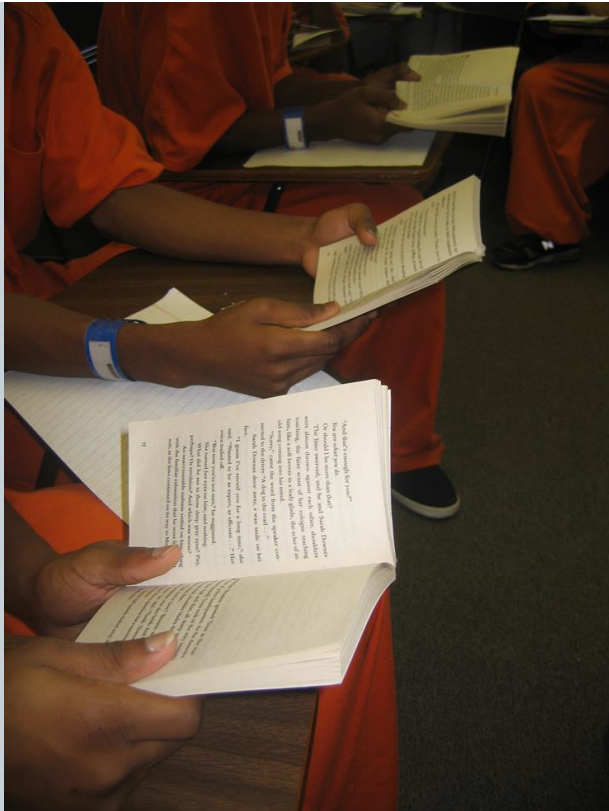


Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop



3 PHASES:
BOOK CLUB
CONTINUING SUPPORT
REENTRY SUPPORT

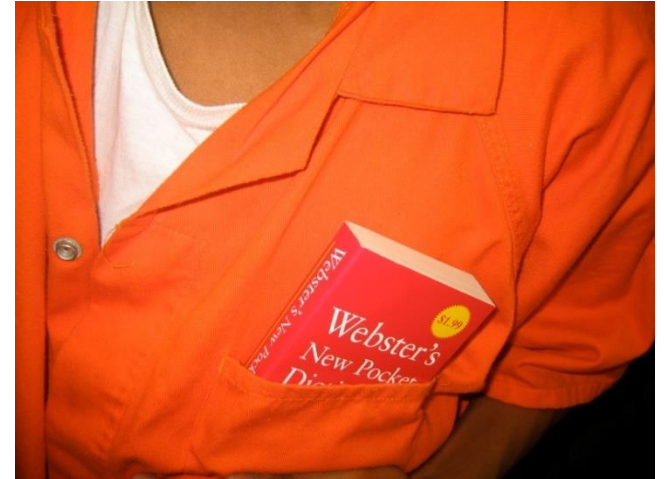
Hi, My Name is Eddie.

I was born and raised in Washington, DC. My mother was on drugs, and I was placed in foster care when I was two years old. The neighborhood I grew up in was rough. Someone was always getting shot or fighting. Sometimes people didn't have even \$4 in their pocket to buy something. I grew up around so much violence that I thought going to jail was cool. In my neighborhood, that was just what happened when you grew up.



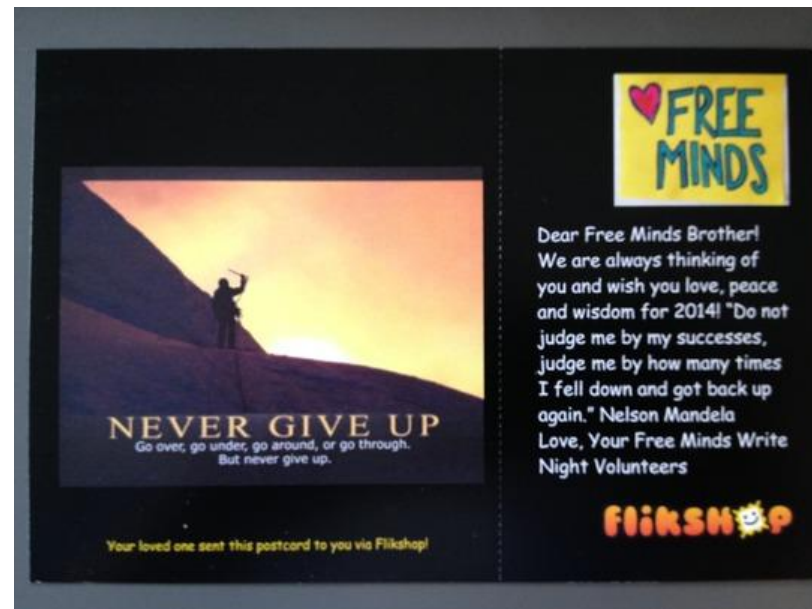
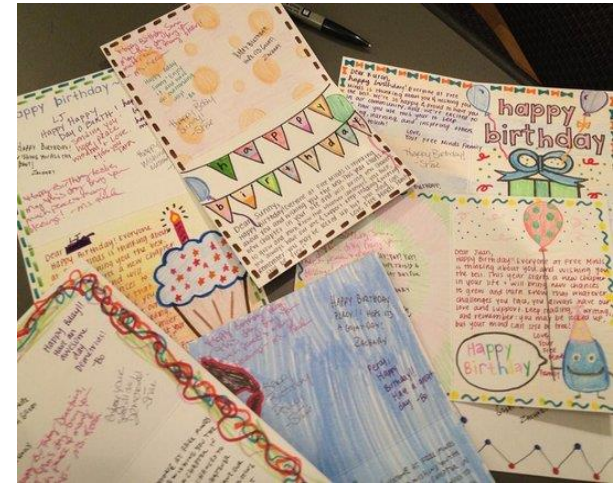
Book Club Phase

