

VOICES INK

2010-2011

ISSUE 9



Have you seen Voices UnBroken's Write Your Way curriculum? We developed the Write Your Way curriculum in 2009 as a workbook that can be used individually by people who are incarcerated/detained or simply do not have access to a creative writing workshop and/or by facilitators in a group setting. We have sold hundreds of copies of the Write Your Way curriculum and it is now being used by individuals and organizations throughout the country. We have presented the Write Your Way curriculum at a number of national conferences, and we have been offering youth development trainings based on the Write Your Way curriculum here in New York City (for more information, see page 20). The Write Your Way curriculum is engaging, educational ... and a lot of fun! And I thought I'd take this opportunity to share an activity with you. This is a modified version of an activity called "Declarations" – the writing on the left is my own and the blank lines on the right hand side are all yours!

I love knowing the right words
I love express trains
I love unlocking the door

I want smoother afternoons
I want to roll my tongue more gracefully
I want to say goodbye less often

I believe there is beauty everywhere
I believe in keeping promises
I believe sometimes you just know

I demand that we treat all children like our children
I demand that we listen to each other
I demand that no one has to be lost for us to find our way

I have seen that a fresh coat of paint changes everything
I have seen gates slam open
I have seen change

I love _____
I love _____
I love _____

I want _____
I want _____
I want _____

I believe _____
I believe _____
I believe _____

I demand _____
I demand _____
I demand _____

I have seen _____
I have seen _____
I have seen _____

That was fun, wasn't it?!? If you'd like to share what you've written, please post it on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/voicesunbroken, or mail it to us at 1414 Metropolitan Avenue, 2nd Fl., Bronx, NY 10462. And if you're interested in purchasing a copy of the Write Your Way curriculum or making a donation to support our programs, please visit our website: www.voicesunbroken.org.

Thank you, in advance, and welcome to the 9th issue of Voices Ink ...

Victoria Sammartino

Founder & Executive Director, Voices UnBroken



As 2011 comes to an end, I feel grateful for all that Voices UnBroken has accomplished. We've been able to continuously provide high quality creative writing workshops to youth across New York City during critical times in their lives. I still remember the feeling I got participating at a Voices UnBroken workshop. I felt challenged and found a place where I could share my thoughts and hear other people's points of view. I continue to be amazed at the potential of the participants that enter our workshops and even more so at how our facilitators and staff turn bashful youth into young women and men who can stand in front of a room of peers and strangers and share their views of the world, their hardships and their dreams.

I've been involved with Voices UnBroken at every stage: participant, staff, facilitator, board member, and now, board president. And my belief that what we do is absolutely necessary has never been stronger. Voices UnBroken will be celebrating its 10th year anniversary and I would like to thank everyone that has made this work possible - Victoria, for her passion and vision as our founder and executive director. Our founding board, including current board member Leslie Smith, for her dedication. I would like to give a special thanks to every participant we've ever coaxed into writing a poem or performing, for giving us the chance to be touched by your voices. Thank you to our funders and individual donors for believing we can deliver on our mission. And of course thank you to our program director for her tireless work and our current board for their energy and commitment.

I would like to challenge you to take your support to the next level. This may mean giving a donation, lending your expertise, or joining our board. Please know that you are critical to our success and I look forward to a 2012 filled with collaboration and growth!

*Dalinez Martinez-Lanzo
Board President, Voices UnBroken*



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Thank you for all of your dedication and support!

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Victoria Sammartino
Magazine Co-Editor

Milagros "Mimi" Acosta
Magazine Co-Editor,
Layout and Design

Thanks to all of the contributors specifically friends who contributed pics, and helped me with the editing tool. :)

Voices UnBroken is a Bronx-based non-profit organization dedicated to providing under-heard members of the community, - primarily youth, ages 14-21 - with the tools and opportunity for creative self-expression. Through high quality creative writing workshops in group homes, residential treatment facilities, jails, juvenile detention centers and various other transitional and alternative settings, Voices UnBroken nurtures the inherent need in all people to tell their stories and be heard. It is our belief that this telling of stories and sharing of dreams leads to individual and community growth.

Staff Update

Dear Voices UnBroken Community,

Working as Voices UnBroken's Program Director for almost two years was an incredible experience. I was honored to help build the organization and its programming, and I want to thank Victoria, who is an amazing boss, mentor, and friend, for all of her knowledge and support over the years. Working with her has truly been an invaluable experience that I will keep with me for the rest of my life. I next want to thank the amazing facilitators that I had the pleasure to work with. All of you taught me so much, and I feel blessed to have gotten to know you and share in your talent. Finally, I thank the many participants in Voices UnBroken's workshops who inspire me every day. I carry with me their stories and their generosity in sharing their voices. Leaving my role as Program Director was one of the hardest things that I have ever done in my life, but I am most thankful for the opportunity to still be a part of the Voices UnBroken family and to continue sharing my voice with all of you. The organization is in amazing hands with Mimi, and I am sure she will take Voices UnBroken to new heights. I will always be around though if you need a helping hand, so this is not a good-bye just a see you later.

