



Social Impact Report: 2020-21

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Executive Summary

This report assessed the social impact of Writers in Residence (WIR), a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization incorporated in Ohio to teach creative writing to youth who are incarcerated to empower their voices and assist in their re-entry into society. This report evaluated survey responses from residents, student volunteers, and juvenile facility staff during the fall 2020 to spring 2021 program cycle.

Threats, Opportunities, Weaknesses, and Strengths (TOWS) Analysis

Threats

Zoom is a major threat to WIR. Most of the survey responses that mentioned Zoom were negative. The program implementation over Zoom went as well as it could, but the stakeholders agreed that the experience was or would be better in person. Zoom presents audio and visual issues as well as camera shyness and a lack of interpersonal connections, which has been a previously impactful factor for WIR. Also, the unchangeable fact that the residents remain in constant flux is another threat to WIR. However, consistency is a strength related to this threat, which will be explained more in the corresponding section.

Opportunities

To increase the organization's impact, WIR should consider the opportunities of addressing the youth's topic or prompt requests including songwriting/writing raps, rhyming, counting syllables, introspection, and social/interpersonal communication skills. By satisfying their interests, residents may be more motivated to participate and open up more freely, which may result in a higher social benefit. Another opportunity that WIR should consider involved spending more time on getting to know the residents through sharing and open discussions since many youth listed these activities as their favorite part.

Weaknesses

With Zoom significantly influencing the lack of interpersonal connections with the residents, this analysis must highlight that the most noted weakness was the inability to interact and engage as a physical community from different institutions. Plus, several responses indicated that time management was another weakness. They suggested that sharing and discussing may be more beneficial than dedicating the most time to writing.

Strengths

WIR excels in promoting equality, openness, empathy, and expression; these are some of their strengths. The stakeholder's feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The residents, student volunteers, and juvenile facility staff claimed that WIR allowed the youth to freely express their



thoughts and emotions. Residents liked the six-word memoir and “I come from” prompts because WIR provides the youth with the opportunity to learn about themselves, each other, and to feel seen and heard by people outside of the juvenile facilities. Empowering youth through positive reinforcements and attention with genuine bonds and chapbooks strengthens and motivates them during their preparation to re-enter society. WIR also helps the residents build up their confidence, increase their self-esteem, and open their minds and hearts to see the world through different perspectives.

Evaluations of Survey Responses

Residents

FALL 2020 - Click [here](#) to read our residents’ pre- and post-workshop survey results (raw excel data).

The Heidelberg University Cohort engaged very few residents. Half of the youth enjoyed the creative writing workshops and commented that they liked expressing themselves. The residents learned about expression, coping, and writing from the creative writing workshops. The other half either did not enjoy the creative writing workshops because the residents did not learn anything, did not like being on camera, or did not feel impacted by the creative writing workshops.

The Hiram College Cohort worked with very few youth too but all of the residents enjoyed the creative writing workshops because the student volunteers made them feel empowered, safe, and capable of freely expressing themselves. The youth learned how to write anything, how to cope, and how to write metaphors. Their favorite parts included learning, reading, and sharing.

The residents of the Mixed Cohort #1 at the Medina County Juvenile Detention Center felt much better emotionally after the creative writing workshops. They became less stressed, more in control, and more relaxed. The youth enjoyed expressing themselves as well as learning about writing and the other residents and student volunteers. They also learned about joy, creativity, friendships, self-esteem, and themselves. The residents wanted to learn more about writing with meaning, rhyming, and generally any new themes and techniques.

SPRING 2021 - Click [here](#) to read our residents’ pre- and post-workshop survey results (raw excel data).

The creative writing workshops made the residents of the Heidelberg University Cohort feel more open, creative, confident, and mostly emotionally better than before the workshops. Their favorite parts included writing about their own experiences, expressing themselves, and hearing other individual’s perspectives. The residents learned that everyone has a unique perspective, writing helps you communicate and process things in life, and more about themselves. They wanted to learn more about writing music/songwriting/rapping, rhyming, counting syllables, social skills, and introspective topics.

The residents of the Hiram College Cohort revealed that they also felt good, mostly better than before, after the creative writing workshops. They felt calm, relieved from stress, and hopeful.



