

# VOICES UNBROKEN PROGRAM REPORT

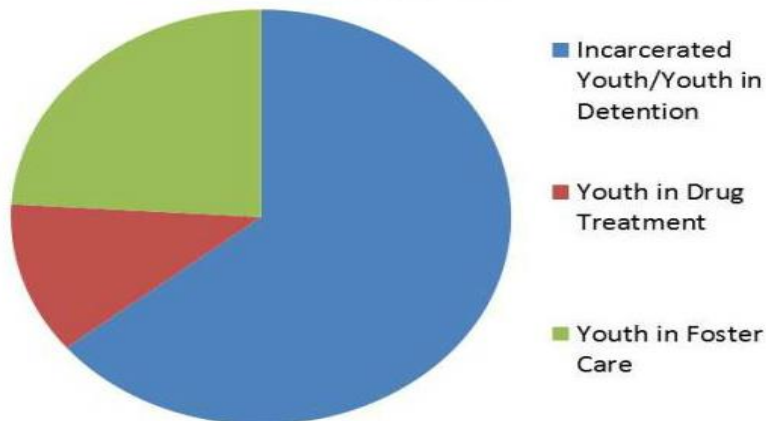


## JANUARY-DECEMBER 2011

Voices UnBroken is 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 facilities, and various other alternative and non-traditional 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.

This report summarizes all of Voices UnBroken's 2011 programming and outlines the programming we are planning for 2012. This year, Voices UnBroken proudly served approximately **400** young people who were in restrictive residential settings throughout New York City. In keeping with our mission, the majority of these young people were incarcerated, detained or in the foster care system. In 2011, Voices UnBroken workshops expanded to three new sites: Crossroads Juvenile Detention Center, Horizon Juvenile Center, and Good Shepherd Services' Peter J. Sharp House.

### Youth Served 2011



**Voices UnBroken**  
1414 Metropolitan Avenue, 2nd Floor, Bronx NY, 10462  
Telephone: 718-684-2125 Website: [www.voicesunbroken.org](http://www.voicesunbroken.org)

**Executive Director – Victoria Sammartino**  
[victoria@voicesunbroken.org](mailto:victoria@voicesunbroken.org)

**Program Director – Milagros Acosta**  
[mimi@voicesunbroken.org](mailto:mimi@voicesunbroken.org)

# VOICES UNBROKEN'S PROGRAMS

**Speaking Our Voices:** The core of Voices UnBroken's programs are socially, emotionally, academically, and geographically accessible workshops. These workshops introduce young people to practical communications tools. Writing sessions and group discussions develop participants' comfort with communication, while guided practice reinforces this learning. Speaking Our Voices is an initiative which brings creative writing workshops into a variety of community and alternative settings. During these workshops participants are able to write from the heart, speak for themselves and share their stories. The young people who participate in Speaking Our Voices workshops are primarily in foster care and live in restrictive residential facilities. All Speaking Our Voices workshops take place in partnership with other organizations and agencies, we refer to these as our "partner sites".

**2011, Voices UnBroken served 149 participants in the Speaking Our Voices Program.**

I seem to be confused  
but really I am lost in this lonely world

I seem to be talkative  
but really I am just looking for love, friends and family

I seem to be a loner  
but really I am mysterious about who I bring close

I seem to be sensitive  
but really I'm sensitive because of the little bit I've got in  
the past

