

Writers in Residence Handbook



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Introduction:

In the middle of a service-learning class titled “Poverty in American Literature” taught by Dr. Debby Rosenthal at John Carroll University (JCU) in the spring of 2016, the idea of Writers in Residence (WIR) popped into my head. I was a sophomore, so I didn’t know as much as I pretended to know. But I did know that I wanted to be a writer because words actually made my life make sense. The entire class was reflecting on their service experiences half-way through the semester in small groups. The majority of my small group volunteered at the local Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center (CCJDC) through a program called the Carroll Ballers. My small group shared their frustrations with the CCJDC because the facility instructed the student volunteers to avoid topics of conversation that would trigger an emotional and/or physical outburst from a resident, which constrained how we could talk with each other.

I didn’t agree with the CCJDC’s decision, but I accepted it. Still, it made building relationships very difficult. I asked if the residents could have writing materials. The answer was no: the residents jailed at the CCJDC couldn’t have personal items in their windowless 6x8 feet cells, not even a pen and a piece of paper.

I imagined myself as a resident at the CCJDC. 1 out of 3 black men born in the United States around the early 2000s would be incarcerated¹ at one point in their life. Any one of those residents could have been me. But I still couldn’t imagine myself physically and mentally incapable of eating whenever I wanted, walking outside whenever I wanted, and reading or writing whenever I wanted.

That was exactly when WIR first developed into an idea: a “what if a group like the Carroll Ballers went to the CCJDC and wrote, instead of played basketball with the residents?” We would bring the writing materials, the prompts, and our mission “to reduce the rate of recidivism within the juvenile justice system by facilitating an open forum for artistic self-expression and constructive self-reflection while also fostering genuine, lasting relationships.” The residents would bring their thoughts and emotions, interests in reading and writing, and their desire to get out and stay out of the juvenile justice system.

I knew that in order to develop a program of this magnitude, the program needed a team of student leaders who were empathetic, strong-willed, and intelligent. So, I pitched the idea to Dr. Philip Metres, a tenured creative writing professor at JCU, during the English Department’s “End of the Year Banquet;” to Michalena Mezzopera ‘18, who studied education and volunteered at the CCJDC at the time, in her dorm room; to Anthony Shoplik ‘18, who majored in Biology and English, and minored in Catholic Studies and Italian, over dinner that he hosted at his new apartment; and to Rachel Schratz ‘17, who studied English, at the same exact dinner that Anthony hosted. Everyone wanted to make this idea into a reality.

¹ The Sentencing Project

The JCU WIR cohort facilitated creative writing workshops for women at the CCJDC and for the men Ohio's Department of Youth Services – Cuyahoga Hills Branch (ODYS) by the spring of 2017 and has remained as an active student-run organization on campus and in the Cleveland community. Eventually, the original leadership team graduated from JCU and passed on leadership responsibilities to Sean Freeman '19 and John Sosnowski '19 who had volunteered with the JCU WIR cohort for several semesters before.

However, none of us could have dreamed when we began that the JCU WIR cohort would grow into a larger non-profit organization that would develop and maintain collegiate WIR cohorts across the state of Ohio. But in the spring of 2018 when the Cleveland Foundation discovered the JCU WIR cohort thanks to Dr. Metres, who invited Karen Long to attend one of the creative writing workshops. Then, Long invited Dr. Metres and me to the Cleveland Foundation for a meeting with Lillian Kuri and Courtenay Barton to discuss how the Cleveland Foundation could support the JCU WIR cohort. Finally, during the meeting Kuri suggested a grant proposal that would make me an Anisfield-Wolf Fellow for a year in partnership with JCU, answering these questions:

- Can WIR be replicated at other colleges or universities in Ohio? If so, then how?
- Can WIR be sustained at colleges and universities and local juvenile detention centers? If so, then how?
- Does creative writing increase the residents' literacy and reduce their recidivism? If so, the how?

I'm expanding WIR into a non-profit organization that develops and maintains collegiate WIR cohorts in Ohio. In order to accomplish those tasks, I've written this Handbook as a resource to empower students and faculty or staff to:

1. Facilitate creative writing workshops at your local juvenile detention center;
2. Foster a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents, and;
3. Free the residents' voices.

These three sections comprise the same steps that the JCU WIR cohort took to make itself from an idea into a reality.

If you decide to establish a collegiate WIR cohort, you will be part of a network that maintains and contributes to WIR's mission, history, and advocacy.

So, you picked up this WIR Handbook that will be the playbook for you to create and facilitate creative writing workshops for incarcerated youth. You will be able to make a space for the indescribable magic that can develop between residents and college student volunteers.

Student Profile

If you're an interested student representing your college/university, then this student profile lists some of the appropriate reasons why you should be involved with WIR.

- I believe that reading and writing is fundamental.
- I believe in direct service that allows me to be in fellowship with another individual.
- I'm a student leader, a go-getter, a mover-shaker, a change agent.
- I'm open-minded, patient, and empathetic.

Faculty or Staff Profile

If you're an interested faculty or staff representing your college/university, then this faculty or staff profile lists some of the appropriate reasons why you should be involved with WIR.

- I believe that reading and writing is fundamental.
- I believe in direct service that allows me to be in fellowship with another individual.
- I'm a full-time faculty or staff.
- I'm open-minded, patient, and empathetic.

