



Q4 NEWSLETTER

RICHMOND'S WRITING AND COMMUNICATION
NON-PROFIT FOR YOUTH



Teens and staff during Podium's Dec 2021 Open Mic at the Boys & Girls Club Teen Center

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FALL 2021 REVIEW & LOOK INTO WINTER PROGRAMS

BY CANDACE WEATHER

Fall 2021 welcomed youth back to school in-person, and we continued our in-person after-school model. Serving 88 youth across 7 programs and our open mic, Podium partnered with 21st Century Learning Centers at Armstrong HS, George Wythe HS, and John Marshall HS to bring our Power of the Pen program. We also partnered with Metro Richmond Boys and Girls Clubs. At our Southside location, we hosted story writing where we collectively wrote an action-packed short story. We covered college and career prep with our East End Location. Next Up RVA was also an amazing partner who helped us bring Prep Your Next Step programming to our middle school students both virtually and at Henderson MS.

Spring 2022 programs bring really exciting season for the Podium family! Our new Loving Our Languages program launches in January. This program serves as an opportunity to create a safe space for English language learners to nurture their communication skills while celebrating the beauty of their native language and culture. We are bringing this program to River City MS with Next Up RVA and to George Wythe and Huguenot high schools. We will also be returning to Henrico County this session with Power of the Pen at Highland Springs HS! We are so excited to be bringing on new partners and continuing to grow our reach and impact with our existing ones.

DEC 9TH SUPPORTER AWARDS NIGHT RECAP

BY VICKI YEROIAN

On Thurs, Dec 9th, Podium RVA hosted our inaugural supporter awards night. With thirty of our top supporters, donors, and long-time friends, it was a beautiful night of celebration! From the delicious food to the festive Poinsettia cocktail, we shared good times and laughs all around. A huge shout out to The Hammers for donating our beverages!



We debuted three new annual awards. **The Big Heart Award**, created in honor of Robert and Anne Waldruff, goes to our top annual donor. The Waldruffs received their award for starting Podium’s Pedestal Fund and the Anne F. Waldruff Excellence in Education Scholarship. **The Robbins Award**, created in honor of Podium Co-Founder and Trustee David L. Robbins, goes to our top advocate, the person who demonstrates the most passion and commitment towards generating community awareness and resources for Podium. Finally, **The Hammer Award**, created in honor of Podium Trustee Scott Hammer, goes to our top supporter, the person who provides the most impactful support to Podium over the course of the year. Thank you David and Scott, for your commitment to Podium. It is so phenomenal that we just had to commemorate it and make these awards a new annual tradition!

We also celebrated the hard work and leadership of our Board members by presenting them with superlative certificates and gave a shout out to newcomer Saa'dia Douglas and to Podium's Co-Founder and Pedestal Fund Chair Lindy Bumgarner for her thirteen years of service to Podium (and still counting)! All in all, what a wonderful way to wrap up 2021 with the folks everyone at Podium considers to be our family.

Want to be in the running for next year's awards? It's not too late! Check out our Thankful for the New Year campaign and help us reach our Year end goal today!

THANKFUL FOR THE NEW YEAR

BY AERIN MILLS

While the year winds down, we cannot stop thinking about how grateful and fortunate we are to be a part of a community who cares so deeply about the mission and vision we hold dear. Like our Board Chair Jerry Howard said during The Dish, "You are Podium. You are the mentor, you are the spokesperson, you are the inspiration to the next generation." Thank you.

Because of you, Podium fulfills our mission. During Podium's Thankful for the New Year campaign, we highlight you, our family members, who make it possible for Podium to do what we do. The best part? ***There's still time to get involved!***

Thankful for the New Year

When you go to tinyurl.com/PodiumEOY and donate, your gift is being matched 100%! Turn \$25 into \$50 instantly while supporting those who need it the most: the youth in our community.

[Check us out at podiumrva.org!](https://podiumrva.org)

 [FACEBOOK.COM/PODIUMFOUNDATION](https://facebook.com/podiumfoundation)

 [INSTAGRAM.COM/PODIUMRVA](https://instagram.com/podiumrva)

 [TWITTER.COM/PODIUMRVA](https://twitter.com/podiumrva)

STAFF PROFILES: A DEEP DIVE INTO THE PODIUM TEAM

COMPILED BY AERIN MILLS

Did you know 100% of Podium staff are program alumni or former volunteers?

Learn why our folks come back, year after year!

Fall 2021 Site Lead: Christine Singleton, Podium Alum

When and from where did you graduate, and what are you doing now?

- *Thomas Jefferson High School, class of 2014.*
- *I am attending undergraduate studies, formerly at Spelman College and now at Virginia Commonwealth University. My expected graduation date is December 2022.*

What was your motivation for coming back to Podium?

- *I believe in creative expression, and I believe in helping youth express themselves. Writing, when you can get things out, is so beneficial.*

What quote inspires you?

- *"I believe the children are our future." – Whitney Houston, Greatest Love of All.*

What is your intended career field?

- *I am in school studying to become a professional writer and author.*

The 5 Whys Reflection Exercise: Why did I become a writing mentor?

(This exercise helps Podium youth reflect about themselves and their motivations. With each row, we respond to the statement before it, answering the question, "why?")

