

Kids' Own Publishing Partnership offers a space for children and young people to express themselves through professional arts practice. Collaboratively publishing the work they create provides a public platform so that their voices can be heard more widely.

This project was developed in partnership with Cork Traveller Visibility Group and the Cork STAR (Supporting Traveller and Roma) project. The book was created by Traveller children and young people in Cork and is a unique and significant publication, exploring their lived experiences through artwork and in their own words.

There is a classroom resource for teachers to accompany this book. The aim of this resource is to help teachers use this publication in conversation and collaboration with their students.



Grow Up STRONG

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A book about the lives and experiences of Traveller children and young people living in Cork, Ireland.





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ISBN 978-1-902432-09-0

Published by

Kids’ Own Publishing Partnership CLG.
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Registered charity number: 20082109

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Anne Burke from Cork Traveller Visibility Group for her commitment to this project and to Rachel Coffey and Gina Miyagawa for their continued on-the-ground support, working closely with the young people and their families. Their support and expertise was integral to this project. Thanks also to Eileen O’Shea. Sincere thanks to Irish Traveller Movement for their role as advisory partners. We gratefully acknowledge the support and contribution of Tusla Education Support Service.

This project was funded by the Toy Show Appeal, the Community Foundation for Ireland, Cork Traveller Visibility Group, Cork STAR project, and Tusla Education Support Service (TESS). Kids’ Own gratefully acknowledges Strategic Funding from the Arts Council of Ireland.

Most of all, a huge thanks to the children and young people who participated:

Cheryl, Jimmy, Bridget, Alison, Lucy, Jolene, Helen Marie, Nell, Rosie, Katie, Mikey





Foreword

My name is Rachel Coffey and I am the Traveller Education Worker on the STAR (Supporting Traveller and Roma) project in Cork City. I have worked closely with this particular group of young people and I am so proud of the children and our work together over the 12 weeks of developing this book.

Together with our young lackeens (girls) and sublics (boys), we wanted to give our young people a brave and safe space to discuss our culture, identity and barriers facing our community.

The journey to get here was exciting and creative, exploring and learning together with writing, recording and the use of new art materials. So, you might be asking the question “why” this book was created. Our young people face challenging times in society and I understand that you may feel some discomfort using this book. We urge and hope the adults using this tool will sit with their discomfort and explore those feelings and narratives you may have towards the community. We may not solve all the issues facing our people but together in solidarity we can create a new learning through creativity, openness and a critical self-analysis that will benefit the lives of young Travellers and minorities.

Traveller children feel that they are not accepted in many places or understood so a lot of them feel the need to hide their identity in fear of discrimination. We also see high rates of school leaving and we want these resources to be a tool within the classroom so that our children feel they are represented in a positive way. The book will also be a guide to generate in-class conversations with not just Traveller children but other minorities who face similar inequalities on a daily basis.

This book and the accompanying resource will be an excellent tool for your schools and classroom. We hope that it can break down barriers, make our young people proud and also help everyone learn more about our rich culture. This is an open invitation to become more aware of the existing issues our young people face and to understand how they feel. We hope this invitation is accepted with a beginner’s mind and a new awareness to diversity within the classroom setting. The narrative needs to change for our young people and the work in this book is the beginning.

We are delighted the book has been welcomed and we hope it will :

—Build solidarity and build capacity with stakeholders which will slowly improve the lives of our young people in school.

—Provide spaces where all young people feel safe and their voice is heard.

—Give a voice to young Travellers through participation and education.

—Reflect on our practice working with young minorities.

—Increase knowledge and understanding.

I hope you and all your young people and staff can start this new narrative within the classroom and become part of this enormous journey through creativity and beyond.

Rachel Coffey



Who are we?

We are Cheryl, Jimmy, Nell, Bridget, Alison, Jolene, Lucy, Helen Marie, Rosie, Mikey and Katie. We are all friends, and we are part of the youth club here in Cork. We are all Travellers. We love art and taking photos.

How we made this book:

The latex is spread all over anything, like a clay, drawing, or fabric and you let it dry or use a hair dryer to blow dry it. Then you peel it off, and it's really satisfying and relaxing.

We used wax too. It was messy, the art was the messiest.

The best part of making this book was the messy art.





