Spring 2021 Zine
A Fresh Start
Spring 2021: A Fresh Start

You cannot be a writer unless you see yourself as one. Each program begins with an exploration of ourselves as writers, creators, and communicators. Some work is developed by the individual, and some work is a collaborative effort.

Enjoy youth pieces from Podium’s community partners:

Armstrong HS Center for Empowerment
NextUp RVA
Highland Springs High School Mentorship Program

Cover interpolation from vecteezy.com
By Podium Alumni Writers, Tristan Wynn & Kavin Jackson

Do you remember your teen years? All the chaos and uncertainty about not knowing who you were and what it was like to have a voice. What if you had someone or a group of people to help you find that voice and have a safe place to use it?

In 2008, David L. Robbins and Lindy Bumgarner saw a void that needed to be filled. Many bright young people needed to find their voices and use them to change the world, so they founded Podium RVA. This program teaches writing and communication to city youth in grades 6 through 12 with the goal to inspire youth creativity in writing and create safe spaces for them to express themselves freely and as their authentic selves. There is no real limit on the students. Podium participation is free of cost and open to all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or romantic orientation.

In addition to weekly program meetings, Podium hosts open mics where students can share their work to their peers, families, and with alumni of the program and publishes youth zines and literary journals. Open mics are always a wonderful place to be, and even when they are hosted virtually, it is a great time to just laugh and hear everyone’s voices, stories, experiences, thoughts, music, and pieces of poetry. Every summer, Podium offers the Teen Professional Conference to inspire and offer mentorships and networking opportunities. Meeting with community role models from industries like news networks, television production, business entrepreneurship, and more, youth create and follow the paths that they choose to make for themselves and their futures.

With over 400 students participating annually, Podium’s impact grows as support and interest in the literary arts and finding one’s voice increases. Podium youth leaders find their voices, hone their skills, and gain access to more opportunities within writing-related fields. Overall, Podium serves as a critical support system for those going through what may be some rough and lonely years. Vicki Yeroian, the executive director, is not only wonderful at leading programs and pushing youth to both get themselves out there and into leadership positions, but she also serves as an excellent friend and mentor for those she meets by truly making them feel at home with the group.

The people we met through Podium have changed our lives for the better. It has always been a warm and loving environment for everyone to be themselves and engage in brain-turning conversations. If you are looking for a safe and fun after school program in Richmond, Podium is there for you.
Paying Attention
Xzavier W.
Henderson MS

You need to know what you are doing, and instructions help with that. You need to go top to bottom before doing your task. Active listening helps someone see and understand what others are talking about. You can practice it by listening closely, of course, and by thinking hard about what others are talking about, so you can build on those ideas. In the long run, these skills help you get through difficult things that happen in your life. You may also need to listen to certain people to succeed, like your teachers, and to get through school.

The Eye
Aniyah R.
Armstrong HS

The homeless and people who are poor are often the same thing. Listen, the people who are poor don't have enough money for food, clothing, and the things that they need to survive, but they will push themselves in a way that they will not give up. People without money are hustling for their family and friends. They have rough times.

Now, just think about how the homeless got to be homeless. They've had some harder times or been in places where they couldn't stand up for themselves. We should stand up against the things that create homelessness.

Think of It
Xzavier W.
Henderson MS
I’ve always had a love-hate relationship with social media. I’ve been on social media since I was 11-years-old. I started on Google Plus and Hangouts, which were my versions of Facebook and Skype at the time. I would repost chain mail, join One Direction fan groups, and post occasional heavily filtered selfies. Towards the middle of 6th grade, my friend and I decided to finally get Instagram.

We were both pretty scared of the idea of being on a popular, thriving app surrounded by much cooler peers. After installing that app, I would experience my first cyberbully and unsolicited nude photo within a year. Throughout my middle school days, I downloaded Tumblr, Snapchat, Twitter, and other social media apps that were catalysts to my angsty emo phase. I’ve always used these apps to express who I am and what I like during different phases of my adolescence. I’ve had accounts where I made fan edits of my favorite band members, and I’ve had anime blogs on Tumblr.

All of those accounts and blogs, that have now been demolished, led to my peak on social media, a kpop spam account on Instagram. The first spam account I made “bonelessnamjoon” was created in summer 2017, a time where spam accounts on Instagram and Twitter were in their own era of memes and drama. Not to mention, this was during my post-edgelord, deep-fried-memes, leafyishere-subscriber phase, but I was still swept away by Korean boy bands and 2-D characters. That account ended up deleted due to circumstances I cannot say, but I reached two thousand followers before it was terminated.

After deletion, I was in a state of shock. I couldn’t believe the only thing that made me happy, a place where I could be my true self, was gone. I made more friends than imaginable, and it was one of the first times in my life when I felt proud of something. I’d like to think I had influence within that community. I made people laugh, and I made friends from all over the world.

Looking back at it now, I feel pretty bittersweet. Social media is probably my most used source of communication. I get to see myself and others create and grow within each post. Most will say that none of this really matters, and maybe it doesn’t, but it did to me and so many others. At the same time, social media isn’t real life, and even I’m still getting used to that fact.
Feel
Anonymous Submission
Armstrong HS

Why is it that I don't have any respect for myself because I don't do things your way?
Why am I even here if you hate me like you say?
All I want is the love you have for everyone else.
You make my heart, but
You've made me hate myself.
If you hate, why do you keep me here?
I just want to be happy,
Is that too much to ask?
I'm sorry I'm not perfect anymore.
Maybe I should just go; you wouldn't care anyway.

