

WRITERS IN RESIDENCE



No Cap

Spring 2020

For the 48,000 youth who are incarcerated in the U.S.

For the 2,100 youth who are incarcerated in Ohio.

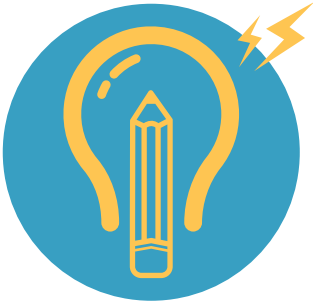
Their narratives will be rewritten.

Their voices will be freed.

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Mission



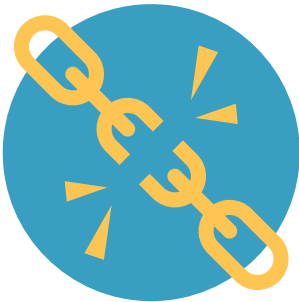
TEACH

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

The data below summarizes and compares the impact of our fall and spring sessions:

Fall 2019

- 4 Cohorts
- 25+ Student Volunteers
- 65+ Residents
- 75+ Direct Service Hours

Spring 2020

- 6 Cohorts
- 56+ Student Volunteers
- 76+ Residents
- 86+ Direct Service Hours*

*The original projection was 190+ direct service hours but couldn't be fulfilled because of the coronavirus pandemic, which suspended our program halfway into the spring's creative writing workshop for all of the cohorts.

As we continue to expand and develop more cohorts across Ohio, our impact will continue to increase as a result. We will educate more student volunteers about our organization and the juvenile justice system and those student volunteers will teach creative writing to more youth, or residents who are incarcerated.

Visit writersnresidence.org/impact to read the entire report.

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
- 5 Marietta College at the Washington County JC
- 6 Heidelberg Univ. at the Seneca County Youth Center*



*A select group of students from the Seneca County Youth Center came to Heidelberg University's campus for the creative writing workshops.

Letter from the Program Director

Dear reader,

“What makes Writers in Residence successful?”

LJ Sylvia and Lila Mills from Neighborhood Connections asked me this question during an interview about our program’s literacy impact. I provided several different reasons that are responsible for our program’s success but ultimately, I believe that our success, or the “magic” of our program stems from fostering relationships and building community with our residents.

This year marks Writers in Residence’s third anniversary! As I reflect on our program’s genesis and growth, I feel ecstatic and conflicted. At the beginning of this year, we announced our annual goals:

1. Expansion and Development
2. Re-entry Mentorship Initiative
3. Diverse Financial Resources

We will have cohorts in the southwest region of Ohio by the end of the year teaching creative writing workshops in juvenile detention facilities across the state; we will launch a re-entry mentorship initiative that will provide our alumni residents with the same mentorship from the inside but on the outside to reduce their recidivism rates; we will diversify our financial resources to sustain the organization’s growth and development. Even though this progress energizes me, this same progress also affects my ability to foster relationships and build community with our residents.

Occasionally throughout a creative writing workshop, I’ll check-in on the residents, the student volunteers, and the staff. Without fail, a resident, then two, probably three at a time will ask: “Where you’ve been at? You don’t want to see us no more?”

I explain: “I’m working on expanding the program to be at other facilities, so I can’t come every week.” They usually respond: “So? And? They’re not me.” Of course, they’re right! But they’re also one of many youths

under the state’s supervision and in its custody, and our program intends to impact as many of those youths as possible so they too learn the value of creative self-expression in an environment where their thoughts and feelings, their voice, and their existence are marginalized.

Fr. Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest and founder of Homeboy Industries, says: “We go to the margins so folks at the margins make us different.” If we take Fr. Greg Boyle’s quote even further, our residents and student volunteers alike make each other different because fostering relationships and building community requires a mutual exchange of vulnerability. In a survey, a resident described their favorite part of the creative writing workshops: “Outsiders coming to talk to us.” In a different survey, a student volunteer explained how the creative writing workshops impacted them: “You make quick and deep connections with the residents and if a [student] volunteer is receptive, it’s near impossible not to be affected.” Together as a community, the residents and the student volunteers offer themselves up to read and write, laugh and cry, and to examine and empathize.