**I'm an ordinary
girl having an
ordinary life
like everyone
else.**

Cheryl

I'm an ordinary girl having an ordinary life like everyone else. I'm 13 years old. I'm in secondary school now and it's fine. I've two new subjects, Spanish and Business Studies.

I mixed two colours with latex and got a big clear sheet, dried it with the hair dryer and then peeled it off and it came off in one piece.

I did a podcast on the Cant language with the STAR project and Music Generation about the Travelling Community.*

*Please see accompanying teaching and learning resource booklet for more information.



**If I was to make
my own school**

We would have fun but work too.

We'd have laptops and tablets.

We need more support in school.





Jimmy

I'm doing my Junior Cert this year: Maths, Woodwork, Geography, Science, Spanish, Art and SPHE, CSPE, Religion, PE too. I'm taking more interest in studying this year, compared to last year. School is going well. I get help off my tutor for Maths; certain parts of it are hard.

I finished making a model plane in Woodwork just before midterm. It was easy enough once I got the markings made out. I'm starting a bird box next for the Junior Cert project.

I'm staying on in school after Junior Cert to do the LCA course and then maybe an apprenticeship in carpentry after that. I like experimenting to learn.

Once I asked the teacher to get my books from my locker, and the teacher raised her voice and said "Get the books in your own time." They pick on Traveller kids.

If I was to make my own school

Don't pick on the Traveller kids. Be able to talk to the principal.

I went to Chaplain once or twice. They were helpful. A school Chaplain in every school, someone to go to if you are having a hard time.

I go round Glen and hang out with my friends. The Halloween was ok but the weather wasn't great. There were no bonfires or fireworks, just the usual chillin' out. I've a lot of friends in my area and we play football Mondays and Wednesdays. I'm starting soccer as well.

The STAR project is good. It's helpful to students to talk about how things are going in your day, you get help with work if you need it. You get encouragement.

The artwork was really enjoyable in the book project and I'd like to keep it up.

I like experimenting to learn.



I just want to
help people.



