

WRITERS IN RESIDENCE



*Don't Let Opportunity
Control Your Loyalty*

2019

*For all youth in Ohio who are incarcerated so
their voices may be freed, heard, and
understood as a call to reform the juvenile
justice system.*

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Letter from the Program Director

Dear reader,

In Ohio, there are close to 2,100 youth in the state's custody according to the Sentencing Project's report from 2015. Ohio's Department of Youth Services recorded a daily facility population of 530 juveniles at all of their prisons and treatment centers, 53% of juveniles are black, and the county with the highest admissions is Cuyahoga with approximately 20%. The Justice Policy Institute highlighted in their 2014 report that it costs approximately \$200,000 to incarcerate a juvenile for a year compared to approximately \$10,000 to educate a youth for a year in Ohio.

These facts only illuminate a small cog of the juvenile justice system's overall mechanical design that for many youth break down their contact with the outside world, their hopes and dreams, and their human dignity.

For 12 weeks, our residents produced creative writing during workshops designed to teach them about different genres from diverse authors so their voices may be freed, heard, and understood by you as a call to reform the juvenile justice system because these are just kids locked inside cages.

Before you read this chapbook, I want you to open your mind and your heart because our residents have done the same to share their work; I want you to separate our residents from qualifiers such as juvenile, delinquent, felon, convict, gang-banger, and criminal because these terms don't define our residents. Then, after you read this chapbook, I want you to ask questions and search for answers; I want you to share this chapbook with everyone around you; and I want you to remember what my mentor Dr. Philip Metres told me: "Their souls are the art."

Despite being broken down by the system, by life, by fear, our residents managed to transfer their souls through writing for you to read.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Zachary Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the beginning and a long tail that loops back under the name.

Zachary Thomas
Program Director for Writers in Residence

Mission



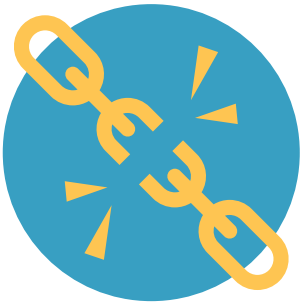
TEACH

creative writing to youth who are incarcerated in jails and prisons.



FOSTER

a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents.



FREE

their voices through the distribution and showcase of their creative writing in published chapbooks shared with the community.

Impact Report

This impact report summarizes all of our cohort's work during the fall semester from August to December:

4 Cohorts

29+ Student Volunteers

66+ Residents

72+ Hours

These totals highlight our program's expansion and development with more cohorts from colleges and universities employing our mission and vision at juvenile detention centers across Ohio. If we compare these totals with the impact report from 2017, which marks the origin of the program, we would see a tripling and quadrupling difference in the number of residents, student volunteers, and service hours.

Visit writersnresidence.org/impact to learn more.

Cohorts

- 1 John Carroll University at the Cuyahoga Hills JCF
- 2 Oberlin College at the Lorain County JDH
- 3 Hiram College at the Portage-Geauga County JDC
- 4 College of Wooster at the Indian River JCF



Letter from the Cohort

Dear reader,

We have been blown away by the courage of some of the young people in sharing their experiences. Even more, we have been inspired by their resilience in dealing with the experiences that they share. We are grateful to be part of a program that enables catharsis and support for individuals who are (often) otherwise deprived of an emotional and creative outlet.

Writers in Residence is about more than practice in creative writing; it facilitates structured and productive discourse between the student volunteers and residents, creating a space for mutual learning. That being said, creative writing proves an especially pertinent pursuit for the residents, as they often express their need to process their trauma through poetry or prose.

We are all collectively failing our young people by allowing the poverty and violence that puts these young people into situations which cause them to end up in the facility to continue. If you aren't already mad, we want you to read their work and get mad. Not just mad, it's also funny and inspiring and positive. But we want you to get mad that we as adults, as a country, as whoever, look away as large numbers of young people (particularly low-income and Black and Brown people) have to see family members killed, are taken away from their own children, are trafficked and then we lock *them* up.

And despite all of that our kids still laugh and write and fight.

