

X _____





FOR YOUTH
IN DETENTION, OR
IN THE COMMUNITY
WHO ARE WHAT THEY SAY, AND
BECOME WHAT THEY DREAM

...

INFORMATION

WRITERS IN RESIDENCE
FALL 2025
JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY COHORT

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MISSION

We teach creative writing to youth who are incarcerated to empower their voices and assist in their re-entry into society.

VISION

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

VALUES

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.

8

OHIO

1 A

C

4 3

2 B



SCHOOLS AND FACILITIES



- ¹ OBERLIN COLLEGE**
- ² HIRAM COLLEGE**
- ³ JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY**
- ⁴ CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY**



- ^A LORAIN COUNTY JDH**
- ^B PORTAGE COUNTY JDC**
- ^C CUYAHOGA COUNTY JDC**

IMPACT

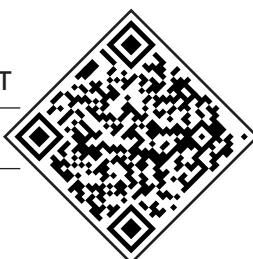
We determined the graphic elements and creative writing artifacts in advance to place this chapbook in the hands of every resident published by the final workshop.

As a result, the outputs only highlight a portion of the cohort's and the organization's impact from this program season.

The residents also complete surveys before and after every creative writing workshop, providing us with quantitative and qualitative data so we can evaluate our outcomes and ensure a high-quality program experience.

TO LEARN MORE, VIST

writersnresidence.org



John Carroll University Cohort, Fall 2025

Chapbook	1
Residents (direct contact)	100
Residential Participants	44
Residents Published	22
Teaching Artists	2
Student Volunteers	11
Hours	135
Artifacts (pieces generated)	41
Workshops	8
Fiscal Valuation	\$4,172

Dear reader,

FOREWORD

At the intersection of literary arts, higher education and the juvenile justice system, you will find Writers in Residence: the only organization in Ohio that transforms the lives of justice-involved youth through creative writing and mentorship. Since 2017, we have seen those transformations at juvenile facilities throughout Ohio.

Our Creative Writing Workshops (CWWs) are weekly, in-person engagements during the spring and fall for nine to 11 weeks. We contract with local writers to teach 10 to 15 residents—most of whom are between 13 and 18 years of age - in each workshop. Our teaching artists use the work of writers who represent their color, cultures and creeds, creating prompts that explore universal human experiences.

We also engage five to 10 undergraduate volunteers from nearby schools to participate in each workshop, becoming positive peer mentors and helping us to:

- Increase residents' literacy levels and writing disposition;
- Build their self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-awareness;
- Publish their creative writing;
- Advocate for them.

Our work includes a passionate and committed staff, teaching artists and college cohorts who believe in our mission and in the promise of the young people we serve. Our board of directors is equally devoted to honoring our mission, vision and values.

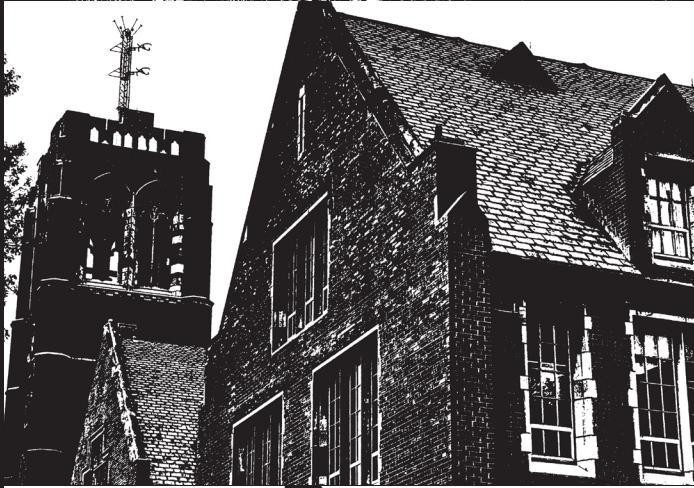
There are challenges that come with our work—for example, the brief periods of time our residents have to write original pieces; institutional delays and other interruptions to the proper editing of their work. Many residents would further revise their poetry and prose if given the chance.

We take those challenges in stride as we empower residents through creativity and community. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), one-time Cleveland resident Langston Hughes wrote,

*Go home and write
A page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.*

Thank you for reading these truths from our Writers in Residence.