But what happens when our student volunteers can’t meet our residents at the margins because it’s dangerous to everyone’s health and safety? We adapt to engage our residents despite the temporary suspensions announced following Governor DeWine’s state of emergency to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Because the novel coronavirus disrupted our creative writing workshops halfway into the spring semester, we decided to publish a chapbook filled with our resident’s artifacts so they would still have physical proof of their hard work even though we couldn’t workshop or revise any of their artifacts. Then, we launched a letter-writing initiative with the help of 75+ volunteers (not including student volunteers) from our larger community. Finally, we piloted virtual creative writing workshops via Zoom at some of our juvenile detention facilities depending on their capabilities.

In a matter of days when the first cases of the coronavirus appeared, this global pandemic exposed our nation’s weaknesses and strengths. I hope that exposure inspires us to serve and advocate for those in our community who are on the margins, or on the brink of becoming marginalized because we’re all in this together as humans.

Best,

Zachary Thomas
Program Director for Writers in Residence

Letter from the Cohort

Dear Reader,

This chapbook is the culmination of the Hiram Cohort’s second “semester” with students at the Portage-Geauga Juvenile Detention Center. We settled in with the students—some strangers, some familiar—utilizing lessons we learned from the previous semester along with the heart and commitment of our new volunteers to deliver this collection of writings. Throughout this semester we often asked the students to think about the past, present, future, and how their stories fit (and don’t fit) into that framework. We were blown away by the thoughtfulness and creativity with which they responded, and for that we’d like to thank the students at the Portage-Geauga JDC.

We encouraged our students to be as open and honest as they could be about themselves and their stories. It’s for this reason we titled the chapbook “No Cap,” after a slang term that was often used by our students in workshop to mean ‘for real’ or ‘I’m not lying’. This theme appeared especially in one of our workshops modeled after José Olivarez’s “Five Truths and a Lie About Paxton Avenue,” where the students told true stories and one lie about their lives. In the spirit of honesty, we made it clear to the students that they could write freely and we would do our best to preserve their voices in the publishing of their work. This is the reason we have kept grammar, spelling, and punctuation in this chapbook as close to what they put on paper as possible.

Our cohort has greatly enjoyed the privilege of hanging out with these young writers; it is an experience we would not trade for the world. The humor, energy, and excitement of these students has been wonderful to experience. When conversation shifted to more serious matters, from the students’ separation from their families and friends to the profound distress caused by the criminal justice system, we observed the kindness and sincere empathy they offered one another. This is not to say our semester was devoid of obstacles, though. The lockdown of Ohio’s juvenile justice

system due to COVID-19 rendered our cohort unable to physically visit the students at the JDC for several weeks towards the end of our semester.

However, thanks to the staff at the JDC, we were able to perform a remote workshop with our students. Through teleconferencing software we are able to see the faces and hear the voices of these students once again, despite the fact that our cohort is currently scattered and isolated across the country. Teaching workshops through a computer screen is difficult on a good day, and it would be impossible without the cooperation, participation, and good nature of the students on the other end. In times like these in our country, we hope that the public remembers those that have already been isolated for some time now.

In this chapbook you'll find a collection of young writers who invariably express hope and optimism for the future, which we believe is a welcome message today. We'd like to convey our gratitude once again to our students, and to you, the reader, for listening to the voices of these writers.

In solidarity,

The Hiram College Cohort



Hiram College

Portage-Geauga County JDC

The Sad Truth

Zachary

1 mama said trust nobody, shoulda listened...

2 Life has no manual, Just advice

3 i like seeing past the fake

4 though fake makes it farther now

5 pure at heart, torn in mind

6 sometimes bad times make good times

7 when alone whos got your back ?