Sincerely,
The Oberlin Cohort



Oberlin College

Lorain County JDH

Six-Word Memoirs

Junior

1. I want to be at home
2. I thought I had nobody anymore
3. To me Alyiha is most precious
4. I love watching SpongeBob on TV
5. I need my father's forgiveness NOW

Six-Word Memoirs

Zak

1. I am a very cool kid
2. I love both dogs and cats
3. I love my two birds alot
4. I love to eat friend chicken
5. I love my friends and baseball

Six-Word Memoirs

Tyler

1. But I am annoying at times
2. I love my family and friends
3. Hide behind a mask, not me
4. I like cucumbers and I will
5. like to write [too] so yeah

Six-Word Memoirs

Juliano

1. I play basketball for fun everyday
2. I want to go to Saturn
3. I want to be called Jaydoe
4. My opinion of colors is red
5. My favorite food is fried chicken
6. SpongeBob is my favorite TV show

Six-Word Memoirs

Ryan

1. I'm short and I'm strong and
2. never will fold, never have told
3. chains keep me bounded, I'm gone
4. I've been gone way too long
5. never let opportunity control your loyalty

Six-Word Memoirs

Chris

1. I like to be very happy
2. Run fast from the f'ing 12

Six-Word Memoirs

Robert

1. I am tall and I'm respectful
2. I am talented and I'm smart
3. I like to write raps all day
4. I want to leave this daycare

Six-Word Memoirs

Karlos

1. I am a very coo person
2. I'm Karlos; I'm from Elyria, Ohio
3. You left me in the dark
4. Watching every move I make quietly
5. The streets will have you thinking
6. Be careful how you trust people

Untitled

Aaliyah

1. Family means the most to me
2. Got big goals to think about
3. No goal has ever been impossible
4. Ta'Laya got a big oh head
5. Stay strong keep your head up
6. Don't ever [never] put yourself down
7. Thank God, he has a plan
8. Big heart and has big dreams
9. Bobbi Gibson is my baby dad
10. You can't call me broke money

Untitled

Ta'Laya

1. I can't hide the fact I
2. [really really] miss my daughter Za'Nila
3. I love you Za'Nila that I
4. do even though the system is
5. messed up they can't keep me
6. from you, I love you so
7. much that it hurts my heart
8. as deep as a [knife] cuts

Untitled

Nayeliz

1. Short Hispanic girl with puffy burgundy hair
2. Sharp tongued reserved polite out-there girl
3. Kind but fearful but outgoing [but]
4. Young midsize oldest of 3 strong
5. Bright, loving, family involved, caring person
6. Not here but I'm still down
7. Thought a mistake maybe a success
8. Sunrise smiles sunset best I've met
9. Midnight calls got me [so] happy
10. Love and care versus hate/neglect

Life Goes on People Come and Go

Sara

1. I'm Hispanic with long red hair.
2. Hispanic Latina from Lorain, Ohio, smart.
3. Only child born in a prison
4. Have a boyfriend, I'm very loyal.
5. They left scars I'm gonna heal.
6. I let the real me out.
7. I'm poor before now I'm rich.
8. I'm the impossible that's not possible.
9. Have some victims in my family.
10. Born in Ohio never gonna leave.

Six-Word Memoir

Jenessa

My boyfriend never ever stops smiling.

Six-Word Memoirs

Monica

1. Uma: short, colorful, smiley, corny, nerd
2. I try and try to persevere
3. Looking at trees, I'll never grow
4. I read to find new world
5. I love my family – do they?
6. You left scars that won't heal
7. Big mad because a bitch bad
8. I'm a nice person but misunderstood
9. Victim of heartbreak; I'm damaged

Survival Scar

Monica

Here on my body lies a mark I made
when I was down I cut with a blade
though here is a testament I confess

see these scars left on my thighs and arm
makes me realize I was in a place of no rest
now when I see those wounds
I'm reminded of the brokenness I once consumed

but these scars mean survival
I survived a lot of trauma, I can survive more
here on my body lies a mark of SURVIVAL

Untitled

Aaliyah

I remember one time when I was 8 years old and my mom and her boyfriend got into a fight and my mom got me and my older brother ready to leave before he came back from the store and as he was coming up we were going down and he stepped out of the elevator and saw us going down. The doors closed and he kept pressing all the buttons and the elevator got stuck for 20 sec. I was so scared I thought my life was over but then that elevator started going and right then I knew there was a god.

Untitled

Aaliyah

There was a little bug and I was big and the bug was little but I was so scared and the bug was so scared but I was more scared. I jumped on my bed and screamed so loud my brothers and sisters came running like what's wrong and I said it's a bug!

The Police

Monica

They're quick to arrest or put us to rest.

They're quick to pull triggers and make families quiver.

You make one body movement and they're quick to pull triggers.

Government wanting to change gun laws,
the police are the ones doing more wrong.

Blue lights flashing; sirens walin
panic in the air; fear in my heart.

The fear runs down to my feet; I'm gone.