LORI ASHYK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



LETTER FROM THE COHORT

Dear reader,

Poetry has ways to speak into individual parts of our lives, and often Writers in Residence's Creative Writing Workshops give us all a chance to reflect on our life experiences and memories. We truly have a wonderful opportunity to find connection in these moments, to grow to see how our similarities can unite us more than our differences can separate us. When we first arrived, the atmosphere was tense, and the residents were wary of us, but shifting just two workshops later, they began participating and even greeting us when we came in, as well as saying goodbye and telling us to have a good day. The feeling of trust has been really moving. The girls we work with have trusted us and opened up to us about their stories and writings. We are very grateful that they trust us in this way, and we feel lucky to witness their writings every week.

Writing forces us to dive deeper into the why behind our writing, and sometimes, letting ourselves discover this why is challenging. It takes bravery to share part of yourself on paper, and these residents have let themselves be vulnerable in expressing who they are. These girls have truly put their heart and soul into their writing. They have shared their stories and personal experiences and trauma with more vulnerability and bravery than many ever could. No matter the road blocks they had in their way during the writing process, whether that be physical, mental, or emotional, they pushed through and produced some truly beautiful work. These are artifacts that hold a piece of each resident. In reading these works, remember that their vulnerability is powerful, their willingness to grow is their strength, and you are getting a small glimpse into their lives even if it doesn't seem like it. Whether it be understanding their humor, how they view themselves, the world or even how they view certain foods—it's a piece of them.

**“...THESE RESIDENTS
HAVE LET THEMSELVES BE
VULNERABLE IN EXPRESSING
WHO THEY ARE.”**

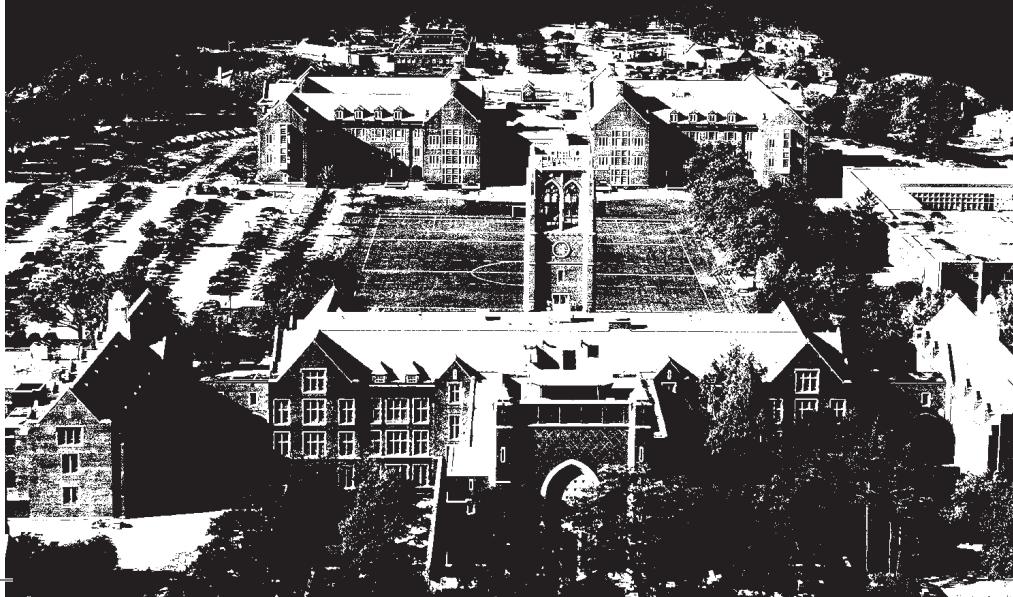
...



We are beyond grateful for the chance to walk alongside these residents, to hear their stories and make them feel known. Each of them helped us transform and grow, and we can only hope that they might have felt an ounce of the impact they had on us. We are grateful to our Teaching Artists for being so helpful every step of the way, which has allowed the residents to blossom in their writing. It can be very intimidating to open up to a group of strangers, and our Teaching Artists fostered an environment of incredible trust.

Thank you for your support and for taking the time to experience the words of these young writers!

THE JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY COHORT



+ HAIKU

(Spring 2025)

S U M M A R Y

This creative writing workshop revolved around the form of poetry called haiku demonstrated by Sonia Sanchez's poem "14 haiku," about Emmett Louis Till, who was a 14-year old African American boy who was abducted and lynched in 1955 after being falsely accused of offending a white woman.

P R O M P T

Write 5 haiku about a single event or multiple moments.