– *Celeste Rivera*



I am very grateful to be involved with such an incredible organization. I learned about Voices UnBroken while I was working at Euphrasian Hall, one of the residential facilities where Voices UnBroken workshops take place. I have always been behind Voices UnBroken 100% and I am excited to be a part of the bigger picture.

I want to thank Celeste for being so helpful in the transition and for her continued support. I want to thank Tory, who is such a wonderful, inspiring leader. She has been so supportive and truly believes in me and my potential.

I have been connected with so many wonderful people because of Voices UnBroken and I thank you all for accepting me into the Voices UnBroken family!

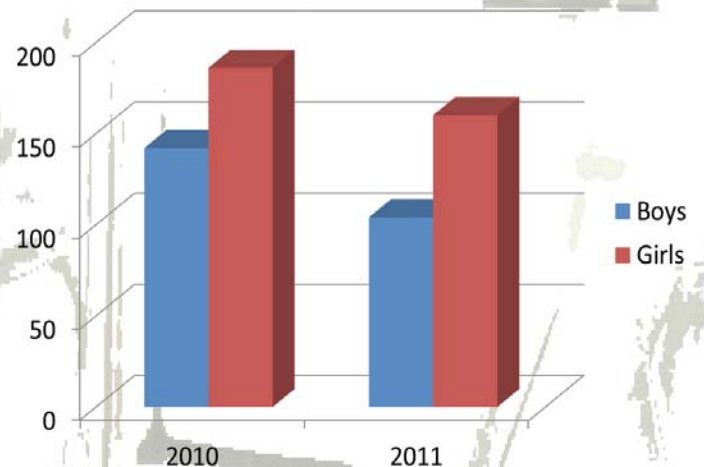
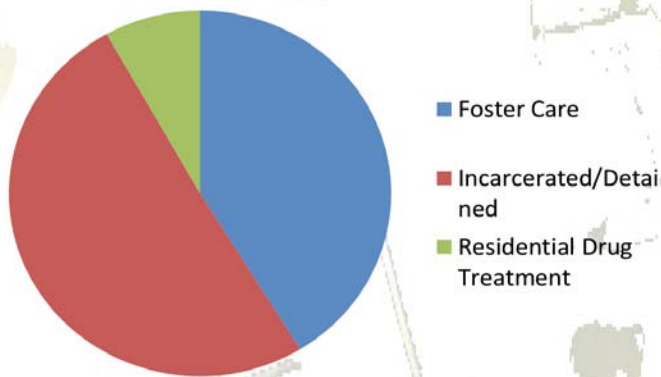
– *Milagros "Mimi" Acosta:)*

Voices UnBroken's Programs

Voices Beyond Bars

workshops take place in jails and juvenile detention centers; meet for 1 ½ hours, twice a week for five weeks; and culminate with a final reading. Young people who participate in Voices Beyond Bars workshops learn new tools for coping with stress, for moving past trauma, and for taking responsibility for their actions and emotions. By helping participants develop fundamental communication skills, Voices UnBroken is also contributing to the betterment of the communities to which these young people will return.

Youth Served 2010-2011



Speaking Our Voices

workshops take place in restrictive residential settings and primarily serve young people who are in the foster care system. Speaking Our Voices workshops meet once or twice a week for 10-12 weeks and culminate with a final reading. Speaking Our Voices workshops are socially, emotionally, academically, and geographically accessible workshops that introduce young people to practical communications tools. Voices UnBroken trains facilitators to establish an enjoyable and productive forum for self-expression that does not otherwise exist for teens and young adults in the alternative and transitional settings where our workshops take place. Writing sessions and group discussions develop participants' comfort with communication, while guided practice reinforces their learning. Participants of the Speaking Our Voices program also attend monthly open mics at the

Starbucks located in Parkchester in The Bronx.

A BIG THANK YOU to all who participate, and to the staff at Starbucks!

Voices UnBroken's Programs

Voices Ink

Sharing our participants' voices with the larger community has always been a part of Voices UnBroken's vision. In 2001, we published our first full-length anthology of participant writing and to date, we have published eight full-length anthologies of participant writing. Writing by Voices UnBroken participants have also been featured in publications including The Daily News and YM Magazine, and on local television and radio. In 2005, we began publishing this 24-page magazine that is distributed to individuals and organizations throughout the country. And in 2009, we published the Write Your Way Curriculum, a 120-page workbook that can be used by individuals who do not have access to a Voices UnBroken workshop or by facilitators in a group setting.

In 2010, Voices UnBroken partnered with The Beat Within to present a workshop at the national Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY) conference in Washington, DC. Workshop participants wrote a collaborative poem that was performed before hundreds of conference attendees. And in 2011, Voices UnBroken presented a panel at the Association for Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Conference, also in Washington, DC. Poet, professor, and Voices UnBroken facilitator, Kamilah Aisha Moon, joined Voices UnBroken staff for this panel discussion that was focused on the experience of facilitating creative writing workshops in non-school settings. Also in 2011, Mimi attended the School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL) Training for Trainers in Oakland, CA. Mimi learned a lot, met some amazing people, survived two earthquakes (!), and brought back a lot of new activities and ideas that we are beginning to incorporate into our workshops and trainings.

