



PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE
**CENTER FOR HEALTH
& JUSTICE RESEARCH**

**PROCESS EVALUATION OF THE INDIANA PRISON WRITERS WORKSHOP
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In an era of decarceration in the United States, strategies to rehabilitate individuals who will reenter society are paramount. One common approach to rehabilitation is providing educational programming for individuals who are still incarcerated, such as college courses, life skills training, and creative writing and other arts-based programs, in order to enhance their chances for a successful reentry.

One such in-prison educational program is the Indiana Prison Writers Workshop (hereafter IPWW). Created in 2017, IPWW is a twelve (12) week creative writing workshop for individuals who are currently incarcerated. Participants in the class explore the craft of writing, including fiction and non-fiction, poetry, rhetoric, and play writing. Facilitators teach 90 minute classes that are structured to provide educational material, writing prompts, and feedback on individual work in each session. In addition to improving participant writing skills, an important goal of IPWW is to enhance participants' communication skills so they are better prepared to reenter society.

Researchers from the Center for Health and Justice Research (CHJR) at Indiana University Public Policy Institute (PPI) partnered with IPWW and the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) to conduct a process evaluation of IPWW's program. In addition to reviewing existing research on the characteristics and effects of other in-prison arts programs, CHJR worked with IPWW and IDOC to access, share, or collect data on participant recruitment, workshop attendance, delivery of program curriculum, fidelity of activities to program model, and participant pre- and post-program surveys.

With these data, the research team provides a foundational assessment of IPWW's program and its delivery. These insights will allow IPWW to strengthen program fidelity, elaborate on the existing logic model, incorporate new data collection tools, and explore future outcome evaluation structure and needs.

Key Findings:

- Decades of research on in-prison creative writing and arts-based programs suggests that IPWW's model is similar to many other programs in terms of activities, facilitator characteristics, and participant experiences.
- In partnership with the IPWW founder, researchers developed new survey tools capable of tracking long-term outcomes deemed important by IPWW stakeholders, including participant healing, self-confidence, and well-being.
- Site visits to IPWW classes within IDOC facilities and interviews with IPWW facilitators suggest that the program is being delivered with fidelity as documented by IPWW stakeholders.
- IPWW has served at least 84 participants. The program served a larger proportion of Black or African American and Hispanic/Latino individuals in relation to the racial and ethnic makeup of Indiana's prisons. The average participant is in his late thirties with a high school diploma (or equivalency) serving an 11-year term of incarceration for a higher level felony conviction for a crime against persons.

- Participants opt-in to IPWW for a variety of reasons. Participants agree that writing is important, allows communication that cannot be said in other ways, and brings joy. Participants seek an opportunity to write on their own in a structured setting, to gain knowledge on how to improve their writing, to revise their authored works, and obtain instructor feedback. IPWW is also perceived to provide a break from daily routines and to serve as an outlet for expression.
- Overall, IPWW survey data suggests participants largely agree that the program content, structure, and delivery provides immediate or future writing and communication benefits.
- Based on these findings, CHJR recommends:
 - Making a commitment to robust data collection
 - Conducting classes weekly with an emphasis on external publishing and guest lecturers
 - Standardizing the program by creating a manual
- Future research on IPWW, based on existing studies on other similar in-prison writing programs, will incorporate outcome evaluations that monitor recidivism trends of released IPWW participants.