Include images that appeal to the five senses: taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing.

18

WRITERS IN RESIDENCE
FALL 2025
JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY COHORT



Cars, freedom, fresh air, horns, people yelling
Excited, can't wait, nervous
Do my hair, getting in the shower
Eating real food, wood to the face-
Russian Creme Lukaf

UNTITLED

KH

I wanna see my dog because I miss
her. I love to lay in my bed with her.

I wanna see my
dog because I miss her so much
we love to lay in my bed.

A MOTHERS NIGHT.

ANONYMOUS

Blak midnight, time leaving,
A mothers eyes.

foot prints becoming
classrooms winter settles
night wind.

UNTITLED

AS

I wanna go home
cause it's corny here haa haa
You making me hot.

+PHOTOGRAPHY AND EKPHRASIS

S U M M A R Y

This creative writing workshop combines visual art and literary art through a poetic form called ekphrasis thanks to Mickalene Thomas' and Lorna Simpson's inspiring photography about race, gender, and identity.

P R O M P T

Take a portrait and still life with an instant camera.

If you chose to write about your portrait, then reflect and respond to these questions: What's something you want more people to know about you? What do you want to keep for yourself?

OR

If you chose to write about your still life, then reflect and respond to these questions: What significance do you want others to acknowledge and appreciate about this object? What does this object represent to you?



EMOTIONAL WRECK

MH

I chose to put this picture together because the color combinations spoke to me. I love how the red blends with the gold and the yellow with the white and the duck adds a silly touch to it. The red stands for anger, the yellow means joy, the gold is confidence, and the white is hurt. These are the feelings I feel on a day to day basis. The picture shows that mixed emotions can be beautiful.

UNTITLED

ZM

The flowers are pretty and remind me of 2019 when we were doing my mother's funeral. The duck was my mom's favorite animal.

ALL THE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT KH!

KH

I am very intelligent.

I am also funny.

I also have a strong sense of self.

I'm mature for my age, most people think Im either 17-21 yrs old but Im only 15. I be fooling people on da outs. I onk how but Ig I look older than what I am but in here I definetly look my age cause my hair not done. I dont got no lashes no nothing.

I am strong.

+ COMEDY WRITING

S U M M A R Y

This creative writing workshop introduces everyone to comedy writing thanks to the instruction and assistance from TJ Maclin.

P R O M P T

[You know what's ATTITUDE about...] + [TOPIC]? + [Your answer].

Example: You know what's weird about bullies? They hate you, but they give you so much attention. I don't interact with people that I hate. So which is it?

Question (Attitude + Topic)

Answer (Premise)

Write at least 2 jokes for a 1-minute set by...

1. Choose a question and answer like the format above.
2. Add an act-out or action to the joke, extending the laughs.



You wanna know what's hard about being a big girl pregnant
in jail?

Cause people say you come here to get double portions,
Annnnd
you big, so they don't think you pregnant!

You know what's weird about jail?

We be serious about breaking out, and the staff laugh.
Be tryna sneak out in disguise wearing an extra small,
can't breath.

+AFFIRMATIONS

(Spring 2025)

S U M M A R Y

This creative writing workshop reminded the residents to love themselves and affirm the parts that make them who they are through Markus Amaker's poem "Give Yourself Some Flowers."

P R O M P T

Imagine you're looking at yourself in the mirror.

Write (10) affirmations to yourself, about yourself, for yourself. Make them positive, present, and personal statements. Use traits, attributes, and qualities you love about yourself.

Start with: "Where I am isn't who I am..."

Then repeat every sentence with: "I am..."

End with: "I am capable of [fill in the blank]."



Where I am isn't who I am. I am smart.
I am resilient.
I am beautiful.
I am creative.
I am hardworking.
I am determined.
I am kind.
I am intelligent.
I am respectful.
I am talented.
I am capable of anything I put my mind to.

WHO I AM - Z

ZM

Where I am isn't who I am.
I am beautiful.
I am calm.
I like cars.
I am enough.
I am different.
I am mature.
I am an overachiever.
I am caring.
I am an advocate for myself.
I am creative.
I am smart.
I am capable of doing better than my parents.

I love my tattoos, I love my eyes
I love my hair, I love my nails
I love my nose ring, I love my hair
growth. I love my name, I love myself
I love my height, I am pretty, I am
smart, I am funny, I am a virgo
I am me.

