In the US, over 48,000 youth are confined in juvenile or criminal justice facilities. In Ohio, about 2,200 youth are held in juvenile or criminal justice facilities.

They have been separated and isolated from family, friends, and members of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of them feel forgotten, alone, & scared.

This is for them.
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We teach creative writing to youth who are incarcerated.

We empower our residents’ voices.

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.

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. This means that we continually welcome and accept our residents into our communities because they belong to an environment that promotes 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.

RELATIONSHIPS. 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.
“One writes out of one thing only.”

— James A. Baldwin
We strive to reduce the recidivism rates of our residents,
and participate in the transformation of the juvenile justice system.

one’s own experience.”
1. Capital University
2. College of Wooster
3. Heidelberg University
4. Hiram College
5. John Carroll University
6. Marietta College
7. Oberlin College
8. University of Dayton
9. Cleveland State University
10. Case Western Reserve Univ.
Circleville JCF
Montgomery County CAS
Seneca County YC
Portage Ceauga County JDC
Cuyahoga Hills JCF
Washington County JC
Medina County JDC
Cuyahoga County JDC
Lorain County JDH
Indian River JCF
Franklin County JDC
To clarify how we track our outputs, we take attendance at every session because our service population remains to be extremely transient, generating the total number of residents. However, some of the residents participate in our program more than once, so we averaged the total number of residents from every cohort to produce an approximate number that represents how many residents we engage weekly. We replicated the same calculations for our student volunteers too. The Independent Sector valuates volunteer time at $27.20/hour; we multiplied this dollar amount by the total number of service hours for every student volunteer.

This information was last updated on 11/29/21 before our creative writing workshops concluded for the fall season.

Read more about our outputs, outcomes, and impact at www.writersnresidence.org/impact
FY19-FY21 AVG. YTD

26 residents
7 student volunteers
87 hours
$2,242 fiscal valuation
39 artifacts
82 chapter books

FY19-FY21 TOTAL YTD

782 residents
159 student volunteers
1,908 hours
$50,336 fiscal valuation
826 artifacts
2,096 chapter books
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the family is a bonfire
Dear reader,

Being able to meet with the residents in person this fall was extremely motivating, and always left us full of energy. Something the twelve of us will always remember is their eagerness to hear about our lives, engage in creative discussions, and of course, put words to paper. Even through face masks and a loud HVAC system, the residents managed to make connections and to find a piece of themselves in a room of strangers from a college they knew nothing about. To say the least, we believe that with them we found a piece of ourselves too — which goes to show just how much everyone can learn from those who maybe aren’t so different from them. Face to face interactions in the facility allowed for more personal connections and more inside jokes between everyone.

Throughout our time together, we had some really fun workshops. In week 2, we listened to each other’s plans for how we would achieve our dreams. For week 3, we tricked each other with two truths and a lie. During week 4, we shared some descriptive poetry about our hometowns. It was great to hear that everyone felt like home was somewhere special, usually influenced by loved ones. As a cohort, we’re proud to say that we felt at home talking with the residents — they made it worth the trip off-campus every week. From discussing how Kool-Aid pickles are made and laughing over food that is “bussin,” there are moments that certainly made our interactions homely.

Finally, we want to thank the residents for taking part in the workshops, even when they weren’t sure they wanted to. Writing, and especially sharing can be emotionally draining. However, many residents left their thoughts in the post-workshop survey, saying they enjoyed the environment of “passion,” and “respect.” The title of this chapbook, “The Family is a Bonfire,” comes from a resident’s metaphor of family — and something that the rest of us felt sounded just right.