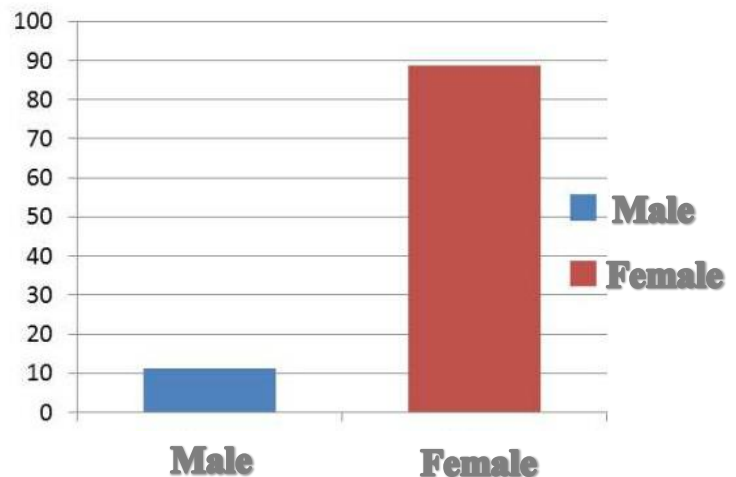
I seem to be loveable  
but really I am lost on how to show it

I seem to be soft  
but really I am strong with what I say

I seem to be a fashionista  
but really I am pretending to be happy

- Y.S., Voices UnBroken Workshop Participant

**Speaking Our Voices  
% of Youth Served  
by Gender**



**In 2011, Speaking Our Voices workshops were held at the following sites:**

**The August Aichhorn Center for Adolescent Residential Care**  
a long term psychiatric treatment facility for youth in the foster care system

**Good Shepherd Services' Euphrasian Hall**  
a rapid intervention center for adolescent girls in the foster care system

**Odyssey House Lafayette**  
a residential drug treatment facility for young women

## 2011 Speaking Our Voices Workshops

| Site   | # of Participants | Average Age | Female     | Male      | Workshop Structure  | Total # of Sessions |
|--|-------------------|-------------|------------|-----------|---|---------------------|
| August Aichhorn Center For Adolescent Residential Care | 32                | 16          | 16         | 16        | 1.5 hour per wksp session<br>1x per week<br>10-12 weeks<br>3 workshop cycles held | 31                  |
| Good Shepherd Services' Euphrasian Hall                | 68                | 15          | 68         | 0         | 1.5 hour per wksp session<br>1x per week<br>8-10 weeks<br>3 workshop cycles held  | 25                  |
| Odyssey House Lafayette                                | 49                | 19          | 49         | 0         | 1.5 hour per wksp session<br>1x per week<br>8-10 weeks<br>3 workshop cycles held  | 27                  |
| <b>Totals</b>  | <b>149</b>        | <b>--</b>   | <b>133</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>--</b>   | <b>83</b>           |

### Open Mic @ Starbucks

Since 2007, Voices UnBroken has held a monthly open mic at the Starbucks store in Parkchester. These open mics take place on the third Tuesday of every month and participants from our various Voices UnBroken workshop sites are joined by former workshop participants and other community members. Participants perform poems that they have written during a workshop or poems that they are inspired to write while listening to their peers during the open mic.

**Looking Forward:** Our 2012 workshops will begin mid-February. We work closely with staff at our partner sites to ensure that Voices UnBroken's workshops complement the services that young people are being offered. With this in mind, we also tailor each Voices UnBroken workshop to the culture of the facility where it's being held. For example, the staff at one of our partner sites are planning to dedicate each month in 2012 to a particular theme ("growth and change", "nonviolence", etc.) and we are working with them to make sure that Voices UnBroken workshops at that site correspond to the theme of each month.

## Speaking Our Voices Program Outlook for 2012:

### February-May

- The August Aichhorn Center for Adolescent Residential Care – 10-12 weeks/1x a week
- Odyssey House Lafayette – 10-12 weeks/1x a week
- Good Shepherd Services' Euphrasian Hall - 8 weeks/ 1x a week

### June-August

- The August Aichhorn Center for Adolescent Residential Care – 10 weeks/ 1x a week
- Odyssey House Lafayette – 10 weeks/ 1x a week
- Good Shepherd Services' Euphrasian Hall – 4 weeks/1x a week

### September-December

- The August Aichhorn Center for Adolescent Residential Care - 10-12 weeks/ 1x a week
- Odyssey House Lafayette – 10 -12 weeks/ 1x a week
- Good Shepherd Services' Euphrasian Hall - 8 weeks/ 1x a week
- 1 new site – 8 weeks/1x a week