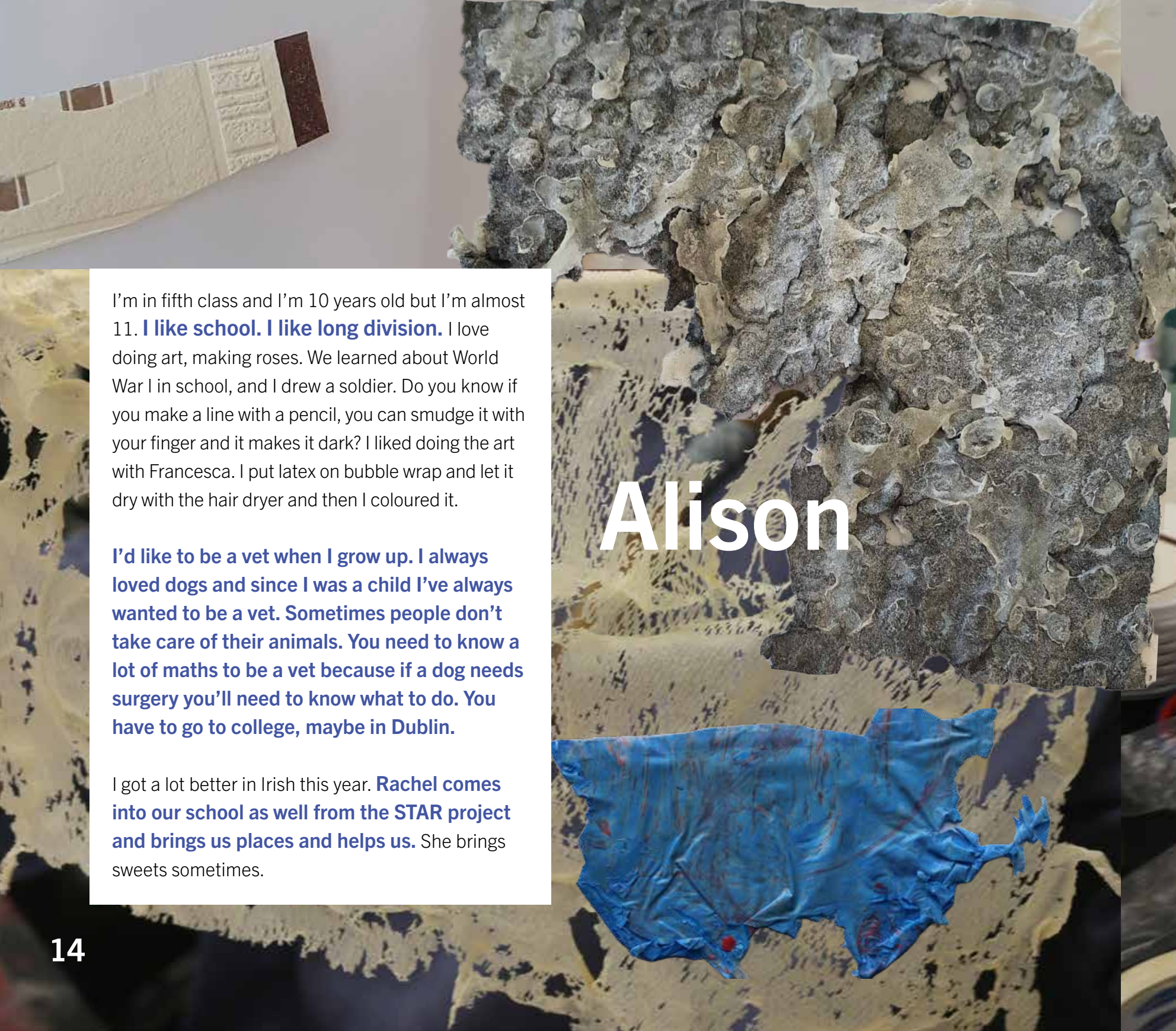
Bridget

I like Hip Hop dancing. I used to go to classes, but I stopped. We were training for ages. We did a dance in the Opera House. During lockdown we were so bored there was nothing to do. We used to play school with old school books.

When I was 7, I decided to become a paramedic and I never changed my mind since. I just want to help people since I saw lots of shows on TV.

I'm in sixth class. Last year we did a project in our school and there's a teacher there who knows first aid, and I interviewed her about becoming a paramedic. She told me that there's courses I can do even at my age.

If there's an accident and someone sends for the ambulance, you come and help them. If their heart stops working and you can't get it going by just your hands, you shock them.



I'm in fifth class and I'm 10 years old but I'm almost 11. **I like school. I like long division.** I love doing art, making roses. We learned about World War I in school, and I drew a soldier. Do you know if you make a line with a pencil, you can smudge it with your finger and it makes it dark? I liked doing the art with Francesca. I put latex on bubble wrap and let it dry with the hair dryer and then I coloured it.

I'd like to be a vet when I grow up. I always loved dogs and since I was a child I've always wanted to be a vet. Sometimes people don't take care of their animals. You need to know a lot of maths to be a vet because if a dog needs surgery you'll need to know what to do. You have to go to college, maybe in Dublin.

I got a lot better in Irish this year. **Rachel comes into our school as well from the STAR project and brings us places and helps us.** She brings sweets sometimes.

Alison



It's good to be reading and thanks for reading this.

Cant is important for us, because we are Travellers and Cant is the Travellers' language.



Jolene is No. 1 Boss

I was in Canada in the summer and it was very warm over there. It went up to 40 degrees. I was in Toronto. My aunts and cousins were there too. When we first went over, we stayed in my cousin's apartment until we got our own. We were going to water parks and outdoor swimming pools to stay cool. But everywhere you go they had air conditioning. There was no curry over there or Taytos or chocolate or Lucozade. We went to the Irish shop to get Taytos and Lucozade.

I'm a bit nervous about going to secondary, but I'm going with my cousins. My mum and my aunts and my nanny went there, but I am looking forward to making new friends. But the good thing is you'll be in new classes.

Cant is important for us, because we are Travellers and Cant is the Travellers' language. We know a few words already, *beoir*, *lakín*, *grad*, *feen*, *súblic*. *Takend* means if you were messing and someone called the guards and you were taken, caught.

I did my own eyelashes and lots of the girls'. You can't do your own, it's awkward. When I'm older I want to be a beautician, eyebrows, hair, nails and everything. I'll have my own salon. I might have people working for me. I might stay in Cork.

Jolene



Lucy

I know Cant words and I just use them when I'm talking to my friends.

I'm in first year and it's grand. I've a load of subjects; **I like Business Studies.** We've a lot of Travellers in my school, some I knew from my old school but I've met new people too.