Hiram College Cohort
I like how goofy and hyper my brothas are.
I like how confident they are.
I really hate how my brothas act.
My best friend is able to do whatever and always wanting to do new things. We are going around the United States and Canada. Me and my best friend have never gotten into a fight because we agree on everything.
Untitled
BS

Murky water to escape. I can't breathe
Eight legs. Venomous bites
When I was nine I got lost at Chuck E. Cheese and I was very scared. When I got caught up I was nervous and shook up. I didn't like not knowing where my people was and I couldn't find them. I looked and seen them outside my window.
Untitled
JJ

People told me to drive under a haunted tunnel. When I did, my check engine light came on.
I heard my cat scratching at my door. But I realized my cat died two weeks ago.
Samuel L. Jackson creeps me out. He always says “I got my eye on you.”
I got a text message. But I was in the country and there was no service.
I was driving on the racetrack... then Dua Lipa said I was levitating... levitating away.
I Went for a Walk through the Graveyard, and Came Across My Own Gravestone

RC

You’re born with a tattoo of your death date. It was yesterday.
You hear your dad call your name. He died four years ago.
I looked out the window, and the stars were gone, and when I looked out the window some more there was a weird sky outside. As I paid more attention, I saw the creatures moving outside by my back door. And they were the most hideous creatures I have ever seen. Think of a killer clown but with no eyes and eight spider legs carrying guns on its back and spitting venom out of its mouth. Then I got up through and ran into another situation!
TE’s Halloween Poem

Halloween, scary costumes, late night scary movies
Leaves flying around, scary decorations
You get so scared you run
Walking around with your
Family having fun and
Eating all the candy
And getting so full
You go to sleep
Because you’re so full
And exhausted
After the kids go
To sleep have a
Couple drinks and
Have fun. Halloween
There are so many costumes
That you can be anything
So scary that people
Scare you to
Death you
Pee your pants.
Untitled
BS

Trapped in cold brick walls
Confined in cold solitary
Waiting for open spaces/room

Old weathered pages
Knowledge is plentiful
Scarred in memory
Hills on Mill
RC

The time is now here
To make a haiku about nothing
Sorry it’s not something

No words; confusion
Different is no more here
Lips seal themselves shut

Snow covered houses
Brisk, clean smelling ice comes down now
There’s hills everywhere
Cold quiet jail cell,
My thoughts bouncing off the walls,
I am not alone.
I really like dogs
And also watching anime
I like working on bikes with my dad.
I like going on trips
With my family and
Young marines.
Untitled
CK

Sike Sike motor bike
Love Kool-Aid pickles
I’m not even gonna lie to you.
Can’t read, can’t write, Kent State?
I like Naruto
Sike, Sike motor bike
Sike Sike motor bike
Sike Sike motor bike on a kite
Sike, Sike motor bike
I'm C.J dippa
And my raps are super slap
And your feet will tap.

My raps ain’t nothing
That is just the beginning
There is more to it

My feelings and love
That is all I rap about
It’s all that I know

Here is my new rap
This rap is called “Call Me King”
This sh** is bustin’

I will rap it, too
I will rap it tonight, man
My rap is good, too
Basketball means a lot to me. It helps me stay focused and have fun with my friends. I help my little brother get better than I was. My little brother means a lot to me. He likes to follow what I do, like playing games. He likes calling people b***hes on the game and it is funny when he ducks on his little hoop. He's like his big brother.
Different Words for Mad

CH

Free me out the box
I want to go home right now
Free me out the jam

Mad, irritated
I am frustrated right now
Mad, irritated
Family

ZS

The family is a bonfire
You get the warmth for when it’s cold
Also, you gather around and watch
You also get light when it gets dark
The family is the best at what they do for me.
Like my siblings we got a very good bond.
The family is the people that I can
Go to when I have a problem.
The family is the people that
Will have my back through thick and
Thin. Even though I have my
Ups and downs I know my family
Still care for me, and at the
End of the day I know I can always
Go back to them and not be
Judged.
The family is everything
From birth to afterlife
To brothers and sisters
To aunts and uncles
Love and affection
To laughs and fun
To school and work
To report cards and
Paychecks
To dinner gatherings
To Easter egg hunts
Like I said
The family is everything
Don’t ever forget that.
The family is everything. They’re my strength. They help me out when I’m down. My family supports me if I’m right or wrong they support me – through anything. The love for my family is like the ham juice on my turkeys.
The family is where the heart is
When there’s late night phone calls
Late night designated drivers