- *I believe in supporting the arts.*
- *Writing creatively can heal the spirit and the soul.*
- *We need to speak the future into existence.*
- *We have the power to help youth hone their voices to make a change in their lives, their schools, their communities, and in their world.*
- ***Richmond youth like myself deserve to be seen for who they are and not where they come from.***



**SITE LEAD:
CHRISTINE SINGLETON**

Communications Manager: Aerin Mills, Podium Alum and former intern

When and from where did you graduate, and what are you doing now?

- *Open High School, class of 2015.*
- *Undergraduate Studies: Virginia Commonwealth University, class of 2019. Graduated with a B.S. Degree in Mass Communication and Media Studies, cont. Creative Advertising.*
- *I interned with Podium RVA the spring and summer of 2019 and was promoted to our Communication Manager that fall.*

What was your motivation for coming back to Podium?

- *Podium's programs and mentors helped me so much when I was in high school, that I felt compelled to provide that same help to the next generation*

What quote inspires you?

- *"If you admire somebody you should go ahead and tell 'em. People never get the flowers while they can still smell 'em"*
- K. West

How did you pick your career field?

- *It was people at Podium who helped me realized I wanted to study Advertising at VCU, and for them I am so thankful.*

Why should a student join a Podium program?

- *Podium is here to help students achieve what they are fully capable of. The youth in our community are passionate about bettering the world they live in. **Youth should consider participating because, even if they don't think they do, they have something to say and emotions that writing can help them to process.***

What is one piece of advice you would share with a current Podium student?

- *There are countless people who are ready to judge you for how you dress, act, or think, but there are an infinite number more people who support you fully and want to hear your perspective. You have a unique story that no other person can experience or relate to. People are valuable not because they have a nice car, or somebody thinks they're attractive, but because they were made by this universe.*



**COMM MANAGER
AERIN MILLS**

Program Director: Candace Weather, former intern

When and from where did you graduate?

- Undergraduate Studies: VCU class of 2018, BA in English with a concentration in African American Literature.

When did you intern with Podium, and what did you do?

- I was an English Program Assistant intern at Podium during the Spring semester of 2018. I helped lead programs at Armstrong and Thomas Jefferson, helped edit and select student writing for publications, and began workshop creation for our college and career prep units.

What was your motivation for coming back to Podium?

- After graduation, I went straight into teaching high school English, and I found myself both comparing my experience to my time at Podium, and wishing that my students at the time had access to a resource like that. I was quickly reminded of the power of, what I like to call, the "gap-filler."
- There are only so many hours in a day and, as much as we try, teachers can't be everything for our students. **Podium is able to help fill the social, emotional, and educational gaps left behind after the traditional school day is over while nurturing a love for learning in older students who are often forgotten. I knew I had to be a part of that again.**

What quote inspires you?

- "When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game." – Toni Morrison

How did you pick your career field?

- I think I was a natural born teacher and advocate. My mom is a teacher, so I grew up emulating her, being the lesson plan test subject, and helping her grade papers. If you ask my family, I had a reputation as the kid who jumped out of her stroller to help anyone she saw. Despite my other fleeting childhood dreams, I always felt most at home teaching and helping people. So, it seems as though the profession chose me.

Why is Podium an important community resource to you?

- Podium embodies exactly what educational equity means. Middle and high school students only see each teacher for about 2 hours a day, and they may not feel seen or engaged during that time. **Every student deserves a safe space to discover who they are and to nurture that person. By providing students from historically underserved communities with communication skills, coping skills, and safe spaces to learn and grow, we are ensuring that our students are equipped to become the next generation of leaders.**



**PROGRAM DIRECTOR
CANDACE WEATHER**

Executive Director: Vicki Yeroian, MSW, former volunteer

When and from where did you graduate?

- Undergraduate studies: VCU class of 2013, BSW and B.A. Political Science, cont. Civil and Human Rights
- Graduate studies: VCU class of 2014, MSW, cont. Social Work Administration, Program Planning, and Policy.

When did you volunteer with Podium, and what did you do?

- I interned at Podium between fall 2009 – spring 2012 running our weekly after-school program at Armstrong High School. I was responsible for coming up with a weekly writing activity and prompt, securing needed resources, and submitting pieces for publication in our annual literary journal.



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
VICKI YEROIAN, MSW**

What was your motivation for coming back to Podium?

- *While an intern, I experienced firsthand how much of a difference an after-school program like Podium helps folks grow. In our weekly meetings, we explored writing as a tool for oneself and not just as a homework assignment. We helped youth share about who they are and take pride in their unique stories. Seeing educational inequities, we practiced applying for colleges and talked about all the steps need to make sure every Podium youth had a plan for after graduation. My biggest motivation for coming back to Podium stems from a wholehearted belief in our mission and insider knowledge that our programs truly make a difference. I wake up every day of my life so proud and excited to be part of this incredible team!*

What quote inspires you?

- *"Well behaved women seldom make history." - Laurel Thatcher Ulrich*

How did you pick your career field?

- *I have always known I wanted to be part of helping my community improve and grow. I am not sure where I picked this up, but I operate with the understanding that if you give to your community, your community will give back to you. Being a social worker allows me to take a person-first approach to creating systems and solutions that support the goals of Richmond's children and teens.*

Why is Podium an important community resource to you?

- *There isn't always a safe space to celebrate exactly who you are. There isn't always a guarantee that your community or school has the resources you need for success. Podium levels the playing field by addressing the one commonality among every single career and professional field: communication. **By expanding writing, public presentation, and dialogue skills with others, Podium youth are prepared for whatever they want to do post-graduation, from college, to career, and beyond!***