The Voices Network

is made up of former workshop participants, young people, educators, writers, artists and others who believe in the power of art as a tool for individual and community growth. Through the Voices Network, we present workshops at local and national conferences; participate in forums, roundtables and panel discussions; and offer free trainings to youth development professionals in New York City who are interested in using the arts to engage traditionally hard-to-reach youth. We also use the network to connect participants to community resources.

As mentioned above, Voices UnBroken offers youth development trainings for educators, teaching artists, youth workers, and anyone else who is interested in learning how to use the arts to engage traditionally hard-to-reach youth. These trainings are based on the Write Your Way curriculum, and in 2011 alone, more than 100 people have attended these trainings including staff from the New York City Administration for Children's Services' Division of Youth and Family Justice, the New York City Department of Probation, and various non-profit organizations that operate non-secure detention facilities and/or residential facilities for youth in the foster care system.

Voices UnBroken's Programs

Introducing our NEW program! (DRUM ROLL PLEASE!)

Voices In Action

is a leadership program specifically for girls and young women who have participated in Voices UnBroken workshops and are interested in using their voices to advocate for themselves, their sisters and their/our communities. This first year of the Voices In Action program will be a planning year and participants of Voices In Action will help design and shape the program. They will also decide how they will want to use their voices as a catalyst for growth and change in our communities.

Declarations

I demand pencils for the writers unheard!
I have seen broken smiles after droughts.
I want to get through this.
I demand peace of mind.
I have seen ugly situations become beautiful poems.
I demand to be heard!
I demand empathy!
I have seen the world the way I wish it to be.
I hate the words that describe exactly how I feel.
I want to be whole.
I believe she will see that I never meant for this to be.
I have seen the angels of my nightmares.
I want everyone to hear my voice.

-Written by participants of the
Voices In Action program



HAIKU:

Voices in action
Connects, empowers and bonds
Our unbroken voice
-VOICES IN ACTION PARTICIPANT

Hearing Our Voices Awards

2010 HONOREES

NY Times Journalist, David Gonzalez

Poet, Carlos Andres Gomez

SIMS Metal Management, Mark Santiago

See the following page for the 2011 Honorees



We would like to thank Celeste Rivera, Marthalia Matarrita, Sien Ide, Sandra Guzmán, and everyone at the **Havana Room** for their help in making the evening a success.

Photo Credits: Sandra Guzmán

www.mayaazucena.com



Maya Azucena is a Brooklyn-raised singer-songwriter who believes that music is a tool for healing and activism. Maya has released seven albums the most recent of which, *Cry Love* (Executive Produced with Christian Ver Halen), was released earlier this year on her new imprint label, Azucena Songs. Every publication you can think of from *Billboard* and the *Village Voice* to the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* has raved about her incredible voice and performances; and her music has also been featured on HBO (*The Wire*), NBC (*30 Rock*), and in advertisements for Verizon Wireless and Ford Motors. She was awarded a “Best Reggae Album” Grammy for her work with Stephen Marley and her vocal contributions to an album by Croatian superstar Gibonni garnered two Porin Awards (the top music award in Croatia). She has served as a Cultural Ambassador for the U.S., and has performed for audiences in places as far-ranging as Honduras, China, Tanzania, Italy, Myanmar, and Slovenia. Maya also co-founded MDGFive.com with Emmy-winning director Lisa Russell. Their multi-media website for maternal health awareness prompted an invitation from Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for Maya to perform at the United Nation’s 2010 MDG Summit. Maya has also received a Proclamation from the House of Representatives and recently won *The Network Journal*’s prestigious “Top 40 Under 40” Award in recognition of her tireless community work.

www.fdlmstudio.com



Franck de Las Mercedes is a Nicaraguan born painter raised in New York City. With a self-obtained education straight from the aisles of the New York Public Library, Franck has emerged as one of the country’s most prolific visual artists in recent years. In 2006, Franck launched *The Priority Boxes Art Series*, a peace initiative that has evolved into a movement now embraced by popular culture, mainstream media outlets, schools and art educators across America. From his small studio near the Hudson River, Franck ships abstractly painted, seemingly empty boxes with a label that reads: “Fragile, handle with care: Contains peace” to people around the world. The boxes aim to spark dialogue and challenge people to reconsider their ability to influence change and question the fragility, value and priority given to concepts such as peace. Franck has shipped more than 10,000 boxes to countries and cities across the globe from urban and rural America to Asia and South Africa. Franck and his work have been featured on numerous national and international television and radio shows including, *LatiNation*, *CNN En Español*, *Noticiero Telemundo* and *Univision’s Aqui y Ahora*. Franck has also been featured in prestigious publications including, *Selecciones (Reader’s Digest)*, *Art Business News*, *Hispanic Magazine*, *SoulPancake*, *Museum VIEWS*, *American Style* and *The Artist’s* magazine. In addition to *The Priority Boxes Art Series*, Franck’s art has been featured in hundreds of solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and internationally.