Facilitate Creative Writing Workshops at Your Local Juvenile Detention Center:

I understand that accomplishing a task of this scale may seem difficult. However, the first section in this Handbook will explain how you should facilitate creative writing workshops at your local juvenile detention center by completing these four steps:

1. Locate and contact your local juvenile detention center.
2. Create a student-run organization at your college/university.
3. Pilot a creative writing workshop.
4. Survey the residents.

Step One: Locate and Contact Your Local Juvenile Detention Center

This is the first step to facilitate creative writing workshops at your local juvenile detention center because the distance between your local juvenile detention center and your college/university determines the feasibility of your collegiate WIR cohort. If the distance is close enough for a regular commute, then you should contact your local juvenile detention center. Ohio contains 3 state-run juvenile detention centers (Cuyahoga Hills, Indian River, and Circleville) and approximately 85 county-run juvenile detention centers, which puts the state's 60 colleges and universities within a reasonable distance to a juvenile detention center. Ohio also incarcerates more juvenile males than females², which results in more all-male facilities and fewer all-female facilities. Table 1 points out the admission rates of juvenile males and females in the state-run juvenile detention centers:

Admissions by Gender		
Date	Male	Female
2016	93.5%	6.5%
2017	94.3%	5.7%
2018	91.7%	8.3%

Table 1: This information was provided by the Ohio Department of Youth Services in their annual fiscal reports.

Locate your local juvenile detention center in relation to your college/university by clicking the link:
<https://goo.gl/bX7H2q>

Next, you should contact the Volunteer Coordinator (or the individual responsible for residents' programming activities). For example, the JCU WIR cohort contacted Ms. Jacqueline Brackett at the CCJDC and Mr. Scott Sooy at ODYS and scheduled separate face-to-face meetings with each of them to introduce ourselves and WIR as an alternative educational program for the residents. During these meetings, we asked Brackett and Sooy if the residents would be interested in a creative writing workshop, and Brackett and Sooy

² Prison Policy Initiative

thought the residents would be interested. Then, we scheduled a pilot creative writing workshop at each local juvenile detention center.

You should follow the same steps that the JCU WIR cohort took: call or email the Volunteer Coordinator about your collegiate WIR cohort to schedule a face-to-face meeting with him/her. Next, during the meeting, you should introduce yourself and your collegiate WIR cohort and ask the Volunteer Coordinator if the residents would be interested in a creative writing workshop. If the Volunteer Coordinator thinks the residents would be interested, then you should schedule a pilot creative writing workshop for the residents. Schedule the pilot creative writing workshop 2 weeks after your meeting with the Volunteer Coordinator to prepare for the creative writing workshop pilot.

Finally, you should also ask the Volunteer Coordinator if there are any requirements to volunteer at your local juvenile detention center. Every facility has different requirements that may include background checks, mandatory orientations or training workshops, and signed risk and liability consent documents. JCU WIR cohort worked with its university and its local juvenile detention centers on various risk and liability consent documents for the welfare of the student volunteers as well as the academic institution.

Here is a list of questions that you should ask during your meeting with the Volunteer Coordinator:

- Where will the volunteers and the residents meet?
- How many residents are admitted to the juvenile detention center?
- How long do the residents remain admitted at the juvenile detention center?
- What are the juvenile detention center's policies and procedures in case of an emergency?
- What security level is the juvenile detention center?
- Are male and female residents admitted to this facility?
- What does the Volunteer Coordinator recommend for female volunteers that work with the male residents?
- What are the restrictions on bringing outside items into the juvenile detention center?
- Does the juvenile detention center have a preferred day and time during the week for volunteers?
- Has the juvenile detention center allowed college student volunteers before?

Step Two: Create a Student-run Organization

Your collegiate WIR cohort should operate within your college/university as a recognized student-run organization. This recognition grants your collegiate WIR cohort access to financial resources, transportation vehicles, and faculty or staff advisers, which are all integral to the success and sustainability of your collegiate WIR cohort. As long as your collegiate WIR cohort remains active, organized, and compliant with your college/university's policies and procedures, then your collegiate WIR cohort will have access to the aforementioned privileges.

Every college and university posts information about their student-run organizations online under various titles such as “Student Life,” “Student Involvement,” or “Campus Life” for you to start a student-run organization. You should follow your college/university’s steps to create a student-run organization for your collegiate WIR cohort because the process will benefit you and your college/university. For instance, you and your college/university will know the following information below that usually appears on the application to create a student-run organization:

1. Student-run Organization’s Name
2. Student-run Organization’s Mission/Purpose
3. Student-run Organization’s Membership Roster
4. Student-run Organization’s Constitution
5. Student-run Organization’s Adviser

WIR will work with you to complete the application to create a student-run organization.

You should recruit the minimum number of students that your college/university requires to create a student-run organization. These students should be committed to volunteering with your collegiate WIR cohort. When the JCU WIR cohort applied to create a student-run organization, our university required at least 10 students for the membership roster. We put the four leadership team’s names on the membership roster first, and then we recruited five men and women that wanted to volunteer with us, facilitating creative writing workshops at our local juvenile detention centers. These 10 student volunteers committed to the 2 to 3-hour weekly commitment (service and travel time included) for 10-weeks during the fall and spring semesters with the understanding that any absences had to be an emergency because part of WIR’s mission is “fostering genuine, lasting relationships,” which only occurs when both parties show up and are present.

