



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, collect, and analyze data on participants and program delivery, including but not limited to IPWW data on recruitment, attendance, program curriculum, fidelity of activities to program model, and participant pre- and post-program surveys, as well as IDOC data on participant demographics, program participation, and case notes.

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 and is classified as a moderate to high security risk of future recidivism.

- 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.
- Participants perceive that IPWW provides a break from daily routines, serves as an outlet for expression, and creates a sort of “micro” family in which participants can share their work and show vulnerability. Participants interviewed agree that the workshop’s content, structure, and delivery help to provide immediate or future benefits, including enhanced communication and coping skills, awareness of personal actions, and improved sense of empathy. Participants also discussed job opportunities that emerged following IPWW programming, such as writing a book and speaking engagements.
- Secondary analysis of IDOC data suggests that certain positive outcomes can be associated with IPWW program participation, including enrollment in available addiction recovery services, steady in-prison or post-release employment, and continuing, or starting, other programming while incarcerated. IPWW participation is also associated with a reduction in conduct violations, as preliminary evidence suggests a 38% reduction in violations after participants were admitted to the program.
- 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 (including writers, employers, and IDOC staff)
 - Standardizing the program by creating a manual
- Future research on IPWW will need to incorporate suitable comparison groups of individuals, programs, or facilities to advance one or more outcome evaluations that monitor the various data collections used in this report as well as recidivism trends of released IPWW participants. A survey of recidivism outcomes and other performance measures for similar in-prison writing programs can inform the design of future outcome evaluations.