the short-term, some families need a break and get better and then the foster children go back to their families. But sometimes in the long-term, the families might not be able to care for them because of financial issues or illness or death of a parent.

It can be hard on the family where the kids come from and also on the kids themselves. It's good for us, because we know they are coming to a good place, and it can be hard when you have a good connection with them and they move to another foster family or back to their family of origin.

In the five years since we became a foster family, we've become closer as a family because we talk more, and get on with each other better. At the moment, we have children with us since their birth and maybe we will go on to adopt them.

Both our parents have jobs as well as the five children in our family. We all help each other I do a lot of cleaning, trying to keep my bedroom tidy. My Dad is a cattle farmer and that keeps him busy as well. We share lifts to school with our neighbour.



Dolly

I'm mad about horses and I go horse riding every week. Dolly is my favourite pony, she's just so sweet, she nickers when she sees me coming. She knows when you say goodbye, maybe she feels sad when I'm going. She is my horse and I have her in the field beside the house. She's a Shetland pony and used to being outside the whole time. She lives off grass and multigrain nuts and then hay in the winter. I don't ride her because she's too small. We bought her off one of my dad's friends. She's a pure pet. I go to a riding centre for lessons every week, I can canter, and jump metre-high jumps. I haven't fallen off yet. I have all the gear: helmet, body protection (it's like a life jacket to protect your back) jodhpurs and riding boots.

We do a lot of talking, especially over dinner.

We have a farm and I love farming with my Dad. I'll do any of the jobs needing doing, like cleaning out the sheds, scraping off all the cattle poo and putting in clean straw.



Like my sister, we have had a good experience of being a foster family. We do a lot of talking, especially over dinner. We talk about school, and how the day went and if someone has an issue we talk about it. My parents sometimes give us advice how to solve the problem. We all eat what we are given, my favourite is lamb stew with carrots, peas, and sweetcorn.




KT and Dolly's story

Snowman enjoying time in the snow, just after being built.

Snowman starts to get upset as the sun comes out from behind the clouds and gets brighter. The snowman ends up melting as the sun gets the best of him. Only his hat and carrot are left in the puddle of water.

The horse escapes from the field and goes over to the melted snowman. The horse puts on the snowman's hat and eats the carrot. The horse ends up turning into a brown snowman.





We started fostering
4 years ago, I was an
only child for 11 years
before that. — Julia

Book Participants

Ruby	Bellatrix
Julia	KT
Wilbur	Eleanor
Dolly	



A person's hand is visible on the left, painting a large, textured blue shape on a piece of paper. The paper is on a wooden table. Various art supplies are scattered around: a white cap, a glue stick, a jar of green liquid with a green stirrer, and a paint palette with blue, yellow, and black paint. In the bottom left corner, there is a piece of paper with colorful abstract patterns.

**Like my sister, we have
had a good experience
of being a foster family.
We do a lot of talking.
— Dolly**