**Voices Beyond Bars:** Voices UnBroken’s first workshops were with incarcerated girls and we have maintained a commitment to serving young people who are incarcerated or detained, even as we have expanded to serve others. Voices Beyond Bars workshops give young people who are incarcerated/detained new tools for coping with stress; moving past trauma; and learning to take responsibility for their actions and emotions. As with all Voices UnBroken workshops, participants improve their ability to speak in public, practice creative self-reflection, interpret challenges with a positive mindset, develop a hopeful future outlook, gain a willingness to engage in other essential services (counseling, re-entry, education, etc.), and increase confidence in their voice as a vehicle for change both in their lives and in the communities they come from and/or will return to upon release.

This year, we have added three new workshop sites to the Voices Beyond Bars program and we are proud to say that we are currently serving **ALL** of the girls in secure detention at Horizon Juvenile Center and Crossroads Juvenile Center, New York City’s two secure detention centers. We are also serving girls at Good Shepherd Services’ Peter J. Sharp House, a non-secure detention facility in The Bronx. And Voices UnBroken workshops for boys are being held at Horizon Juvenile Center and at the Robert N. Davoren Center on Rikers Island.

**This year, Voices UnBroken served 267 participants in the Voices Beyond Bars program.**

**With My Hands...**

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.

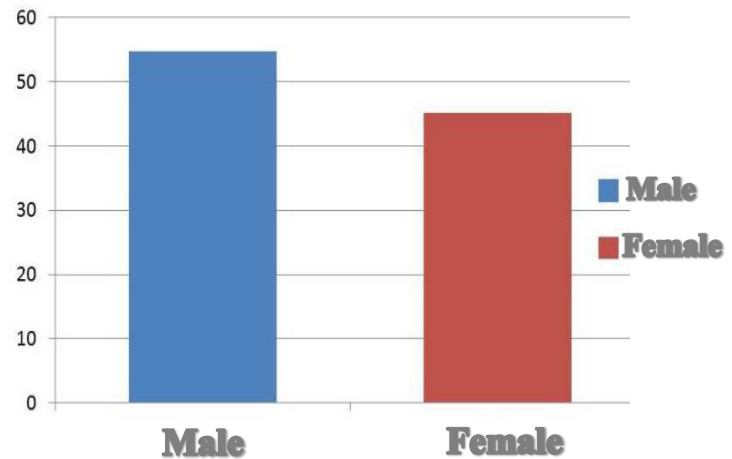
With my mind I can change the world and make history.

With my feet I can run the universe.

These hands want to change humanity, I want to see everyone progress one step at a time.

- M. L., Voices UnBroken Workshop Participant

**Voices Beyond Bars  
% of Youth Served  
by Gender**



**In 2011, Voices Beyond Bars workshops were held in the following facilities:**

**The Robert. N. Davoren Center on Rikers Island**  
(NYC Department of Correction)

the facility on Rikers Island that houses adolescent boys (16-18) who are incarcerated or detained

**Horizon Juvenile Center**

(NYC Administration for Children’s Services’ Division of Youth & Family Justice)  
a secure detention center for children who are under the age of 16 at the time of arrest

**Crossroads Juvenile Center**

(NYC Administration for Children’s Services’ Division of Youth & Family Justice)  
a secure detention center for children who are under the age of 16 at the time of arrest

**Good Shepherd Services’ Peter J. Sharp House**

a non-secure detention (NSD) facility for children who are under the age of 16 at the time of arrest