Their favorite parts included when everyone shared, read the poems, wrote their own creative writing artifacts, specifically the six-word memoirs. The youth learned how to open up, express themselves, be open-minded, and realize that they are better at writing than they thought. The residents wanted to learn how to write better, how to write poetry and different styles of writing in general, how to open up more, and how to become more confident. Two youth asked if they could participate in the creative writing workshops after their incarceration.

The Mixed Cohort #1 residents listed that the creative writing workshops made them feel:

- Good
- Reminiscent
- Happy
- Alert
- Refreshed
- Relaxed
- Creative
- Better

However, one of the youth said that talking louder for the volunteers to hear them over Zoom made them feel anxious. They enjoyed the “I come from” and six-word memoir prompts, sharing and hearing everyone’s opinions, and the storytelling portion. The residents learned about creativity, openness, and different individual’s backgrounds by discussing everything with the student volunteers. They also learned how to write, the past, being grateful, hopefulness, and how to improve on their writing. The youth wanted to learn how to rhyme, work on themselves, help others, develop their social skills, become more introspective, consider more opinions from people especially their advice on life. Some of the residents wanted to know how to apply for college, become a undergraduate student, and what the academic experience was like.

The all-female residents from the University of Dayton Cohort described either feeling good, anxious, or unmoved after the creative writing workshops. Yet they enjoyed writing poetry, listening to the texts, opening up without judgement, and learning about or from others. The youth learned that everyone comes from a unique place and possesses different points of view. They also learned about poetry, specifically haiku. They wanted to learn more about people, writing, spelling and grammar, poetry, rhyming, dealing with their own struggles and interpersonal relationships, and life advice.

Student Volunteers

FALL 2020 - Click the links below to read our student volunteers’ pre- and post-workshop survey results (Google Form Summary):

- [Pre-workshop Survey](#)
- [Post-workshop Survey](#)

The student volunteers from Heidelberg University suggested more interaction by calling on the participants to keep them engaged. They also recommended better time management to prevent running overtime. The student volunteers felt that Zoom made it hard to communicate and remained unsure if they were allowed to answer certain questions or if they were just meant for the residents. They noted the strong sense of equality and eye-opening opportunities to risk factors. The student volunteers learned that the residents made mistakes and want to work on themselves and become better individuals. They believed that discussing interesting topics kept the youth more engaged. Certain aspects such as sharing, prompts, guest speakers, and the



chapbooks were effective. Overall, the student volunteers reported that their service experience was eye-opening.

The student volunteers from Hiram College felt that the creative writing workshops were rewarding for everyone involved, but the sessions were difficult to facilitate effectively via Zoom. They highlighted interacting, sharing, and bringing in different perspectives. They liked the general format and the virtual van rides before and after. It was eye-opening to social issues, stereotypes, and privilege by bringing in different perspectives. They felt it was open and comfortable, and expanded the way that they think. One student volunteer responded that they did not learn much about the criminal/juvenile justice system while the other student volunteers said that they did. The student volunteers noted that sharing is effective and writing is a good outlet. Also, the guest speakers were effective. By sharing and laughing together, these experiences made the creative writing workshop meaningful. Overall, it was an eye-opening experience, but the student volunteers lacked any personal interactions with the residents because of the remote/virtual creative writing workshops.

The student volunteer who reported from John Carroll University noted that censorship limits freedom and openness. They also suggested having a closer ratio of student volunteers to residents. To paraphrase their words, consistency and equality are what keep WIR a special and safe experience for the residents, but Zoom was debilitating.

SPRING 2021 - Click the links below to read our student volunteers' pre- and post-workshop survey results (Google Form Summary):

- [Pre-workshop Survey](#)
- [Post-workshop Survey](#)

The student volunteers from Heidelberg University reported that the workshops impacted them more than they think it impacted the residents. They stated that this was the most engaging semester they have experienced and that it went better than anticipated. The virtual experience was pretty good, and residents were pretty open by the end. However, they did agree that the workshops would be better in person. They noticed and enjoyed the strong sense of equality in the workshops, the stress-relieving nature of the writing, and opening up with communication. They also favored sharing their work and hearing what the residents had to share.

