



This is Gary. When he was a toddler, Gary's crack-addicted mom abandoned him on someone's doorstep, wearing nothing but a dirty diaper. He grew up in the streets of Washington, DC . At 16, he was arrested and sentenced to 7 years in federal prison...the last two of those he spent in a California penitentiary on solitary confinement—that's 23 hours every day with no human contact. The day of his release, an officer led Gary straight from solitary. He gave him 75 bucks, put him on a cross country Greyhound bus to DC and told him "good luck."



This year, 570,000 state and federal prisoners will be released. After years in prison, they'll step back into this world...estranged, alienated, and ill-equipped. And to make things worse, they'll come home to communities where people are afraid of them, and where the stigma they carry as ex-offenders often means they can't get a job or a place to live.

This situation poses an enormous danger for *all* of us. Because the disconnect results in more than 67% of people recidivating--committing new crimes and going right back to jail within the first year. It is to our *huge* collective benefit to create strong, positive connections between people in prison and their communities *BEFORE* they are released so we can stop this cycle, reduce crime, and begin to heal. And here's how we do it!

...A project called On the Same Page. It's already working locally in Washington, DC and now we want to implement it on a national level. The idea is simple: Use poetry to forge understanding and connection between incarcerated people and their communities. Right now DC prisoners send us hundreds of poems about their lives. We bring stacks of the poems to community or workplace gatherings called On the Same Page Write Nights.



DC Volunteers read them and respond in writing, literally “on the same page.” Then we send the pages – filled with comments in different colored ink—back to the incarcerated writers. The result is magic.

Studies show pro-social connections with people on the outside can dramatically reduce the chances a person will commit new crime. (In fact, among the participants in *our* program, the recidivism rate is three times lower than the national average!)

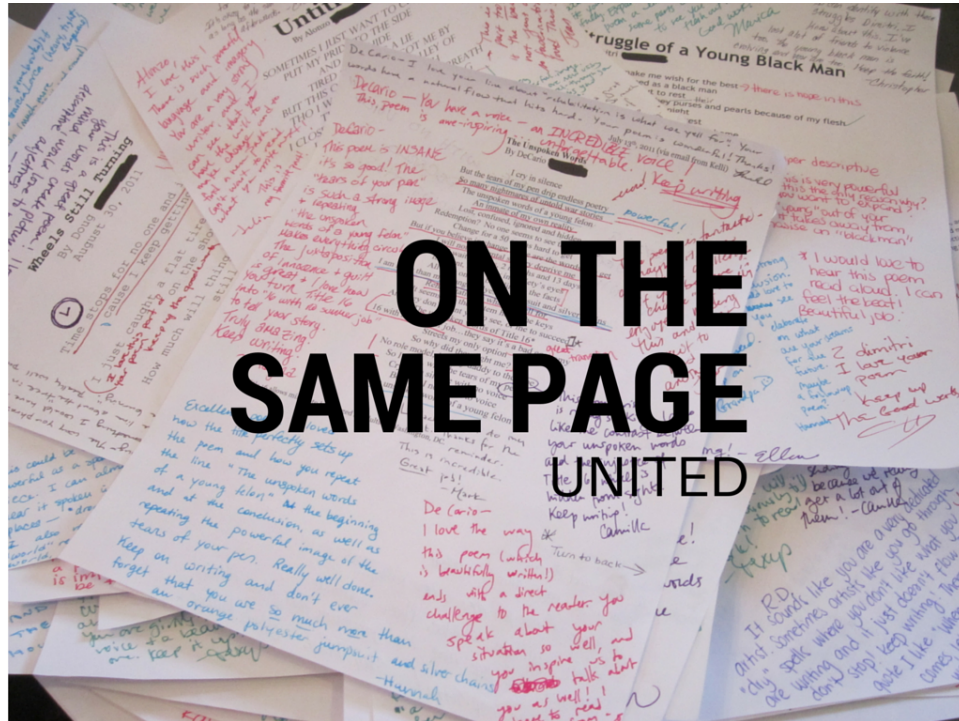
As word spreads, we can't keep up with the number of groups who want to hold these events. Because, it's clear -- the benefits flow *both* ways.



A doctor named Phil says:

*Reading these poems totally opened my eyes. Raw, powerful poems about remorse, regret and deep feeling. It made me see these kids as kids ...It made me want to **help them** succeed in changing their lives.*

This bonding...this connecting...this being open to another human being...*This* is what leads to communities that encourage the success of ALL their people.



With \$25,000 we can implement this project on a national level—On the Same Page UNITED. The money will fund a part-time staff person to coordinate the national project establishing at least 4 new site cities in the first year. We'll produce a digital tool-kit, including a video and “how-to” guide on holding successful On The Same Page events in *your* community.



So *what about Gary?* You're wondering. He has a full-time job, a strong relationship with his mom, and volunteers at our events. In September, Gary starts college.

By recognizing our shared humanity, we can build stronger, safer and better communities. We all just need to get, *On the Same Page*.