

**YOUR WORDS<sup>STL</sup>**

# **Volunteer Handbook**

2018

**Email: [tutors@yourwordsstl.org](mailto:tutors@yourwordsstl.org)**

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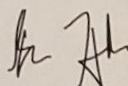
# YOUR WORDS<sup>STL</sup>

Thank you for your interest in YourWords STL!

YourWords STL was created to help amplify the voices of underserved STL youth through after-school tutoring, creative writing workshops, and collaborative writing projects. In the past 1.5 years, we have been able to provide over 250 hours of tutoring to our students at Marygrove Children's Home. We have also published three volumes of their work in the chapbooks "Words From the Drury House" through 2016.

We are excited to continue expanding our programming throughout St. Louis and in 2017, we will have multiple locations in St. Louis City and County. With the dynamic evidence-based curriculum crafted for our students by our programming director, Dr. Anna Guzon, as well as other local artists, we allow students to explore their own worlds with creative writing. Our students improve the strength of their voice on the page and out loud. Their finished works display talent and passion that deserve to be heard. We believe this will improve students' confidence in school as well as in the community.

We thank you so much for your time and energy! We are so grateful that you are willing to help us amplify the voice of our youth who are so ready to be heard!



Steve Handoyo MD MPH  
Executive Director  
YourWords STL

## **ABOUT YOURWORDS STL**

### ***Mission***

YourWords STL uses **one-on-one tutoring, creative writing workshops, and collaborative writing projects** to amplify the voices of St. Louis youth.

### ***Vision***

We are committed to bridging racial, cultural, and economic divides by honing the ability of people to tell their stories, while providing opportunities for the ears and hearts of the community to listen.

### ***Philosophy***

We believe that creative writing and one-on-one guidance are powerful tools for positive change.

### ***Our History***

YourWords STL began when two people had the same inspiration around the same time with just enough serendipity to bring that thought into action. Two high school friends, Dr. Anna Guzon and Dr. Steve Handoyo, like all in St Louis, were shocked and overwhelmed by the tragic events in Ferguson late in 2014. While Anna had already been moved to tutor children at St. Louis Catholic Academy (SLCA), Steve came home from Chicago that Christmas and had a life-altering conversation with his brother-by-marriage, Fr. Steve Giljum of St. Elizabeth's parish, also the parish of SLCA.

Over Christmas brunch, with anguish and pain still smoldering throughout the city, Fr. Steve recounted with pride the love and goodness of the young African-American men in his North St. Louis parish. Fr. Steve reveled in the memory of the boys going to a fundraiser in a West County home uncertainly, and leaving elevated by the possibilities that lie just a few critical miles from their homes. He lamented the writing skills they had not acquired to tell their story, and apply for colleges much less the financial aid needed. Fr. Steve explained his fear each time he said goodbye to one of the boys, for they were all imperfect - therefore normal - St. Louis teens, some from the same housing complex as Michael Brown, all surrounded by danger no child should endure.

A hopeful late night email from Steve to Anna helped convince Anna to solidify and expand her work. Taking the idea of creative writing as a tool of empowerment, and programming initially modeled after 826 National's wonderful curriculum, Anna and Steve created YourWords STL early in the spring of 2015. Their artistic vision was strengthened with essential administrative infrastructure by high-school friends Jenn Rengachary and Sarah Krussel.

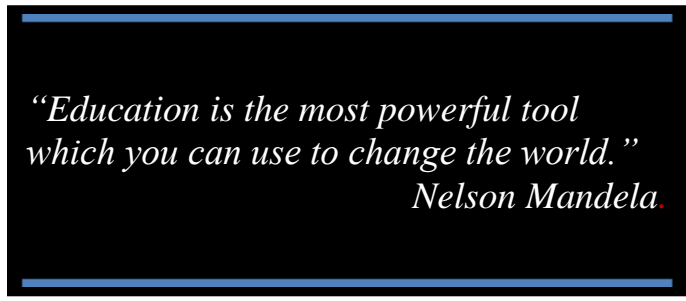
In addition to initial workshops at SLCA, the next critical partner arrived in the form of Marygrove Children's Home, a residence for children in the DCFS system in Florissant. By the summer of 2015, Anna was leading pilot sessions with the extraordinary men at Drury House. A room full of 16-20 year olds kept from dinner by our workshops poured themselves into creative writing with a respect and passion few of us could approach at that age. We started formal weekly programming in the fall of 2016, and those workshop have produced three published chapbooks to date.