www.bobholman.com



Bob Holman is a poet, a professor, a curator, an entrepreneur and an Emmy award winner who also founded the Bowery Poetry Club and has been called everything from “Ringmaster of the Spoken Word” (*New York Daily News*) to “this generation’s Ezra Pound” (*San Francisco’s Poetry Flash*). It would be impossible to list everything that Bob has done, every book he has published, every incredible project he has had a hand in, so here are some brief highlights: Bob produced the *United States of Poetry* series for PBS; worked with Bill Adler and Sekou Sundiata to create “the world’s first” poetry record label, *Mouth Almighty/Mercury Records*; and has appeared widely on *Nightline*, *Good Morning America*, *ABC News Magazine*, and *The Charlie Rose Show*. Bob co-edited *Aloud! Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café*; *Crossing State Lines: An American Renga*; *Off the Cuffs: Poetry by and about the Police*; and various other anthologies. Bob collaborated with Chuck Close on *A Couple of Ways of Doing Something*, a book that featured twenty daguerreotypes by Close and twenty praise poems by Holman. Bob won three Emmys over six seasons producing *Poetry Spots* – for WNYC-TV, received a Bessie Performance Award, and won the International Public Television Awards for *United States of Poetry* and *Words In Your Face*.

from the pencil to the page...

From 2010-2011, Voices UnBroken's workshops took place in:

August Aichhorn Center For Adolescent Residential Care

Good Shepherd Services' Euphrasian Hall

Odyssey House Lafayette

Horizon Juvenile Detention Center

Crossroads Juvenile Detention Center

Good Shepherd Services' Peter J Sharp House

**The Robert N. Davoren Complex & The Rose M. Singer Center
on Rikers Island**

**Voices UnBroken's high quality workshops would not be
possible without our facilitators.**

It has been a great year and we truly appreciate your hard work and dedication.

Ashley Hamilton

Elizabeth Parker

Jana Lynne Umipig

Lisa Santiago

Sheila Maldonado

Brianna Hayes

Geoff Kagan Trenchard

Julia Taylor

Lily Bechtel

Subha Ahmed

Elizabeth Fox

Jackie Sheeler

Kamilah Aisha Moon

Morgan Willis

Willana Mack

The poetry on the following pages was written by participants in Voices UnBroken workshops. Given the nature of the facilities where Voices UnBroken workshops take place and the need to protect our participants' anonymity, we have credited their writing by using their initials.

from the pencil to the page...

**I am smart, untouchable.
I wonder how my family is.
I hear music when I'm upset.
I see flowers on the outside of my heart.
I want to go home a.s.a.p.
I am smart, untouchable.**

**I pretend that I'm in La La Land.
I feel depressed, hurt.
I hope to see my family and friends again.
I worry about my brother and cousin.
I cry when I don't see my brother.
I am smart, untouchable**

**I understand the key to life.
I say I love my family every night.
I dream about me being up in the sky on the moon.
I will do better than I did before.
I am smart, untouchable.**

-A. K.

**I'm the kind of person
who cares more about my friends than I do myself.
I'm the kind of person
who doesn't let other people's opinions bother me.
I'm the kind of person
that will help someone turn their day around,
meanwhile, I can't even fix mine.
I guess I'm just a nice person.**

- J. E.

**This jail really kills me
I'm ready to change**

**I never lost hope
I just lost control of my mind
I need to find it**

**I need to let go
I'm just loosening my grip
I want to finish**

**I am just a teen
I'm trying to grow too fast
I need to slow down**

**I'm tired of being me
I wish to be someone else
before I'm gone**

-M. W.

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from the pencil to the page...

**If I had one minute to tell the world what it's like to be a teenager
I would say...**

**Yes, we screamed, yelled and kicked
with what seemed like the most powerful force...**

We punched and cursed...

**We swore and hated,
loved and failed,
fell and got hurt,**

but we always knew who would help us get back up...

**Even after all this, you have to remember,
We never said we wouldn't make it through...**

-N. G.

**Frustration looks like holding on to someone who doesn't want
to be held on to.**

Courage smells like the pleasant scent of your loved one's body.

Temptation sounds like a Dr. Pepper top coming off.

Happiness feels like being a part of someone's life.

Anger tastes like spoiled cheese.

Fear looks like a haunted house.

Hope smells like your grandma's cooking.

Comfort sounds like holding on to your lover tight.

Grief feels like watching your loved one get hurt.

Confusion tastes like watery fountain soda from Mickey D's.

-T. D.

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from the pencil to the page...

Last night I took a different route home
I saw a new path of light
moving on to see a new journey,
I had roadblocks and fights,
the struggles and new experiences
help the mind, moving through rocks
you can't be kind, I know
last night I took a different route home.

I see myself
adapting to life, learning to change
Life can move fast like on a speeding range.
Life can be cloudy, and rain heavy
but as long as you can take cover you won't
get caught, then I look down and
I see myself.

I realized I'm my own man.
I'm the only one that can control
my life plan,
So I think differently, and paint on a new
picture.