8 pain is only TEMPORARY Remember that

9 The world is Cold, Find heat!

10 Sometimes trauma makes the best person

11 the worlds cold. cells are colder

i am good at heart really

i Like to be really nice

Untitled

Wes

1. Be careful what you wish for
2. Success will come from repeated Failure
3. Mama Wanted me to be different
4. Gotta spend money to make money
5. Move yo feet lose yo seat
6. Music is therapy for the mind
7. Payback in the mirror sees karma

Always Forgive My Enemies

J. S.

1. My Birthday is in two Months.
2. Im going to be LEaving Soon.
3. I will be home very soon.
4. I will Be Playing Football soon.
5. I will be back in school.
6. I will play my brother soon in Madden.
7. I will go to college soon.
8. I will workout when I leave.
9. I will play the new Madden.

Untitled

Andrew

1. Brown hair, video game, sleep, friends
2. Ravenna is colder than my freezer
3. I don't like school at all
4. Domino's employes dont do there job
5. I like to sleep all day

Untitled

Tyson

1. Athletic, funny, outgoing, smart, kind, helpful
2. I love music, I love rap
3. I'm 5'8 and have a dream
4. From Ohio where weather changes 24/7
5. Favorite spot to eat is Chipoltila
6. My favorite sports are basketball, baseball
7. Kevin Hart is the best actor
8. My favorite favorite artist is Juice Wrld
9. all time lyrical artist is NBA Young Boy
10. Your never to old for Phines and Pherb

Untitled

Brenten

1. I 5/11 Feet tall with Brown eye's
2. I'm a Fighter and a Boxer
3. I have a 9 month Boy
4. I have a 9 month year old Baby Boy
5. I hope I Leave tomorrow In court
6. Makes me mad when People Judge

I Come From...

Wes

I come from High School football games & abandoned houses

I come from soundcloud rappers & skipping school

I come from stoners & drug addicts

I come from addiction & not knowing who to trust

Untitled

L.S.

I come from the trenches

Nowhere

Jeremiah

I come from a place where theirs sirens

I come from confussion

I come from everywhere, becuse

Ive never hada steady home.

Untitled

J.S.

I come from akron childrens hospital,
I come from Ravenna because I live out here with my grandma.
I come from a rough child hood.
I was raised By great grandma.
I was raised on the football feild
I was raised on the B-Ball court.

I come from several bando's.
I come from a family of 11 brother's and 1 sister.
I come from a mother that doesn't do anything for you.
I come from a grandma that cares for you.
I come from a family that shows disciplines you.
I come from a little city called Ravenna.
I come from a good household.
I come from friends that care for you.

Untitled

Billy

I come from a small town
no one knows of
I come from eating lots of food
and getting beat up by my brother an sister
I come from lots of mistakes and
bad accidents
I come from a caring mom
an a bad Dad.

Untitled

Jada

I come from hurtful news,
being independent, and trying to stay
strong.

I come from an address of wonder,
never knowing what to call home.

Never knowing why my dad didn't
make any effort at all, or why
my mom didn't see her actions
were truly hurting me.

I come from the wrong path,
trying to find the motivation to
seek my way out.

I was never actually raised, so
I had to watch over myself.

I was never raised since my mom
was so absent, and my family is distant.

Therefore I raised myself to feel
like I had to feel high to feel
happy.

I come from losing important
people, and sometimes myself.

Untitled

Kirklin

I come from Akron,
east side.

I come from an alright family, bad name not 100% true.
Big brother to a ten year-old.

I come from all the new games, Fortnite, 2k20, Madden 20.

I come from St. Vincent Football field and its turf.

2 Truths 1 Lie

Andrew

I like video games

I wear joggers

I love it here

One day A got hit with the Bob Barkers

1 time I was on video chat with my friends and one of them went to sleep and his eyebrows was burned off with a lighter

I read a very long book and I found out I loved it

2 Truths 1 Lie

Billy

T- I like food

T- I like video games

L- I listen well

2 Truths 1 Lie

J.S.