## 2011 Voices Beyond Bars Workshops

| Site   | # of Participants | Average Age | Female     | Male       | Workshop Structure   | Total # of Sessions |
|--|-------------------|-------------|------------|------------|--|---------------------|
| Robert. N Davoren Center on Rikers Island    | 116               | 17          | 0          | 116        | 1.5 hour per wksp session<br>2x per week<br>5 weeks<br>6 workshop cycles held  | 44                  |
| Horizon Juvenile Center                      | 110               | 15          | 80         | 30         | 1.5 hour per wksp session<br>2x per week<br>5 weeks<br>6 workshop cycles held  | 67                  |
| Crossroads Juvenile Center                   | 12                | 15          | 12         | 0          | 1.5 hour per wksp session<br>1x per week<br>5 weeks<br>2 workshop cycles held  | 12                  |
| Good Shepherd Services' Peter J. Sharp House | 29                | 15          | 29         | 0          | 1.5 hour per wksp session<br>4-5x per week<br>1 week<br>3 workshop cycles held | 11                  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                | <b>267</b>        | <b>--</b>   | <b>121</b> | <b>146</b> | <b>--</b>  | <b>134</b>          |

## One Time Events

### Women's History Celebration – March 2011

In March of 2011, Voices UnBroken participated in a Women's History event on Rikers Island by conducting a three-day series of workshops. The workshops were facilitated by Victoria and Mimi in the Rose M. Singer Center, which houses women and girls. Over the three days, Voices UnBroken worked with 8 women and assisted them in poetry writing. Activities from the Write Your Way curriculum was used as inspiration for the women to write about the experience of being a woman and they also wrote poems based on the writing prompt, "if I could tell the world how it feels to be woman, I would say...". The workshops culminated with a performance at the Rose M. Singer Center's Women's History Month celebration. The women read their poems in front of NYC Department of Correction staff and officers (including the Warden of the Rose M. Singer Center) and, perhaps most importantly, in front of their peers.

### Poem In Your Pocket Day & National Poetry Month – April 2011

In April of 2011, Voices UnBroken participated in Poem In Your Pocket Day and National Poetry Month by hosting a performance and open mic on Rikers Island for the women and girls housed at the Rose M. Singer Center. Voices UnBroken Board Member, Caridad De La Luz performed alongside Voices UnBroken's Program Director, Mimi Acosta, and former Voices UnBroken participant and volunteer, Angelina Ortiz. Approximately 60 women and girls attended the event and we had pencils and paper on hand so they could write. Approximately 10 women shared their writing during the open mic.

### Rikers Island, Robert N. Davoren Complex visit – June 2011

On June 8, 2011, Carlos Andres Gomez, a poet and performer, visited the boys at the Robert N. Davoren Complex on Riker's Island as a guest poet. He performed his poetry and listened to the young men read their poetry.

**Looking forward:** One of our goals is to expand Voices UnBroken workshops to serve all of the girls in secure and non-secure detention in New York City over the next two years. We plan to maintain our workshops in New York City's two secure detention facilities. And of the approximately six non-secure detention facilities for girls in New York City, we are currently working in one: Good Shepherd Services' Peter J. Sharp House.

## Voices Beyond Bars Program Outlook for 2012:

### February-May

- Rikers Island, Robert N. Davoren Complex – 10 weeks/ 2x a week
- Horizon Juvenile Center – 10 weeks/ 2x a week (Girls), 10 weeks/ 2x a week (Boys)
- Crossroads Juvenile Center – 10 weeks/ 2x a week
- GSS' Peter Jay Sharp House – 3 weeks/ 5x a week
- 1-2 New Sites

### May-August

- Rikers Island, Robert N. Davoren Complex– 10 weeks / 2x a week
- Horizon Juvenile Center – 10 weeks/ 2x a week (Girls), 10 weeks/ 2x a week (Boys)
- Crossroads Juvenile Center – 10 weeks/ 2x a week
- GSS' Peter Jay Sharp House – 2 weeks/ 5x a week
- 1-2 New Sites

### October-December

- Rikers Island, Robert N. Davoren Complex – 10 weeks/ 2x a week
- Horizon Juvenile Center – 10 weeks/ 2x a week (Girls), 10 weeks/ 2x a week (Boys)
- Crossroads Juvenile Center – 10 weeks/ 2x a week
- GSS' Peter Jay Sharp House – 3 weeks/ 5x a week
- 1-2 New Sites
- Additional New Site

In the group Voices UnBroken  
every voice gets heard,  
releasing inner feelings,  
by writing down whatever we're feeling.