Your collegiate WIR cohort won’t be the same as the JCU WIR cohort because of the differences between the institutions’ population, geography, and resources. The JCU WIR cohort serves the male and female juvenile population based on the already mentioned factors: JCU educates approximately 3,200 students (51% males and 49% females)³; JCU sits 20 minutes away from the CCJDC and 15 minutes away from ODYS; and JCU permits student-run organizations to reserve vans for off-campus activities only if a student volunteer is van-certified.

The best size for the creative writing workshop depends on the ratio between your student volunteers (this includes yourself as the facilitator) and the residents, which should be 1 student volunteer to every 1 residents with a maximum capacity of ~15 residents, who should always be the majority. This ratio ensures that the residents receive individual attention during the creative writing workshop. Table 2 reveals the ratio between student volunteers and residents based on your college/university’s resources, specifically transportation:

³ John Carroll University

Van Transportation: 7 student volunteers + ~10 residents = 15 – 18

Car Transportation: 5 student volunteers + ~7 residents = 12 – 15

Table 2: The ratio between the student volunteers and the residents during the creative writing workshop.

A student-run organization's constitution is critical to the health and endurance of a cohort. If, for example, the college/university wanted to contact the president, vice president, or financial officer from your collegiate WIR cohort because of an uncompleted training module that reviews your college/university's policies and procedures, then your college/university would know who to contact based on the constitution. Or what if the president from your collegiate WIR cohort graduates in the fall or spring and several student volunteers wanted to succeed the president and accept his/her leadership responsibilities for your collegiate WIR cohort, how will your student-run organization decide? The constitution should include a voting process for succeeding officers' positions because this increases the sustainability of your student-run organization.

Your student-run organization should also have a full-time faculty or staff adviser whose professional or personal background relates to your collegiate WIR cohort. Take, for instance, Dr. Metres who advises the JCU WIR cohort because he teaches creative writing and resides as the director of the Peace, Justice, and Human Rights Program (PJHR). Dr. Metres not only guarantees that the JCU WIR cohort complies with the university's and the juvenile detention centers' policies, but also promotes the JCU WIR cohort to students, colleagues, alumni, and donors. Without his counsel from the very beginning, especially during the major decision-making processes of placement within the university, student volunteer selection, and curriculum writing, the JCU WIR cohort would have never expanded into the student-run organization model for other colleges and universities. Dr. Metres represents an exemplary adviser because of his suitable skillset and his unwavering commitment to the JCU WIR cohort, so you should find an adviser, either faculty or staff from your college/university, who aligns with the qualities and responsibilities of Dr. Metres, or qualities and responsibilities listed in the faculty or staff profile, to facilitate creative writing workshops at your local juvenile detention center.

Finally, as soon as your college/university recognizes your collegiate WIR cohort as a student-run organization and grants your collegiate WIR cohort access to financial resources, transportation vehicles, and an adviser, then you should start using those privileges by asking yourself the following questions:

- What materials will you need for the creative writing workshop?
- How will you get these materials? (Purchase or Donations?)
- What kind of food will you bring to the creative writing workshop?
- How will you get this food? (Purchase or Donations?)
- What will be your mode of transportation to your local juvenile detention center?

Step Three: Pilot a Creative Writing Workshop

A pilot creative writing workshop will determine how well the residents receive you and experience the creative writing workshop as well as how well you facilitate and connect with the residents. Most importantly, the pilot creative writing workshop should demonstrate a down-up decision-making process instead of a top-down decision-making process. If the residents don't receive you or experience the creative writing workshop well, then you should consult with your student volunteers, adviser, and the Volunteer Coordinator to determine if your collegiate WIR cohort should continue facilitating creative writing workshop at your local juvenile detention center. Administering a survey to the residents at the end of the pilot creative writing workshop as well as at the end of the entire 10-week creative writing workshop will help you adjust according to the residents' reception and experience.

It's normal to be nervous before, during, and after the pilot creative writing workshop because you will process several different experiences simultaneously for the first time, at least, that was our experience when Anthony and I co-facilitated a pilot creative writing workshop in the spring of 2017. We had never been to a juvenile detention center. We had never interacted with incarcerated juvenile residents. And, we had never facilitated a creative writing workshop before. On paper, we knew what to do: follow the creative writing workshop's schedule. However, in reality, we didn't know what to do. Yet, the residents were in the same position. So, we faked it until we made it.

Only five residents attended our pilot creative writing workshop. Two residents participated in the reading and discussion; two more residents sat in their seats dead silent and stared at us; one resident fell asleep halfway; and yet, to our surprise, all of the residents wrote their own creative writing artifacts and shared them aloud.

Anthony and I stammered over our words and struggled through the pilot creative writing workshop because our imaginations projected an unrealistic expectation for us. As we drove back to JCU, we talked about the pilot creative writing workshop, and even though we were outside of our local juvenile detention center, I noticed that we were still shaken up. For certain individuals, an experience like this would have meant failure, but for us, we embraced the challenge, especially after reading the residents' feedback to the pilot creative writing workshop's survey. We realized that despite our fears and failures, we could facilitate creative writing workshops at our local juvenile detention center.