T: I'm good at basketball

T: I'm good at Football and I'm good in school

F: I'm bad at Math. # No I'm not that is my favorite subject

2 Truths 1 Lie

Wes

Truth:

Every week I go to Auburn in the morning and when we leave at 11:00am we don't have to be back at the High School until 12:40pm. So I'll drive over to D****'s house to wake him up and smoke a cigarette and get something to eat.

Truth:

It was on a Friday, me and my best friend were walking down the sidewalk in downtown Cleveland passing Moes Barbeque. We saw a guy that looked like MGK from the back so I jokingly yelled "Hey Kells!" The dude turned around and it was actually MGK.

Lie:

It was a Sunday morning, me and my boy D**** were walking down to Church when we saw this group of dudes walking out of Sheetz. We decided we were hungry and were about to steal food, walking into the door we found a \$100.00 bill on the ground and we went in and actually bought a whole breakfast.

2 Truths 1 Lie

Zachary

J was my best friend. Me and J used to party a lot and perfectly clown up after. It was magic.

1. Me and J used to contribute to each other. He'd get me something, I'd give him something too. It was equal. Eventually me and J became roommates and not friends and I saw his true colors.
2. J was always a good friend. He always checked on me and always made me happy. He never used me though he had chances.
3. J always helped me keep my head on my shoulders and stay out of trouble. He was a good friend.

Untitled

Corli

I want a love that makes me hop out vans for it

I want a love that I go to jail for

I want a love that I cheat

I want a love that I buy an iphone for

I want a love that I runaway for

Untitled

Billy

I want a love thats real
I dont want a love that's a*s.
No fake sh*t

Untitled

Jeremiah

I wanna love like love and no crazy/annoying sh*t. I wanna love and support you and never ever lie or be on some funny sh*t. you got my heart so just know that sh*t.

Untitled

Unknown

I want love how a cat loves you

Untitled

Zachary

i want a love like she hold my gun in her purse for me type love

i want a love she dont care what her think type love

i want a love like she make me rather be broke than in jail type
love

i want a love she make me dumb like Holmer Simpson

i want a love like she make me nervous after 20 years married

i want a love like she make me wanna watch a movie that scary

i want a love like she make everyday merry

i want a love that makes me forget about me and just worry about
us

i want a love im to busy with her to meet the boys type love

i want a love like i got!!!!!!!!!!

i want this love to last forever

Untitled

Unknown

I wanna love like Bonnie & Clid

I want love like The Flintsones

Untitled

Wes

I want the type a love where I feel a high off your affection
I want the lay outside and look at the stars type of love
I want type of love where we turn our phones off when were with
eachother
I want this finishing our sentences type of love
I want the tupa love where we steal our clothes
I want the tupa love where we argue about who loves the other
person more
I want the tupa love where we send eachother songs
I want a love like a breath of fresh air after doing a 1-90
I want the type of love where I enjoy getting taken out of my
comfort zone

Untitled

Wes

Past:

ADHD crazy, bouncing off the walls, always filled with hatred, that I never let go. Hatred turned to depression which seemed inescapable with out drugs. Becoming obsessed with depression giving me reasons to do more

Present:

Always lost in thought, surrounded by these walls my life depending on courtrooms, opinions from some s**tty judge. isolated & aware that Im an addict, but the ones that determine my freedom dont seem to understand

Future:

Somewhere far from home where it never ever snows, things to call my own, my happiness not relying on drugs, living with someone who makes me laugh like noone ever has, enjoying life in the present not dwelling on my past.

Untitled

Ahman

1. Guilt
 2. I feel like this is a learning experience
 3. I think I will feel better than how I came because I won't be in here.
-

Past:

I feel guilty
trying to figure out
why I'm in here. Blaming
everyone else but me.

Untitled

Ant

Past:

I felt mad I felt mad because people like to make me mad

Present:

Hungry we need fed more

Future:

Happy because it makes me feel like a caged animal locked in a cell

Untitled

Billy

Past (before JDC):

I would have done the night i f**ked up different realize it was a bad idea. But i don't regret the past you learn off your mistakes and the past makes your future.