As YourWords STL progressed, our unique strengths emerged out of the needs of the community. With young men in the DCFS system, we demanded consistency from our tutors, in order to earn their trust and create the nurturing environment they deserved. We are proud that our programming is engaging to students who are 1-2 years from self-sufficiency. We are proud to have contributed to the significant improvement in school performance and confidence achieved by these young men.

With a full year of pilots and workshops, we applied for and received 501(c)3 status at the end of 2016. We also were honored to receive a program support grant from Regional Arts Council for programming in July 2016-June 2017. In the summer of 2016, Midwest Arts Project agreed to provide us fiscal sponsorship, lending essential administrative and bookkeeping services. Our volunteer bookkeeper, Sheri Phegley, has finally received some much-appreciated aid.

In addition to full programming since 2015 at Marygrove, we are so pleased to have opened up another regular workshop at Lift for Life Gym in North St. Louis city, led by Patsy Zettler initially, followed by Donna Patton in 2017-2018.

As our programming has expanded, we are moved to help build bridges in the community. Towards that goal, YourWords STL has led collaborative writing projects starting in 2017 between middle school students in the Parkway system and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in Marygrove, as well as 6<sup>th</sup> graders at Parkway and SLCA. In 2018, students at New City School and Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls participated in the Crossing Delmar program. We continue to refine and improve our mission and vision through the needs of our community, and are thrilled at the possibilities that continue to emerge!



*“Education is the most powerful tool  
which you can use to change the world.”  
Nelson Mandela.*

## **ABOUT VOLUNTEERS**

### ***Roles for Volunteers***

#### **TUTORS**

YourWords STL seeks tutors from a wide variety of backgrounds who have an enthusiasm for reading and writing, a compassion for underserved youth, and the ability to commit to our program for at least one year.

Tutors will work one-on-one with a student from one of our partners such as Marygrove. Generally, our tutors go to the partner's location to serve the students there. Tutors help students with homework with the purpose to help them improve their school grades.

We have an on-going program with Marygrove that needs tutors every Monday and Wednesday from 4:00 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. This is after school tutoring program for young men and women ages 14-20. In addition to tutoring for high school coursework, tutors may also help with college or job applications, cover letters, or college admissions essays. On Saturdays during the semester, tutors and students participate in a creative writing session led by a program leader.

Tutors for the Marygrove program also are asked for a one school year commitment as we feel it is important to maintain relationships with the students. Consistency is helpful for these students and will result in better outcomes.

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE**

YourWords STL seeks volunteers who like to help with office duties such as making phone calls, maintaining records, mailing letters, etc. These duties can be done at home as well as at the office at YourWords STL. Administrative needs occur on an occasional basis.

#### **WRITING PROGRAM LEADERS**

YourWords STL seeks volunteers with writing backgrounds to help create and lead creative writing programs. These programs may be a one-time session to a group of sessions. Generally, these will be for groups of children ranging in ages from 8 - 18.

#### **CREATIVES**

YourWords seeks volunteers who have creative backgrounds in areas such as art, photography, marketing, design, social media, event planning, fundraising, grant writing and more.

## ***Expectations of Volunteers***

We count on you—the volunteer—to keep YOURWORDS STL going and to help us meet our goals in helping others. By becoming a volunteer, you are part of the YOURWORDS STL team. Following is a list of expectations:

- Act in a professional manner at all times; remember you are representing the organization.
- Stay committed and attend functions or assignments for which you have agreed to attend and help.
- Let us know promptly if you cannot attend a function for which you have been assigned.
- Stay in contact; let us know of any changes to your contact information.

## ***What Volunteers Can Expect From YourWords STL***

- YourWords STL will never disclose a volunteer's whereabouts, phone number, or address.
- We are always truly grateful for your help.
- We respect your skills and attributes.
- We are understanding when changes occur and when you contact us to let us know that you cannot attend a function or an assignment.
- We will provide support for you to do your best as a volunteer. If you have any questions about something you are doing for us, please contact us so that we may assist.