The family is when a bad day turns good
While coming home after being drunk

The family is carrying you out to your
Own car to drive you home.
1. My favorite color is bright red.
2. Used to be called little red
3. My favorite drink is pop
4. I will be 16 very soon
5. I will be tall very soon
1. My favorite color is royal blue.
2. My favorite drink is strawberry abewater.
3. I am a MLB in football.
4. I have two blue nose pitbulls.
5. I hate black cats with a passion.
6. I will be a Paleontologist someday.
7. I was a very loving kid.
8. I love my mother and brother.
9. I got stabbed when I was thirteen.
1. I am having trouble doing this
2. I can do math with fingers
3. I like cars more than life
4. I miss my girlfriend right now
5. I miss my daughter right now
6. I want my own bed now
7. I will be the best dad
8. I don’t like cornbread man
9. I want to go to work
1. I miss my life
2. I miss my girlfriend and my family
3. I love my family, stay strong
Things I Learned from my Life

1. Once a friend, now a brother
2. Broke my heart again and again
3. Miss my dog, I love her
4. Sorrow always is a painful beginning
5. Learn and live but always forgive
6. Don’t ever give up on yourself
7. Keep pushing through, pain never lasts
8. I love you mom stay strong
9. Never let yourself give up easily
Cleveland, Ohio

BS

I always like summer best
Going to the beach on a hot day
Listening to the birds chirp
The sounds of the waves crashing
The busy traffic up the hill
Walking the busy streets
The soaring buildings
The great water display
The colorful lights
The crowded streets busy with festivities
Assorted cultures about
And it’s all home
Home to me and many.
I always like winter coats
You can eat Taco Bell
Listen to rap music
You see kids with shovels
Feel of soft snow
Talk to the peoples
Drink some good drank.
I like Halloween because of my birthday. Pizza shop is dark at night, McDonalds is different colors. Taco Bell is a good food place and it’s on a main road. Yuca is a fun place to go to. My friends are fun to hang out with and do stuff with. My family is loving and on my birthday, they gave me a lot of stuff. I always see school busses all of the time. Akron is not a good place, well not the best place but I like it because it’s my hometown. I always hear a bus. On Halloween I like doing pumpkins and having fun with my family.
Nothing to see
It’s not fun
Leave while you can
My road floods
All the time
The cows go poo
The horses clack
I always like winter best because I enjoy the cold air and calm days. Christmas reminds me of a cheerful time, and I enjoy the smell of peppermint. I enjoy Christmas plays and lights and times spent with the ones I love.
I always like fall best because of the change of the leaves that tell me my birthday is coming up. My birthday is October 20th, and my birthday is right next to Halloween, and I love candy, especially KitKats.
Summer in Cleveland

CH

I always like summer best in Cleveland because I feel connected to it but also it is sunny most of the time. I like to go outside and chill with my friends. Not only do I go outside, but I also like to go up to the high school and watch football. I always go downtown and the only way to get there is by the bus, but I hate to always have to pay.
Untitled

ZT

My dad had a big box of marshmallows and it was cool to see on a picture.
Chinese Food

CK

Kool Aid pickles they taste sweet and sour.
They look nice when they shine off the Kool Aid.
Heard about them from my Granny.
Pizza stuff crust
Peperone and
Cheese with
Black olives
That is my
Favorite pizza
Sushi
JJ

Sushi is so great
But people want to hate. At first fish
Are slimy, so handle
Them so kindly.
The sensation of
The rice, it
Feels, just, so nice.
The sushi is
A little sticky.
But don’t be
So picky.
The sizzle
On the Fryer.
Oh, we
Got a
Cryer.
Taco Bell it tastes so good
Taco Bell the smell is a good smell
Taco Bell the sound of it from the wrapper
Taco Bell when you look at it when you open it
The memories when you get full
And when it's so good
Every time I get Taco Bell is with my brother
Taco Bell craving; we have the tacos
Hamburgers