My mother is in college and she is doing a course on working with children.

I don't know yet what I'd like to be when I'm older.

Education is very important to me, and back in the day Travellers did not get an education and there's a lot of inequality.

I could do the taxes for Jolene's business, do the budget, and keep an account of her opening cash and closing cash, her income and her expenses.

My Auntie is my best friend. We talk. I help her out with the kids.

I know Cant words and I just use them when I'm talking to my friends.

There's a museum in Fitzgerald Park. There's a paddy wagon inside there and my grandfather helped build it. He and my grandmother are both dead. She passed away last year but he passed away a couple of years ago.



Education is very important to me.

In lockdown, it was really boring. Everything was shut down. You always had to wear a mask. I was worried about it.

We're going to be famous. I want to hear my name going around. I'm going to be a beautician when I grow up. My sister has a load of makeup and she lets me use it and she practises on me.

I'm in fifth and it's going good. I was learning how to make rap songs. I was trick or treating round my estate getting loads of sweets.

Helen Marie

Never judge a book by its cover.

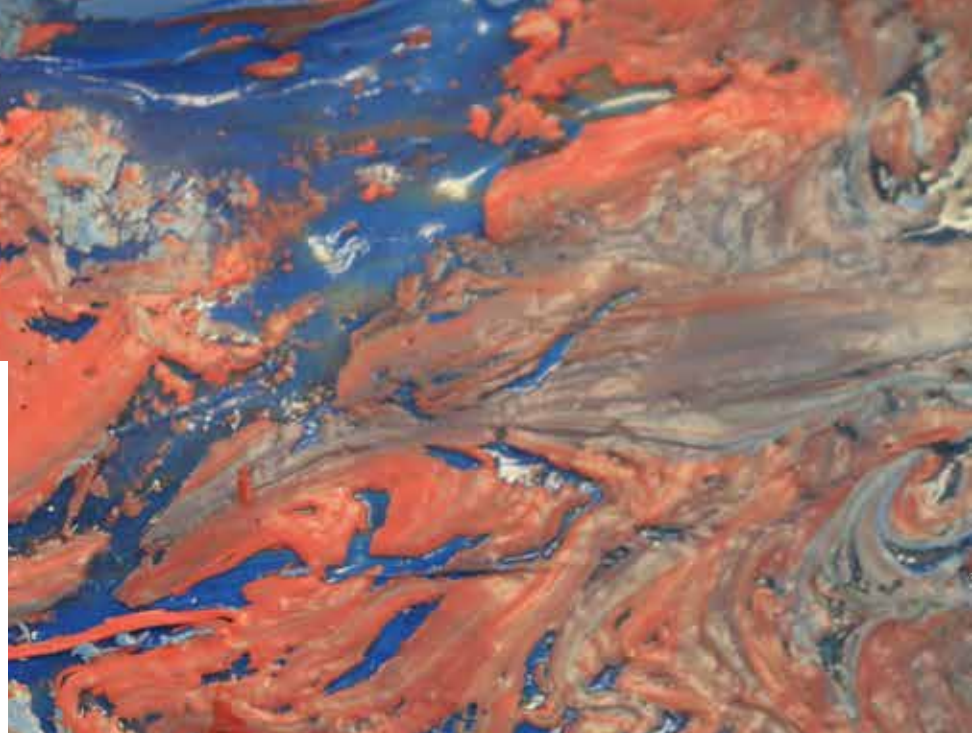
Nell

I'm in TY now and still waiting on the results of the Junior Cert. I'm hoping I did ok. I didn't find it that hard. TY is ok, there's not much course work to do.

I've my work experience coming up in December and I'm going to the hairdressers on the hill. I'd like to do that after school. I want to find out about hair colours and dying hair and be a colour specialist. I do other people's hair, my friends. Plaits and all that. I want to open my own salon, but I'd have to work as a hairdresser first.

We have STAR in our school and you can get help in your work and you get to go on trips, like cinema and paintballing, with other people in our school.

If you like the teacher, you'll like the class. I think the teachers should understand that Travellers are going to be in school so they should teach us. They are just ticking boxes with us. I am not going to be talked down to.