The student volunteers from Hiram College appreciated the welcoming atmosphere and open attitude that encouraged the residents to share their unique thoughts. The creative writing prompts and discussion questions that were prepared together worked well. To have more than one facilitator for each creative writing workshop also worked well because the session was more collaborative. The student volunteers enjoyed the relative freedom of expression and the general sense of equality since the creative writing workshops humanized the residents. They felt that the program was better in person. They also suggested more time for writing, sharing, and learning about the residents. The student volunteers believed that getting to know the residents makes the social justice issue unignorable and more obvious that there are issues in the juvenile justice system but the people in it are trying to make it better. In the end, they described their service experience to be positive, insightful, inspirational, and emotional.

The student who reported from John Carroll University expressed that the virtual version is extremely debilitating compared to in-person. It should be a time to get away from technology



and be present in the moment to write, but that gets ruined over Zoom. This student felt no connection and neglect for WIR's mission/purpose.

The student volunteers from the Mixed Cohort #1 at the Medina County Juvenile Detention Center had an impactful, exciting, meaningful, and connective experience. They grew and witnessed the growth of the residents as they interacted together as a community. The student volunteers mentioned that receiving the lesson plans before every session was helpful for them to jump in whenever necessary. They emphasized that popcorning generated more engagement and connection with the residents. The student volunteers felt humbled and more aware of their privilege. They learned about the importance of writing to express emotions. They also thought that the opportunity to transcribe the residents' creative writing artifacts presented a special opportunity to build trust. The student volunteers agreed that the creative writing workshops would have been better in person, but service provided hope in times of hopelessness.

The student volunteers from the University of Dayton noticed that the organized themes and prompts each week were good to get the residents to open up. They commented that the internal communication as a cohort was good and the remote/virtual creative writing workshops via Zoom went smoothly besides occasional audio issues. The most important factors that these student volunteers underlined were equality, humanizing the residents, and identifying that this service was eye-opening to the criminal/juvenile justice system. They learned that people change and grow to be better. Their highlights were sharing, honesty, and openness. The student volunteers also emphasized the effectiveness of the chapbooks.

Juvenile Facility Staff

Click [here](#) to read our juvenile facility staff's program evaluation survey results (Google Form Summary).

For the first time, WIR surveyed the juvenile facility staff that supervised our creative writing workshops, and their responses were mostly very positive. They suggested that the student volunteers should be more energetic, engaging, and find better ways to be attractive to the audience of troubled teens. Because there was only one facilitator presenting while the other student volunteers remained quiet, it did not feel as involved which caused the youth to feel the same way.

The juvenile facility staff noticed that the youth who participated more also benefited more from the experience. They reported that the youth look forward to the workshops and feel encouraged by them. The residents appeared to be more reflective, and the juvenile facility staff noticed an overall positive effect on a more individual scale rather than an institutional one.

They also noticed that residents were using healthier approaches to conflicts or arguments and that they were able to express their thoughts and feelings more openly. The residents were writing noticeably more, specifically journaling and letter writing, and they were more conscious about their grammar.



The juvenile facility staff also noted that, because student volunteers genuinely wanted to get to know the residents, they responded more freely and not as guarded since they did not feel like they were merely answering questions for record-keeping or filling out reports.

Conclusion

According to the survey responses from our residents, student volunteers, and juvenile facility staff, WIR's creative writing workshops clearly benefit everyone involved. This social impact report underscored the organization's strengths and opportunities to improve our weaknesses and confront potential threats. Overall, WIR's impact was eye-opening, educational, emotionally expressive, and independently beneficial to youth.

Recommendations

After reviewing the summarized survey results above, WIR should implement better engaging techniques during their remote/virtual creative writing workshops such as "popcorning" to call on my residents and student volunteers.

WIR should also create breakout activities for the residents to "think, pair, share" so they develop a relationship or strengthen an already existing bond with their peers. The more time that the residents spend sharing and discussing during each session, the more impact the experience will be based on the survey responses.

WIR should consider more fiction-based creative writing prompts. For example, instead of writing about a personal experience in the first person, residents might write about a fictional character in the third person. This exercise might allow the residents to take a further step backward and become more introspective, learning about themselves and others more deeply from an objective perspective. Plus, WIR should also design more creative writing workshops that satisfy the residents' direct interests.

WIR should devote more time to facilitate open discussions for both small and large groups, which will bolster the residents' interpersonal social skills. Ultimately, if WIR emphasizes sharing, discussing, and learning more about the residents, then the remote/virtual program will be more connective and impactful for everyone.