



The Tunes of Incarceration

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



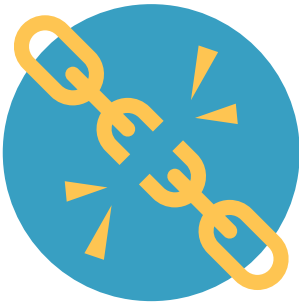
TEACH

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,

We enjoyed the challenge of some of the workshops, such as the one involving writing rap verses. We were also glad whenever we could help our residents come up with ideas or understand prompts better. They gave us helpful ideas for our own writing as well!

The creative writing workshops allowed for self-reflection and discovery for us and the residents, which sometimes led to catharsis.

We're grateful to the residents and the staff at the facility for welcoming us. We felt comfortable talking to everyone, which we really appreciated.

Sincerely,
The Marietta Cohort



Marietta College

Washington County JC

Untitled

Gabe

I am, right now, very peaceful.

I am very excited.

I am calm.

I am pleased and happy.

I like to help and converse.

I want to have a future.

Where do I want to be?

How long till I can leave?

Why does life have to hurt?

Why did I make bad decisions?

Untitled

Kylar

I am caring

I am honest

I am tall

I am quiet

I am calm

I am creative

What do i do now

how am i going to react

How is my life gonna go

Is this love real or fake

I feel emotionally upset every day, unnaturally

Untitled

Arron

I am a really good athlete.
I am really missing my family.
I am tall and funny.
I like to help people out.
I really enjoy listening to music.
I am a very smart kid.
Hope outlasts what we have forgotten.
Will this feeling ever go away
Am I willing to really change
Kobes gone now and Im sad
I feel nostalgic memories everyday.
Stressful situations make me doubt reality.
Does anyone need an extra minute

Ill never give up on trying.
You left me In the mix
I strive to prove you wrong
Locks lock but clocks dont stop
Lions don't listen to sheeps opinions

Untitled

Maddox

I am calm, cool, funny and short
What is for dinner tonight
This is honestly kind of hard
I love sausage biscuits and gravy.
I wish I were home now.
This class is pretty fun.
I love to play many sports.
I need to pay better attention.
I wish I were on structure.
Dont go chashing whaterfalls

Untitled

Zayne

I am strong, loyal, and forgiving
love yourself enough to forget the past
I learned from my past mistakes
live up to your wildest dreams
help those who struggle more than you
fight for the things we lost
live your life to the fullest
do the best you possibly can
follow your dreams not your friends
Be a leader not a follower

Untitled

Kyleigh

I am goofy, short, crazy, and funny

I've been numb, hard to feel
Maybe I wasn't just perfect enough
Said you loved me, jokes aside
hard days, but i've seen worse
live your life, not your parents
don't panic, everything will be fine
my demons make me think crazy
take your time, don't rush things
Popeyes chicken makes my soul dance
I'm blessin you, I'm sayin achoo
rapping makes my mind explore myself
crazy fiday nights, makes me forget

Untitled

Gabby

I am responsible, funny, Respectful, Quiet, creative, outgoing

Inspiration is the Key to life
I am afraid that I'm alone
Love yourself for who you are
Are people worth trusting or not
you give respect to get respect
your opinion matters not always others
I am not a cat person
rap is always to express feelings
love others for who they are
I am the tallest midget
I am a depressed human being
Demonds lie but angles are honest
follow your dreams not others
dreams
Rock-stars are amazing to the world
live, love, laugh, always love yourself
Is life worth living or giving?

Untitled

Amya

I am short, funny, loud,
smart.

I like to listen to music
I am scared to be happy
Live Life the way you
want
Dont ever be afraid to
shine
Be happy and
dont give
up
Home is where
the Heart is
Be happy with
who you are
My life is a
hard
struggle
My foot my
friend is
Broken
Link is a
very good
dog
Friday night pizza nights
are amazing

Untitled

Mareesa

I have a lot of stress.
I Love hanging out with Friends.
I can be really really funny.
Love is a over used word
Love is painfull and heart warming
Pain is gain right oh ok?
Love has its ways right ok?
I Love going Skating with friends.
I Love listeng to rap music.
In life Love can be hard.
Be happy be yourself
Don't focus on the negtive.
Live up to your own mistakes.

Coop with other to be cooped with.
mistakes are away of Learning.
Hearts are fragile so be careful.