A lot has changed
so I see, I can be new,
and become a better me.
A lot has changed.

-D. M.

Ode to the Eyes that See

How can you say
that you saw what you seen?
The vision you claim to have had
could also have deceived you.

-M. W.

I am hard, loving
I wonder if I will succeed.
I hear yelling and laughter.
I see clouded dreams.
I want to be happy.
I am hard, loving.

I pretend that everything's ok.
I feel unpredictably insane.
I hope that I will care.
I worry that I won't be here.
I cry when I'm angry.
I am hard, loving.

I understand that life is unfair.
I say God's help will be here.
I dream for a new quest.
I try to impress.
I will be a success.
I am hard, loving.

-A. M.

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from the pencil to the page...

I'm the kind of person who...
will pick you up when you're down,
make you smile when you frown.

I'm the kind of person who...
cares what you think about me.
Do you think I'm pretty, smart and funny?

I'm the kind of person who...
sees what no one else sees in you.
I'm the one who believes in you.

I'm the kind of person who...
no matter what, no matter where, I'll
always be there.

That's just the kind of person I am.

-I. M.

Ode to Basketball

The old me dribbles down the block only
listening to the ball's heart and pulse.
It sounds like a unique sound
beating against the ground,
making a beat.
Never looking down
just dribbling to the beat.
Feeling a tight bond with the ball
as I move my feet.
All you hear is the ball and my sneakers
walking on the concrete!

-J. B

Through my window,
all I see is you.

Through my window,
I see buildings.

Through my window,
I see the moonlight shining in
my eyes

while you hold me in your arms.

Through my window,
all I see is you.

-N. B.

I live in a doorway between two rooms...
I hear pots and pans, also dropping spoons.

Nephews crying and nieces whining.

Smoke, a smell that catches my attention.

Big brother says, "there's something I didn't
mention."

Trying to guide me the right way,
but I don't listen.

I peek into the other room...

A crowd of my friends,
laughing and joking like this is where
the movies begins.

Counting my money, trying to get
the newest Tims.

Pictures on the wall, cars
with the newest rims.

Something like a novel, but I don't know
when it's going to end.

Which room do I want to go in?

-D. J.

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from the pencil to the paper...

I live in a doorway between two rooms.

I hear my parents talking.

They're trying to get rid of me.

**I'm in my room crying out,
they don't understand what I see.**

**I decided to go and see what was going on,
they told me to go to bed,
there's nothing wrong.**

**When everything was calm, I saw
my mother packing,
saying that I had to leave.**

**I peek into the other room
and guess what I see ...
my future was looking bright and clean.**

**And now I know my story,
it was missing a lot of scenes.**

**My parents were in trouble,
and I had to leave soon.**

**And if I didn't, me as a flower,
would not be able to bloom.**

**I thank them so much,
I wish to see them soon.**

**But right now I know...
we are all on the moon.**

-Q. H.

**Take life by the horns
Ride it out til the end
don't ever look back!**

-B. H.

**Live with no regrets
Let nothing disappoint you
Let the inner you out**

-B. H.

**Do you ever feel out of place?
Somewhere you just don't belong...**

No one understands.

No one hears you screaming.

No one in this world understands.

**Do you lock yourself in your room with the
radio turned up so loud?**

You don't know how it feels to be like me.

I bet the world finds me crazy and paranoid.

I bleed inside.

**Where is the doctor?
because I feel out of place,
where I don't belong.**

No one understands me.

No one hears me screaming.

**I lock myself in my room with the radio turned
up so loud.**

Welcome to my life...

-G. G.

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from the pencil to the paper...

**With my hands I can build the things that are
important to my community.**

**With my heart I feel for the hungry and poor
that walk the cold streets at night.**

**With my mind I can make life lasting decisions
that can change my life in a couple of seconds.**

**With my feet I can run in a charity marathon to
look out for the have-nots who are struggling
in my environment.**

**These hands want to be involved in the
betterment of this generation and to build
schools for my future children.**

-M. B.

**People see me as wild, but I really am adrenaline seeking
I'm always looking for something fast paced that's going
to give me a rush. I'm adrenaline seeking
You know how they say, "opposites attract",
My opposite would be a companion or partner that's
laid back, easy going.**

-L. L.

**Where did she go wrong
Thinking about my mother
Missing her clearly**

-J. C.

**My heart beats then stops
The thought of seeing her leave
It kills me softly**

-R. W.

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from the pencil to the page...

**I live for the sport
I am married to Spalding
The wind feels so good**

-J. B.

**Family always comes first.
I wake up thinking of you
My friend never being here**

-K. C.

**Yo tomo agua
nosotros comiamos
el escucha**

-R. M.

**If I could tell the world
what it's like to be a teenager
I would say...**

**I have only been a teenager for two years.
You would not know about all the tears.
I cry myself to sleep almost everyday,
because I did not know it would end up this way.
Life has been hard the past two years,
what a surprise.
I will be 15, here comes more tears.
If I had a chance to go back in time,
I know, I just know, that things would be fine.**

-Q. H.

