



# Words I Would Not Say

*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



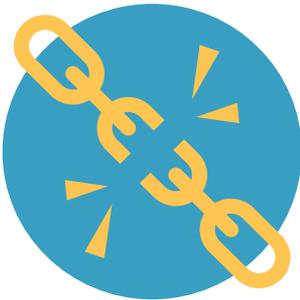
## TEACH

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](http://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

Looking back, we had fun with our residents, and we got to know them more than what others would perceive them to be, which is a very important thing to understand, especially when it comes to writing. We worked hard as a cohort to make unforgettable connections with our residents who we realized shared similar backgrounds and have lived through similar experiences as us.

Every week we taught our residents that writing can not only be fun, but they can make it as creative as they want! We talked about different methods, styles, and configurations of how someone could write about one thing or another. Technical, detailed, spirited, high end, flowy, contextualized, personal, distant; these are words that empower the mind and embellish the spirit. Writers in Residence gives everyone a chance to relate to one another through creative writing, whether that is poetry, letters, or even rapping. It was really neat to see what every resident came up with and what they were willing to share during the workshop.

We shared our ideas, feelings, goals, and passions, and not a day went by without at least one resident opening up. There was a joy felt amongst everyone whenever a resident who usually never shared first did in fact share, or when a resident would be so invested in what they were producing. That is really powerful and moving to think that every one of us is talented in our own way and express ourselves so differently, even though we are all from the same root.

Their work, printed here, won't go unnoticed. That's the point of being published, right? To pass on words of wisdom, humor, understanding,

or something else that might be considered a five-dollar word. You simply reading this provides an understanding of life in more ways than one. Perspectives were meant to be challenged, and with this collection, Writers in Residence allows for these voices to show themselves as something never before seen...but we've always seen them. We've just never heard them as clearly as before.

There's not much that people can think about when it comes to these stories, but we have to bear in mind that these words, though printed, were once spoken. Laughed at, talked about, thought of keenly, or differently than the person next to them. There was a unique form of life behind it, whether that's acknowledged or not.

We would like to give a huge shout-out to each and every resident whose work is contained in this chapbook. Their vulnerability is felt within each piece and we couldn't be more proud. Our residents not only opened up during the workshop, but they opened up to themselves more than they thought they could. We would also like to thank the SCYC staff who came with the residents to ensure safety and a smooth transition for the residents on Heidelberg's campus. We would also like to thank Sarah Lazzari and Zach Thomas for making it a new part of our Heidelberg experience! And finally, we would like to thank you, the reader, for taking the time to read the precious and raw talent of our residents.

Yours truly,  
The Heidelberg Cohort



# Heidelberg University

*Seneca County Youth Center*

# Six-Word Memoirs

*Nikalus*

I am a dog person Bandait  
Small dog is loyal and noice  
I like playing robot with Chad  
I don't like that many people

# Six-Word Memoirs

*Jasmine*

I am nice, caring, and hungry

When my first best friend started acting funny

When I got my first puppy

When I moved to Fostoria

When I went to Florida to the beach

When I learned I don't need friends in my life to make me happy

Everytime I go to Great Wolf Lodge

When I started getting in trouble

# Six-Word Memoirs

*Mirroraje*

I am brave, tall, sweet and caring

I wish I continued in basketball

Doing makeup calms me down faster

I wanna be an actor and become big

My style is not like others

I have a big family

I've always wanted a snake

Food escapes me from my thoughts

# Six-Word Memoirs

*Bella*

If I'm so happy, why are my wrists bleeding?

I wish I was more myself.

Sometimes, you need a boat HARH!

Love? What are you talking about?

Don't waste energy on meaningless arguments

I am artistic, dark-humored, vocal, creative, hungry, tired

I hear what my brain says

# Six-Word Memoirs

*Cenon*

I am the Koan. Dissect me

I am a big fan of games

I am a fan of stories

I love to play football and swim

I believe Black Ops 2 is the best Black Ops

Zombies... What weapon works best?

The paralyzer because you can fly

How high? Never heard of this!

# Untitled

*I.M.*

I'm eating a fruit roll up, it's in a silver package and it crunches/krinkles when I pick it up. It strawberry flavored and red. It smells sweet. It taste fruity and sweet, it's sticky, it's like a big red square but it changes shape as I eat it, my fingers kinda stick together b/c of the roll up, I can hear the wrapper crunch around as I unwrap it.

# Untitled

*I.M.*

One of my favorite snack's would have to be dorito bagles, the way the fluffiness of the bagle the creamyness of the butter and the crunch of the dorito all mixes together is just fanomanol, you can take a plain bagle, or blueberry, and still will tast just as good, the smell of the nachoes and the crunch when you bite into it, how the nachoes fall off as you take a bite because there is to many stacked onto the bagle, the way the creamy butter spreads so effortlessly across the top of the crumby yet fluffy bagle, by far one of my favorite snacks.

# Untitled

*I.M.*

I come from 419 where the trains are like music to our ears.

I come from a broken home where screaming is considered calm.

I come from a chaotic family where we all wish we could get away.

I come from a home where even the screaming can't put you to sleep at night.

I come from a home where it's okay to jus' come and go as you please

I come from a home where white powder is just like pixi dust.

I come from a home where you must learn to fend for yourself because even with family you're still alone.

I come from a home where alcohol is drank like water.

I come from a home where we put on a front when the doors aren't closed.

# Untitled

*Gage*

I come from the city where theirs broken windows and lit  
cigarettes.

I come from the passing of drugs street to home day and night.

I come from the loud music and bright lights keep me awake in  
the night.

I come from a place where rapping puts things into words I would  
not say.

# Untitled

## *Mirroraje*

I come from a mom that had to also play dad.

I come from a family that struggled to get where we are at now

I come from a mind that allows me to make my dreams come true.

I come from a household of creativity.

I come from a household where I had more women influencers than men.

# Untitled

*Jasmine*

I come from a big family with not lots of love to give or go around.

I come from a supporting mom.

I come from frosty.

I come from a place with not a lot of good people.

I come from a heart that loves animals.

I come from a family that is spread out.

I come from a heart that would take care of any hurt or injured animal.

I come from a family who made me who I am today.

I come from a city where most people use.

# Untitled

*Cenon*

I come from Tiffin, where we run down streets and hit signs.

I come from Ronald Donald and Dunkin.

I come from trap houses, parties, and music.

I come from cookin pizza rolls and hot pockets.

I come from running down the streets for service.

# Untitled

## *Mirroraje*

### Ice Cream

Headed to Shake Shack  
It's got the ice like the Rollie  
Mint choco chip, sprinkles, cherry on top  
My belly is gonna be fully.

### My Dog

He's hairy and stinks  
He barks so loud it makes my ears ring  
When he walks in he never cleans his feet  
I need a new pet this ones mean.

# Untitled

*Gage*

## The Bag

I got that bag on me

Filled with SCYC carrots

Icey like my wrist

Flexing on your b\*\*ch

# Untitled

*Cenon*

## The Bag

I got the bag on me

Filled with SCYC carrots

They icy like my wrist

Flipped it and bought a new rolex



# 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](https://writersnresidence.org/donate) or scan the code with your phone's camera below to donate!**