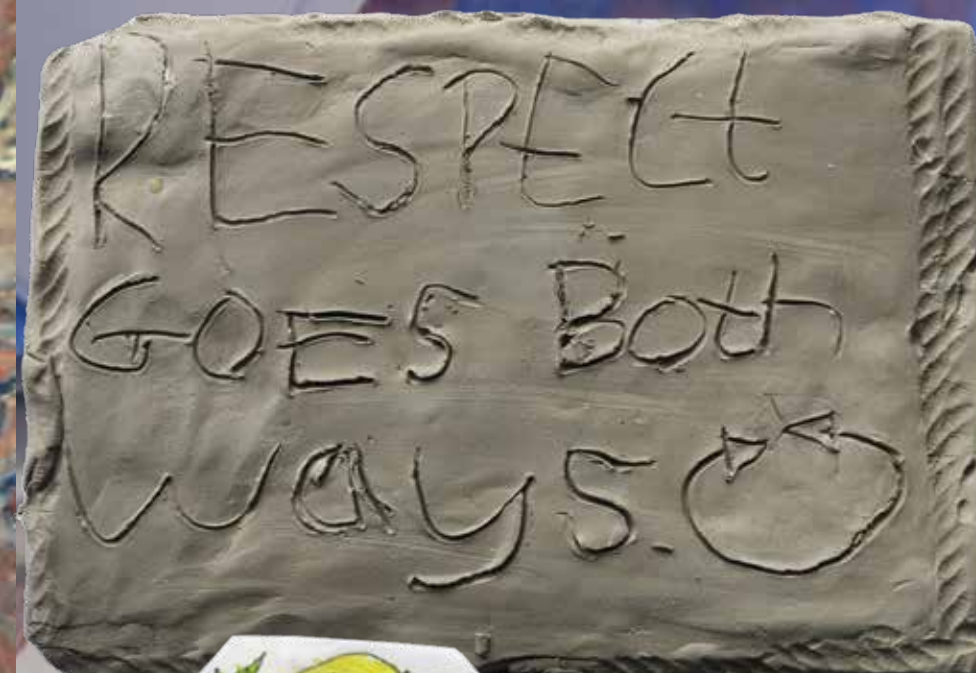


The teachers are from posh places. They put their nose up at us.

I want to learn.

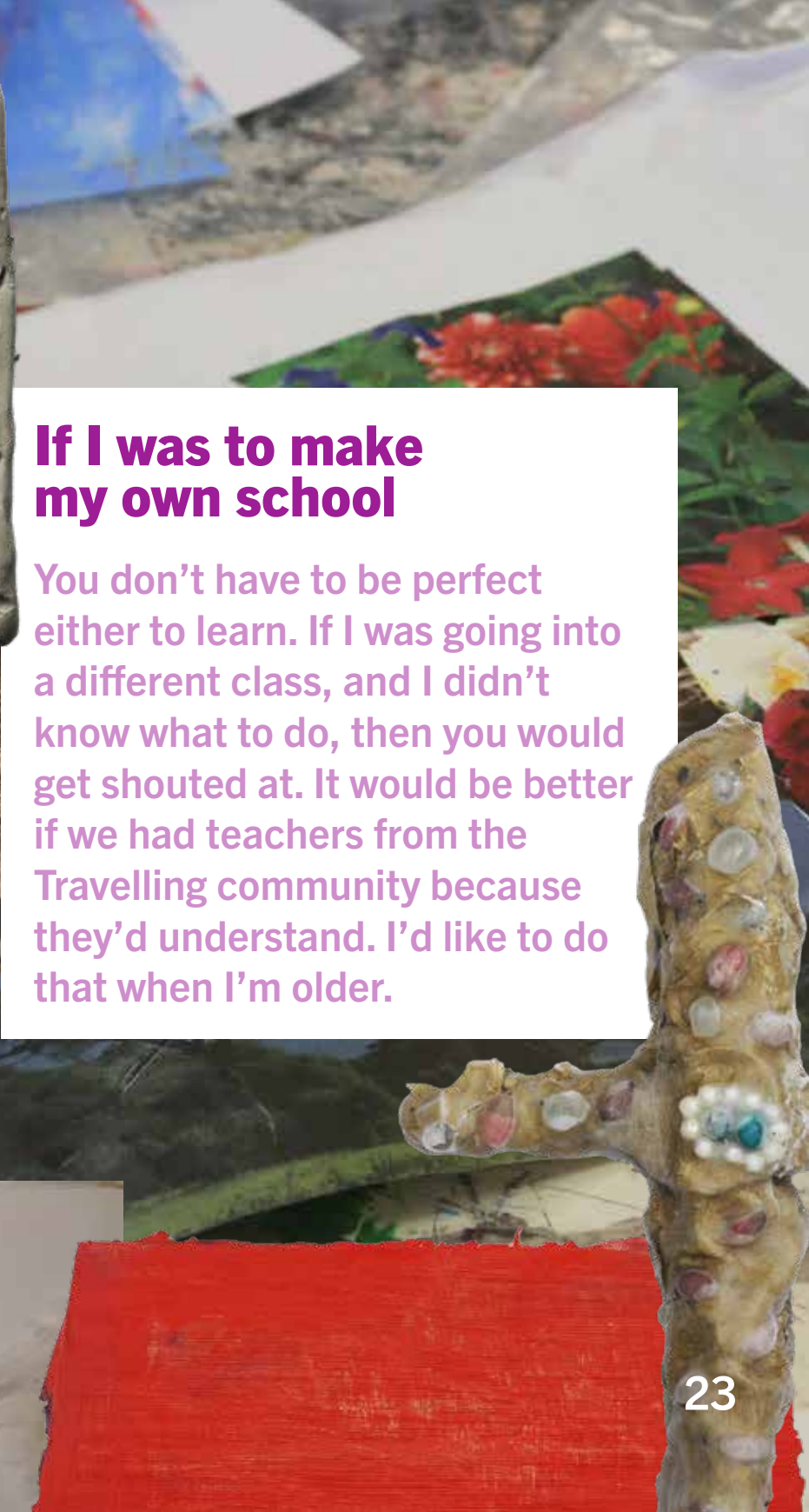
I don't want to sit in a classroom and argue but the teachers draw you out. Make a decision with me and I will behave inside your school. Instead of telling me where I can and can't go, you could just talk to me. Teachers talk about you in the halls behind your back. We have rules. We have to contribute but they need to be fair. You need to be more fair. It goes both ways.