Present (in JDC):

Just keep doing good till i get out. listen, don't f**k up, follow rules and dont be stupid. "today is filled with anger fueled with hidden hate scared of being outcast afraid of common fate" Pac

Future (after JDC):

Better myself and live a great long life, and stay out the way of drama and bullsh*t. If you see change or want it just grab it but change is never gonna happen if you don't want it to.

Untitled

Billy

Pain – got shot

Sh**ty – it dumb in here

Great – ill be free

Untitled

Ahman

I'm really hungry, orange & good
from China Chef, hint of orange & sweet
when I walk into the resturant
there is a lot of good smells.
It taste good. And I don't have
anything for hearing.

Untitled

Andrew

When I walk into golden corral
I see a gumball machine and
a toy crane that has stuffed
animals in the machine. And
you pay and get your drinks
at the door and there is alot
of food when you walk in.
the food is very good. The
mac and cheese there looks like
the cheese is creamy a little
bit and the cheese is gold/yellow
and the chicken is crispy and
good. When you pick up the potato
fries out of the pan with the
spatula it sounds crispy.
The touch of the potato fries is
soft.

Untitled

Anthony

I gotta resturant called Young Ni*ga
with The Cheetos And Let me Holla
At You About it real Talk come
Here if you The Homie you Get
a Whole Plate of Cheetos Free They
Flamin Hot!! And Cheeto swanwiches
It Look Like Good

Red Lobster

Azire

Walking in you see both s and a fish tank full of lobsters. Host take you to your seat, you seat alot of seats and they're all full. Looking at the menu shrimp, salad, and a sprite stands. The waitress bring the food quick and always ask if the food is good. You hear country radio and lobsters swimming. Table is clean of bumps. When the shrimp gets there you don't have to take the tail off, you can just bite it, it's always steaming hot. It's a soft pepper butter smell. The waitress asks if you want more because it's endless. You walk out after feeling full, a little stomach are hurting, and satisfied

Untitled

Billy

I f*x wit

Walmart, Popeyes, Chickfila, Kanes, KFC, the
bar. it all slaps no cap

Steak @ The Cheesecake factory

Wes

Touch as the blade cuts like a hot knife through butter showing
the endless juice which holds the savory smoky
mouthwatering taste that bursts in your mouth,
you immediately sense the smell of the sizzling steaming
piece of amazingness

Untitled

Zachary

my girlfriend tried to make me
a vegan burger one time i looked at it
and it looked to weird. i took one bite
and i felt fake. it smelled somewhat the
same but defenitely nasty. it felt like
chewing on a nasty salad with oil smashed
it tasted like inexplainably weird. and
sounded when chewing like rubber on rubber

Food; Jail; Freedom

Ahman

F*ck doin good
I'd rather eat food

I'm in jail
Dukes can't post my bail
I punched him in the face
now he can't see str8

I miss bein on the outs
I want to get out
being in my cell make me pout
All alone with no trout (dead)

Food

Wes

I JUST ATE A CHICKEN WING

Say u not a snitch but I know you'll sing

Searchin for a Popeye's up on bing

Now im runnin from the cops cus I just stole a drink

I be in the bank yall in the parking lot

I keep stackin paper like im michael scott

Say u really bout it when I know you not

U rappers need a rethik yo life when my sh*t drop

Untitled

Zachary

Cheetos and munchies and funnnions and doritos
Sloppy Joe, hot breakfast, weird noodles and suritos
I want a variety in jail so bad id take me some fritos
Ima get me some real food when im free tho

Acknowledgments

We want to thank everyone who has given us their time, talents, and treasure because our organization relies on everyone working together every week for several months to fulfill our mission and vision:

- Our residents
- Our student volunteers
- Our advisors and academic institutions
- Our community partners and juvenile correctional facilities
- Our graphic designer
- Our legal team
- Our founding members

Finally, we want to personally thank the Cleveland Foundation and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards who continue to believe and support us.

Donate

Beyond supporting our mission and vision, your donation will also directly 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!

