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InsideOUT Writers (IOW) received a special invitation to attend the Marvel Comics’ Eternals Movie Premiere on October 18, 2021. Movie Director Chloe Zhao made the special invitation recognizing the IOW’s work with current and formerly incarcerated youth including foster youth, at-risk youth, and youth in the County diversion system. IOW Alumni got to see the cast including Salma Hayek, Angelina Jolie, Richard Madden, Kumail Nanjiani, Gemma Chan, and many others. It was a night to remember and our alumni members definitely had a good time while feeling a sense of belonging in a space typically reserved for Hollywood insiders. We recognize that by having our members in these kinds of spaces only encourages them to pursue their dreams and believe that they are achievable.
Thanks to InsideOUT Writers ambassaor, Elvira K. Gonzalez, our Alumni members were invited to participate in the Third Literary Accelerator Writers Inkubator, a four-week program teaching our members how to write a book and make a proposal that makes book deals. The program connects our members with accomplished professionals in the publishing and film industry.

Even after the program is over, our members will have a dedicated team of industry professionals working along their side to get their stories in the hands and hearts of readers and film audiences everywhere. We are beyond excited for the four IOW alumni members who received full scholarships to participate in this program and wait to hear of their success in the months to come.

IOW has been fortunate to be able to collaborate with various institutions of higher education. Every time, the Writing Circle space is shared with attendees who don’t know exactly what it is they’re walking into. Without fail, they walk away forever changed. There is something that can’t be replicated about being in an environment where trust and respect are not only sacred, they are expected. For University students, an IOW Writing Circle can seem like a scary or dangerous place. Sharing vulnerabilities, looking honestly at oneself - those aren’t generally the top priorities of most college students outside of their academic performance. But, as Dominican University students have discovered, there is nothing dangerous or scary about it. Starting in October, our alum, Olivia Carrasco and volunteer Marcia Salvary led a series of Virtual Writing Circles with students from Cheramine (last name?) course, (course title?).
Various themes have been explored and the emotional impact and resulting vulnerability have opened doors those university students hadn’t realized were closed. As one student responded, “While I was sharing my story about the fears that I have for my future, I felt as if a weight was being lifted off of my shoulder and I enjoyed how therapeutic it felt for me. While I was listening to the personal stories of those in my breakout room, I felt as if the fears we had in common allowed us to feel like we were all a part of a supportive community that can make us feel less alone in our time of struggle” Olivia and Marcia will continue to facilitate Virtual Writing Circle sessions with Dominican University students until December.

Looking to make a difference? Apply for the 2022 California Justice Leaders Program

The California Justice Leaders-AmeriCorps Impact Justice 2022 Application is now open. If you have been or know someone who has been system-impacted, is between the ages of 21 to 30, and wants to make a difference in those returning from incarceration, then let them know to submit their application within InsideOUT Writers. We have two available spots for the 2020 cohort. Selected CJL members will serve a 900 hour, 11-month term of service as a navigator for youth and young adults currently in or released from California’s Division of Juvenile Justice facilities. Members will build awareness of California’s new Honorable Discharge petition, work to increase utilization of the Honorable Discharge (HD) petition process and guide youth and young adults on a successful re-entry pathway. Members will also provide re-entry support for young adults who have been released from other California juvenile justice facilities. Please send an email to emmacecilia@insideoutwriters.org for more information or to apply.
Lastly, we've been holding our Annual Holiday Party on December 16th, 2021. 2020 and 2021 have changed the meaning of connection. These past years have changed the meaning of sharing space, the value of sharing time and impact of the words shared when we can connect. As a community, the sincerity of our intentions and the way we reflect together virtually has become as profound as what we accepted as normal when we were in-person. Our alums are just as supported, just as welcomed and wanted as they always have been. As staff, we are just as grateful to be able to celebrate all of the believes, hearts and minds that make IOW, IOW.

First up, on Thursday, October 28th, 2021 our insightful new facilitator, Shane Jones will be leading us a journey through haunted mansions, frightening woods and a challenge of introspection, armed with little more than a mysterious suitcase and a steel sense of resolve. We may laugh, we might gasp in horror, but we will most certainly have fun. Costumes are heavily encouraged, and we know our alums and community are going to show up ready to give us all a proper fright!

Next, we’ll be hosting our Annual Giving Thanks Celebration on November 18th, 2021. While we may not be eating traditional Thanksgiving fare in person, we will be sharing laughter, love and positive and honest reflection in a safe space, together. Each one of us will have the opportunity to reflect on what we are thankful for from this past year, the lessons we’ve learned and the ways we’ve grown, surrounded virtually by a community who has grown in heart and strength with each passing day.

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We have been so fortunate to be able to continue our Alumni Writing Circles virtually. This past year, we delved into topics that have included current events, creative writing, and deconstruction of the systems and ideals we have held societally. We have also continued our Virtual Writing Circle Workshops to allow our volunteer Facilitators to break into an idea over an extended period of time and allow our alums to do a deep dive into their understanding and experience of various topics.
Creative Writing Enneagram Survival Showdown!... with April Hong

What do Oprah, Johnny Depp, Alicia Keys and Daenerys Targaryen all have in common? Each one of them share a personality type with one of the participants of a profound and delightful Virtual Writing Circle led by our facilitator April Hong! On top of that, each one of them survived our Creative Writing Survival Showdown!