CH

The meaty smell you give off
That sizzle and pop of the grease
That juicy meat as it turns brown
When I pull you off the skillet
You fill me with joy
When I bite into you
You send me back to a hot summer
Day in the backyard on a day
So perfect for a backyard
barbecue.
I go crazy like a monkey.
My siblings are monkeys.
When I get high in football,
I feel like I’m flying like a harpy eagle.
When I fight I feel mighty like a tiger.
When I was in Florida for vacation we had a beach day. As I was playing in the waves, I felt a sharp burning sting sensation. I started crying, turned, and saw I had been stung by a jellyfish. This had made me very afraid to go back into the water; just because something bad or scary happens to you, shouldn't mean you have to quit having fun or living your life.
I was attacked by a raccoon on a dark night. I was headed out the door after taking the trash out and then it leaped for me screeching and then I kicked it like a football and ran for the door.
The Time I Went to Sea World

KM

One memorable moment/interaction I had with an animal is when I went to Sea World with my family. My family and I, except for my mom, went to go see the killer whales. My dad was holding me up because I was only four years old. One of the Killer whales sneezed on me, there was snot and boogers all over my arm and my dad had to wipe it off.
Snakes slither with the river
Letter to Larry

LD

Dear Larry,

Don’t go to jail. Don’t screw up. Make sure you swing on the swing more. Hangout with mom more and get more sleep (shut your phone off earlier). Enjoy yourself more. Get better friends and don’t let them down. Stop smoking. Be more careful with your glasses.
Letter to my Child

GR

Don't go to jail, try to be good and stay out of trouble. When you feel like giving up the most, try your hardest because it will always get better. When you lose motivation try to find anything that will keep motivating you because when you’re not motivated you will get locked up and have to leave the people you love, which will hurt you and make you hate yourself, so stay motivated and do good always. Be on your best behavior, make money the legal way, stay away from people that will bring you down and keep the people that care around you always.
Dear JaVeon,

When you get older don’t be around people that are doing bad, walk the other way and stay in school and don’t go to jail. Listen to your parents and stay in sports and do better for you. Just stay out of trouble and be a good person, you really are. Enjoy your freedom while you’re young.
Dear Kaleb,

Make sure to watch anime but take some time off. Be sure to be more brave and make sure to follow your dreams. Try to learn martial arts and train to use a sword/katana.
Letter to my Child

Hey, I just wanted to tell you not to get caught up in other people or small things that happen to you or other people. Do not overreact when something big happens either.
“Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done”

— Bryan Stevenson
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
We want to acknowledge the following individuals below for their time, energy, and resources devoted to fulfilling Writers in Residence’s mission and vision because without them nothing would be possible:

- Residents
- Community Partners and Juvenile Facilities
- Student Volunteers
- Cohort Advisors and Academic Institutions
- Special Guest Authors and Artists
- Staff and Contractors
- Board of Directors
- Donors and Community Members

We want to thank another integral member of our team, Morgan K., who transcribed almost every resident’s handwritten artifact into a digital document so we can publish their poetry and prose.

We also want to express our gratitude for our Graphic Designer, Jordan Mondell, who produced this contemporary, high-quality chapbook that elevates our residents’ creative writing.

Finally, we want to recognize the support from the following grantmaking institutions:

- The Cleveland Foundation - Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, Cleveland Black Futures Fund
- The Sisters of Charity Foundation – Ministry Leadership Program
- The Fowler Family Foundation
- The Ohio Arts Council
By donating to Writers in Residence, you allow us to...

Provide writing materials, technology, personal protective equipment (PPE), snacks, chapbooks, and teaching artists for our creative writing workshops.

Support our residents who are re-entering society with very little or zero access to social services and resources to prevent them from recidivating.

Educate our local communities and government officials about the juvenile justice system’s traumatic effect on our youth to enact reforms and alternatives.

To donate, please visit: writersnresidence.org/donate or scan the code below

Writers in Residence is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization incorporated in Ohio.