Untitled

Taylor

In life emotions can be hard.
(love dies in a empty hand)
family is the more important Love
(life in Juvie Is the hardest.)
everyone is different, has complicated mindsets
Not everybody is the same gender.
sticks and stones may break hearts
Never could, untill she had tried.
Cloudy days Never overcome sunny days.
Emotions. Why are they even here.
to Love another, Love yourself first.
Basketball is a sport Not games.
Games are Not hurting but fun.
Charish the little moments. more Emotional
(Do what you, Believe in doing)
Be you, and No one else.
(Why does life have to hurt)
(Bad decisions can effect the loved.)
(Have the most Powerful
dreams ever.)
(Respect the
ones you Have
Loved.)
Most hearts break from every breakup.

Untitled

Jaylin

I give way too many chances
Don't ever let somebody control you
Don't judge, normal is not real
I hurt, but it always hides
Be yourself, nobody can be perfect
Try your best, you will succeed
Eat Bacon, Its good for you
Laugh some more, youll enjoy it

Untitled

Kaiden

The blue and white floor
the place i grew
playing basketball with
family and friends to
swishing the ball threw the hoop
wishing to make more memories with
my loved one's and family
why playing many games to
I would love to make more
memories here with other
people i bring in my life
as friends and family to

The Story That Made Me The Person I Am

Zayne

Walking down an old dirt road that's leading me to the place I call home smelling the fresh cut hay along the way. Knowing that tomorrow is going to be a long hard day before I can hit the woods to come and play. Watching the sun set is a thought that will never fray.

Many hours spent doing the things I love like hunting and fishing with my dad is memorable i can look back on that will never make me sad

What Raised You?

Dylan

I learned to ride a bike at the age of four years, and after I learned, I rode around with my friends and raced them. My favorite thing to do in my free time now is to ride my bike and race people for fun while listening to music

Untitled

Taylor

I was once home going to school having fun and making memories all year around, laughing and smiling.

But one day these group of girls walked up to me and asked to be friends. I said yes and went along the way.

They started to skip school and do drugs. I went along with it and decided to do the same. It started chaos here and there.

I started to get into trouble and breaking the rules. My P.O. got called one day at school. I see my mom in tears as I'm walking by.

I got cuffs on my hands before I would hug her. I got rushed out of the building to be in the car. We pull up at the Washington County Juvenile Center 5 months in and I'm still sober. Crying and thinking about what I have done. met a couple girls and started to hang out.

Just yesterday snow started to fall. Not that long after I had a good chill memory come back to times I was home, a place I wish I was.

What Raised You?

Arron

Long talks and late night walks outside drawing pictures with sidewalk chalk. Star searchin in the late night sky, Grandmas always cooking up them french fries. Me and my friends constantly laughing at each other til the sun sets clear mind off in the distant frightened by the fear. Tryna be different so I don't dissappoint my surroundings by troubling them too, Im not gonna turn out like the person that you want me too.

Grandma Payz

Kyleigh

My grandma Betty told me the story of my grandpa Quantis and the way they did things back then to the clothes and food they had to what I have now. It gave me a bigger perspective on things and to be grateful of the things I have.

Grandma's house, cigars and burning firewood filled the air hard wood on the floor so cold you had to wear slippers food on the stove, cause lord knows I won't go hungry at grandma's

I got told to be grateful of that wonderful food on the stove. She said: "do you see all that" as she told me she never had that. The smell comforts me so amazingly. Grandma said the grandpa I had a different religion than the way she celebrated which gave her a bigger view on the olden days. She told me she used to watch the way he does things and it really fascinates her.

I seen pictures of him, some clothes he wore, it made me happy to know how he did things, and how I do things to this day. The picture book smelled like it has been sitting in an old garage for decades and the paper was so old one small wrong movement and it would rip.

Untitled

Reeseey

I was raised by two sets of parents at different times of my life.
I look outside and picture my family playing in the snow. It makes
my day grand.

Untitled

Kaiden

The blue and white floor
the place i grew
playing basketball with
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swishing the ball threw the hoop
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my loved one's and family
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Untitled

Jaylin

I was raised by my mom and aunt

I was raised by knowing money isn't the root of happiness

Dairy Queen's gravy and chicken

Makes my hunger rage

Starvation

Softball weather

66 and sunny

in the middle of February

About my mother

Gabby

My Great Aunt has told me many times that she doesn't want me to end up like my real mom because she isn't in the right mindset and she isn't doing the best. It influenced me to try and do better than her so I don't end up like her.