Step Four: Survey the Residents

Both quantitative and qualitative survey data will increase your credibility as a facilitator, the credibility of your collegiate WIR cohort, and WIR as an organization. You should administer the pilot creative writing workshop's survey at the end to the residents that asks the following three questions (the pilot creative writing workshop's survey is included in the back of this Handbook):

1. Did you like the creative writing workshop pilot? Why?
2. What did you learn from the creative writing workshop pilot?
3. Do you think that other residents would also like the creative writing workshop? Why?

Did you notice that the pilot creative writing workshop’s survey doesn’t ask the residents about you? That’s because the residents’ feedback shouldn’t be a critique of your facilitation of the creative writing workshop—at least not yet. Instead, the residents’ feedback should critique the creative writing workshop because that model catalyzes a change for the residents’ relationship with writing, with individuals of a different demographic, and with themselves. If the majority of the residents provide positive feedback, then you should share the survey data with the Volunteer Coordinator and continue facilitating creative writing workshops.

Then, at the end of the creative writing workshop, you should administer the creative writing workshop’s survey that asks the following questions (similar to the pilot creative writing workshop’s survey, this survey is also included in the back of this Handbook):

1. What was your first impression of the creative writing workshop? How did you feel about participating?
2. What is your final impression of the creative writing workshop? What has changed from the beginning to the end of this entire creative writing workshop experience?
3. Did you have any expectations of the creative writing workshop? If so what were they? Has the creative writing workshop met those expectations or fallen short?
4. Have you benefited from these sessions, and if so, how?
5. Which author’s work did you like the most? Why?
6. In your own words, how would describe WIR?
7. What would you change about the creative writing workshops?
8. Before the creative writing workshops, were you interested in reading and writing? Do you read or write more or less as much as you did before you participated in the creative writing workshops?
9. Has participating in the creative writing workshops helped you to reflect on your life, and if so, how?
10. Has the creative writing workshops helped you develop as a writer? Has your creativity been challenged, and if so, how?

You should also share the survey data administered at the end of the creative writing workshop with your student volunteers, adviser, Volunteer Coordinator, college/university, and auxiliary affiliates of your college/university (e.g. student volunteers, alumni, community organizations, media outlets, etc.). This will ensure that everyone with a stake in the program remain informed about the impact of the program.

Finally, if the residents provide negative feedback toward the pilot creative writing workshop pilot, or the creative writing workshop, then you should consult your student volunteers, adviser, and Volunteer Coordinator to determine if your collegiate WIR cohort should continue facilitating creative writing workshop at your local juvenile detention center. You should also consider what changes should be made to give the residents a high-quality creative writing workshop including textual materials, student volunteers, and methods.

Foster a Genuine, Long-Lasting Relationship with the Residents:

Week after week, the relationship between the residents and your collegiate WIR cohort will grow deeper because of the creative writing workshop. Your collegiate WIR cohort's impact on the residents will also increase every semester. Some of the writers may be courageous enough to share their thoughts and feelings on paper and with the entire workshop. The second section in this Handbook will explain how you can foster a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents during the creative writing workshops through these three steps:

1. Prepare for the creative writing workshops.
2. Follow the creative writing workshop's schedule.
3. Enforce the creative writing workshop's expectations (the contract).

Step One: Prepare for the Creative Writing Workshops

Preparation is key. Athletes practice before playing in games; lawyers study their cases before arguing in court; and writers write and rewrite before publication. As the facilitator of the creative writing workshop, you should prepare the following three items:

1. Transportation
2. Writing Materials
3. Food

First, complete paperwork and necessary training to schedule your regular usage of a college/university van.

Second, make sure that you have enough writing materials for the residents and the student volunteers. These writing materials include pens/pencils, notebooks, printed copies of that specific creative writing workshop's curriculum with the prompt and the author's work. It's easier for the residents and student volunteers to follow along with you if each individual has writing materials in front of them during the creative writing workshop.

Third, in preparing for facilitating that day's workshop, read and annotate whatever work you are bringing in. For example, I read and annotated Yusef Komunyakaa's "Slam, Dunk, & Hook" for you below to illustrate this preparation before the creative writing workshop.

Yusef Komunyakaa (American, b. 1947)

Slam, Dunk, & Hook

Fast breaks. Lay ups.⁴ With Mercury's
Insignia on our sneakers⁵,
We outmaneuvered to footwork
Of bad angels. Nothing but a hot
Swish of strings like silk
Ten feet out.⁶ In the roundhouse⁷
Labyrinth our bodies
Created, we could almost
Last forever, poised in midair
Like storybook sea monsters.
A high note hung there
A long second. Off
The rim. We'd corkscrew
Up & dunk balls that exploded⁸
The skullcap of hope & good
Intention. Lanky, all hands
& feet...sprung rhythm.
We were metaphysical when girls
Cheered on the sidelines.
Tangled up in a falling,
Muscles were a bright motor
Double-flashing to the metal hoop
Nailed to our oak.
When Sonny Boy's mama died
He played nonstop all day, so hard
Our backboard splintered.⁹
Glistening with sweat,
We rolled the ball off
Our fingertips. Trouble
Was there slapping a blackjack
Against an open palm.