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from the pencil to the page...

Don't tell me...

You love me if you don't mean it.

I will never change.

I'm getting old.

Nothing.

Something I already know.

I'm not going to be with him forever.

I'm an addict.

You don't like my swag or my demeanor,

just get to know me first.

I don't look like a mother.

What I better do or else.

I'm pretty for a dark skinned girl.

All of the things you never did say,

because now it's too late.

-J. J.

What is life about?

Being as happy as you can

smile at every moment

-B. H.

**I don't trust nobody
Baby, please don't hurt me no more
Stop telling me things**

-K. C.

**With my hands I can touch the souls of
those who are in need and touch the hearts
of all people from many walks of life.**

**With my heart I can see light in the darkest
of individuals and turn hateful individuals
into fun-loving human beings.**

**With my mind I can change the world
and make history.**

With my feet I can run the universe.

**These hands want to change humanity,
mainly my life, but I want to see everyone
progress one step at a time.**

-M. L.

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from the pencil to the page...

**I am a cougar that is black
I am a daisy that grows up to the sky
I am an eraser so I can erase things
I am thunder cause I'm scary
I am a drum that makes a loud noise**

-T. B.

**He has two tables
nosotros leiamos
tenemos libros**

-R. M.

**I am big and playful
I wonder if I will be home soon
I hear "I love you"
I see a good life
I want to be a good man
I am a playful man with kids
big and playful.**

-C. A.

**With my hands
I feel the soft aroma of love.
Passionate and gentle. My hands
fondle the chains of love which are
as cold as the Arctic.**

**With my heart
I feel joy only certain things or times
can change. Only does my heart pump
for the joy of roses. Oh, sweet things
keep my heart at ease.**

**With my mind
I think freedom. My mind
wonders about
what tomorrow might bring.
Sometimes my mind is cloudy,
only for a short time. But
with my mind comes sensual thoughts
of
a brighter day.**

**With my feet
I move at a quick pace.
Walking to no end.
Only to find myself on a different
path. As my feet walk, they leave
footprints of where I've been.**

**These hands want to break the chains of
misery. Hands
of freedom can only bring tranquility to
the soul. These hands want to feel
love once again.**

-D. B.

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from the pencil to the page...

The hope that lingers
sweet, soft, life, love,
my future
off those precious lips

-S. B.

Last night I took a different route home
Seeing the city from my new room
Crossing a new bridge everyday
Seeing people every time I head to my verdict
On a highway I've never been on
before

I see myself
Going through the same B.S. staying
in New York
As another statistic
A caged animal
Taking a new route for a different life

I realized
Certain things happen for a reason
Everyone who is supposed to be there won't
How bad this makes me feel inside

A lot has changed
ever since I got locked up
People who I thought I was in love with
ain't in love at all

-A. P.

Home Sweet Home is where I'm created.
Sometimes I love it, sometimes I hate it.
Others dislike it, others it's their favorite.
They wanna take it away.
I'm happy they made it.

As kids we all met up in the schoolyard.
As we get older some work two jobs.
Some hustle and rob,
that's what
they call work.
We try not to go that route,
feelings get hurt.

High school is fun, it's a fashion show.
We look nice for the girls, flash and go.
Vise versa. They do it for us.
The main point is flashing is a must.

-D. L.

I love to eat food
I love to eat M&Ms
I do enjoy school

-T. B.

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from the pencil to the paper...

The Touching Light

I am a sunflower that shines in the dark
You can't hear me but you can see me
I only shine when there is peace in the air
If you try and touch me I will disappear
I'm only here to shine a light through
your darkened tunnel
When I appear your day is no longer bad
I make you turn from mad to glad

-K. S.

I am angry, a lion
I am depending on my mother, a kitten
I am the sunset sinking below the
equator, low self-esteem
I am full of different things,
a calculator
I am full of pollution, the earth
I am a book, full of intelligence
I am sugar, always so sweet
I am a soldier, protecting
my community
I am a cheetah, protective of my cubs
I am the sun, wise and bright

-T. B.

Let me tell me you about agitation...
I have felt so much agitation today.
I wanted to do something about it.
I wanted to cry it out.

The girls in this hall are agitating me!

You know what really agitates me? When people drive slow in the fast lane.

Or, when there are no real consequences to actions!

It agitates me when people say they're going to do something, and they don't.

Or, when people give up!

Agitation, I feel agitation when I am not understood.

Or when someone is immature!

When staff abuse their power, that agitates me!

Prolonging showers...

When we get upset about things that aren't important.

What is so agitating is when I wake up to problems every day, all that drama!

Hair in the shower and asking the same questions over and over - that is agitating!

-GROUP POEM -Horizon Juvenile Detention Center

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from the pencil to the page...

**Last night I took a different route home
taking a different route
changing my lifestyle with
more positive actions
trying to beat my case
and trying to make it home**

**I see myself
changing my life
being more mature
moving on to a better life
Being Brand New**

**I realized
I'm getting locked up too much
I'm missing out on life, being locked up
People moving on, changing their lifestyle
A lot of people are dying**

**A lot has changed
prices, getting older,
realizing what's important in life
People's attitudes towards life
and how they want to live it
My mind has changed to a mature matter**

-D. R.