What’s a Creative Writing Survival Showdown you ask? Well, it’s simple. Take a pen, grab some paper, and find yourself transported to the middle of a hair-raising survival situation! Will your celebrity Enneagram twin survive on a desert island with total strangers? Guess you’ll just have to start writing to find out! Who knows, maybe you and Oprah have a lot more in common than you may think! It’s important to remember that even as our alums take those deep dives into the darker recesses of their souls, that doesn’t have to be a depressing or lonely dive. You can have fun as you reckon yourself with your strengths and weaknesses and realize how one is as much the other. One might even find that the better one knows themselves the more insight they may have into others. By thinking outside the box, our alums were able to find a way to take an alternative route to introspection, healing and growth – and have fun in the process!

The American Dream Tree with Marcia Salvary and Aaronn Wilson

"Rent still due at the end of the month. All the same to me. Because money don’t grow on trees, well, at least not on mine. That’s alright because hope doesn’t grow on your tree. Well guess what? It’s abundant in mine. Uncle Sam you scared? That you left me heartbroken but I didn’t allow my heart to forever break? You scared? That a 17 year old stands before you, washed in passion. Can’t even drive yet. Hey, can’t even vote and yet I see the sweat on your forehead. A 17 year old who eats Jiffy out of the jar, has got Uncle Sam shaking. Good, because it’s not just me."

- Ariel Gilbert

The American Dream (Tree)
So beautifully said by one of our newest members. Thanks to our incredible facilitators volunteer, Marcia Salvary and our own alum, Aaronn Wilson, our Virtual Writing space was opened for a necessary and empowering conversation. This Virtual Writing Circle reminded us that every moment that could be an opportunity to give up, is truly just a reminder that hope and change is waiting around the corner - if one can give themselves the chance to see it.

Politics is daunting. It’s easily something that can overwhelm and destroy one’s sense of agency. But the point of any system of government, even ones as flawed as ours, is that you can change what isn’t working. Our votes truly matter – and we do have the power to change what affects us on the outside, if we give ourselves the chance to overcome our fear of powerlessness on the inside.

The Ghosts of Our Past Who Show Us Our Future taught by Shelley Diamond

There are those in our past who serve as the perfect reflection of our future, and those who serve as the shadow of our potential. Often, it is not until we have come face to face with the way time has wrought change on those we believed we knew best, looked up to, thought could do no wrong; that we fully realize how much our light has strengthened as we’ve moved along our separate paths. Our facilitator Shelley Diamond, led a powerful Virtual Writing Circle to open the space to this conversation. As always, our alums showed up with uncompromising honesty as they reflected on themselves and the paths their souls have traveled to share space and time with us each week. Our alum, Gi Diaz so beautifully illustrates this in her poem, Phoenix.

"I am the vision behind the photo..
I am a Phoenix regenerating with each experience..
I am the arrangement of a symphony..
I am a dormant bud eager to sprout after a fire...
I am a teacher guided by the student..
I am a mirror..
I am ME, a reflection of us ALL..."

-Gi Diaz
When darkness encroaches, sometimes there is no desire to see the light in the periphery of our vision. That’s okay. Sometimes, that is a very good thing. We’re taught from birth to fear dark, fear different, fear the newness and rawness that comes from tears. But what if we just...sit with it for a moment? What if we don’t run? When we’re ready to look up, what do we see? If we choose to, maybe we realize how close the light has always been, patiently waiting just beyond. If we choose not to, there is no shame in allowing ourselves a little longer to sit in the silence and stillness of ourselves. The light will be there, when we are ready for it. Maybe we will find that a newer, rawer, stronger and more peaceful version of ourselves on the other side. That is the hero’s journey.

Our superstar facilitator, Ana Lilia chose to guide our alums down the path of the hero’s journey and what it truly means to “sit in one’s own shadow.” It can be a harrowing experience to have to face what seems to be the scariest, most unwanted parts of ourselves. But oftentimes, that part of us doesn’t need much other than a chance to exist and be accepted – just like anything else. Fortunately, our alums are always willing to narrate their journey and give a hard look straight into what scares them the most. There is so much to learn about oneself in the stillness of the dark and just as much when we re-embrace the light. During an IOW Virtual Writing Circle, there is nothing that can stop our alums from taking the hard road, so long as it is the honest and the healing one.
The mission of InsideOUT Writers is to reduce the juvenile recidivism rate by providing a range of services that evolves to meet the needs of currently and formerly incarcerated youth and young adults.

Using creative writing as a catalyst for personal transformation, these young people are empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully re-integrate into our communities becoming advocates for their future.

PEN. PAPER. PERSEVERANCE.
I write from the inside out.