I've seen her living on the streets skinny and pale. She never really ate and didn't care much about us. I've seen her in and out of jail and prison, doing things that aren't healthy. Seeing this happen is stressful and painful. Seeing her still doing the same things are hard.

She always smelled like ciggerates and like she hasn't showered in days. When she'd come around she made it seem like she was staying but, then again you wouldn't hear or see her for months and days. You'll never know what to expect but I may never see her another day.

Growing up was hard and now I know I don't want to be a repeat of her. I will make my life stronger and longer by learning and growing from her mistakes.

How I almost died

Gabby

I was 2 months old living in a strangers house with my bio mom. I was very sick and mom was out and left me with this woman I didn't know. I couldn't keep my milk down. Mom did nothing the only thing she did was give up on me and gave me to my Great Aunt and Uncle.

My Great Aunt and Uncle took me to the hospital just in time before I died. I was diagnosed with asthma Bronchitis and I think lack tose. They told my aunt and Uncle if they waited 1 more night I would've died.

They spent a lot of time on me. When I ate they had to pat my feet to keep the food down. They always had to watch me because I'd stop breathing in my sleep. I was depressed growing up and I still am today.

I learned to be very grateful that I am alive today. I am very happy to have my aunt even though I am very disrespectful to her I am now learning how important she is in my life. I can't wait to get out and be with her and show her how important she is to me.

When I got locked up: Part I

Gabby

I was 15 years old, thinking I was an adult and that I could do what ever when ever I wanted. I never followed rules and cared for anyone but myself. I went out and partied with my friends.

I never stayed home, I guess you could say I lived with my bestie more than my family. I was always their through day and night. The only time I'd go home was when I needed clothes or money. I started living with my bestie after I got kicked out of the last week of school.

After I got kicked out of school I started doing unhealthy and negative things. I became agressive and abusive towards my Great aunt. I came home the day I turned 16. I only came home because I had to pack to go to Kennywood for the weekend for my b-day. I stayed the night at the house. The day after I was very angry.

I woke up and done my hair, makeup and got dressed. My phone buzzed and I went over to check it. My best friend texted me and asked me "Do you want to come to our cook out?" I replied "Duhh!! When?!?" They said "noon." I went to ask mom she said "no you have counselling." I said "no I don't." I got angry punched her ear and started walking to my friends house. I was 3 houses away when the cops picked me up. They took me back to my house told mom I'm getting arrested and brought me to juvy.

I got out 11 months later. I was out for 3 months then got brought back here.

When I got locked up: Part II

Gabby

I was 17 years old, still thinking I'll get away with what ever I do. I didn't treat others with respect. I didn't do my best or try my best. I was two-faced and fake, I acted around others.

I started thinkin no one cared and began doin alot. I never really thought, that I would get caught, but when I got caught I got put back on the spot. Everyone said "You got this." although I never thought that I'd be missed.

I didn't care about my family I only cared about him. He is like a gem, cause I'm so attracted to him. I got so caught up that my name got brought up, on scaners even on banners. I got worked up, because I couldn't call em up.

Was it worth it though to get in trouble bro. I wish I could go back to the day when I got locked away. I got brought back to juvy because I was very moody. I went back to my old ways tryin to get away.

Untitled

Zayne

smoked tender loin marinate with brown sugar
cumin and some seasoning salt. then
you have to preheat the smoker to 400 degrees
cook for 3 hours on one side then flip and cook
for another 3 hours make sure to cook with
applewood.

make sure it's crispy on the outside then
wrap in foil to finish cooking for the last 2 hours
to keep moist It's cooked in my front yard
others should make this their favorite meal
because it is the best smoked food in the
county served with coleslaw and sweet baby
rubs bbq sauce You can smell the apple wood
mixing with the bbq sauce and see the
crunchy burnt edges of the tender loin you can
hear the wood popping and cracking and taste the
mixture of flavors

My Bro

Pasco

Please dont take my bro
I really dont want him to go
it makes me feel so alone
I just want him to stay
Stay in my own mother f**king lane
I on wanna feel afraid
afraid of him simply going away
I got six bands and he got locked away
I just wanna see my bro today
I got four words not tryna play
“I luv you bub”

Untitled

Kyleigh

My ultimate favorite restraurant is chick-fil-a because of their heavenly smell of chicken, and when you eat their chicken it's like a party in your mouth but better. The sight of the chicken and the polinesian sauce makes me drool to the point where I have to drink my whole 40 oz cup of Dr. Pepper. When I'm in the restruant and I hear people mouing down on their amazing chicken and hear people working very hard on getting the exact taste of chicken I'm obsessed with. I feel like my whole body is glowing when I eat chick-fil-a and I feel like a whole new person!

