

# Writers in Residence

## RISE FROM THE ASHES



Heidelberg University Cohort  
Spring 2023

**FOR** the 49,000 juveniles  
confined in detention centers in the US.

For **THE** 2,000 youth  
confined in juvenile facilities in Ohio.

For the **WRITERS**  
in residence this spring.

Many feel invisible,  
voiceless, **AND** misunderstood.

May **THEIR** creative **WRITING** rewrite  
the preexisting narrative  
and **FREE** their voices from incarceration.

And for those no longer with us  
but remain in **OUR HEARTS AND MINDS.**

This is **FOR THEM.**

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# VISION & MISSION VALUES

We strive to reduce the recidivism rates of our residents and participate in the transformation of the juvenile justice system.

## **teach.**

WE TEACH CREATIVE WRITING  
TO YOUTH WHO ARE INCARCERATED.

## **empower.**

WE EMPOWER  
OUR RESIDENTS' VOICES.

## **assist.**

WE ASSIST  
IN THEIR RE-ENTRY.

## **JUSTICE**

We believe in creating an environment where justice becomes visible, where restoration from wrong is possible, where people are seen as more than their worst moments, where people can create a future not doomed to repeat the past.

## **EMPOWERMENT**

We believe that our residents can build their self-esteem, resilience, and power through working on their writing, their reflection, their communication, through the creative writing workshop experience.

## **RELATIONSHIP**

We believe in fostering genuine, strong, and long-lasting relationships as well as walking with our residents as they navigate the path to re-entry.

## **DIGNITY**

We believe that our residents deserve to discover and recognize their own dignity and self-worth through our creative writing workshops. We also believe that if we respect ourselves, our residents, and our student volunteers then we successfully lead by example.

## **COMMUNITY**

We believe in the power of community. We continually welcome and accept our residents into our communities to promote individuality and empowerment, especially upon re-entry. We also believe in the creation of a collaborative atmosphere that amplifies all voices together in a spirit of mutuality and kindness.





# SCHOOLS & FACILITIES

## ACTIVE (SCHOOLS)

1. Case Western Reserve and John Carroll Universities
2. Oberlin College
3. Hiram College
4. Heidelberg Univ.
5. Baldwin Wallace Univ.

## ACTIVE (FACILITIES)

- 1a. Cuyahoga County JDC
- 2b. Lorain County JDH
- 3c. Portage-Geauga County JDC
- 4d. Seneca County YC
- 5e. Medina County JDC

## INACTIVE (SCHOOLS)

- Bowling Green State Univ.
- Capital Univ.
- Cleveland State Univ.
- College of Wooster
- Marietta College
- Ohio Univ.
- The Ohio State Univ.
- Univ. of Toledo

## INACTIVE (FACILITIES)

- Circleville JCF
- Cuyahoga Hills JCF
- Franklin County JDC
- Hocking Valley CC
- Indian River JCF
- Lucas County JDC
- Washington County JC
- Wood County JDC

# IMPACT

We compiled these creative writing artifacts and designed this chapbook through April of 2023 to ensure its delivery at the final workshop rested in the hands of every resident published inside. As a result, the outputs reported only reflect a fraction of this cohort's and the organization's net impact from this spring program season. We survey our residents before and after each creative writing workshop to understand our outcomes. These surveys give us quantitative and qualitative data so we can maintain a high-quality program experience.

TO LEARN MORE VISIT  
[writersnresidence.org/impact!](https://writersnresidence.org/impact!)





# FOREWORD

Dear reader,

At the intersection of the arts, higher education, and the justice system, sits Writers in Residence, the only nonprofit in Ohio dedicated to creating space and time for youth in detention to reflect on their lives and express their feelings through poetry and prose during Creative Writing Workshops (CWWs). This original idea continues to anchor and propel us forward since our first pilot CWW in 2016 at the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center with the support of the Carroll Ballers.

