

Speaker 2 ([00:00:01.08](#))

This event started when we had... We invite guest authors and poets to come into the jail. We had a poet, Washington Wizards, Eitan Thomas, who has unfortunately been traded now. But he came in and he read his own poetry, which we thought was great. All of a sudden, one of the kids said, Can you read mine? We never even thought about it. They read his. They were so excited. All of a sudden, we were like, We got to have a poetry reading. Of course. And we have to invite the community.

Speaker 3 ([00:00:34.02](#))

This is a poem I wrote since I came home when I was doing my internship with Free Minds. It's called The Street Watch by I learned. You got your eyes on the corner thinking you see cops, but all the time you too blind because really the street's watch. Every move you be making, thinking your peeps clocking, you ain't hifted on the rip, it's only the street watch. But Why? You was child and he raised you here, so the streets don't keep you on his side, so your days is near. The streets don't ever want to hear you say, I made it through. He just wants you to have a seat so that he could raise you, too. The streets will promise the girls clothes and money that you will never see. He laughing because he think it's funny you, the dummy he know will never leave. When you finally realize this ain't for you, dog, that's when the streets stop. But until then, you can't win because, yeah, the streets watch. That's it.

Speaker 2 ([00:01:31.04](#))

Our program serves about 300 young men. What we are is a nonprofit that works with teenage boys at the DC Jail who are charged and incarcerated as adults. They're in the adult system for felony charges. We believe that books and writing can change lives. We do a book club, just like a regular book club, where we choose books and we discuss. It's all based on themes that our young men can relate to about life on the streets and changing. Then we do creative writing, so we do poetry workshops. We then follow them as they're transferred to federal prison, where we send them books, continue to send them books, set them up with a pen pal, and work on their re-entry when they come home. When they come home, they're in the re-entry phase, and we help, number one, get back into school and jobs. So it's a whole circle.

Speaker 4 ([00:02:28.03](#))

How did it get Things ain't been like this. Things ain't been like this. They got a guy like this once. Bush got hit. They got wars with the money, but the full-scale 100. Man, I used to love this country, but this country's getting ugly. Why would I go to our army, fight for some country? Shapping me up, shitting me off, sleeping me on some concrete. Title 16 is the law that says, When you're 16, you could be tried as an adult. I thought, Robert, you was supposed to be a crime. They over there fighting this war, taking over from Afghanistan. Democrats and Republicans, man. That's for the ropings, man. What's good with my brothers in the hood that's been smuggled down? A donkey or an elephant has never been seen in the hood. Only rats, raccoons, and pit bulls in the hood. Only rats, raccoons, and pit bulls in the hood.

Speaker 1 ([00:03:14.14](#))

We're roaches in the house.

Speaker 4 ([00:03:16.09](#))

It's about a three-room house, eight folks in the house. Let's say two to a room, that's the couple on the couch. And the fact that the problem, you won't even have them out, it's not the line of the three. We're the line of the It's really the books.

Speaker 2 ([00:03:37.13](#))

They read about somebody. If Nathan McCall can do it and makes me want to holler, they have a roadmap that they can do it. That is the key, is the books and the reading about others who have done it, who've gone before, met these challenges, and succeeded. Then the writing, the feelings, the emotions these kids go through in a violent in prison, in families that have forgotten about them, through writing, they can express their feelings of loneliness, anger, instead of resorting to the cliché of picking up a pen instead of a gun. It's really true.

Speaker 3 ([00:04:14.06](#))

We got guys who came home and got their GDs while I was locked up. I got my GD when I was 17. I was supposed to be going to college in January. Most of the themes of the writing of our member center around certain themes of feeling lonely and not connected and wanting to be connected to their moms and feeling that they are a big disappointment and they want to prove to them that they can be a success.

Speaker 2 ([00:04:47.10](#))

The feeling of not having a father, as you can imagine, most of our members have never had a father in their life, but they also many have young children themselves, so they want to be a better parent to their kids than they had themselves.

Speaker 1 ([00:05:04.00](#))

This poem was written by me. It was dedicated to my daughter when I was locked up. So this is where my daughter right here is. Don't be like, I can't explain on how bad I feel inside. Waking up in the cell sometimes daddy cry, and that don't make your father any less as a man. I love you before my heart, and when you get older, you will understand that your dad made a lot of wrong choices. I think I'm going crazy because I keep hearing you and your mom's voices saying, Baby, stay strong. Daddy, please don't be away alone. It brings tears to my eye when I hear the pain of your mother voice on the phone. It hurts me to know that I left you all in the world alone. But I told your mother I'm ready to make a change. For my daughter I'm a man up and turn my back on the street game. Plus, I must say your mother's strong for holding the fort down. I once was a boy, but daddy's a man now.

Speaker 2 ([00:06:00.10](#))

We don't know if anyone that's doing youth in the adult system exactly like ours, but we're spreading the word. It's spread to... We've done trainings in Baltimore, Maryland. We want to get the word out so everybody can use this method because it's very easy and it's very effective.

Speaker 5 ([00:06:24.14](#))

We left that land. It's cold here, I'm not going to say that I'm not going to call you, but I can see the stars through your mires. Search for love and places. The love of all your since. Trying to survive through your eyes and your steps. Overcome a option to fix what parts left. Can we go? I mean, here we go. We are messing not to this about. Can walk this in the air, but those are coming out. And we got voices on the street, so we are.