The police do more harm than anything.

They put fear in millions, people wondering

"Is he gonna shoot me," "Will he arrest me for assuming I'm doing something
wrong."

The police and I don't get along.

Police they do a lot of wrong.

Piss me off

Oh man I run

Lie to much

Immature at times

Change lives

End many lives

Heights is What I Fear

Junior

Heights is what I fear

Look down I shed a tear

All I know

God's wrath is near

Sun is bright

Bees are the next fight

Going crazy day and night

Heights is what I fear

Then never shed a tear

Untitled

Zak

I am afraid of spiders
because when I was 6
years old and it bit me
and I felt like I died
ending up in the hospital!

Untitled

Tyler

I'm afraid of a horse
and here is the story:
it was one chilly afternoon
we went to the petting
zoo and fed horses
and fed it a carrot
and it bit me

Untitled

Howards

[I'm afraid of my mom] because she used to give me this look and I just thought that I did something wrong and snitch on myself about something else that I did and then I would get a whoopin', go to my room, and take a good nap. Then I would have to clean because I would be on punishment.

Untitled

Juliano

I'm scared of my mom because if I get in trouble, my dad is going to punish me for a long time. I'm scared of my dad because I have to get my things taken away every time I get in trouble.

Addiction

Monica

It seems easier to just go on
smoking weed, popping pills, doing LSD
yet somewhere deep inside
a tiny shaft of light reminds me
of the girl I used to be.
When my brain was clear and free,
I'm not sure I can be that girl I once used to be

Cry for Help

Monica

Crying on the outside; dying on the inside
That's me; That's all you can see.

But what you don't see is that isn't really me
or at least not the girl that I once use to be.

I'm drowning in my addiction, this is true,
but I'm desperately reaching out to you.

Untitled

Junior

life like slippery

slope didn't catch a rope and

don't know when you'll choke

Untitled

Amanda

houses in a row

people living drawn out lives

figures like paper

Untitled

Amanda

boats float on water and
people walk on ground
hearts don't stop until they do
and end of the day
when the sun sinks into the
huge, swallowing, gray sky
all of this living
and working 9 – 5
and going to school so you can grow up
and buy a nice house at the end
of a cul-de-sac and marry young to
cover up mistakes
is all for what?
to be buried in the same dirt
as everyone else.
humans wreck
we make games out of love,
out of earning a living,
out of friendship.

Untitled

Josh

first memory i

I was in kindergarten

my tongue on a pole

Untitled

Daymarion

Halloween is cool.

I like reading action books.

I like pizza, yeah.

I like eating stuff.

I like tuna casserole.

I like basketball.

Untitled

Jacob

Bye grandma see you
later, sorry for locking
you inside the house

Untitled

Tyler

Cold winter morning
I'm three and it is Christmas
It was really cold.

Untitled

Jeremiah

Basketball times over

I was the best one this year

can't wait till next year

Untitled

Juliano

Scooby Dooby Doo

November is my birthday

[it was] the best gift

Untitled

Ryan

I won't come back here
these cells are always freezing
please send my butt home

Long live my bro Kev
your life won't be forgotten
in Heaven you are

Untitled

Chris

Locked up in a cell

This ish feeling like it's hell

Yeah, I miss my boo

Untitled

Kevin

being in here sucks

the detention home is cold

I want out of here

Redic in that Chair

Tyler

Redic he's sitting in a
chair got some nice hair
I look like a bear
and I breathe on dat air
and I like my steak medium
rare and you know I like to stare
at the pears and you know
I fell down the stairs
I hate you because you
don't share because of those
darn nipple hairs

Live Yo Life

Junior

You gotta live yo life live it right
Don't fight. Pray to God and his son Jesu
Christ.
I won't give up even though life is tough
Life is not all about them cuffs
You gotta learn to live laugh love
Merry Christmas oh yeah you can't
Forget the 2 turtle doves

Untitled

Josh

All of these innocent bodies
We pull up with semis and shotties
All of these poles we slidin'
I'm callin' my mom she cryin'
She say big bro got shot at
All of these hittas be plottin'
My brother pulled up then shot him
My cousin got shot now we cryin'
This sh*t got personal we slidin'
I got my family cryin'

Blackman Blackman

Rontez

Black brothers put the gun down

I'm tired of my people taking each other's souls now

It's only us that can make a difference

Only my brothers can stop shooting and just listen.

If I'm Lyin' I'm Dyin'

Savion

Truth hurt, but we all need it
Pain here, but I'm still seeking
God, help take away the demons
Gunshots, but nobody screamin'
Seek me out – I could leave you fiendin
Eyes white, but my vision bleeding.