We facilitate our weekly, in-person, or remote CWWs in the spring and fall seasons for 10-15 youth inside juvenile facilities. Every workshop lasts for 3 months and each session runs for 1-1.5 hours. We contract local teaching artists to educate our residents on different writing techniques, texts, and themes from authors that identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, or Midwestern with a preference for Ohioians. We involve 5-10 undergraduate volunteers from the nearby college or university to participate alongside the residents as writers in the same experience.



## Our CWWs accomplish these primary goals:

- Increase our residents' literacy levels and writing dispositions
- Build our residents' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-awareness
- Provide our residents with positive peer mentorship
- Publish our residents' creative writing into chapbooks to showcase and distribute within juvenile facilities, on campuses, and throughout the local communities
- Advocate for our residents by raising awareness and educating our communities about the justice system

Although our purpose, history, program model, and goals remain clear, the implementation of our CWWs for our youth persists with limitations and variables. Take, for example, the short amount of time in which our residents have to write, leaving few opportunities for revisions. The youth's creative writing artifacts that we publish exist unfinished oftentimes even though they would take advantage of the chance to edit their work if provided, especially as first-time writers. Finally, the juvenile facilities that we partner with operate in rural and urban communities, under strict and lenient supervision, and with staff shortages to name a few variables that affect our CWWs.

By overcoming these constraints and factors, we still empower our residents' voices. And for those reasons, I'm proud to present this chapbook: proof that freedom is possible and necessary.

Zachary Thomas  
Executive Director



## LETTER FROM THE COHORT

Dear reader,

This semester's creative writing workshop was an experience we will never forget and are thankful to be part of. We had the perfect mix of the same residents each week, as well as some new faces added to the group here and there, which along with sharing stories, dreams, and aspirations, allowed us to create good relationships with our residents and help them feel more comfortable in our space. The special moments that stand out to us the most are seeing the transformation in our residents from being more introverted and uninterested in the workshops to leaving with a smile on their faces and being more confident in their work and completely proud of what they've accomplished with WIR.

Before reading our residents' creative writing, we believe that it is really important to keep an open mind first. This book embodies the many different backgrounds that we all come from and the many different stories we have to share. The residents could write about anything they'd like, and then they chose whether or not to have their work edited. So, if you see something and it may not be spelled or phrased exactly "right", just know that it might be intended by our residents to keep their work how it was originally written. These youths have been through a lot and often came in closed-off about their writings, and it took some time for their confidence to be built up enough to where they would want to publish their writings, and we are so proud of them and all their work.

When reflecting on this semester's creative writing workshop, we are most grateful for the opportunity to build and create connections and relationships with our residents. While they may not have always wanted to be there, we appreciate them coming and giving us honest, hard work and allowing us to see a glimpse of who they are. Throughout the semester, we got the opportunity to be a part of and witness the residents grow, learn about themselves, and begin to realize their full potential, and it has been an honor to be able to support and cheer them on. Additionally, as much as we (teachers and volunteers) are there to mentor them, we learn just as much, if not more from the residents, and we are so grateful for the positive impact that they have had on all of our lives, and we hope we were able to do the same for them!

Heidelberg University Cohort





## rhyme

Life – Life's not really long

Love – Just a poison life lesson

Food – Not everything is good to eat

Advice – Never trust someone you first meet

C.Y.

## keep in mind

Keep in mind

that you're kind, nice and hard-  
working, and funny.

J.E.

## untitled

Life

Is there an after?

Love

Love is Love can be hard

Food

Pizza and watch TWD

Advice

Move forward not back

Questions

How many licks does it take to get to the center of a  
Tootsie Pop

I will be the best person I can be

J.W.

## how i'm viewed

That I won't make it nowhere – Leaving Ohio  
That I'm following in my parents footsteps –  
Barely know them.  
That I'm ungrateful – Don't ask for nothing

★ I hate not getting the same respect I give – Start  
giving the same respect they have towards me.

★ If it's not their way then there's no way!

C.Y.

## untitled

1. Keep in mind ... you're beautiful the way you are!
2. You are stronger than you think you can be.
3. Remember to always put a smile on your face.
4. Remember that you are amazing.
5. Keep in mind ... you mean something to someone.