I would like to get a job,  
that will feed my family,  
so my next generation survives.

Graduating high school is a major goal.  
It's up to you to be in control.  
You control your future.  
Being in college gets you acknowledged.

Voices UnBroken was the greatest  
token that was actually free.  
Groups on Tuesday and Thursday  
helped me.

- J.B, M.W, & B.H.  
Voices UnBroken Workshop Participants



**Voices in Action:** In 2011, Voices UnBroken launched the Voices in Action program, 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 for their/our communities. Voices in Action meetings are held once a month at Voices UnBroken's office, and participants are paid for their attendance and participation.

**The first year** of the Voices in Action program is designed to be a planning year. Voices in Action group members are using writing to explore their life stories along with the life stories of their sisters, friends, mothers, and other women and girls they are close to. They are also reading poetry, essays, articles, memoirs and research studies that will help to inform this process of telling, contextualizing and feeling agency over their stories. Voices in Action members have decided that their first project will be to write a book that uses memoirs and poetry to tell their stories. This book will also include resource information and informational interviews.

**Looking Forward:** In 2012, Voices in Action group members will complete the book they are working on. Copies of this book will be disseminated to young people who are still in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, and to the adults who work with young people in these systems. In the spirit of this being a leadership group, once the book is completed. Voices in Action's members will decide how they want the group to move forward.

I demand pencils for my writers unheard.  
I have seen 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 to describe exactly how I feel.  
I want to be whole.  
I believe she will see, I never meant for this to be.  
I have seen the angels of my nightmares.  
I want everyone to hear my voice.

- Written by Voices in Action Group Members

**Voices Ink:** The Voices Ink program projects the voices of our participants to make them heard in a larger community. This includes publication in journals, anthologies, and newsletters of other organizations. Voices UnBroken also publishes Voices Ink, a full-color magazine that features writing by workshop participants. In 2011 we published the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of Voices Ink, which featured program updates, organizational information, and lots of writing by participants in Voices UnBroken workshops.



**Looking Forward:** In 2012, Voices UnBroken will publish the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of Voices Ink! This special 10<sup>th</sup> edition will be a retrospective of Voices UnBroken's accomplishments over the past 10 years.

We will also publish an anthology of writing by Voices UnBroken workshop participants in all of our Bronx workshop sites, and 1-2 additional anthologies.

**Voices Network:** The Voices Network is a collective of former workshop participants, young people, teachers, writers, and other artists dedicated to the incorporation of student voices in a supportive community. The network involves training, workshops and conferences, among other forums. We also use the network to connect participants to community resources. Voices UnBroken is also a member of the Juvenile Justice Coalition and The Community Justice Network for Youth.

## Trainings

In 2011, Voices UnBroken hosted five free youth development trainings that were geared towards youth development professionals who were interested in using the arts to engage hard-to-reach youth, including those who are currently in or transitioning out of the foster care system and those who have experienced incarceration/detention. Participants in these trainings had the opportunity to try out - and take home - some of the activities featured in Voices UnBroken's Write Your Way curriculum. Staff from various organizations/agencies attended these trainings, including but not limited to, Community Word Project, the NYC Administration for Children's Services, the NYC Department of Probation and the CUNY M.A in Applied Theater Program.

***"The passion and energy you both had inspired me to trust creative forms of expression. I learned useful, applicable activities and how to open and hold a space."***

***-Joanna McClintick, Training Attendee***

### We Are The Ones Who...

We are the ones who will lead the revolution for the greater good of humanity.  
We are the ones who are raising the future.  
We are the few that care.  
We are the ones who laugh with the girls.  
We are the ones who are judged.  
We are the ones who speak with our hearts.  
We are the ones who will see the invisible.  
We are the ones who can overcome anything together.  
We are the ones who are making a difference.  
We are the ones who won't give up.  
We are the ones who are living proof that survival through hard times is possible.  
We are the ones who march in solidarity.  
We are the ones who give valuable life lessons.  
We are the ones who are preparing tomorrow's leaders.  
We are the ones that are called names that weren't given to us.  
We are the ones who believe in the inner strength of our youth.  
We are the ones who rely on one another for success.  
We are the ones who hold our heads up when we are scared.  
We are the ones who can change today's youth into tomorrow's leaders.  
We are the ones who stick together.  
We are the ones who love and care for our kids.  
We are the ones who survive, who are stronger and smarter than we might look.  
We are the ones who speak to the big picture.  
We are the ones who won't give up.