I'm not getting the stuff I need to know about my culture.



If I was to make my own school

You don't have to be perfect either to learn. If I was going into a different class, and I didn't know what to do, then you would get shouted at. It would be better if we had teachers from the Travelling community because they'd understand. I'd like to do that when I'm older.



The Burkes

Rosie

Mikey and

Katie



We all used to box. Our father had Burke tattooed on his arm. He was a boxer and he was a legend. Our Mum teaches us a lot about respect, you can't judge people, and about how they grew up. She teaches us to have confidence in ourselves. She teaches us to grow up strong, even if people are talking behind your back and to keep out of fights.



I'm going to start my own business at the house, and people can just come there.

I help my Mummy with the housework and the younger children. I like going to cafés with my friends, and have iced coffee. I like talking to people.

I'd like to be a beautician when I'm older, nails, eyelashes, eyebrows, and hair. I could come here to the Beoir Boutique at the TVG. I practise on my sister Katie and send her out with fish plaits and stuff. I'm going to start my own business at the house, and people can just come there. I can advertise on Facebook or something like that and say 20% off.

I like fashion too, fancy clothes, and I take a look at all the shops in town. You'd get a nice outfit for say €50 in Penneys. I like jewellery too. Whatever outfit you go for, it has to go with the look you've decided on. If you're going for the "smokey eye" look, (that's layers of eye shadow, fill in the eyebrows, and colour them), it could take you two hours to get it right. So jeans and a nice top might go with that.

We've two chihuahuas in the family: Daisy and Max. Daisy is very wild and Max likes to do more sleeping. Max is a vegetarian but Daisy will eat anything, and if you drop any food on the ground she'll run straight over.

Rosie

If I was to make my own school

I'd have a teacher that teaches you stuff and doesn't shout at you every second of the day.



**It's confidence
you need.**

Katie

I like makeup too but I don't put it on myself, because my skin is sensitive.

I liked doing the artwork for the project.

I dressed up as a cheerleader for Halloween, and it's like gymnastics. I can do a headstand against the wall. I'm going to join the gymnastics club. It's confidence you need. One time I went to do a handstand against the wall but I didn't know the floor was wet and I almost broke my back. It was sore for a while and I had to rest it.

