

Program uses writing to help Metro Detroit teenagers develop leadership skills



One Earth Writing Ambassadors program helps teach valuable skills to teens

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DETROIT - It's a program that uses writing to help Metro Detroit teenagers find their voice and develop their leadership skills.

Maheen Haq, a 10th-grade student at Detroit Country Day, is among 14 teenagers who recently graduated from the One Earth Writing Ambassadors program.

"It teaches you how to talk, to go outside of your circle, talk to people that you normally would never interact with, and it also really allows you to explore your passion as a writer," Haq said.

Michael Davis, a ninth-grade student at Warren Mott High School, said the program helps you become a better person.

"I got better at writing. I made a whole bunch a new friends and I learned how to become a leader," Davis said.

Many of the students finished the program understanding that they have the power to make a difference in their community. Krisha Ramani, a seventh-grade student at Novi Middle School, said the program teaches students how to interact with others and gives suggestions on how to make a difference in the world.

"I just want to help people, really it's not about creating change in the world, but creating change in one person or one heart and putting emotion in to one person, and hopefully I can do that to a lot of people," Ramani said.

During the program, students from seventh to 12th grade meet in workshops on a variety of different topics from superheroes to food, share their writing and speaking about their experiences.

One Earth Writing was founded in 2016 by Lynne Golodner, an author, entrepreneur and teacher of writing.

"I started it to build confidence and voice in teens while they're building their identity and deciding who they want to be and how they want to impact the world," Golodner said. "I believed it was really important that they meet peers who are very different from them but find common ground."

The program brings students together from different races, religions and socioeconomic backgrounds and uses storytelling, writing and conversation to help build confidence, voice and leadership in the teenagers.

Elyce Debro, a 10th-grade student at Lamphere High School said the program is about creating new leaders for the world today.

"I think this helps because everyone is a little bit different everyone has a different background so when we have our discussions around the table we all kind of chip in with our own ideas and our own thoughts," Debro said.

The program wrapped up with the students graduating from the program with one last meal together and a presentation of their writing to family, peers and educators who came to see them share their work. It was held at Madonna University in Livonia.

One Earth Writing is an eight-week program with students meeting every Tuesday. Leadership training is introduced by week three.

"The idea there is to think very deliberately about 'Wow my voice matters, but I need to put it to use to impact others, to make a difference in the world. I could really change the world for the better and how can I do that strategically and small steps so it doesn't feel so overwhelming?'" Golodner said.

The workshop includes an all-day writing retreat.

"You learn to, like, not be afraid to tackle the important topics and I was able to like delve into myself and really write about that experience," Haq said.

This winter workshop was supported by a grant from the First Foundation of the First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham in addition to in-kind food donations from Beirut Bakery, Cebella's Pizza, Shawarma Palace Mediterranean Grill, Cottage Inn, Noodles & Co., and Plum Market.

Any students interested in applying to the fall ambassador program can [send a letter of application and writing sample here](#).

The fall program runs from Oct. 16 to Dec. 4, with Tuesday meetings from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and a writers' retreat on Dec. 2. The program is free for students and transportation is provided upon request.

When students complete the program they receive a certificate of completion that counts toward six hours of community service. Graduating students from previous workshops have expressed interested in continuing on, so Golodner created a senior ambassadors program. Under the seniors program, students continue writing as well as set up and lead programs in their communities.

For more information on One Earth Writing, [click here](#).

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