J.W.

## me n my homie

Me and my homie hang every day, we  
sit down and have hour long talks, also we  
walk around town just cuz we bored.

Me and my homie would have an argument  
about stupid stuff and then look it up to see who's right.  
We would always chill at my crib. Me n my  
homie would sit on our phone for like 4 hours  
without talkin to each other.

T.M.

## family

My sister always had my back  
when something happens at school  
or anywhere

When stuff happens she never  
has my back or never  
will or has

J.E.



## untitled

She's pretty, funny, nice, and I love her.  
She's there for me, I can rely on her.  
She has a bad attitude.

She never texts me but calls me  
her friend. She is the nicest person with  
no attitude, she doesn't call anything  
dumb or stupid, and she's always nice to everyone.

J.W.

## life for me ain't been no crystal stair

I had ups and downs everyday I try to  
be a better pair, not easy but you learn  
something new everyday and every second,  
don't judge me from what people told you  
about my past think about what I do in  
the future.

C.Y.

## you gotta do what you gotta do

It's had up and downs but i've always  
put it behind me and keep a smile on my  
face. You always gotta stay happy.  
I'm still climbin to make it to the top and  
I'll never stop till I make it to the top.  
You gotta always try to make what you  
want.

T.M.

## untitled

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair,  
It's been difficult at times,  
but that just makes me stronger.  
There's been a lot of broken friendships,  
and a lot of wasted time. My life  
hasn't been the greatest but I  
still wouldn't change any of it.

E.A.

## crystal

Life for me aint been no  
crystal stair it's had it's  
ups and downs some days  
are easy and some days are  
harder then other days

J.E.

## frosty not wendy's / the block is hot

That frosty is trashy, and there's always little  
kids playing on the tracks, people always shooting  
guns, and there's a lot of wannabe gangsters and  
a lot of hustler's, But me I think of it as entertainment,  
comedy, life lesson, I call it home, my peace to the  
world and life.

C.Y.

## home

If I had to take someone to Toledo and have a  
chance to change their perspective the first thing  
or place I would take them is the trap and  
to all the gang bangers because they dont have family.  
The gang is all they have selling drugs to eat  
and feed their kids most people look at it as "oh  
that person wants to be cool," but they just tryna  
survive. Wondering whos gonna go next and showing  
the kids who wanna be gang bangers that they don't  
want that and that that life is a losing game  
and after seeing the things I've seen watching loved  
ones get tarps put over them you don't want  
that life.

Anonymous



## **bino**

I would change my name to Bino  
cause that's what everyone knows me by or  
people call me June but I want my last  
name to be Y cause I'm my dad's twin.

C.Y.

## **meaning of my name**

My name is L. I don't know why I was  
named L but I do know my name is latina.  
My middle name is Nichole. I was given this  
name because my mom has this middle name and  
like 20 others in my family. My last name is  
L, from my mom. My last name was going to  
be Jackson because of my dad, but then he got locked up.

Anonymous

## **untitled**

You call is trashey and  
everything else but we call  
it nice somtimes

J.E.

## **untitled**

They would probably think i have more  
more than a normal person or live in the suburbs  
because I guess my neighborhood is  
nice but I always grew up in the "projects/trailer  
park" but when I think of home I  
think of my old house.  
I think about playing outside that small blue house.  
I had no worries  
running around my neighborhood with friends  
only thinking about getting home on time.

M.E.

## untitled

Then the dogs would get out  
If I never met my roommate freshman year  
Then I got in the car and drove away no regrets  
If I go to the JDC that will be crazy  
Then my friends would leave  
If I would have chosen another college  
Then I couldn't find you in a crowded room  
If I sleep too much I won't wake up  
Then I would never find happiness  
If I moved to Las Vegas

L.L. and T.M.