I love my hair.
I love my body.
I love my personality.
I love my intelligence.
I love my skills.
Where I am isn't who I am . . .
I am kind.
I am respectful.
I am intelligent.
I am beautiful.
I am skillful.
I am talented.
I am creative.
I am friendly.
I am strong.
I am resilient.
I am capable of being loved.

I am sexy i am nice I am smart i am worthy I am kind.
I am passionate I am focused I am Positive
I am strong I am capable of being my best
self without Anyone

Where I am isn't who I am!
I am beautiful like a sunflower on a sunny day.
I am loved by many of all types.
I am kindhearted, giving, and always helping.
I am responsible and live up to my name.
I am strong, letting no one break my character.
I am positive, ignoring all negativity.
I am unique. No one is the same as me.
I am enough. I deserve everything that comes to me.
I am attractive, pretty, and beautiful.
Now you know me.
I am capable of anything I put my mind to!

Where I am isn't who I am,
I am pretty,
I am strong,
I am powerful,
I am kind,
I am intelligent,
I am open minded,
I am creative,
I am artistic,
I am well spoken,
I am black,
I am capable of making my future great.

Where I am isn't who I am.
I am cranne.
I am a fan of food.
I am happy.
I am pretty.
I am clean.
I am a good cook.
I am kind.
I am confident.
I am beautiful.
I am loved.
I am capable of doing hard things.

Where I am isn't who I am.
I am able to read.
I am still growing.
I am a good friend.
I am good at math.
I am good at writing and spelling.
I am smart.
I am creative.
I am helpful.
I am kind.
I am good at school.
I am capable of self-love.

I AM

DM

Where I am isn't who I am.
I am intelligent.
I am important.
I am kind.
I am funny.
I love my singing voice.
I know I have a purpose.
I am capable of anything I put
my mind to.

Make sure you save some light for yourself at the end
because hard times don't last forever

Where I am isn't who I am . . .
I'm myself.
I'm smart.
I'm a leader.
I'm cute.
I'm special.
I'm a real friend, I am capable of
anything I put my mind to, even in
dark situations.

WE WANNA BE ROCKSTARS PT. 1 TR

Mom leave me alone, I wanna be famous -

WE WANNA BE ROCKSTARS PT. 2 JD

- I wanna be famous. My my doctor said I got ADHD. I don't even know what that means.
I'm all drugged up. I'm all, I'm all drugged up "ahhh"

What's wrong?
Tell me what's wrong I'm wondering.
Was it me?
Was it her?
Was it them?
Why are you mad all of the time?
It's ok to be happy, you know.
It's ok to express yourself
You know what, I'm tired
of everything.
Why am I here? I'm not supposed to be here.
In this place.
I want to be better.
I need to be better.
Help me be better.

+SIX-WORD MEMOIRS

S U M M A R Y

Typically, this is the resident's first session, introducing them to our creative writing workshops. They explored who they are, who they were, and who they want to become through six-word memoirs.

P R O M P T

Write (1) six-word memoir from each of these categories:

- 1.** I am / I'm...
- 2.** Life
- 3.** Love
- 4.** Food
- 5.** Advice
- 6.** Questions
- 7.** I will be / I'll be...



1. I just left im back again dey got me on house 5
2. Do's dont wanna see me win dey keep switchin my Pod
3. Chalked a Do fa a Pen N Put it in my sock
4. Up late night writin Past 10 i miss my n**** F
5. Back to back Poppin alerts dey Put me in my box
6. dey dont even kno da otha day but i had Popped my locked
7. My momma think im still a tweak but i told er im not

I AM ME

CM

1. I am beautiful in my own way.
2. I am smart in Math class.
3. I am kind to other people.
4. I am a listener when others talk.
5. I am a cook for my family.
6. I am good at coloring.

YOLO, why not take a chance?
Remember everyone is not your kind.
I love Wing Stop boneless chicken combo.
You should love who loves you.
Why do feelings change?

UNTITLED

ANONYMOUS

idk

I really dont know
have a Nice day

FACTS

AM

I am loving.
Life is backwards.
Love is a gamble.
Food is everything.
Head up, mouth open.
Why do I feel like this?
I will be better soon.

RIR

AA

Jail is Not it on my daddy
Love yourself Before others

UNTITLED.

TT

1. I am T, yes I am.

UNTITLED

ANONYMOUS

Life is like a roller coaster. One moment I'm with mom and family enjoying life, the next I'm in juvie. I have no one on my side (other than my gma), and I feel so alone. I have no friends in here, no one to talk to about my real thoughts and feelings,

[REDACTED] juvie is too much to handle for me on top of what I'm already going through. Life is what you make it, so do your best.

