2023 IMPACT REPORT
Celebrating 15 Years
Back in 2009, Mighty Writers launched as a free writing nonprofit for kids 7 to 17 in a Philadelphia storefront space that had recently served as an Obama for President headquarters.

“You’ll be all set, open for business,” nonprofit veterans told us. “But it takes time to establish a nonprofit — especially one that focuses on writing — so don’t be disappointed.”

No problem. We measured our expectations and spent our time designing and decorating our space (which, FYI, had been provided by music impresario Kenny Gamble — ever grateful, sir!) with superhero art: Spider-Man, Maya Angelou, Marvel Comic covers, James Baldwin, Beyoncé.

As day one approached, we sat back and waited to see if maybe a few kids would trickle in out of curiosity. By day’s end, we were scrambling to adjust. Soon, our numbers were growing with no end in sight.

We adjusted our expectations upwards those first few years — and we’ve been adjusting upwards ever since.

When we received our first-year grant from the late Gerry Lenfest, the generous Philadelphia philanthropist, he offered this: “Don’t sit on that corner storefront in South Philadelphia long. If you believe in what you’re doing, grow — reach more kids, be unafraid.”

Today, as we celebrate our 15-year anniversary, we have nine Mighty centers in Greater Philadelphia and New Jersey. We’re also in the midst of launching a program in El Paso, Texas, both for kids who have been residents for some time and for those who have recently crossed the border.

Our elevator pitch hasn’t changed in 15 years: We teach kids to write. Nor has our mission statement: We teach kids to think clearly and write with clarity so that they can achieve success.

Writing gets kids to focus, to contemplate, to assess, to think clearly and write with clarity.

Given that, how can we possibly not keep growing?

Tim Whitaker, Executive Director
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2009

- Mighty Writers opens its first location at 1501 Christian Street in Philadelphia.

- The full-time staff consists of two: Education Director Rachel Loeper and Executive Director Tim Whitaker.

- 75 kids sign up for the first workshops.

The first online description of Mighty Writers:

“Mighty Writers is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit with plans to open free-to-all writing centers in the city's neighborhoods. Teaching kids to write in cool storefront settings.”
2010–2011

- MW opens **Mighty Vision**, a storefront pop-up at 641 South Street, dedicated to comic-book writing and new media ventures.

- Locations are decorated with superhero art, to remind kids of their **superpowers**.

- High school students take MW's **first college prep** class.

- MW is named a **Champion in Action** by Citizens Bank.

- MW implements MY Access, a quantitative assessment tool to **measure literacy proficiency**.

- Mighty students launch **The Mighty Post**, a kid-run digital magazine.

- The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation awards MW a large grant to create a **multimedia history of Black radio in Philadelphia**.
• **Mighty Teen Scholars** teaches high schoolers critical thinking and different styles of writing.

• **The Phillies Charities** honors Mighty Writers.

• MW launches its flagship **Academy**, transforming from a drop-in approach to a consistent homework and writing program.

• PRX broadcasts **Mighty Radio**, a student-run Internet radio station honoring the legacy of Philadelphia’s early Black broadcasters.

• **MW West** opens at 39th and Lancaster.

• **Philadelphia 76ers** names MW a “Hometown Hero.”

• Students get individualized support through the launch of MW’s **one-on-one mentorships**.

• MW’s volunteer enlistment reaches **300**.

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Image: A group of children and adults posing together.

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Image: A student holding a phone.

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Image: A student wearing a helmet.

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Image: A student holding a basketball.
2014–2015

- President Obama’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities names MW one of 50 top arts and humanities-based programs in the U.S.
- MW receives a Knight ArtsChallenge grant to open a bilingual center geared toward Mexican families.
- The Barra Foundation honors MW as an “exemplary nonprofit that demonstrates leadership, performance and adaptability.”
- College prep becomes part of MW’s core programs.

- MW North opens in North Philadelphia.
- MW El Futuro, the first of MW’s bilingual centers, opens in the 9th Street Market.
- Philebrity names MW Nonprofit of the Year.
- MW wins an Edward R. Murrow Award for Audio News Documentary for its history of Black radio.
- MW enrolls 2,500 students.
2016–2017

• MW sets a world record for simultaneous writing by gathering 3,000 students on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art to write on the theme “If I Were President.”

• Number of volunteers climbs to 400.

• NBC/Telemundo chooses MW El Futuro as the winner of its 21st Century Solutions Grant.

• Philadelphia Magazine names MW its “After-School All Star.”