## untitled

if I didn't sleep I'd be crazy,  
Then I would be a failier  
If I had to clean 1,000 dishes a day,  
then I gave my friend the biggest hug  
If I walk da town thats because im ba  
Then my mom would be upset  
if I had to eat a frog,  
then I fell over from laughing so hard  
if I got money every hour I would be rich  
Then the stars wouldnt sparkel

Anonymous



## untitled

Then the sky erupted with beautiful colors  
if I run in rain Ill slip.  
Then I would be sad  
If I had a mansion in L.A.  
then the world went silent  
if I threw da paper its not my problem  
Then the moon would explode  
If I got stuck in outer space.  
then the stars danced and twinkled while we danced  
if my house blew up that would suck.

L.L. and T.M.

## untitled

Then i would call the police  
But I hit a bump and fell off my bike  
If I really loved frogs  
Then, I could eat peanut butter  
But the fork ran away with the spoon  
If I see S @ the game  
Then, I will drive away  
But I saw a bat on the ceiling  
If I go back to JDC I will never forgive myself  
Then, I cried

A.O. and B.N.

## untitled

I love the sunshine today.  
I love fruit loops.  
None of this has to make sense, HOW FUN!  
What's life?  
bananablueberrymintfresh  
What's your middle name?  
Call me Bino Santana.  
What if up and down were switched?  
Why people?  
Tiffin walmart.

C.Y., M.E., and J.E.

## untitled

If I never went to school I would be happy  
My brain is having a hard time w/ this  
What color should I dye my hair  
I like ramen  
I miss my dog so much  
Drawing a blank, sorry  
I eat hot cheetos and chocolate icing  
I chase bats  
45 days till graduation  
And they all lived happily ever after

L.L. and T.M.

## untitled

I wish I had flaming hot mac n cheese  
There's a green chalkboard.

Curtain have hair dye  
I want to take a nap  
S is a funny, positive person  
trees grow in metal  
I want to eat Hawaiian rolls with butter  
California is cold

A.O. and B.N.

## untitled

Orange juice is better than apple juice  
& I don't know what to eat for dinner.  
I hate conversating with people.  
I wish I could be with my friends all the time.  
How do boats float?  
I want to go home.  
Imagine a 10-foot chocolate cake.  
Chocolate is so nasty!  
When do we get to fully be us?  
I like dogs.

C.Y., M.E., and J.E.

## untitled

The cat in a hat.  
I like cheese pizza.  
I wish I could go swimming.  
Kodak Black is my dad.  
If you have love, then don't worry too much.  
Who started life?  
Bing bong.  
Do you remember Michael Jackson?  
Vanilla is better than any flavor!  
I've got friends in all the right places.

C.Y., M.E., and J.E.

## untitled

If I dropped out of college last year,  
then the wind blew a strong gust  
if I do math I'll get better  
Then the sun would no longer shine  
If I had quit eating meat,  
then I scream and sang at the top of my lungs  
if I look at the clock I will tell the time  
Then Jesus would come back for Judgement day  
If I was the president,  
then they all lived happily ever after

L.L. and T.M.



## untitled

I like apples  
Ice cream sounds really good  
I'm so mf hungry  
Jesus loves you  
I cant think  
Summer can't come fast enough  
I miss when I watched Lazytown  
I miss my dad  
I like dogs  
Footwork is key in sports

T.M. and L.L.

## untitled

If I had a million dollars,  
a dog in a tree.  
Take me down to the paradise city where the grass is  
green.  
Where am I going in life?  
Are relationships worth the risk?  
How do you always make everyone happy?  
What happened?  
What sound does a Jellybean make?  
Running out of things to say.  
I like turtles :)

C.Y., M.E., and J.E.

## untitled

Leaving tiffin for good

The sun is too bright to look at.

a dog driveing

I want a dounut

I love to go to the beach.

I'm gonna throw egg's at my twin.

I have more than I need, but I have less than I want.

I like food

give me my Jellybeans 🍬

HeHeHe so funny.

C.Y., M.E., and J.E.

## untitled

I don't want to be here!!!

the girl fell into peanuts

I love Taylor Swift

I Hate my shoes they look weird

ducks are turtles

My favorite clothing item is a cardigan

I don't know what to keep writing

windows eat birds

Yellow and green is the best color combination

A.O. and B.N.

