

From: Council for Unity

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For Immediate Release:

ECHO OF TROUBLED INNER CITY YOUTH REFLECTED IN NEW POETRY BOOK

Volume Peeks Into Souls of New York Kids

New York, N.Y. – For youngsters, expressing one's self through poetry is not limited to those attending upscale suburban or private schools. A local anti-violence and anti-gang program, the Council for Unity has published "*THIS IS ME*" a 58 page anthology showcasing the work of 62 youngsters ages 8 to 18.

The works, written by many at risk and disenfranchised youth covers a range of personal experiences, thoughts and raw emotions from deep darkness and anguish to discovery and enlightenment.

In one verse of the poem "*Gangsta Love*" a high schooler writes about leaving an abusive relationship....

"So one day he gave her flowers
And she thought he was the one.
Until the day she tried to leave him.
She became a victim of a gun." (by Renei Morrison)

Or in "*Untitled*" about teenage sex, pregnancy and a relationship lost...

"It's funny how I finally moved on.
It's funny how you gonna be a dad.
It's funny how I'm not even sad" (by Shanelle Daison)

"*In 1998*" about the gang murder of a best friend....

"In 1998 Bloods murdered my best friend.
I had only three.
Life came to an end.
I couldn't form tears, no words for emotions.
My anger spread like waves from the ocean.
Ever since I have been in Hell's Kitchen
I'm society's product.
They just refuse to listen." (by Kyle Harmon)

Or "*Big Tall Woman*" about the typical cruelty dished out about one's physical proportions....

"I'm not defined by my height or size
But for what I can do
So don't judge me
Because my skills might
Surprise you.
I am a tall big woman
And I don't care." (by Hanibel Tolentino)

Compiled with Robert J. DeSena, a retired New York City English and Mythology teacher, who much like the Sidney Poitier character in *To Sir, With Love*(1967), is a mentor and surrogate father for the thousands of kids who come to his organization's door for help.

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DeSena uses teachings about such things as ancient mythology, poetry, and bolsters each young person with the vital pillars of family, unity, self esteem and empowerment, that they often lack, to turn their lives around.

In the forward in the book, Pedro Noguera, Professor of Urban Education at New York University says, "For young people who so often find themselves silenced and talked about, who are the objects of suspicion and even scorn, poetry can be a way of reminding the world that they too have thoughts, feelings and dreams."

The verses in "THIS IS ME" have not been polished, edited or vetted to remove or sanitize the genuine words the children expressed in their own words. Noguera says simply, "These are the unvarnished expressions of young writers who are struggling to find their voices."

But not all of the expressions these children write about are dark and despondent.

In one poem, "*Checkerboard*" a young middle schooler writes of tolerance and different races joining together...

**"Inside we are all the same.
No checkerboard is present there.
We're all siblings in our minds
Although we are of different kinds."** (by Arina Bykadorova)

Others write about emotional uncertainty and a search for acceptance from one's own family in "*Dreams of Light*"....

**"I have a vision of you smiling, saying that's my son.
But in the back of my mind, do you really mean it?
I'm so confused. So much emotion in my head.
I look to God for answers, still questions in my head.
My mind's in the clear some light's seeping through"** (by Ralph Gaetan and Jean Marie)

In "You Make Me Better," a young person writes about the help he received....

**"Before you I was a mess.
Before you I couldn't care less.
Before you I was on the verge of jail.
Before you I wouldn't have made bail
Before you a piece of me was missing.
Before you I had no direction.
Now that I found you I'm never letting go."** (By Dajuan Hawkins)

The Council for Unity's accomplishments range from mediating violent gang wars to helping transform rural and inner city children into productive citizens. The program's alumni have gone on to become Rhodes Scholars, judges, lawyers and educators.

According to the New York City Board of Education, 94% of Council for Unity participants' graduate high school, 96% attend college and 70% of participating school principals reported a decrease in violent crime in their schools with police precinct figures showing a flat lining of gang violence in schools utilizing the Council model. The program and its varied methods, using the creation of poetry, artwork, performance, emotion and learning are having a significant positive effect on youth.

Copies of "THIS IS ME" are available to members of the general public making a tax deductible contribution of \$25 or more to The Council For Unity, 50 Broadway, Suite 1503, New York, NY 10004. Additional information on the program can be found at www.councilforunity.org