



PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE

CENTER FOR HEALTH & JUSTICE RESEARCH

Researchers from the Center for Health and Justice Research (CHJR) at Indiana University Public Policy Institute (PPI) partnered with the Indiana Prison Writers Workshop (IPWW) and the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) to conduct a study 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, adherence of activities to program model, and participant pre- and post-program surveys.

With these data, the CHJR research team provided 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 of this study include:

- Decades of research on in-prison creative writing and arts-based programs suggests that **IPWW's model is similar to many other programs across the country** 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 participant outcomes deemed important by IPWW stakeholders, including **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 as described** by IPWW stakeholders.
- **IPWW has served at least 84 participants**, with the average participant being a White male in his late thirties with a high school diploma or equivalency.
- On average, participants were 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 believe 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, researchers provide several recommendations for IPWW stakeholders, including making a commitment **to robust data collection**, conducting classes weekly with an **emphasis on external publishing and guest lecturers**, and standardizing the program by **creating a manual**.
- Future research on IPWW will integrate **interviews with former program participants** who have been released as well as **insights from the analysis of IDOC official records**. These research activities will be completed July 2020.

Questions about this study can be directed to Dr. Eric Grommon (egrommon@iupui.edu).