# untitled

Life: Only focus on the positive!

Love: It aint real so dont  
worry about it!

Food: Spicy food ALWAYS  
goes hard!

Advice: Stick wit yourself,  
and then life is easier!

Questions: Why do people care  
so much about other people?  
Why do people care what  
other people think?

E.A.

At Writers in Residence, we intend to support our youth from the moment we meet them. As they explore their voice in our CWWs, we also assist them while they prepare for their reentry process.

We launched the Reentry Mentorship Initiative (RMI) in 2022 to help our residents create personal goals, develop valuable life skills, and continue to build their self-esteem. Throughout the 12 weeks of the CWWs, we inform our youth about the RMI, emphasizing that they have the opportunity to engage with an adult mentor from their home community. For residents who express an interest, we coordinate with the juvenile facilities to contact their guardians and then connect them with a mentor.

The youth and their guardians create target goals to pursue over 12-18 months. Then, our mentors work directly with their mentees to build relationships and develop life skills. We have helped residents with school work, acquiring GEDs, practicing driving, applying for and securing jobs, continuing their exploration of writing, and persevering through the challenges of reentry. We believe that a mentor consistently shows up for our residents, walks alongside them, and empowers them to reach goals they want to achieve, and to help them feel confident throughout their reentry process.

#### GOALS:

- Provide our mentees with positive peer mentorship to cultivate their trust in others and themselves.
- Build our mentees' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-awareness.
- Facilitate the design and implementation of our mentees' reentry care plan that details SMART goals for them to be successful.
- Connect our mentees to local social services and community resources including education, employment, housing, transportation, food security, and physical and mental health support systems.
- Create a safe and confidential atmosphere for our mentees to grow and learn alongside their mentor.

To our readers, the stories that appear in this chapbook from our residents are powerful, and as they continue to grow and head back home, those stories don't end. We are always looking for adult volunteers who are passionate about mentoring one of our youth to thrive in their home community. Scan the QR code to apply!

#### INVOLVEMENT:

- Meeting for 2-4 hours every month with a mentee.
- Reporting on engagements and accomplishments with a mentee.
- Cultivating a relationship with a mentee for 12-18 months.

To our former residents, we want to hear from you and pair you with a mentor who will assist you with whatever services and resources you need through our RMI. We know that the reentry process is difficult and uncertain at times. Mentoring places a trusted and reliable adult in your life so you can become the best version of yourself. A mentor will listen to your perspective, encourage you to discover your voice, figure out your future path, and then work with you to find the tools to achieve your version of success.



Reach out to us at  
[info@writersnresidence.org](mailto:info@writersnresidence.org),  
[writersnresidence.org](https://writersnresidence.org),  
 or any social media platform.



And a special thanks to the following:

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to thank the following for their time, energy, and resources devoted to Writers in Residence:

- Residents and Juvenile Facility Staff
- Student Volunteers, Transcribers, Cohort Advisors, and Mentors
- Staff, Teaching Artists, Production Manager, and Printer
- Board of Directors, Community Partners, and Donors

It takes a team to achieve what we do, so thank you to everyone involved!




### Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*



THE CHAR AND CHUCK FOWLER  
FAMILY FOUNDATION



printed in Cleveland at  Outlandish Press

# WAYS TO GIVE

**THIS CHAPBOOK IS ONLY AVAILABLE  
IN EXCHANGE FOR A DONATION.**

Your support directly benefits our youth  
through education and reentry.

**\$10** – This gift covers the cost of a chapbook printed by  
Outlandish Press in Cleveland, OH.

**\$100** – This contribution allows a local teaching artist to  
facilitate a creative writing workshop at a juvenile facility.  
Or, this gift matches a resident with an adult mentor in their  
community.

**\$300** – This donation sustains the organization's daily  
operations to provide its programs and initiatives.

**Visit [writersnresidence.org/donate](https://writersnresidence.org/donate) to give  
or scan the code below.**



**Writers in Residence is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and  
contributions are tax-deductible.**