**I live in a doorway
between two rooms. I hear inmates
yelling out their cells into the tier.
Mother crying at home for her
child. Newspaper spreading
the information about her child
to the community. Child behind bars
in disguise for a moment. When problems
happen there's no running away,
survival of the fittest is the game I play.**

**I peek
into the other room where
the hope is here. Being back
united with my
family. My dreams are
near. Mother shows that
beautiful smile that her
son hasn't seen in a
while, now that I've
returned I have responsibilities
as a man, no longer a child.**

-M. B.

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We want to remind anyone who has experienced abuse that it is never, ever your fault and that there are people who can help you to get safe, to stay safe and to heal. Even if it has been years since the abuse, it is totally normal to still need help. Please, talk to a teacher, a staff person, or someone else you trust. You can also call the National Youth Crisis Hotline (800.448.4663) or the Boys Town National Hotline™ (800.448.3000).

You are not alone!

An Introduction to Crossover Youth

Written by Victoria Sammartino

I began working on Rikers Island in 1999 and the adolescent girls who were my students would often reel off their brief biographies sharing stories of abuse, abandonment, heartbreak and loss. And a common story began to emerge. Many of the girls had been born to mothers who were too young, too unprepared, too unstable and/or too addicted to drugs to properly care for them and they had, in turn, been raised by a variety of female family members (grandmothers, aunts, older siblings), or by multiple foster families. Their fathers were often absent for a number of reasons: some were incarcerated, some had died very young, and many were simply “gone” or had never actually been present in the first place. Invariably, the girls had been “getting in trouble” in their pre-teen years and had been placed in group homes which they had then run away from. The incidents that followed were the ones that had landed them in jail.

If I had heard this story from only one girl it would surely have left an impression on me, but hearing it from so many girls left me with the terribly knowledge that this was a trend and that the systems that were designed to protect these girls and had seemingly acted in their best interests had indeed failed them profoundly.

And after eleven years of working with young people in the child welfare and juvenile/adult justice systems, I heard the term “crossover youth” for the first time in 2010 and I immediately recognized these students and the many other young people that Voices UnBroken serves. I then had the incredible opportunity to attend the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare: Multi-System Integration Certificate Program for Private Sector Leaders conducted by the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at Georgetown University’s Public Policy Institute. And I left that program and returned to New York City, where many important child welfare and juvenile justice reforms are underway, feeling hopeful that now is truly the time to change this awful phenomena and to ensure that we do our best by all of our nation’s children!

WHO ARE CROSSOVER YOUTH?

Crossover youth are defined as any youth who has a history of maltreatment (abuse/neglect) and has committed acts of delinquency, regardless of system involvement. This means that a young person who has experienced abuse that was never reported and then runs away from home and/or experiments with alcohol or drugs would technically be a crossover youth. Although many of the important new programs that are being developed are for young people who have “dually-involved” or “dually adjudicated” (young people who have been involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems), it is important for us all to remember that many of the young people who “get in trouble” are young people who have actually been hurt and need help.

Research about crossover youth has shown that they are often in the child welfare system for long periods of time, have been placed out of the home and oftentimes have experienced numerous placements, including multiple placements in congregate care (group homes)¹. Crossover is a significant contributor to disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system among African-American youth, as they are twice as likely as similarly situated white youth in the child welfare system to be arrested².

In Los Angeles, African-American youth are 14% of the total population, but make up 30% of the child welfare population and 41% of foster care placements. African-American youth are 54% of the total population that moves from child welfare to juvenile justice³.

The same study in Los Angeles showed that more females, who are the fastest growing population in the juvenile justice system, entered the juvenile justice system from child welfare than from any other single referral source⁴. Also in Los Angeles, 72% of crossover youth had a biological mother or father with a history of substance abuse, 24% had a history of mental health problems, and 36% had a history of criminal behavior. At least 33% of these crossover youth were exposed to domestic violence, and at least 17% were born drug exposed. The transition into adulthood is difficult for all adolescents and, as J.S. beautifully demonstrates in *The Letter I Never Wrote*, crossover youth are struggling to make this transition in the absence of healthy adult role models.

The Letter I Never Wrote

Dear Mom,

I used to always say that I hated you behind close doors. At this point in my life I'm learning to love you, even though you are not at your best. I used to hate you because you never knew what was going on in my life and yet, I was so close to you. There are still some things you don't know about me. I guess that's my fault too. You always tried to be my friend more than my mommy.

I don't want to hurt you by saying that I used to hate you but as I get older I understand your circumstances and why you weren't there as much as I needed you. I hope you understand me and what I'm trying to say. We are both grown so there's no need to hate now. My point is that I love you and I can actually say it more now and mean what I say.

Your daughter,
-J. S.

My emotional detachment is a product of my experiences. Just how you get angry, and snap beyond recognition, I shut down. I know it makes me seem uncaring, but really I'm just afraid of making the situation worse. I was taught growing up that "if you're not doing anything to help the situation, do nothing at all."