• Kids showcase their writing at the first annual MightyFest, a celebration of student voices.

• Budget reaches $1 million.

• MW teaches 3,000 kids.
2018–2019

- MW expands programs into Philadelphia rec centers and public schools.
- Mighty high schooler Richard Jenkins is celebrated nationally for getting a full ride to Harvard.
- MW Camden opens in New Jersey.
- MW donates books to children held at the Berks ICE detention center.
- MW students present a booklet to city and state lawmakers with writing about how violence affects them.
- Chester County kids get bilingual programming with the launch of MW El Futuro Kennett.
- The City of Philadelphia recognizes MW for “outstanding after-school literacy programs.”
- MW hires a dedicated mindfulness director to focus on social-emotional learning.
In response to the pandemic, MW pivots and starts its **Food and Literacy Distribution Program**, offering free lunches and groceries to kids and families in need.

MW hires a full-time director of distribution to supervise the expanding program.

During lockdown, MW transitions to **MW At Home**, its virtual learning program.

MW students write about their pandemic experience in “**Writing from Quarantine**.”

The **Library of Congress** names MW a Best Practice Honoree.

Jewel, Jason Isbell, Marcus Roberts and other prominent songwriters participate in the **Mighty Song Project**, a joint project with LitHub.
2021–2022

- Distribution efforts expand with the addition of pop-up sites.
- Katie Couric celebrates Mighty Writers with a large donation and a shout-out at a Philly event.
- MW Atlantic City opens.
- MW Newark opens.
- Students and families come to MW locations to get COVID vaccines and health screenings.
- MW wins Best Pandemic Pivot from Billy Penn.
- MW Germantown opens.
- MW gets its first transit van for distribution.
- As part of its broader Whole Child Approach, MW releases a mental health resource guide for Philadelphia County.
- Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation awards a Kindness in Community Fund grant to support MW’s community-led mental health efforts.
- Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney makes a World Series bet with the City of Houston — with donations to go to “beloved local youth program Mighty Writers.”
• MW has 42 full-time and 21 part-time employees.

• Our Mighty fleet consists of six vans for distribution.

• MW Executive Director Tim Whitaker is named one of 12 Gucci Changemakers nationwide.

• MW Camden East opens at Ablett Village.

• Students in the border town of El Paso, Texas, get Mighty Bags of toys and treats to help them on their journey in the U.S.

• MW El Paso begins pilot programming.

• MW Senior Writer Maureen Boland launches The Mighty Writers Podcast.
2023 Program Outcomes

**Academy**
- $65\%$ of students achieved grade-level literacy proficiency.
- $85\%$ of parents believe that MW improved their child’s grades.
- $100\%$ of parents saw their child’s relationship with writing improve.

**Workshops**
- $95\%$ of students said they would re-enroll at MW.
- $86\%$ of students overcame writing challenges.
- $77\%$ of students increased their ability to think critically.

**Mentorships**
- $91\%$ of mentees said their mentor helped them achieve their goals.
- $96\%$ of mentees said their mentor helped them become a better thinker and/or writer.
- $91\%$ of mentees said they felt supported.

**Teens**
- $100\%$ of high school students graduated.
- $95\%$ of high school graduates matriculated into post-secondary education.
- $83\%$ agreed with: “MW is a safe place for me to spend time.”

**Social-Emotional Learning**
- $70\%$ agreed with: “Because of MW, my confidence and self-esteem have improved.”
- $75\%$ agreed with: “Because of MW, I am learning how to focus better.”
- $65\%$ agreed with: “Because of MW, I can stay calm in difficult situations.”

**Quotes From Our Mighty Kids**

“Mighty Writers is one of the best places to go when your mother does not want to deal with you.”

“I love Mighty Writers because we have someone to help us with our homework and we do fun projects. I want to live at Mighty Writers.”

“My mom likes this place, because if we are running out of food then we can go there.”
2023 Financials

**Income**
- Foundations: 35%
- In-Kind: 21%
- Government: 20%
- Corporations: 12%
- Individuals: 11%
- Other: 1%

**Expenses**
- Personnel: 53.8%
- Programs: 27.9%
- Rent: 4%
- Program Contractors: 3.5%
- Marketing & PR: 2.4%
- Other: 8.4%
A Mighty thanks to all our supporters for helping us make the last 15 years so special. We couldn’t have done it without you.

Here’s to another 15!
Celebrating 15 years of teaching kids to think clearly and write with clarity.

mightywriters.org