+INSPIRATION

S U M M A R Y

This creative writing workshop asked the residents to consider what inspires them and who they inspire through Damien McClendon's poem "What moves me," which includes rich images, metaphors and similes, and an anaphora.

P R O M P T

Start writing with: "What moves me? It must be..."

Repeat the phrase "it must be" 6x to introduce a new idea. This writing technique is called an anaphora.

OR

Write about being an inspiration to someone in your life. Explain why and how you will inspire them.



It must be The way my boyfriend D say he love me. It must be the way me D love myself and will never change. It must be home where D hate being because of all the yelling. It must be the way I dance because It's not pop lock in dropping it, majorette dancing as if my life depend on it.

What moves me?
It must be my mom caring for me.
It must be me listening to Big boogie.
It must be me loving myself.
It must be me coloring all the time.
It must be playing with my siblings and loving my siblings.
It must be me eating spaghetti.

It must be the absence of my Nana's smile. It must be time for a new beginning. It must be bouncing from house to house, new placements. It must be God throwing obstacles at me to know the way to live life. It must be hearing other people's stories, good or bad. Going through struggles at such a young age, not knowing if you're gonna be ok, getting separated from your family, your happiness, your inside peace. It must be the tears that fall out your eyes. It must be you looking at the time. It must be you thinking it's a crime. It must be

it must be the feeling of not having to worry or fear what's to come, it must be the feeling of peace not caring for everything going on, it must be me knowing myself enough to not care what nb says, it must be the feeling of internal peace that I love myself more than anything else. it must be knowing there's stuff in the world to view than what im seeing. it must be all the city in the world to view. It must be having the opportunities to explore. It must be the chances for a new beginning. It must be the chance to start over. It must be me trying to forgive myself. It must be me letting myself move on. It must be knowing there's more to the world, it must be new chances and opportunities, it must be more stuff to come, it must be my sister supporting me, it must be my sister coming no matter what, it must be my sister being 19 with her own house and car it must be it must be

WHAT DOES INSPIRE LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

AA

It must be people my age with their own stuff. It must be a dream to become a travel nurse. It must be my mother calling my name from the other side when I win. It must be something bigger at the end. It must be memories.

how come everyone love and hate me?

maybe because sometimes I am mean and sometimes nice or

maybe because I give a lot sometimes or I don't at all or

maybe because I'm funny sometimes and other times I am

boring

or maybe everybody loves me

it must be the way I am funny

it must be who I am

it must be me

that fill the room with laughs

people fly when they been laughin

I want to inspire the people who are always feeling down.
The people who feel hopeless
The people who feel unloved
The people who feel lonely
The people with bad attitudes
The people who got a back turned towards
them
I want to inspire the mean people
The people who are mad at the world
The people who had to grow up before
their time
The people who've been through a lot
The people with a story to tell
I want to inspire these people because
I went through all these things and
no one inspired me.

+ADULTHOOD

S U M M A R Y

This creative writing workshop asked the residents to reflect on the moment when they were becoming an adult through Stephanie Ginese's prose poem "32nd Street," which also remembers the good times and grieves those who passed away.

P R O M P T

Write about the moment when you realized that you were becoming an adult. Include specific, concrete details that appeal to the senses.

OR

Write about your summer days, in your community, with your friends, being young and free.

Include specific, concrete details that appeal to the senses.



My life, it lifes

I remember sleepin on the floor with my sisters with no heat.
I remember going hungry and stealing from the store to eat.
I remember losing my uncles at 13-14. That hurt my soul.
I remember I saw my gma lifeless at 16. That left me numb.
I remember my mom putting me and my four sibs before
herself.
I remember fighting through life just like my mom.
I remember putting everybody before myself like my mom.
I remember my mom met this guy named I and they
came up together and everything got better.

When I knew reality hit, when the
police was arresting me, I realized that
I need to grow up and do better, and
do better for my little brothers, so they
never end up here.

She was hurt, left beatin on putting drugs in her body to help the pain. Nobody fw her, so she turned to the streets for the love she couldn't get at home. Her mom never showed her love, so she didn't know what it was. She got into stuff she shouldn't have at 13. She never had a place to call home, so the streets was her home.

WRITERS IN RESIDENCE IS...

...where **encouragement** and **empowerment** meet.

That was the case for these juvenile facility staff members who wrote their youth letters.