Untitled

Maddox

It Looked like a shriveld peice of Bread that has been stomped on and wiped in mud. it smelt like cinimin that was probly the best thing about it but it tasted like soggy hot dog water and what I heard was people talking about the man in the hat and it felt like soft soggy nasty french toast with syrup on it and that is about it.

Untitled

Maddox

My favorite meal is contry fried steak with mashed potatos and gravy. It is cooked in my house or in other local resturants. I would recomend this meal beacause it benifits everybody in the family by filling them up with the Crispy, tasty, gravy coverd and fresh out of the heavens diliverd straight from the almight himself. I highly recomend this meal to any body that walks, talks, breaths or eats, its just the way that it makes you feel when you take the first bite of it beacause of the crunch and then the warm ness of the gravy as it soaks your tongue, then the mushy ness of the potatos the whole meal is just a perfect blend and I hope to bless others with the very goodness of contry fried steak with mashed potatos and gravy.

Untitled

Jaylin

The French Toast tasted like soap and soggy plain bread.
It was a dark brown with slimy edges. The
potatoes had no taste even with the Ketchup.
It smelled absolutely amazing and looked
pretty good but you know what they say...
don't judge a book by its cover.

Untitled

Jaylin

Fusion and Shogun are pretty much the same to me but many people could think of them very different. Fusion has a very nice hibachi grill seating and very good entertainment which makes you feel easily welcomed. Although those are nice qualities they have pretty expensive prices which are usually only worth it on special occasions. Shogun in Marietta is overall small and sometimes extremely slow they have great warm and delicious food that is very affordable and it's here in town and easy to get to. Overall I think Shogun is a good restaurant for an anyday thing and Fusion would be a lot better for special occasions. Each of them have great flavorful rice that is amazing with a lot of things like they're juicy steak, chicken, and shrimp. When you are sitting at the hibachi grill it's very thrilling. You get to see how they do things from cook your delicious food to hearing the satisfying popping sounds from the food and you get to see the thrilling fire that comes up right in front of you. After you see the amazing parts of the food getting made, you get to eat the mouth watering, extreme flavors of the food of your choice.

Untitled

Kaiden

My Life

Look tired of family fighting over dumb drugs

They say they gonna feed me starved for 2 months like two
wolves fighting

All the anger and nesusivity running threw there blood she mad
over something small

Momma left me real like im drowning in my own blood like family
don't care

Ex

Say you love me but you fake

Telling your new man what u said on our first date

Getting board of your lies funny u the only one who is a mistake

I could have your friend but I don't do that sh*t I'm not fake

Untitled

Maddox

My Mom

[] she would take hold me kind or hurts me that she turned me
Wishing i was perfect
Loving her see through the lines I guess it kind of blurred me
It effected my life took a drug test and it turned out
My piss is dirty

Untitled

Pasco

Being Broke

I used to be broke it was no fun
would have shot myself in the face if I had a gun
had no friends had no option
all these ni**as trinna rob me but I really don't care

an I told 'em that it aint fair
Please don't make fun of me cause lon got no food

Untitled

Arron

Forgotten

Shout out to that judge tho
He aint like that bro tho
He the man that changes me, not the man that raised me
Ayy state slides and that ramen, and secureus where Im callin

Kobe (Remembrance)

Forever remembered
Shot that shot like Im Kobe
Lace up and ball with me broken ankles and nose
Bleeds is how you Bron me
Fr, just ask Bron what happened when he tried to
show me.

What If

Please forgive me momma would you
What if your momma kick you out and your brother too
What if you ain't have no food, you out here robbin sh*t just so you
can make it through
What if your girl aint want you no more said she on to your daddy
ooh.

Untitled

Zayne

Broken Dreams

something that we all tryna turn into a relaty
hiding like a scared a** dog the whole fam mad at me
this is always something thats ben a part of me
I dun feel like god gave me a epiphany

Untitled

Gabby

Consequences

Don't get caught
or you may get taught
a very good lesson
that will keep you blessin

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!