⁴ The only sport that I know that uses this term is basketball, so immediately I know what Komunyakaa's poem is going to be about.

⁵ Komunyakaa references both a particular type of Nike basketball shoe and the design on the ankles of the shoe that are symbolical to basketball and the Roman God.

⁶ Komunyakaa captures this athletic achievement with the sound that net makes once the ball passes through it gracefully: a wet swish sound.

⁷ This is another basketball term that talks about the area within the 3-point line. Or it could be just the area that is usually painted and closest to the basketball hoop.

⁸ Komunyakaa illustrates the basketball players' reactions to the ball bouncing off the rim: they'd spin upward and dunk the ball underneath their opponents.

⁹ Again, Komunyakaa gives us a tightly articulated scene, one in which shows how Sonny Boy mourns the lost of his mother and the intensity he played that day until the backboard, oak as mentioned earlier, cracked. Basketball, in this sense, goes beyond being a pastime into a metaphor for the struggle of being alive.

Dribble, drive to the inside,
& glide like a sparrow hawk.¹⁰
Lay ups. Fast breaks.¹¹
We had moves we didn't know
We had. Our bodies spun
On swivels of bone & faith,
Through a lyric slipknot
Of joy, & we knew we were
Beautiful & dangerous.¹²

Finally, you should also make sure that you have enough food for the residents and student volunteers. Your local juvenile detention center may have specific policies and procedures about outside food, which you should follow. For instance, the JCU WIR cohort used to bring 3-4 boxes of Little Caesar's Pizza (\$20.00 total) to the creative writing workshops, but a new policy and procedure mandates that volunteers may only bring prepackaged food into the juvenile detention center.

Step Two: Follow the Creative Writing Workshop's Schedule

This consistent routine builds the residents' comfort and self-confidence as a writer as well as your comfort and self-confidence as a facilitator during each creative writing workshop. This is what we do:

1. 5-minute freewrite. (5 minutes)
2. Introduce the topic, the author, and his/her work. Read and ask these questions (25 minutes):
 - a. What's the central drama (i.e. what is this work's conflict, question, or struggle)?
 - b. What do you like about the work? Why?
 - c. What don't you like about the work? Why?
3. Pass out the creative writing prompt and give the residents time to write. (35 minutes)
4. Share. Critique. (15 minutes)
5. Conclude. Eat. (10 minutes)

¹⁰ Here Komunyakaa uses a simile to elevate the movements of the basketball players to that of a long wingspan soaring bird.

¹¹ Towards the end of the work, Komunyakaa switches these two words.

¹² I don't know what it is about these last two words, but I think Komunyakaa mentions this high caliber athleticism that many professional athletes achieve after years of training and playing. It's almost like Michael Jordan: he's so good at the game that when he plays, he's beautiful at the same time while being a dangerous opponent. It's also an allusion to W.B. Yeats' line from "Easter 1916" about the revolutionary uprising: "a terrible beauty is born."

5-minute Freewrite

Sometimes, you will wait for the residents to be transported by a corrections officer from their pods or units to a meeting space inside your local juvenile detention center. This may be a classroom, library, or gymnasium. So, while you're waiting for the residents, set up the meeting space with the appropriate number of pens and the residents' notebooks around a centralized table so that as soon as you greet the residents, you can begin.

This 5-minute freewrite gives the residents an opportunity to transition into the freedom of the creative writing workshop. The residents will immediately write down any thoughts and feelings that manifested beforehand that they may want to release, explore, or exorcise during the creative writing workshop. Also, this 5-minute freewrite may be unguided or guided. The 5-minute freewrite guided creative writing prompt is different than the creative writing prompt for the creative writing workshop.

Introduce the Topic

After the 5-minute freewrite, introduce the creative writing workshop's topic, provide a brief biography of the author, read the author's work aloud (once or twice depending on the length of the work), and discuss the author's work together as a group.

The JCU WIR cohort have the residents and the student volunteers read the author's work aloud line-by-line or paragraph by paragraph. This round-robin reading method engages the residents and student volunteers, requiring them to pay close attention to the reading for their own turn, and you should use the same method. If a resident doesn't want to read for any reason (e.g. to avoid embarrassment from the other residents or corrections officers because of the resident's reading skills), then he/she should say "pass." However, you should encourage most of the residents to read aloud because improving his/her reading skills is one of the creative writing workshop's goals. Occasionally, a creative writing workshop may be divided into the residents who never want to read and the residents who always want to read. As the facilitator, part of your job is to DJ the voices during the creative writing workshop: amplifying and quieting the residents' voices so all voices are heard equally.

After the first or final reading of the author's work, begin the discussion by asking the three questions above. They will build the group's collective understanding of the work, so that they can apply it to their own writing. You can also ask the residents other questions as they emerge, to fully engage the residents and facilitate a successful creative writing workshop. The discussion during the creative writing workshop generate some of the magic responsible for fostering a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents because everyone is on the same playing field when encountering a poem or piece of writing.

Pass out the Writing Prompt

Immediately after the discussion, pass out the creative writing prompt for that particular creative writing workshop. The prompt should incorporate one or two components of the author's work that requires the residents to imitate these components in their own creative writing artifacts. Writers have imitated or been in dialogue with other writers for generations, so this exercise will allow residents to be inspired in the process of creating their own work. Facilitators should participate in the workshop. After all, everyone is a participant. Also, you can model the behavior that you want from the residents, where everyone is exploring together. This fellowship is part of that same magic that fosters a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents.