## ***Policies for Tutors***

- The ultimate goal of a tutor is to help students become independent learners.
- Tutors are expected to remain with YourWords STL for at least one full semester, or preferably one school year starting in fall.
- A tutor behaves patiently and professionally towards both students and staff.
- A tutor uses his/her time during a tutoring session efficiently and effectively.
- A tutor is to act as a role model and show good study habits with students.
- Tutors do not write or type papers, complete homework for students, and/or assist with take-home tests, quizzes of labs for students.
- Tutors should not be using their cell phone or other electronic device for personal use during tutor sessions.
- Tutors should not alter or otherwise handle students' personal items.
- Tutors are strictly prohibited from giving out personal information to tutees.
- Tutors are strictly prohibited from contacting tutees outside of the sessions.
- Tutors are strictly prohibited from engaging in physical contact with a tutee or other tutors.
- Tutors should not attempt to "diagnose," categorize or stereotype their students under any circumstances.
- If you are approached by parent, faculty members, or counselors, refer them to the program director or tutor coordinator.

- Do not contact parents, faculty members, or counselors without speaking to the program director or tutor coordinator.
- Refrain from discussing tutees' progress with fellow tutors unless such a meeting/discussion has been facilitated by a member of the supervisory team.
- Tutoring sessions are confidential. Tutors are strictly prohibited from disclosing any information about their tutees to a third party with the exception of the YourWords STL staff or the staff of the school or facility hosting the YourWords STL session.
- YourWords STL has a zero tolerance policy in regards to disrespect towards student; tutors who belittle students or show disrespect towards them will not be allowed to return.

### ***On Being a Tutor***

Not just anyone can be a great tutor. It takes practice and experience. It takes patience and a strong commitment to helping others. Below are some suggestions on how to conduct a tutoring session and become the best tutor you can be.

#### **START**

1. Relax. If you are relaxed, this will help the student feel calm.
2. Start with some friendly conversation to get to know your tutee better. Ask questions like:
  - a. How are things going?
  - b. Do you have any homework?
  - c. What is your favorite subject?
  - d. What is your least favorite subject?
  - e. What music do you like to listen to? Do you have any favorite TV shows or movies?
3. Most importantly, LISTEN. Be an active listener. Give good eye contact.

#### **HOMEWORK**

1. Start with the most difficult work.
2. If you don't know an answer, ask someone in the room, or research in a book or online.
3. Show an enthusiasm for learning. This is one of the most valuable things you can teach as a tutor.

*“Feeling listened to and understood changes our physiology; being able to articulate a complex feeling, and having our feelings recognized, lights up our limbic brain and creates an aha moment.”*  
*Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.*

#### **CREATIVE WRITING**

1. Show enthusiasm for the writing exercise even if it isn't exciting to you.
2. Encourage any effort. Find something good in the writing.
3. Help the student express their thought as accurately as possible in writing.



4. Help the student correct his/her grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation, even in poetry. If there are misspellings or changes in grammar, these should only be intentional by the writer.
5. Sometimes the process of revision is when the student learns the most.

### ***What to Watch for When Tutoring (Red Flag Terms)***

If you find a student experiencing any of the following, report it immediately to the program director or tutor coordinator.

- Excessive sadness...crying during class or outside the classroom.
- Attendance problems – arriving late or not attending.
- Changes in weight.
- Difficulties sleeping (either reports sleeping too much or not enough).
- Express in writing feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, past or future plans to harm themselves/others.
- Student reports excessive alcohol or drug use.
- Physical symptoms such as headaches and digestive problems which do not respond to treatment.
- Irritable for no apparent reason. Emotional outbursts (disruptive student).
- Unable to concentrate or make decisions.
- Student reports there is no hope to solve their problem.
- Student reports recent purchase of a weapon or access to pills.
- Student mentions harm to self or others in class essays and speeches.
- Student presents with sad mood most of the time.
- Student displays evidence of self-harm, as in self-cutting.

#### **Student states:**

“I wish I were dead.”

“There is no way out.”

“What is the point of living?”

“Who cares if I am dead?”

“I wish I could drive my car...off a road, over a bridge, into a tree.”

“I wish I would never wake up.”

Student reports previous attempts of harming oneself.

Student has a plan to harm self or others.

Student talks about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.

Student talks about being a burden to others.

### ***Following the Guidance of the National Tutoring Association (NTA)***

Tutors will find helpful information from the NTA by visiting their website [ntatutors.com](http://ntatutors.com). You can join the association and receive their newsletters. You can also become a certified tutor. On the next page is the code of ethics as published by NTA.

