

Report back to The Funding Network

1. Name of your organisation and date funded by TFN:

First Story Ltd., September 2011

2. What does your organisation do?

Using creative-writing workshops, First Story aims to help young people and their teachers in challenging UK secondary schools develop confidence, creativity, literacy and aspirations. We also aim to promote the arts and, in particular, literature, poetry and creative writing by inviting, commissioning and maintaining services of British writers.

First Story's aims and objectives have not changed since receiving TFN funding.

3. When was your organisation first established?

First Story was established in 2008. The pilot project took place in 2007.

4. Since receiving funding from TFN how has your organisation changed?

First Story's projects run from September to August. Our turnover increases year-on-year as we expand according to the number of schools taking part in First Story. We have just completed the project for the 2011-12 year, during which time we received funding from TFN. In 2011-12 the number of beneficiaries was approximately 400 students. In 2012-13 we estimate this will increase to over 500 students as the programme expands from twenty-five residencies to thirty-two residencies. The annual turnover will increase next year in accordance with expansion.

The geographical scope (London, Oxford and the East Midlands) will remain the same in 2012-13; we look to take First Story to two new regions (Bradford and Bristol) in September 2013.

Since receiving TFN funding in October 2011 we have employed an office administrator and an intern, taking the number of employees from three to five.

5. Can you describe/measure the impact that the specific TFN funded project/work has had?

Funding from TFN (£15,473) helped enable the First Story creative writing projects at Oxford Spires Academy (40% of project costs) and Nottingham University Samworth Academy (87.5% of project costs). Both are challenging secondary schools, i.e. more than 50% of pupils are considered deprived according to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and/or GCSE results fall in the lowest third of the national distribution.

The writers-in-residence at the schools – Kate Clanchy at Oxford Spires Academy and Graham Lester George at NUSA – led weekly creative writing workshops throughout the academic year for groups of students. Kate Clanchy says, 'The students at Oxford Spires are not smart, forward, or middle-class: they tend to take a humble view of themselves and anything they might have to say. Once they do get started [in the First Story programme], many of them are strikingly talented.'

First Story helped to publish anthologies of the students' work for both schools at the end of summer term. At Oxford Spires Academy, the beautiful cover of their anthology *Journeys* was illustrated by a talented student within the group named Rhianna Graham. The anthology from NUSA was entitled *Undiscovered Voices*. The students were responsible for deciding the title and cover artwork of the anthology, as well as contributing to the book, meaning they were all professionally published writers

at the end of the project. The schools also hosted a celebratory anthology launch party where students read aloud their work in front of their parents, peers, teachers and members of the local community.

In feedback surveys, all students (100%) from Oxford Spires Academy rated their experience as being excellent and said it was inspirational. 80% of respondents said it has helped them to achieve things they could not have done otherwise and that it had increased their love and quality of writing. Students said the best thing about taking part in First Story was 'being able to say my feelings', 'being able to express your own voice', and that First Story 'is about being able to be yourself and to do this through poetry so freely is perhaps the best reason.'

Similarly, 100% of students at NUSA said they would continue to write for pleasure. 62.5% responded they have become much more confident and always enjoy writing. They said the best thing about taking part in First Story was, 'meeting new people and getting new ideas' and the 'freedom to write anything.' Others said, 'It helped me realise that I'm a good writer and helped me gain confidence' while another respondent stated, 'I made more friends and have socialised more. It definitely inspired me more about creative writing.'

Emma Bates, the First Story liaison teacher at Oxford Spires Academy, gives examples of two students who have specifically been impacted by First Story. She reports, 'One student has gained so much confidence in her writing through First Story that she has taken part in a public speaking competition. Another student was taking Science based subjects due to their parents' wishes but now she wants to pursue a career in writing because she has been so inspired by First Story.'

We see the projects as being a success, offering students access to creative writing which they otherwise would not have received. The workshops provided them the opportunity to increase confidence by reading their work aloud in workshops and the launch event, and also having a writer encourage and support them to develop their writing skills. Working with professionally published writers also helps the students the opportunity to develop aspirations. Writer-in-Residence Kate Clanchy says, 'There is a definite benefit in the way this work raises the students' aspirations. They are encouraged and validated. Many of the children have very low self esteem. Writing can help to lift that.'

The teachers taking part in the project have had access to training opportunities, and they, too, have been given encouragement with their writing and teaching practices which they can then share with their students throughout the school.

6. Could you give us an estimate of how many people have been reached by the TFN funded project/work and by how much?

At NUSA, roughly ten students regularly took part in the programme and at Oxford Spires Academy eight students took part in the programme. Through the creative writing workshops the students came in weekly contact with the school's writer-in-residence and 100% of students at both schools said they would continue to write for pleasure in their feedback surveys. The benefits would have also been felt by the students' friends, family and by the local community at the book launch events which took place during the summer term.

We believe the greatest outcome of the project will be our partnerships with teachers. This will provide a lasting legacy for the school. Data from the end-of-year survey in 2012 shows that more teachers wrote more as a result of working with First Story, and half of teachers felt more confident of themselves as writers. The majority of teachers indicated that the project is a source of inspiration for their teaching practices, a source of creative ideas and a source of practical ideas. This renewed vigour and the concrete tools that teachers gain in the workshop setting are then shared with students throughout the school and has an impact on countless more students throughout the school.

7. Did receiving the money from TFN make positive difference to your organisation? If yes, in what way? If no, please specify why not?

Funding from TFN has undoubtedly made a positive impact to funding at First Story. At the event in September, we met one of our current corporate partners who has pledged to support funding. They



are currently filming a promotional video for First Story and promote us on their website. We were also offered two hours pro bono fundraising advice from Kingston Smith which was hugely beneficial. The evening gave us the opportunity to meet other charities and make contact with trusts and foundations and key organisations.

In early July we were invited to attend The Funding Network & The Elders lunch as a result of receiving funding from TFN. This has helped recruit volunteers and spread awareness of First Story.

Throughout 2011-12 funding from trusts and foundations has increased by 60% on the previous year. Although the direct link cannot be made with TFN, it is clear that funders are encouraged to give to First Story as we can clearly demonstrate recognisable and reputable sources of income.

8. Do you have any other comments regarding TFN funding?

We can't thank TFN enough for giving us the opportunity to speak at one of your events. As a growing charity the contacts we made and the credibility it has given us has been invaluable. It is a unique format providing a simple yet high impact source of funding, at the same time raising awareness and being a very enjoyable evening.

Evening

Azfa Ali, Oxford Spires Academy

Walk quietly through
The forest. Inhale
The crispy musk of peace.

Look at the sky. Admire
Its heavenly hue: red, orange, pink
Now jump onto your ship.

Slip slowly past
The sleeping Jenga blocks.
Listen to the landlord snore.

Rush through the house
And grab the chubby baby,
Put him on your lap.

And feel the wet dribbly kiss
Of a baby's love tickling
As it trickles down your cheek.

In-between

Lauren Cater, Nottingham University Samworth Academy

Door slams, and angry voices argue beyond it,
I peer around the corner,
Per usual, no-one is there.

Purified wings wrap around me for comfort,
Entwined with barbed wire that cuts my skin,
But still, holding me tight and draining away my fear.

Pieces of love, trapped in bubbles, dance along the ceiling,
Desperate to escape – but they can't,
But, like normal, I can't reach them.

Sat in the cold heart of the room,
Wings wrapped around me, unable to move,
My lungs stop breathing.

Suffocating with no-one around me,
Drowning without a drop of water,
I'm stuck in limbo.