Share and Critique

Once the writing time runs out, use the round-robin reading method again so residents and the student volunteers may read their writing aloud. Remember, residents don't have to read, so if they say "pass," that's completely acceptable. You should give each resident positive, constructive criticism about their creative writing artifact when they finish reading aloud. Tell each resident what you specifically liked about their creative writing artifact because this positive reinforcement adds to their comfortability and self-confidence as a writer in the creative writing workshops. As you develop rapport and relationship, you can add more substantive critique. But always, the first step is affirmation.

Conclude and Eat

Some of the residents may come just because of the food. After all, residents are teenagers or young adults. But also, sharing food together is part of fellowship. The food should follow your local juvenile detention center's policies, should also be convenient to pick-up before or en route to your local juvenile detention center, and should be eaten at the end of the creative writing workshop. Be careful not to stretch yourself thin based on the requests of the residents. For instance, if a resident doesn't eat meat, then include a non-meat option. But if a resident doesn't eat the type of food that you bring because they don't like it, you are not obligated to accommodate the resident. You should make the creative writing workshop as equal, fair, and democratic as possible to avoid bias and conflict. The residents are and always will be WIR's bottom-line. Everything that you do as part of your collegiate WIR cohort should always benefit the residents at your local juvenile detention center. At the end of every creative writing workshop, they remain incarcerated and you will be free. Their voices remain behind bars. However, through the creative writing workshops, their voices will gradually loose or even lose the mental chains and break down the bars that imprison their human dignity. When their voices are heard and read by friends, family members, and corrections officers as well as by college students, community members, and politicians in a published WIR chapbook—they have a little bit of freedom.

Step Three: Enforce the Creative Writing Workshop's Expectations (The Contract)

The creative writing workshop's expectations establishes accountability among the residents and your collegiate WIR cohort, ensuring that the creative writing workshop fosters a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents and accomplishes its goals. Every once and awhile you may need to enforce or remind the residents about the creative writing workshop's expectations because the residents will try to push the boundaries.

Because incarceration traumatizes the residents, like Kristine Pytash argues in her *Writing From the Margins: Exploring the Writing Practices of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*, the residents revert back to behavior that fails to manage their thoughts and feelings.

A simple reminder from you should enforce the creative writing workshop's expectations, but if that method doesn't work, then you should use alternative methods. An alternative method should not be dismissing the residents or threatening the residents that your collegiate WIR cohort won't return based on their behavior, even if the creative writing workshop is a privilege. I believe this method is ineffective because based on the assumptions that most of the residents embody by already being incarcerated means that society has dismissed them.

If your collegiate WIR cohort wants to foster a genuine, long-lasting relationships with the residents, then your collegiate WIR cohort should always show up and be present no matter what. The only method that enforces the creative writing workshop's expectations in line of WIR's mission is making all of the residents responsible for their behavior and the behavior of all the other residents. The JCU WIR cohort uses this alternative method of enforcement in addition to reminders and rewards for the residents, and we have seen significant success in this accountability in the residents' engagement and participation during the creative writing workshops because the residents understand that the creative writing workshop isn't only about themselves but everyone else too.

So, if a resident repeatedly violates the creative writing workshop's expectations, then all of the other residents receive the same consequence, which usually is no food at the end of the creative writing workshop. You still facilitate the creative writing workshop with your collegiate WIR cohort, but you don't bring food for that following creative writing workshop because of the resident's behavior from the previous creative writing workshop. However, for the next creative writing workshop, you bring the food again like normal. This method of enforcement requires the residents to be accountable for not only their own behavior but the behavior of all the other residents.

Finally, you should consider amending or ratifying any of the creative writing workshop's expectations if the residents continue to violate some of the creative writing workshop's expectations. But for the most part, the residents should behave well during the creative writing workshops. The residents become excited and accustomed to the weekly return of your collegiate WIR cohort, especially the residents who have another individual to listen to their thoughts and feelings.

So far, you have learned to facilitate creative writing workshops at your local detention center and foster a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents. The next section will conclude the Handbook, giving you the tools to free the residents' voices.

Free the Residents' Voices:

Maya Angelou writes: “The caged bird sings/ with a fearful trill/ of things unknown/ but longed for still/ and his tune is heard/ on a distant hill/ for the caged bird/ sings of freedom.” By the end of the creative writing workshop in the tenth week, the residents’ voices, rather their tunes will be freed and heard outside of your local juvenile detention center because the residents’ creative writing artifacts will be published and shared with the community. The third and final section of this Handbook explains how you should free the residents’ voices by completing these three steps:

1. Publish a chapbook with the residents’ creative writing artifacts.
2. Showcase the chapbooks.
3. Explore policy.

Publish a Chapbook with the Residents’ Creative Writing Artifacts

You may already know what it feels like to read your name printed on a page of a published text. Imagine the pride and satisfaction that builds when you work hard to accomplish that goal. The chapbook changes the residents’ creative writing into a tangible proof of their voices. The chapbook transforms the residents into published authors, it captures the residents’ voices and shares them with your local juvenile detention center, and it reminds the residents and its readers that this marginalized population also has the same human dignity bestowed upon all of us.