## **NATIONAL TUTORING ASSOCIATION (NTA) CODE OF ETHICS**

The National Tutoring Association is dedicated to providing its members with opportunities to achieve and maintain high professional standards for tutors and administrators of tutoring programs and services.

- I understand that my role as a tutor is to enable students to do their own work using the best learning approach possible.
- I will provide honest feedback in the form of positive praise and/or constructive suggestions to the student I serve in a manner that will be beneficial to their overall learning.
- I will demonstrate faith in my student's learning abilities.
- I understand that my relationship to the student is professional and not personal.
- I will show respect for my student's cultural background and personal value system.
- I recognize that I may not have all the answers to student questions. In this event, I will seek assistance in finding answers to the student's questions and/or direct the student to an appropriate resource for the information.
- I will maintain accurate records of tutoring sessions as expected and required.
- I will respect my student's personal dignity at all times.
- I will be on time for tutoring appointments, not only out of courtesy, but to be a good example for my student to follow.
- I will keep information about the student whom I am assigned confidential.
- I understand that my ultimate goal is to assist my student in discovering how he or she best learns and to help my student develop the skills to achieve his or her best educational outcome.
- I will share any concerns I have with my supervisor.
- I expect to learn along with my student.
- I will keep current in both my subject area(s) and learning methodologies.
- I will remain flexible to my approach to student learning, respectful of the various learning styles and preferences.
- I will share techniques for improved study skills with my students.

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## ***On Being a Writing Program Leader***

At times YourWords STL will host its own or partner with a school or another non-profit organization to bring creative writing activities and lessons to their students, members, or residents. These programs may be a one-time session or a group of sessions. Generally, these will be for children ranging in ages 8 to 18.

If you have a background in teaching or curriculum design, you may find being a writing program leader a good fit for you. Ask our program director Anna Guzon for more information and how to write a program using our template.

### ***Evidence-based Practices***

#### **1. Explicit vocabulary instruction**

- a. Reading literature that captures students' interests with relatable subject matter
- b. Creative writing using new vocabulary found in literature
- c. Repetition and frequency of new vocabulary

#### **2. Direct and explicit reading comprehension strategy instruction**

- a. Paraphrase and summarize
- b. Draw inferences
- c. Answer specific questions
- d. Create visual art as interpretations

#### **3. Lessons plans that increase motivation and engagement**

- a. Use a wide variety of engaging and relatable literature
- b. Use theory of multiple intelligences
- c. Design fun and age appropriate challenges
- d. Provide options and allow student autonomy

#### **4. Cultivation of a supportive environment**

- a. Encourage participation through verbal praise
- b. Present mistakes as opportunities for growth
- c. Employ active listening

#### **5. Individualized instruction through one-on-one tutoring**

- a. Match tutor and student personality
- b. Engage tutors in ongoing training
- c. Enlist tutors from a variety of backgrounds to assist in a variety of subjects
- d. Provide focused and active listening

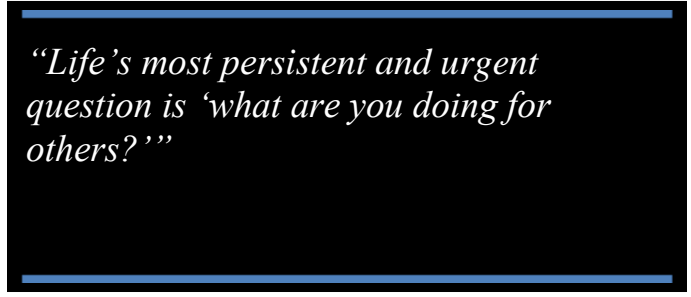
#### **Sources:**

- *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* (2008) by the Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.
- *NREPP Learning Center Literature Review: Positive Youth Development* (2015) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- *Building Literacy in Afterschool* (2015) by The Afterschool Alliance.

## ***Procedures for Reporting Your Volunteer Hours***

Reporting your volunteer hours is very important to YourWords STL. We use them for reporting to our sponsors and grantors. It is one of our important metrics—to know how many volunteers have helped this year and how many hours they worked to help St. Louis youth.

Please use the sign-in sheet when you attend tutoring sessions. If you work from home, please send an email after each month to report your hours. Send your email to [tutors@yourwordsstl.org](mailto:tutors@yourwordsstl.org). Thank you for your cooperation!