Untitled

A/lex

No matter anyone's circumstances
you need to believe and
keep ya head up
believin' is tryin'
so ya gettin' somewhere
I see believe me
so I hear ya not
keepin' ya head up but
ya need to believe
me I'm cryin' for ya
but believe me no matter
what I love ya
just keep ya head up

Nobody's There

Ryan

I'm steady hurtin'
these pills ain't workin'
feel I don't deserve it
cuz I ain't worth it
tryna make it through my problems
but I can't solve em
wish somebody there
they all gone
I hit the bottom
DAMN

Get to the Money

Jeremiah

Gotta keep my head up

All dees wiggas in my way I'm gettin' fed up

Gotta get my money but they say it's a set up

I'm a neva let up.

Untitled

Dominic

When you get knocked down you gotta get up
face your struggles and just get your bread up
learn to walk away when you get fed up
and once you do that the storm will let up

Untitled

Jairamir

He was known as Jr. He brought joy to his family, friends and people. He just [was] cruel but he always found the light. I would be lying if I said there was no darkness in his life but Jr. was the type of person to find the light in darkness. Now let's take our time to get over this horrible thing because Jr. would love it if we were happy and life life.

Someone I miss is my Titi. She was a very wonderful person [who] did not have a long life. She will always be remembered by her family, friends and her kids. May God give her the gift to have a place in Heaven.

Untitled

Junior

He may have not been the brightest but he was the most caring, loving, silly, and honest person I ever knew. Now I know he will RIP. He would wake up every day and tell himself “today is going to be a very blessed [day].” No one could tell him otherwise even if it was the end of the world.

—

My aunt Pam was the most caring, honest person. She always looked on the bright side. Her spirit will carry on. She will never be forgotten. She was the best. RIP Aunt Pam.

You will live forever in our hearts.

Untitled

Tahjay

I lost my dad but
I have my mom as
my shoulder to lean on and an uncle
to take his place

Untitled

Rontez

I miss my grandma. She died in 2012. She died of cancer. The reason I miss her [is] because I always got advice from her. She always wanted to see me do good. She was my best friend and my everything. She's the reason I'm the person I am today. I respect her still to this day because in my eyes she was the most beautiful thing to walk on earth.

Ryan; My Partner In Crime

Monica

From the day I first [met] yo
to now
I wouldn't change a thing.

we're never solo
if ones in trouble, the others there to help
if one goes down, both go down.
I won't ever fold; I won't ever tell.

From the day we first [met]
it was sleepovers ever since.
Everyone thinks we're in a relationship
idk why; brother and sister until we die.

I won't fold
I won't tell
free us and F 12
we'll be back together soon
they can't hold us forever
but like I said F 12

Untitled

Serena

Laughing on a couch with one of the closest people to me. Crying over the pain of losing people. Not knowing how to act or prepare when there's more thrown at you. Losing my uncle and my mom put a hole in my chest that will never be able to be healed or fixed. Being confused and anxious hearing you lost them. Having a bond that you couldn't have with nobody else cuz nobody understand you the way they did. Trying to motivate and push yourself because you feel like there is nobody holding you like you're holding yourself. You try to numb your pain to think it's nobody but you and the people that you lost. Wishing you can go back to hear their voice one more time. To see there smile or their emotions good to bad. Feeling the guilt that you could have been there to help or stop the decision that they made so they could have lived the rest of the life they didn't. But you also think how you can't change the way it makes you feel. How you have to keep going with life to see where your "angles" will lead you. How you can't walk around with your true feelings showing. So nobody will ask you "what's wrong" and go through the hurt again. But in the end, finish what they started

Untitled

Savior

Even though I spoke truth
My selfish ways hit your hear

Lately workin' on caring
'Cause I can't see us depart

Came close to dyin' twice
I don't know where to start

I been at my lowest point
Can you bring light to my dark

I made a mark
Before we quit I'd rather see us restart

I need cleansing
And without you I don't know if I'm winnin'

I apologize deeply
Yes I'm tired of sinnin'

Fell deep in emotions
No one cared 'bout my visions

Cold hearted
I'm just waiting for somebody to listen

Knowledge born – great minds alike
Created with wisdom

What's Love

Rontez

What is love? Crying out at night cause
You ain't pull up. Cheating and cheating never
Showing up. Why can't it just be us. Are you
Giving up? Is there a us? Stop crying all
I want you to do is tell me what's love?