My favourite subject at school is Home Ec and the best part of that is baking. I always eat everything before I can bring it home. I like decorating the cakes with stuff. My history teacher is great.

I'll have pets in my house when I grow up, three chihuahuas maybe.



If I was to make my own school

I'd have McDonalds and Starbucks.

I'd do art all day.

Learn how to read and to dance in school.



Mikey

We're going back boxing again. We've all the gear in a shed in the back garden. **Our father was really good at boxing and swimming.**

I was off paintballing with a load of my cousins this week, 10 of us; they are all Burkes from my father's side of the family. It was my cousin's birthday. They came from Cobh, Middleton, and the city. My cousins taught me lots of things, they taught me to climb trees and box. I don't go fight anyone. It's better not to.

I'm doing the Junior Cert this year, and it's hard but it's not that hard. I'm doing Maths, English, Tech Graphics, History, Geography, and Science. I've an exemption from Irish and Spanish. Woodwork and Maths are my favourite subjects. I have a resource teacher in school, he helps me out with the work. I really learn a lot. It's useful.



My cousins taught me lots of things.

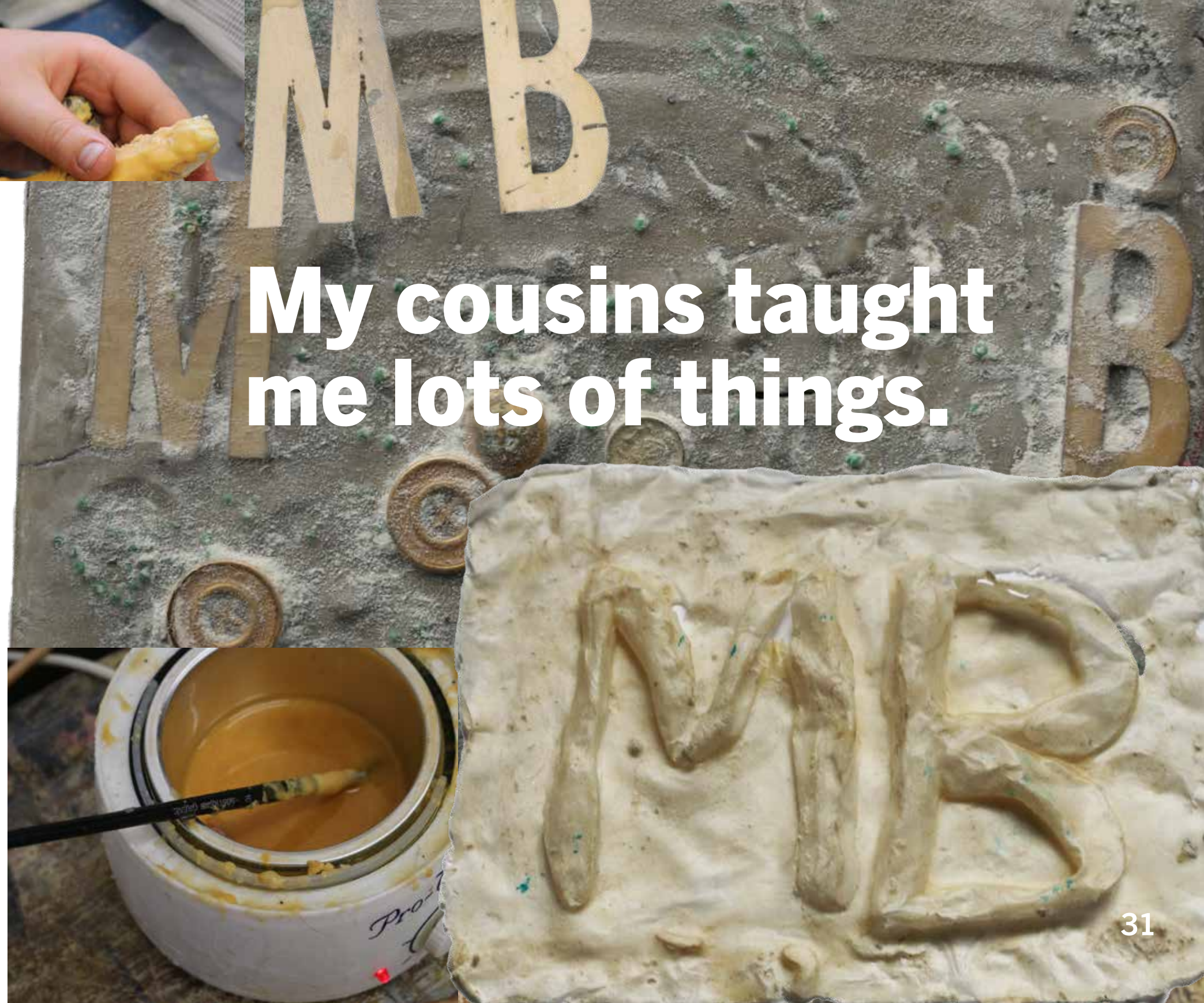
We have 10 in the family and I'm the eldest and the boss. We've the chihuahuas now but we used to have a German Shepherd. My father found them as pups and brought and gave them to all our cousins and kept one. But we gave him away to people who had a big field.