*“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is ‘what are you doing for others?’”*

## **NOTES**

**ACCIDENT WAIVER AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY FORM**

I HEREBY ASSUME ALL OF THE RISKS OF PARTICIPATING IN ANY/ALL ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS EVENT, including by way of example and not limitation, any risks that may arise from negligence or carelessness on the part of the persons or entities being released, from dangerous or defective equipment or property owned, maintained, or controlled by them, or because of their possible liability without fault. I certify that I am physically fit, have sufficiently prepared or trained for participation in this activity, and have not been advised to not participate by a qualified medical professional. I certify that there are no health-related reasons or problems which preclude my participation in this activity. I acknowledge that this Accident Waiver and Release of Liability Form will be used by the event holders, sponsors, and organizers of the activity in which I may participate, and that it will govern my actions and responsibilities at said activity.

In consideration of my application and permitting me to participate in this activity, I hereby take action for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, next of kin, successors, and assigns as follows:

- (A) I WAIVE, RELEASE, AND DISCHARGE from any and all liability, including but not limited to, liability arising from the negligence or fault of the entities or persons released, for my death, disability, personal injury, property damage, property theft, or actions of any kind which may hereafter occur to me including my traveling to and from this activity, THE FOLLOWING ENTITIES OR PERSONS: YourWords STL, Marygrove Center and/or their directors, officers, employees, volunteers, representatives, and agents, and the activity holders, sponsors, and volunteers;
- (B) INDEMNIFY, HOLD HARMLESS, AND PROMISE NOT TO SUE the entities or persons mentioned in this paragraph from any and all liabilities or claims made as a result of participation in this activity, whether caused by the negligence of release or otherwise.

I acknowledge that YourWords STL, Marygrove, and their directors, officers, volunteers, representatives, and agents are NOT responsible for the errors, omissions, acts, or failures to act of any party or entity conducting a specific activity on their behalf. I acknowledge that this activity may involve a test of a person's physical and mental limits and carries with it the potential for death, serious injury, and property loss. The risks include, but are not limited to, those caused by terrain, facilities, temperature, weather, condition of participants, equipment, vehicular traffic, lack of hydration, and actions of other people including, but not limited to, participants, volunteers, monitors, and/or producers of the activity. These risks are not only inherent to participants, but are also present for volunteers. I hereby consent to receive medical treatment which may be deemed advisable in the event of injury, accident, and/or illness during this activity. I understand while participating in this activity, I may be photographed. I agree to allow my photo, video, or film likeness to be used for any legitimate purpose by the activity holders, producers, sponsors, organizers, and assigns. The Accident Waiver and Release of Liability Form shall be construed broadly to provide a release and waiver to the maximum extent permissible under applicable law. I CERTIFY THAT I HAVE READ THIS DOCUMENT AND I FULLY UNDERSTAND ITS CONTENT. I AM AWARE THAT THIS IS A RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND A CONTRACT AND I SIGN IT OF MY OWN FREE WILL.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature  
(legibly)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (please print  
legibly)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT OF VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

I have received a copy of the Volunteer Handbook, which outlines the policies of tutor positions within YourWords STL. I will familiarize myself with the information in the Volunteer Handbook and agree to observe these policies in all respects.

I understand that the Volunteer Handbook does not constitute a contractual agreement and that either I or YourWords STL may terminate my participation at any time for any reason, with or without notice or cause.

I understand that the information contained in the Volunteer Handbook represents guidelines only and that YourWords STL may change, rescind, or add to any policies or practices described in this Volunteer Handbook at any time at its sole and absolute discretion with or without prior notice.

**Please initial these statements as found in the Volunteer Handbook with special regard to tutoring. This will indicate that you understand the policies and restrictions as stated below:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the Red Flag Terms and understand the information. I will follow the procedure to report any of the red flag terms if noticed during tutoring sessions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Tutors are strictly prohibited from giving out personal information to tutees.

\_\_\_\_\_ Tutors are strictly prohibited from contacting tutees outside of the sessions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Tutors are strictly prohibited from engaging in physical contact with a tutee or other tutors.

\_\_\_\_\_ Tutoring sessions are confidential. Tutors **are strictly prohibited from disclosing** any information about their tutees to a third party, with the exception of the YourWords STL staff or the staff of the school or facility hosting the YourWords STL session.

Please sign and return to the YourWords STL Tutor Coordinator.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Tutor Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Tutor Name (Please Print)**