- Write Your Way Training Attendees  
April 2011

## Conferences & Professional Development

Voices UnBroken's staff make it a priority to share the work of the organization and to learn from other organizations that are doing similar and/or complementary work. In 2011, we attended various conferences and trainings. Here are two highlights:

### AWP 2011

From February 2-6, 2011, we attended 2011 AWP (The Association of Writers and Writing Programs) Conference in Washington D.C. Victoria, Mimi and Kamilah Aisha Moon, a Voices UnBroken facilitator, presented on a panel entitled, "Write Your Way – Teaching Writing in Non-School Settings". This panel was very well attended and a number of those present purchased curriculums.

### SOUL FALL 2011

In October of 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 many new activities and ideas that we are beginning to incorporate into our workshops and trainings.



**Facilitators:** All of our workshops are facilitated by experienced teaching artists. Our facilitators teach writing from a youth development perspective and are passionate individuals who believe in the power of art/writing as a tool for self-expression. The facilitators who work with Voices UnBroken continually bring enthusiasm and new ideas.

We are currently in the process of transitioning from contracting with teaching artists to facilitate Voices UnBroken workshops as independent contractors, to hiring teaching artists/workshop facilitators as part-time staff. We feel that this change is an investment in the relationships that we have with the teaching artists/workshop facilitators who work with us. We know that the stronger these relationships are, the higher the quality of the services we can provide.

*“It’s so important to meet the students wherever they are in at the moment, however long or short a time they’ve lived in the facility, however chaotic or dangerous their lives may have been. 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*

*“Voices UnBroken workshops breathe 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*

**Documentation and Evaluation:** Participants in Voices UnBroken workshops develop self-expression skills through creative writing and discussion exercises, which enable them to constructively communicate in situations where they previously would not have had the confidence to speak up. They also learn that their writing, their voices have the power to change people’s perceptions about them, in particular the adults who work with them, including teachers, social workers, corrections officers and staff in the facilities they’re housed in. More specifically, participants in Voices UnBroken workshops improve:

- Comfort with their ability to speak in public
- Their ability to engage in creative self-reflection
- Their ability to positively interpret challenges and develop a hopeful future orientation
- Their willingness to engage in other essential services (counseling, education, etc.)
- Confidence in their voice as a vehicle for change in their own lives and in the communities they live in

In order to track these outcomes, we currently use the following tools:

**Surveys & Sign-in Sheets:** We conduct pre-and-post-workshop surveys with workshop participants, and post-workshop surveys with site staff and facilitators. We also collect sign-in sheets for each workshop to track attendance.

**Weekly workshop check-ins:** Voices UnBroken facilitators document their workshop plans and their observances of its execution, including the challenges faced and successes gained. This information helps to document the effectiveness of Voices UnBroken’s innovative and transformative method of engaging oft-ignored youth.

**Participant Writing:** The best way to know what’s working and what isn’t is by listening to/reading the voices of our participants. We are specifically looking for the poems that indicate progress – is the young person writing more comfortably? Are they sharing more? Are they finding their own unique voice?

**“What I like most of about the workshop was working together”**

**-Workshop Participant, Robert N. Davoren Complex**

**“This workshop allowed me and other individuals to freely express ourselves. That’s great!”**

**- Workshop Participant, Odyssey House Lafayette**

**[In response to the question, “how will you use what you learned in the workshop in the future?”]**

**“Instead of fighting, write about it”**

**- Workshop Participant, Horizon Juvenile Center**