If I was to make my own school

We'd do woodwork and tech graph in the morning and then move on to the other subjects.

We'd be allowed to go out for lunch.

I met my father one time out walking with the German Shepherd and the dog jumped up on me and knocked me. Nearly gave me a heart attack. **We called him Captain, and he had a broken leg when my father took him in, but my father fixed it.**







A note on the art experience by Francesca Hutchinson

My overall motive for this project was to encourage and enable the children to have confidence in themselves, both in their experiences and their lives. I did this by assisting the young people to express what is important to them growing up in today's society and translating this sense of identity through art.

I assisted the young people as an artistic mentor collaboratively, as the children embraced materiality through process, experimental and research-based learning.

As well as developing a new self-led style of working, the children also experimented with unknown materials that pushed them outside their comfort zone. They used materials such as latex, PVA, clay, and found materials.

Francesca Hutchinson is an Offaly based multidisciplinary artist and has recently graduated from Limerick School of Art and Design where she specialised in Fine Art, Painting. She is currently pursuing a PME with Art and Design (2022). Her work varies through a complexity of mediums and materials. Most recently she developed a body of work *Ephemera* (2022), which explores ephemeral materials and their relationship to the transience of life. Her work is "ever evolving" and stems from a variety of inspirations, intuitively her works are motivated by her family, and her family's heritage coming from the Travelling community. Her dream is to continue to pursue her career as an artist and teacher, enriching the lives of young people through the joy and freedom that creativity brings.

A note on the writing experience by Mary Branley

With the recent expansion of Kids' Own's Associate Artist and Writer panel, and funding from the Arts Council Capacity Building Scheme, I was in the position of mentor to assist, encourage and help Francesca and Danny with planning, reflecting and evaluating how the process was unfolding in the Cork project.

I returned to Cork later in 2022 to do a follow up with the participants of the *Grow Up Strong* book, to allow them to revisit their texts, edit, and develop further. It was great to meet up with the young people again and focus on their lives, memories, and hopes for the future.

Mary Branley is a poet, writer and musician based in north Sligo. She is the author of three collections of poetry and her poetry has been included in numerous anthologies. She was awarded the Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in 2008 and she is the recipient of numerous residencies and bursaries from the Arts Council of Ireland. Closely associated with Kids' Own Publishing Partnership, a children's arts organisation and publishing house, Mary has collaborated with children on writing for over twenty years and forty titles.

A note on the writing experience by Daniel Brennan

My work with the young people sought to create a collaborative story with small groups and individuals. The first task was to build trust. I watched, I listened, and I picked up the windfall. I tried to figure out what they wanted to say as young people in a rapidly changing world.

We collected all these snatches of conversation and laid them out in a new way each week, rearranging things together to see what resonated as the seasons changed. This process speaks to the potential of dialogue to foster new ways of seeing for all of us.

Danny Brennan is a Limerick based collaborative artist, community organiser, and educator. Working in the area of film, theatre and text, his work seeks to build new worlds inside the shell of the old. Danny is a member of the Kids' Own Associate Writers panel.



A hand is shown carving a wooden cross on a workbench. The cross is made of a light-colored wood and is being shaped with a black-handled carving tool. The workbench is covered with a layer of yellowish-brown wood shavings and dust. In the top right corner, there is a small, finished wooden cross with a purple and white patterned surface.

Participants in this book

Cheryl

Helen Marie

Jimmy

Nell

Bridget

Rosie

Alison

Katie

Jolene

Mikey

Lucy