Workshop and Collect the Residents’ Submissions

If you followed the curriculum, then weeks 7 and 11 during the creative writing workshop should give you an opportunity to know that each resident will have at least one publishable creative writing artifact for the chapbook. The actual workshops teach the residents that writing isn’t a one-and-done process, but a constant tinkering. Encourage the residents to tighten up their language or consider a different form for their creative writing artifact to determine what works best. Then, determine which creative writing artifacts each resident wants published in the chapbook. Also determine which residents want either spelling and/or grammatical corrections for their creative writing artifacts because the residents, despite not having autonomy while incarcerated, should have autonomy over their creative writing artifacts. Finally, collect the residents’ submissions, or mark the notebook pages that each resident wants published in the chapbook.

Transcribe and Arrange the Residents’ Submissions in the Chapbook:

Type up each residents’ creative writing artifacts exactly how they intended, especially the creative writing artifact’s form. You may need to collaborate with other student volunteers, so you’re not overwhelmed. If you decide to ask for their help, then you should create an organized system. For instance, the JCU WIR cohort creates a folder in Google Docs for that year and semester. Then, we create subfolders for each of the residents that will contain their creative writing artifacts. Each individual creative writing artifact should be its own separate word document because once you begin arranging the creative writing artifacts together

in the chapbook, you should copy and paste the works into the main word document for the chapbook.

There are different ways to arrange the chapbook. You can alphabetize, sort by genre, or weave together writing into a thematic flow. After you have all of the creative writing artifacts transcribed, create word documents for the mission statement, letter from the editors, acknowledgements, and contact information to proceed to the next step for publishing a chapbook with the residents' creative writing artifacts.

Send the Chapbooks to the WIR Organization

Finally, send the chapbook to the WIR organization so we can edit and print the chapbook. Then, the WIR organization will deliver the printed chapbooks to you for the next step in this section.

Showcase the Chapbooks

Free the residents' voices by creating a showcase for oral performance and chapbook distribution. Organize a reading either on your college/university campus or in the community to showcase the chapbooks. At the showcase, you and your collegiate WIR cohort can explain and promote your collegiate WIR cohort, read some of the residents' creative writing artifacts, and ask for donations in exchange for a chapbook (we typically ask for \$5). The donations for the chapbooks can allow your collegiate WIR cohort to purchase writing materials, food, and any possible out of pocket cost for future semesters, making your collegiate WIR cohort financially sustainable.

When the JCU WIR cohort printed our first chapbook, we were thrilled to showcase the chapbooks with everyone because the creative writing artifacts that the women from the CCJDC and the men from ODYS wrote were dynamic, diverse, and deep. We sat in our student atrium for weeks during the rush hour periods to talk with students, faculty, and staff about our JCU WIR cohort and ask them for at least a \$5 donation for a chapbook, explaining that all of the donations would allow the JCU WIR cohort to facilitate creative writing workshops at our local juvenile detention centers for incarcerated youth that following semester.

Explore Policy

As a young adult with the liberty to vote in the United State of America, you should explore policy that concerns this nation's criminal justice system, especially the juvenile justice system because policy changes systemic injustices such as mass youth incarceration. Once a month, The Sentencing Project sends a newsletter titled: "Disenfranchisement News" about our nations' and states' policies that affect incarcerated individuals. The Prison Policy Initiative also publishes monthly reports about racial disparities to prison phone rates. These are only some of the resources in which you can remain informed about an issue that's at the central mission of WIR and your collegiate WIR cohort.

Afterword:

“The Writers in Residence: Kinship through Poetry”

By: Philip Metres

Writers in Residence (WIR) began as a dream. In 2016, Zach Thomas, Anthony Shoplik, Rachel Schratz, Michalena Mezzopera, the four founders, dreamt of creating a space for youth in detention to express themselves and reflect on their lives, to imagine a new future, a future outside of prison.

In the fall of 2016, with the help of the Carroll Ballers, we ran a pilot program at the Juvenile Detention Center in Cleveland. On the first day, after playing basketball with about a dozen African-American teenagers, we repaired to the library and talked about Mos Def’s “Umi Says” and Gwendolyn Brooks’ “Mother to Son,” writing about advice we’d been given or what we’d give, particularly to siblings or our younger selves. I can’t tell you how beautiful it was to be in their quiet as they worked on their lines, and then listened to them share their poems, one after another.

What they said in the survey at the end of the pilot restored my faith in the possibilities of poetry and workshop: “Helped me to express myself.” “Allowed me to get stuff off my chest.” “I learned something new about myself.” “Let me know that no matter what happened, there’s always another chance.”

But two other comments also caught my eye. One young man wrote: “Helped us bond like family.” And another wrote: “I felt like I had a family again.”

You don’t have to be in prison to feel that fierce human longing to belong, to be loved by others, so eloquently expressed by those two young men. But living in detention can be painful, grueling, and traumatizing in ways that are difficult for those on the outside to imagine. People are torn from the only lives they know (no matter how damaged), and have to begin a new life behind bars, with new fears and uncertainties. You do the time, or the time does you, as the saying goes.

Since that first pilot, through various challenges (including ceasing collaboration with the JDC after a riot at the facility), Writers in Residence, under the steady leadership of Zach Thomas, has continued to grow—not only at John Carroll University and Ohio Department of Youth Services in Cuyahoga Hills, but also all around the state of Ohio.