See, I've been walking on egg shells my whole life, unable to react. At times, I felt trapped by my emotions. This is something I had to control - conquer. It was weak to indulge in petty things like screaming, and completely beyond my place as a young child. I was there to be yelled at, never to dare to do the yelling.

So you see, you might think I have a cold, unbreakable exterior, but really, it's how I survived.

-N. R.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAUMA & FUTURE DELINQUENCY

"Child traumatic stress occurs when children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events or situations, and this exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced⁵. Traumatic events can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, community violence, and/or disasters⁶." Sadly, rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in juvenile justice-involved youth are estimated between 3%-50%⁷ making it comparable to the PTSD rates (12%-20%) of soldiers returning from deployment in Iraq⁸ and up to eight times higher than comparably aged youth in the general, community population⁹.

A young person who is hurt and scared can, unfortunately, be mistaken for a young person who is angry and defensive – and, understandably, crossover youth are often feeling all of these emotions at once. As N.R. courageously describes in the writing featured here, crossover youth develop coping and survival skills that can inadvertently come in the way of them to understand and express their feelings.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CROSSOVER YOUTH

Please, take the time to learn more about crossover youth and some of the strategies that have proven effective in addressing the issues that effect them. You can start by visiting the following websites:

Georgetown University's Center for Juvenile Justice Reform: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/>

The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (at the Hunter College School of Social Work): http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/juvenile-justice.html

And if you are interested in learning more about Voices UnBroken's work with crossover youth, I can be reached at victoria@voicesunbroken.org.

... I didn't have much of a choice
because through these years
I've always been left behind
meaning no love, the right to cry as a child
most of all no guidance
I used the only source I could
the streets taught me how to love
to survive being on the streets I nearly died
no mom or dad
don't you think that hurts me inside
the strong thoughts that go through my mind
who I would've been
or who I would've grown up to be
with the love or the company all those things
even though I don't have parents
and those types of things everybody else has
I will make sure that I am
the best mother to my children
and show them the best in
the world around me

- Angelina O.

Former Voices UnBroken workshop participant
& founding member of Voices In Action

¹ Ryan, J.P., Marshall, J.M., Herz, D., & Hernandez, P. (2008). *Juvenile delinquency in child welfare: investigating group home effects*. Children and Youth Services Review.

² Herz, D., & Ryan, J. P. (2008). *Building multisystem approaches in child welfare and juvenile justice*. Washington, DC: Center for Juvenile Justice Reform.

³ Ryan, J. P., Herz, D., Hernandez, P., & Marshall, J. (2007). *Maltreatment and delinquency: Investigating child welfare bias in juvenile justice processing*. Children and Youth Services Review, 29, 1035-1050

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2006). *Defining trauma and child traumatic stress*. Retrieved November 20, 2006, from www.nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=faq_def

⁶ Caporino, N., Murray, L., & Jensen, P. (2003). *The impact of different traumatic experiences in childhood and adolescence*. Emot Beh Disord Youth, (Summer): 63-64, 73-76.

⁷ Wolpaw, J. M., & Ford, J. (2004). *Assessing exposure to psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress in the juvenile justice population*. Retrieved from <http://www.nctsn.net/org/nccts/asset.do?id=515>

⁸ Roehr, B. (2007). *High rate of PTSD in returning Iraq war veterans*. Retrieved from <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/565407>

⁹ Abram, K.M., Teplin, L.A., Charles, D.R., Longworth, S., McClelland, G., & Dulcan, M. (2004). *Posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma in youth in juvenile detention*. Arch Gen Psychiatry, 61, 403-410.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT VOICES UNBROKEN

What I like most about the workshop is how I got to speak openly.
-Workshop Participant, Rikers Island

Voices UnBroken really allows participants the ability to release
the human spirit through writing.
-Jana Lynne Umipig, Workshop Facilitator

Loved your approach! You both show sensitivity and care.
-Training Attendee, April 2011

...On a deeper level, I believe that Voices UnBroken gives young men and women the
opportunity to explore and express their inner worlds in a creative way.
-Ashley Hamilton, Workshop Facilitator

I liked that I got to tell people my feelings, and they didn't judge me.
I felt like they understood me.
-Workshop Participant, Euphrasian Hall

Voices UnBroken workshops create a space for young people to build community, dare to
imagine, and articulate what is important to them in the world.
-Julia Taylor, Workshop Facilitator

I liked everything about the workshop. The [facilitator] made me feel confident!
-Workshop Participant, Horizon Juvenile Center

It's so important to meet the students wherever they are in that moment, however long or
short a time they've lived in the facility, however chaotic or dangerous their lives
may have been before. Not every student gets that "click" every time,
but the whole room feels it when it happens.
Quiet little miracles; Voices UnBroken at its best.
-Jackie Sheeler, Workshop Facilitator

If you are interested in learning more about Voices UnBroken's workshops and trainings,
contact our Program Director Mimi Acosta, at mimi@voicesunbroken.org.

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