In 2014 Cheltenham Festivals established a three-year partnership with the national charity First Story to place writers in local secondary schools serving low-income communities. The programme is designed to increase the students’:

- Confidence, imagination and aspiration
- Attainment and engagement
- Pleasure in writing

In 2015/16 three professional writers (Jane Bailey, Cliff Yates, Alicia Stubbersfield) worked week-on-week with students in All Saints’ Academy and Pittville School in Cheltenham and Millbrook Academy, Brockworth near Gloucestershire, culminating in professionally produced anthologies which were showcased by the students at the 2016 The Times and The Sunday Times Cheltenham Literature Festival.

It’s liberating to express what’s locked inside. It’s great to show who we really are.

Jose Lumactod, CFFS students, All Saints’ Academy, Cheltenham

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Our Impact on Young People

Cheltenham Festivals First Story’s 2015-2016 impact survey of students, teachers and writers demonstrated:

1) Increased confidence, imagination and aspirations

- All of the writers reported that the programme increased students’ confidence and self-esteem. 67% of parents agreed.

Since my daughter began the project she has become less stressed and explains better how she feels, and is proud of her writing.

Parent

Pittville School Anthology Launch

- All of the writers reported that the programme increased students’ imaginative faculties

I think that my writing has improved and I’ve become more confident and comfortable with who I am.

CFFS student

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Teachers noted the boost to students’ confidence and aspirations, with comments such as it’s *highly aspirational, creative and about the whole child*.

2) Improved attainment and engagement

- 83% of parents stated that the **quality of their child’s writing** had improved through the project.

*It has improved his confidence in public speaking and improved his skills in writing poems and prose. He is not afraid to use a variety of words where one used to suffice.*  

Parent

- Feedback, many students stressed the importance of new friendships which the groups allowed.

- Asked what was the best thing about the project, the most common answer from students was *the opportunity to acquire more writing skills*.

*She has always read a lot but is now working harder in all subjects.*  

Parent

- Teachers cited the **value-added** that the project had given their students
3) Literacy: Increased Confidence and Pleasure

- The word used most often by the students to describe their experience was **fun**.

- All of the writers reported that Cheltenham Festivals First Story strengthened students' imaginative and creative faculties.

- 86% of parents reported that Cheltenham Festivals First Story had increased their child's **love of writing**.

> My daughter was a timid child who had been broken by pressure at a secondary school which did not praise. Working as part of this has built relationships with younger students and her passion for writing has been reignited after being pushed under a bush.

Parent
Students reading their work at the Anthology Launch

It really is incredible and eye-opening to see the talent in the Academy as they develop as brilliant young writers.

Rob Nicklin, Assistant Head Teacher, All Saints’ Academy
The benefit of special events and opportunities:

1) First Story Festival at Oxford University in September.

30 students joined together with other First Story students from across the UK for a day of writing workshops, talks and performances at Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford.

As well as meeting some of their favourite authors, some students read their work to an audience of hundreds.

2) Creative Writing at The Wilson Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

Following a tour and workshop, the students read the work to an audience of their peers, parents, sponsors and staff from Cheltenham Festivals, First Story and The Wilson Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum.

For 56% of students, this was their first time to The Wilson. 100% of students enjoyed the visit, 63% ‘very much’. 81% said that the visit inspired them in their writing, 91% said the visit improved their overall experience of CFFS.

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3) **Collaboration with the University of Gloucestershire**

The University of Gloucestershire Illustration undergraduates responded to the students’ briefs to create the art work for the front covers. The students visited the University to see the undergraduates’ designs and to select their favourites.

*It was the most fun I have ever had.*

CFFS student

Students discussing the merits of illustration students’ front cover art work

For six students it confirmed that they wanted to go to university.

*I have learnt of the talent that blossomed in university and how that might apply to me.*

CFFS student

4) **Anthology Launches**


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Each school hosted a Book Launch to showcase their Anthology, attended by staff, parents, students, sponsors and other invited guests.

Every student received two free copies of their Anthology to keep, and copies were given to each school library for staff and students to enjoy.
Showcase event at The Times and The Sunday Times Cheltenham Literature Festival

End Note 1:

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My Mother

My mother and I have the same sized hands, with short fingernails and wide knuckles. Those hands of hers play piano now, but her wide knuckles hide a past that makes my head hurt. My mother and I have the same straight back, the same mousey brown hair. She helps me suffocate it in bleach, and as she mixes dye I am telling secrets and she listens close, even though they are the same every time. My mother and I have the same skinny legs with carriage-lamp knees, but she has scars on hers from where she fell when she was carrying me. My mother and I sound the same on the phone, a B.B.C. voice with an Irish laugh, but my mother speaks with the universe on her lips, and lends me her voice when I can’t find mine. My mother and I have the same soft skin, but she is sprinkled with a constellation of freckles, where my arms are still healing from the time before. My mother and I have the same pride in our hearts and she is proud of me, though half of me is her. My mother and I have the same sized hands. I hope one day we have the same sized hearts.

At the beginning of the year I couldn’t speak, literally, I’m amazed by what I have achieved.

Ciara Austin, All Saints’ Academy

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End Note 2.

An update on Amy Edwards from Barnwood Park, who participated in CFFS in 2014-15:

I’m planning on writing a science-fiction book, about a virus from Pluto’s moon Charon that is brought back to Earth and feeds on our hatred and therefore attacks our brains and kills us unless we can learn to let go of our hatred, and/or learn to forgive ourselves and others. Should be fun to tackle a lot of social issues within the book. (I’m telling as many people as I can so that I hold myself to finishing it.)

I’m also almost completely recovered from my eating disorder, technically because I don’t purge, I no longer qualify for bulimia. (I see this as an achievement) I still eat a lot, but it stays down. (This is the first time in three years I’ve been able to truthfully say that.)

And I’m looking into getting my poetry published and my art displayed in galleries over the next two years. I have not stopped writing poetry and I have included a couple of my recent pieces.

I am also taking part in an expedition to go to Ecuador in 2017.

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2016/17

2016/17 is the third and final year of Cheltenham Festivals First Story in its current form.

Jane Bailey, Alicia Stubbersfield and Jonathan Lloyd will be working in All Saints’ Academy, Gloucester Academy and Severn Vale School respectively with students.

Jonathan Lloyd is working with us for the first time this year. He is a writer and theatre director, specialising in new writing and work for young people.

Future Developments

In consultation with local schools and CFFS students and in partnership with First Story, Cheltenham Festivals have developed a writer-in-residence programme which builds upon Cheltenham Festivals First Story. The three-year programme takes the best of the model of CFFS and will:

• extend the opportunity to more schools
• support primary-secondary transition
• provide enrichment for more-able Year 5 students*

Subject to funding and, the programme will run 2017-20.

*identified by local Head Teachers as a target group

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