Six Word Story
Imani A.
Armstrong HS

She
realized
she
was
worth
it.
Love
Drusilla P.
Thomas Jefferson HS

I want to open my heart with a scalpel
to let you see my ventricles,
my valves.
To feel my heart beat with hands that smell like bergamot,
dripping with my love, an image of spider lilies.
I wish to feel your fingers under my rib cage,
to know my lungs and to plant roses in them.
Daisies and callas and monkshood.
I crave the wisteria on your breath.
Sigh into me,
would you?

The Intelligent Boy
Jamari T.
Armstrong HS

There once was a boy who was stupidly intelligent
who lived in a neighborhood that wasn't very benevolent.
He survived throughout life looking the most elegant,
but there were always people hating who weren't even relevant,
and never did he know they were simply just a fragment.
What Matters To Me
Tamiyah C.
Metro Richmond Boys & Girls Club

As a young child, my parents have always allowed me to voice how I feel about a situation and acknowledged that how I feel is valid. In May of 2020, a tragic experience happened to someone who is African American, and his name was George Floyd. The wrongful death of him sparked protests, social demonstrations, marches, and tons of social media voices. It not only hurt his family, but it has hurt other people who are African American. Living in Richmond during this time, a hub for historical activism, has shown me that this has to change, and we won’t stop until it does.

We, the citizens of Richmond, have protested peacefully, and in return, we received hateful abuse from people who are supposed to protect us. Instead of allowing our voices to be heard, the city set a curfew and increased police attention. Why can’t we express how we feel without being attacked? Why should the color of our skin cause us to be treated differently and looked at differently? All we want is justice for every Black person who has been killed, injured, or put away for no reason. We want to be seen as equal and treated fairly. Why is that so hard to ask for? I am proud to be an African American. We have created history along with others who feel the injustice of our race. We have gotten racist statues taken down, and we turned the most racist statue, Robert E. Lee, into a memorial with national recognition. Not to remember what he has done, but to remember that history can’t be changed but the meaning behind something can.

The Boys & Girls Club taught me that my voice matters. They provided me the resources and networks I needed to get something done and helped me instill the confidence I need to speak up and speak. You never know when there may be another person who feels the way I do, but they are too afraid to say it. They provided me with opportunities to go to multiple rallies such as the Red4Ed rally to increase teacher pay and other necessities. I was also able to attend a peaceful showing of talented African Americans who live in my city. My club has hosted zoom meetings, like these with Podium, and field trips that offer safe and supportive spaces to discuss what was happening in my community and why.

In the future, I want youth, such as myself, to be allowed the many opportunities that I had. Whether it be activism or just having someone or somewhere they could confide in and be comfortable as themselves. I want future club members to have the same support from staff when their voices, feelings, and opinions are heard. The biggest thing that I want is for Black Lives to Matter. I want justice. I want equality. I want to know that other Black queens and kings don’t have to fear for their life or safety when going out. It will happen, and when it does, then and only then, will I be satisfied.
Skills I Prepared to be a Mentor

Problem Solving
Georgio H.

I am good at problem solving. I know this because since I was little I’ve always been engaged in activities and real life situations that display that skill. Leave it up to me to have something solved if it’s put on my plate. I take a second to work through things and try to understand and see how I can fix it or improve it. That’s how I realized I was good with problem solving. I am always looking forward to improving or figuring out the end result.

Relationship Building
Matthew B.

I think I’m good at building relationships because I previously did some community work with complete strangers, and we still keep in contact with each other after a few years.

Obstacles I’ve Overcome

Matthew B.

I overcame losing both friends and family to help me understand that life is short. You only have limited time on Earth to enjoy yourself. Work towards your goals now so you can just relax in the future.

Georgio H.

One obstacle I overcame to be where I am now was worrying a lot about what other people think. I wasn’t focusing on myself, and I let others’ opinions overpower my own abilities. I was able to take a second and realize how much more I could be doing instead of limiting myself for the next person. This resulted in unhealthy friendships being broken, and I created a space to re-align for me and what I want to do for myself.
Why Did I Become a Peer-Mentor

My 4 Whys
Michael A.

WHY: I became a mentor because I enjoy helping others.
WHY: Because I understand how hard this new virtual way of learning can be.
WHY: This method is very hard to learn from and stay focused. Especially if it your first year in high school, it's going to be painful.
WHY: Virtual learning is a new concept that has become our normal, and we are still in a learning period with computer and internet issues.

My 5 Whys
Taivyon P.

WHY: I became a mentor because I remember how hard it was when I first started high school and how complicated things were for me.
WHY: Starting high school is a big step and is not always easy for some.
WHY: There are more things to focus on when you're in high school, like classes, jobs, friends, etc.
WHY: Balancing school work and actual work can make students feel overwhelmed.
WHY: Sometimes high school life is too much to focus on all at once or so suddenly without help.
Connect with us!
@PodiumRVA
www.podiumrva.org