Connecting Sentences

Miami-Dade Public Library System

Adults

Connecting Sentences

Dec 19, 2016

$101-250

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Byline

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Writing is an agent of change. It begins with a sentence and leads to a connection, a kinship with a reader and the building of a community. It grows into a realization that each of us has a story to tell that emerges from the sum of our best — and worst — moments.

The Connecting Sentences exhibition was a partnership between the Miami-Dade Public Library System (MDPLS) and Exchange for Change, a nonprofit that teaches writing at south Florida correctional institutions by pairing incarcerated people with local university students and offering writing prompts.

Incarcerated writers took part in anonymous writing exchanges with students from University of Miami, Florida Atlantic University and Ransom Everglades, and the resulting compositions were displayed in the auditorium of MDPLS' main library. All participants and their families were invited to the exhibition's opening reception.

Advanced Planning

The idea for Connecting Sentences began when Oscar Fuentes, library exhibitions and programming staff at MDPLS and multidisciplinary artist, met the Exchange for Change organizers at an artist showcase performance. As a result of their conversation, Oscar and I attended a class graduation ceremony at Exchange for Change, where incarcerated students performed the written material they had been working on. Oscar and I were moved by the transformational material the students had performed, and we proposed to Kathie Klarreich, the Exchange for Change team leader, an exhibition at the library showcasing the top written pieces.

The initial conversation between MDPLS and Exchange for Change started in March 2016, and the planning began in early April. The Exchange for Change team provided a title for the exhibit, a brief descriptive blurb, a brief organizational bio and a logo. The Exchange for Change team also made the final decision on which 18 poems and short stories were selected for the exhibition; we felt it was important for them to make this decision as they knew their students firsthand and better understood the significance behind the material selected.

Oscar then worked with the library's graphics team to create panels featuring the selected poems and short stories, as well as a panel introducing the project and the exhibition. These were all printed and ready to mount by August 2016.

We also created a DVD explaining the exhibition, which was played on loop in the lobby. On the subtitled video, we see the incarcerated students taking the writing classes, along with the Exchange for Change writing teachers talking in an interview style about the importance of the program. The DVD also featured students talking in a testimonial way about the transformative, healing power of the program.

The brief video below illustrates the layout of the exhibition.

Marketing

In April 2016, as soon as we had the organization information and logo from Exchange for Change, we posted information on the exhibition on the MDCPL Art Exhibitions website.

Our public information officer also sent an email news blast and targeted emails to art groups and media.

Additionally, the exhibition was featured in an article in The Miami Herald.

Lastly, we sent out invitations for the exhibition's opening reception to the writers who had since been released from prison, their families, and the families of the writers who were still incarcerated.

Budgeting

The costs for this event were low. Overall, it cost $150 for the foam board and printing of the exhibition panels.

Day-of-event Activity

At the opening reception for the exhibition, the partnership with Exchange for Change and the origins of the exhibition were discussed. Exchange for Change teachers and organizers provided introductory speeches. Those students who had been released read their own works. If the student was still incarcerated, a family member read his or her work.

Program Execution

Over 50 guests came to the event on Sept. 24, 2016. The guests, writers and family members were engaged. They held up their phones, recorded the event, cheered,

laughed and cried. It was very moving and emotional for everyone. (**View photos from the opening reception under Photo Slideshow at right**.)

The works of the writers are on display from Sept. 23 to Dec. 31, 2016. (**View the writers' works under Attachments at right.**)

After the reception in September, Oscar and I attended another graduation ceremony on Friday the 16th of December. Florida House representative David Richardson was there observing the readings and said he is hoping to spread the Exchange for Change program throughout the State of Florida.

The prison initiative started 3 years ago and there has been zero recidivism for Exchange for Change participants who are released. MDPLS is truly honored to be a part of this and we are especially thankful that Oscar Fuentes created the Connecting Sentences exhibition and program so that Miami-Dade Public Library System can help raise awareness and help Exchange for Change participants reconnect to the community and their families.

Advice

Keep an open mind. Everyone has a story, and we are all connected in one way or another.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Document
connecting_sentences.pdf
Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images

Image







More Programs

Jun 23, 2009
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ |
Image



Crossroads Juvenile Center: Great Stories CLUB

Audiences:

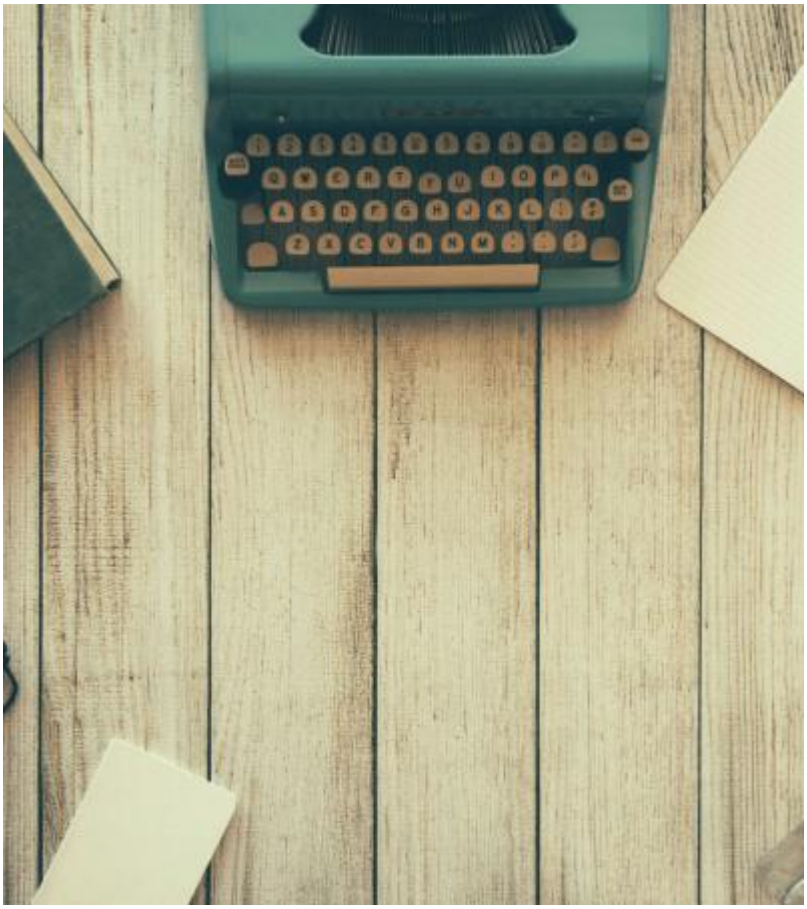
Audience
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Dec 16, 2015
Adults (21 and up)+ |
Image



Programs for Ex-Offenders

Audiences:

Audience
Adults (21 and up)
May 23, 2016
Children (9 and under)+ | □□
Image



WRITE Stuff Writing Club

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Jun 10, 2015
Adults (21 and up)+ | □□
Image



Expunge Your Criminal Record

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)