I met Free Minds when I got locked up at the age of 16. Even though I was a kid, I got charged as an adult and sent over to DC Jail. I didn't really like reading at first but Tara and Kelli told me to just try it. They told me not to worry about what somebody else would think and just to believe in myself. I started to like reading because it got my mind off my situation. Writing poetry was good too because I could express myself with something positive, not just by fighting or being angry.



Continuing Support

When I turned 18, I left the juvenile unit of DC Jail and got sent to the Feds. I was at a prison far from DC, with 30 and 40 year olds who are never coming home and had a negative mindset. But even though I was far, Free Minds didn't forget me. They sent me books, birthday cards, letters, a newsletter, and more. They encouraged me and helped me realize I really did want to change. I started to forgive because I wanted a better life than the streets. I wanted to make something of my future.



Continuing Support



Here are some of my Free Minds brothers preparing *The Connect*, the newsletter that we get in the Feds.

I like *The Connect* because it's written just for us. Anyone from Free Minds can publish their poems and articles and talk about the topics we care about.



Reentry Support: Apprenticeship

After 3 1/2 years, I finally came home. I was so happy to be out, but I didn't have a job and I was worried I might go back to my old habits on the streets. Instead, I did the Free Minds Apprenticeship, a program where I got paid to help in the office for a week. Free Minds helped me with my resume and taught me how to act professional on the job. By working for Free Minds, I also got to give back to my fellow Free Minds brothers who are still incarcerated and need support.





Reentry Support: Apprenticeship Graduation

The hard work of the Apprenticeship finally paid off. We had a graduation ceremony where guest speakers like author Michael Mattocks (top left) talked about their own journey from incarceration to success. I never graduated high school so the Apprenticeship was my first time getting a graduation certificate for anything. I was so proud!





Reentry Support: *On the Same Page*

On the Same Page is what we call our violence prevention program. It's a very important event because we get to share our stories with the community. We go to middle schools, high schools, colleges, and other groups and talk about how to prevent violence. We call ourselves Poet Ambassadors because we speak for the entire Free Minds family—we are the voice for all the youth that are still incarcerated and not here in person.



On the Same Page

Every year, Free Minds does an *On the Same Page* at the Hill Center in Capitol Hill. Over 70 people came to the last one and all to hear our stories!



Here I am making a thank you speech after Free Minds won the Mayor's Arts Award. I always wanted to win an award and be on stage so this was a dream come true for me!





Community Outreach: Write Night

At Write Night, people from the community read and respond to poetry by Free Minds members. It's a great way for us Poet Ambassadors to meet all different people, and for the members who are still locked up to receive feedback on their writing.





New Beginnings

Every Wednesday, Free Minds members go to teach writing workshops at New Beginnings—a juvenile detention center in Laurel, Maryland. It feels good to help the youth who are going through a similar situation that we did and to be a role model for them. I tell them that they can stay motivated and use writing to express themselves so that they don't end up in the adult system like I did.



My Free Mind

It has been a long road for me, but Free Minds has been there every step of the way. Now, I am working on getting a job and applying to go to school for graphic design. I have a five year old son who wants to be just like me, so I am setting a good example for him. Thanks to Free Minds, I know I can make my goals for a positive future a reality.