In addition to helping to improve literacy and creating a space for self-expression and reflection, the Writers in Residence employs poetry and workshop as means to create fellowship, to quench the thirst for belonging, an alternative to the toxic belonging that gangs or cults offer. Because the WIR works through peer mentorship, it doesn’t have the same power dynamics of a classroom. Before the empty page, all are equal. All are trying to find a way to fasten their voice to that blankness.

The sharing of food at the end of each session is not simply about feeding the body. It's about feeding the needs of the spirit for sharing, for being together, even beyond words. The core of the beautiful word "companionship" contains the Latin roots "com" ("with") and "panos" ("bread"). Companionship involves someone you share bread with. The same for the word "accompaniment."

As D.S., one Writer in Residence, writes,

Only if you knew the things I go through.
Only if you knew the mazes of streets I've walked through.
When the pretty doesn't always get stalked but the predator gets stalked too.
Only if you knew the demons I've talked to.
When they tell me yes to the things I shouldn't do...
I just wish you could walk in my shoes.
Where you don't depend on nobody but you.
To see everything that I've told you is not a lie but the truth.

Acts of solidarity require standing with, walking with, writing with, and eating with those on the margins. The criminal justice system in the United States now houses well over 2.2 million people, with an incarceration rate higher than anywhere else in the world. After hundreds of years of slavery, Jim Crow laws and a racist culture led scholar Michelle Alexander to term the criminal justice system "The New Jim Crow." 70% of prisoners are non-white, and one in three African Americans is behind bars. Undoing white privilege and making reparation to the descendants of the enslaved requires radical reform of the criminal justice system and attending to those caught in it.

One need not be a person of faith to know the power and importance of connecting with those behind bars, those locked up and thrown away. Yet for those of us who bring a faith dimension to this work recognize its holy flavor. In Matthew 25:36, Jesus exhorts his disciples to attend to the imprisoned and the oppressed: "I was in prison and you came to visit me ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Visiting the imprisoned is a work of mercy, of course, and an act of love.

As T.B. writes, in his poem "Miracle":

I just need a miracle
Im feeling so lost I dont know
Where to go
This path im on leads down
into a crossing road
Making a decision on
which way to go...

But lest one believe that this is simply about doing one's duty or saving these poor souls behind bars, we should remember the words of Father Gregory Boyle, S.J., founder of Homeboy Industries, the largest work training program for ex-gang members in the world, on the essence of kinship:

“No daylight to separate us. Only kinship. Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. Soon we imagine, with God, this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away.”

For Boyle, building kinship is not simply a gift to the poor or powerless or voiceless. It is also a gift for those of us whose privilege has disconnected us from our human family. For Jesus, in the aforementioned parables from Matthew, it was a prerequisite for eternal life.

What I have witnessed in the Writers in Residence program is that it offers young men and women, whose lives have not always provided them what they needed—from basic physical needs, to the psychological and spiritual needs for love, purpose, safety, and belonging—a place to come together, to explore, reflect, laugh, and eat together.

As Catherine writes, in “Love Letter From a Piece of Paper to a Pen,”

I love the way you glide
upon the lines.
You make my surface shine
with your words
you leave me blind.

Boyle also says that his work at Homeboy Industries is not ultimately merely about job training: “It’s connection and kinship that ultimately heals people. Training will come as a kind of side-order, but the main meal is tenderness and healing.”

During the workshop, seeing young people who have lived in a state of constant guardedness reveal themselves, and be vulnerable with each other, is a total wonder. The boys teasing one of the college mentors for his clothes, then all of them sharing some of their greatest sorrows. It was like watching someone come out of coma, or spring arrive after a terrible winter.

And when those bars that imprison them—the bars that they carry inside—thaw and melt away, the residents come home to themselves, perhaps in a way that they never have before. Through words, and writing, fellowship and companionship, they come home. We all come home.

That’s Writers in Residence.

Creative Writing Workshop's Expectations (The Contract)

These expectations ensure that the facilitator and the residents meet the creative writing workshop's goals.

Expectations for the Facilitator:

- Facilitator comes to every creative writing workshop on time and with food.
- Facilitator respects the residents, the corrections officers, and themselves.
- Facilitator keeps all information shared in the creative writing workshops private.

Expectations for the Residents:

- Residents come to most of the creative writing workshops.
- Residents respect the facilitator, the other residents, the corrections officers, and themselves.
- Residents keep all information shared in the creative writing workshops private.

The facilitator will ask a resident to leave a creative writing workshop if the resident repeatedly breaks these guidelines.

By signing this contract, you fully understand the guidelines present above, and accept reasonable amendments to future expected guidelines, which allows the facilitator to remove you from the creative writing workshops if you fail to meet these expectations.

Signature: _____	Date: _____
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6. In your own words, how would you describe WIR?

7. What would you change about the creative writing workshops?

8. Before the creative writing workshops, were you interested in reading and writing? Do you read or write more or less as much as you did before you participated in the creative writing workshops?

9. Has participating in the creative writing workshops helped you to reflect on your life, if so, how?

10. Has the creative writing workshops helped you develop as a writer? Has your creativity been challenged, and if so, how?