Untitled

Jairamir

Light can also be darkness it's just
How you look at things

People say family is always there, but
One day can be gone. So love and
Cherish them and never take them
For granted. You never know when your
Last day with them could be.

Just A Thought

Junior

One day your there the next day
Your not people say life is a dream
But it's really a nightmare I mean
It's just a crazy thought
That just the life in Y.Town.

Never Give Up Life

Junior

What is life, life for some it's a
waste I tell myself never give up
but sometimes I really want to
every little moment matters in
life you must take every chance
that is given to you
some people say don't let opportunity
control your loyalty because loyalty
is so rare

Baton Rouge

Josh

We are going down the highway
We are going to stay at L'Auberge
Hotel, a really nice hotel. In the
morning we are going to go
eat at Raising Canes and
then go to La Belle Casino
and probably go swimming
at the Y, go downtown
and sit at the levy looking
at all the tall buildings
and cool cars that pass by
then go to Deonte's house
[and chill] while you and him
play the PS4. Then at night go to my
cousin's house so she can
make dinner for us and watch
a movie while y'all get to
know each other. Then we
come back to Ohio and you
take me on a tour on your
campus and we can chill.

Untitled

Karlos

If I was giving a tour to someone who has never been to my hometown I would show them Elyria's high school, downtown Elyria, the waterfall, LCCC (Lorain County Community College), Sheetz gas station.

I'll introduce the new people to my mother because she's kind, smart, and good at cooking.

My Life

Daymarion

All I do is go to the park play with my friends and I go eat. There's a food place right behind my house and that's all I do and I just go home and I just watch TV and then I go to sleep.

I eat fish, shrimp and fries and all that good stuff and go to the park. I play basketball. I just chill with my friends and when I go home and watch all types of movies like Texas Chainsaw Massacre and just movies and then I just go to sleep and when I wake up I just play my Xbox and I go back outside and I go to the library, chill with my friends there or I go to Skate World and skate and all that or I will ask my mom can she take us to Cedar Point and then I will get my friends and then we go have a good time then we drop them at home and then me and my mom and my family will go out to eat and then I go home and that's all I do.

Untitled

Aaliyah

I would show them midway mall before they shut everything down. I would take them to the village so they can meet my boyfriend and so we can get a ride from him so we don't have to walk anywhere else we will go to the Red Roof and get a hotel room so we can be prepared for the next day so I can show them more places the next day.

Acknowledgments

We have to thank the following individuals that have supported our program with either their time, talents, or treasure because without them our program wouldn't exist.

Our residents

Our student volunteers

- Ellie
- Liz
- Jessica
- Rose
- Baraa
- Eric
- Natasha
- Olivia
- Joseph
- Laila
- Uma
- Maeve
- Cat
- Megan
- Savannah
- Sydney
- Morgan
- Sierra
- Jenna
- Madison
- Alexia
- Quinn
- Callie
- Graham
- Naomi

Our advisors, community partners, and academic institutions

- Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards – Karen, Courtenay, Lillian
- John Carroll University – Phil, Debby, Anna, all faculty/staff
- Oberlin College
- Hiram College – Mary, all faculty/staff
- College of Wooster – Anne, all faculty/staff
- Cuyahoga Hills – Erin, Scott, Mark, Jennifer, all of the staff
- Lorain Country JDH – Dave, Mark, all of the staff
- Portage-Geauga JDC – Jenn, all of the staff
- Indian River – Andrea, Aness, all of the staff

Our graphic designer

- Rose

Our founding members

- Rachel
- Michalena
- Anthony
- Zach

Vision



We work towards reducing our residents' recidivism rates by increasing their literacy levels through creative writing that gives them the ability to critically think, creatively express, and independently manage their stress, anxiety, and trauma. As our program grows, we will develop a pipeline between the “inside” and the “outside” for our residents to continue their writing and mentorship with our volunteers as well as benefit from our support network. Finally, we will start conversations with the help of our residents' creative writing to remind our communities about this marginalized population that deserves to be treated as human beings with dignity and educate our communities about the juvenile justice system to create change.

Donate

Your donation will allow us to continue teaching creative writing to youth who are incarcerated in jails and prisons; fostering a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents; and freeing their voices through the distribution and showcase of their creative writing in our published chapbooks shared with the community.

But beyond supporting our mission and vision, your donation will also allow us to:

- Educate our communities about the juvenile justice system.
- Support our residents re-entering back into society.
- Sustain our cohorts' ability to serve youth who are incarcerated.

Visit writersnresidence.org/donate or scan the code with your phone's camera below to donate!