Dear Boys,

I understand it's hard to be stuck, to have your mind withhold motivation. It's okay to be angry, to be sad, or to not know. Every path in life has a stop sign, you must choose when to move ahead and choose which way to go in life. The most important things to remember in life are you can never go backwards and you always have someone to help you along the way. You're not alone, believe in more than what you're going through now. Right now isn't forever and forever isn't far away. Your ways are your choices, and your choices determine your life. I hope and believe the light stays on you and your blessings are fulfilled.

Sincerely,

T

Dear Girls,

Growing up on the east side of Cleveland, I tended to want to hang with my cousins all the time until the day they kicked my Nanna house in on Barlette. I wasn't there, however my cousin was. My mother was a strict mother of four. I never understood why until I encountered situations only God could pull me out of. Seeing the pain and embarrassment my family went through broke my heart. My Nanna and Papa worked hard to become one of the first African American homeowners on that street. Watching my Nanna cry day in and night wondering what she did wrong when it came to my cousin. While my mother cracked down extra hard on me.

Many times in life, we as adults forget we was kids as well. Even though I wasn't promiscuous, I was disobedient in many ways that disappointed not just my parents, God as well. Every day we breathe, God grants us with new mercy and grace. Who am I not to see growth in you ladies just because you're in here. I see passion. Passion shows that once the door close, and it's quiet, the strength you ladies use gives you all passion again. I see growth. When your back is against the wall, at times you guys fight. We all have made mistakes. We all have fell short. However, we don't have to fail at life. Continue to go hard for your dreams. Every second, minute, hour and day is another chance to conquer your dream and goals. Life is you and you're in control of your life.

Love,
Ms. C

REENTRY MENTORSHIP INITIATIVE

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 navigate the intricacies of reentry while building their self-esteem and helping them build valuable life skills. Each week during the CWWs, we inform our youth about the RMI, emphasizing that they have the opportunity to engage in a program that meets their needs. For residents who express an interest, we coordinate with the juvenile facilities to contact their guardians and then connect them with a mentor or group.

The RMI has evolved to include three different programs to fit the needs of our mentees. We offer Long-Term Individual Mentoring for young people who know they will be approaching reentry from the juvenile justice system, Short-Term Facility Based Mentoring for those who are likely to be sent to the adult justice system for an extended period of time, and Group Mentoring focused on life skills development for select facilities.

LONG-TERM INDIVIDUAL MENTORING

Long-Term Individual Mentoring has the youth and their guardians create target goals to pursue over 12-18 months, while working alongside an adult mentor from in or around their home community. **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.

SHORT-TERM FACILITY BASED MENTORING

Just because we encounter someone who is facing significant time in the adult system does not mean we don't want to support them as they navigate the transition from the juvenile justice system. Short-Term Facility Based Mentoring allows a resident to be matched with a mentor who will meet with them on a regular basis to help them accomplish goals related to the rest of their time in the juvenile justice system. Our mentors encourage their mentees to complete school, maintain strong positive relationships with their peers and the staff at the facility, as well as to see a reduction in behavioral incidents.

GROUP MENTORING

Group Mentoring takes place across a ten week period, where we partner with local businesses, institutions, and agencies to provide basic introductions to life skills, as well as valuable linkages to the community, so our mentees know where they can go to find support for specific needs. We provide a laid back and welcoming environment for our mentees to learn about and practice life skills that will help them as they navigate young adulthood.

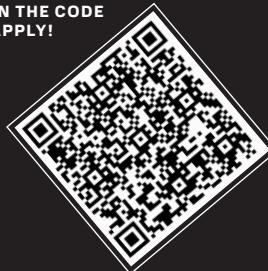
To our readers,

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 or to provide support to a mentoring group.

INVOLVEMENT

- o Meeting for 2-4 hours every month with a mentee.
- o Reporting on engagements and accomplishments with a mentee.
- o Cultivating a relationship with a mentee for 12-18 months.
- o Participate in facilitating group mentoring for 10 sessions in the spring or summer

SCAN THE CODE
TO APPLY!



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,
WRITERSNRESIDENCE.ORG,
OR ANY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM.

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Maureen Berry

WRITERS

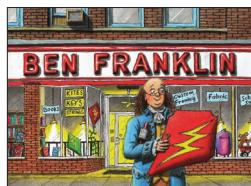
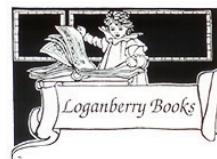
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