



# Instead, Joy

**Mighty Kids Speaking Up in Their Communities**

A Project of Community-Based Violence Intervention  
at Mighty Writers New Jersey

Dear friends,

Having a safe space to write and grow is too often a privilege, one we know should be a right. Mighty Writers' New Jersey locations are purposefully grounded in cities where students face a higher than average number of challenges, including increased risk of gun violence and associated traumas. At our sites in Newark, Camden and Atlantic City, kids meet every day to share ideas, learn and build a community where young voices are elevated and deeply valued.

In this booklet, you'll find small windows into the boundless creative energy of our students. This is just a sampling of what they create each day, and we hope it inspires you to continue to work for a better world. That's what a Mighty kid would do.

### **Mighty Writers New Jersey**

Andre Blakney	Nyoka Myers
Catherine Buck	Kathy Rizzo
Leila Crawford	Katie Rogers
Derrick Gallashaw	Tom Sykes
Danielle Jackson	Angelle Whavers
Omar Navarette	





**JOY**

**is an act of resistance.**

— Toi Derricotte

I AM AWESOME

I AM BRAVE

I AM HANDSON

I AM STRONG

AND I AM CREATIVE



# Joyful Resistance from the Kids of Mighty Writers

"I don't know the meaning of joy. Is it love? I feel joy as love. I don't know how to describe it because it's just that feeling of love. I guess it's also kindness, because people are mean to me sometimes, and that's the opposite of joy. So when I want to make other people feel happy, I try to be nice to them. I try to share and smile because nothing makes people more happy than sharing toys."

— Herbert, 7



"I like learning things.  
Teachers and education:  
New things once nervous."

— Kendall, 9



"Being nice is important because it helps make friends. And I need friends to go to the park with. Friends make me feel good and make me feel better when I'm sad. So friends are the key to happiness."

— Jae'Von, 8

**"When I have fun, I feel joyfulness. I am kind to others and they bring kindness back. When I am positive, then I will get all As on my tests. My friends are ingenious like me and others."**

**— Jerardo, 10**

**“Joy is to be happy about what people give to each other. Another joy is being nice to one another. Be kind to other people if they are being mean to you. If you are not being nice, you’ve got to be kind. People need to stop bullying because bullying is not nice.”**

**— Ar’riel, 9**



**“My friend Daniel said he didn’t know what to write about himself for his homework because he doesn’t know anything that’s different about him. But I know that he’s good at making friends. And I know he is smart and he’s good at writing. I know that he’s nice because he helps me with my homework. Those are all things that make someone a good friend.”**

**— Chandler, 10**

**“My life would be so boring without an annoying little sister. Yes, you heard that right. She is very annoying, but I love her for it. If she wasn't annoying, she would be boring. My sister means so much to me and I make sure she knows that. Sometimes when we're outside I buy her something of her choice. It's something small but I know she loves it.”**

— Melissa, 13



“I have very long hair and I take care of it. My body is also very cool because of my organs and how they function. I love eating food, especially my mom's. I love to drink water because it hydrates me. I love everything about God. The army keeps us safe. I like sleeping because I get very sleepy. I love the clothes my mom gives me. My glasses help me see.”

— Esteban, 11

**I** M V E R Y C R E A T I V E

I M <sup>Very</sup> k i n d I M C A R E F U L

I A M A  
M I G H T Y  W R I T E R !!

"I'm grateful that I have the best mother in my life that takes care of us and loves us with all her heart. She also respects us in all ways. I'm so thankful that my mother gave birth to two of the best sisters who respect me, and I also now know that I have two persons that will defend me and will always have my back. I know that they will take care of me if I get sick. Now I have two best friends that will last me my whole life."

— Maria, 12



## How We React to Stress

I take deep breaths and count to 3.

I do karate: It helps me control my emotions.

I think about positive things, and tell myself [violence] isn't worth it.

I walk away and play with friends, I choose art and volleyball.

I tell a teacher. I tell my friend everything will be OK.

I tell friends to be nice. I say, "Let's just play the game!"

— Karate class group brainstorm

**“I often wonder why some teachers don’t act quickly to respond to the problem of bullying. I don’t think that is the right way to be a teacher! If you don’t help your students, they suffer. When they don’t help, it hurts sometimes, but that’s life.”**

— Justin, 13

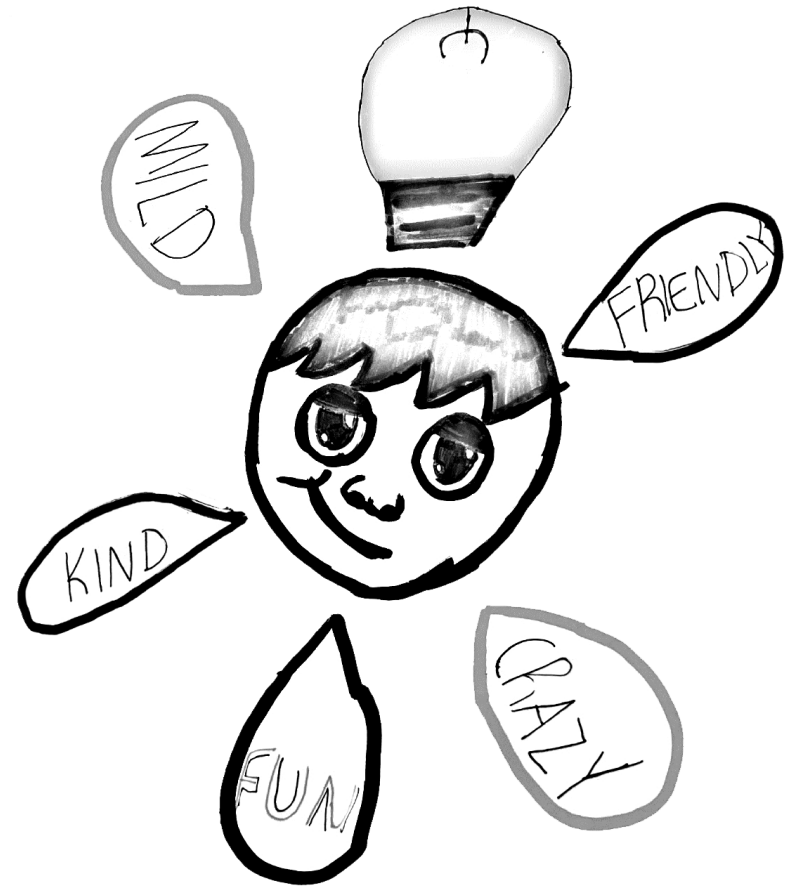


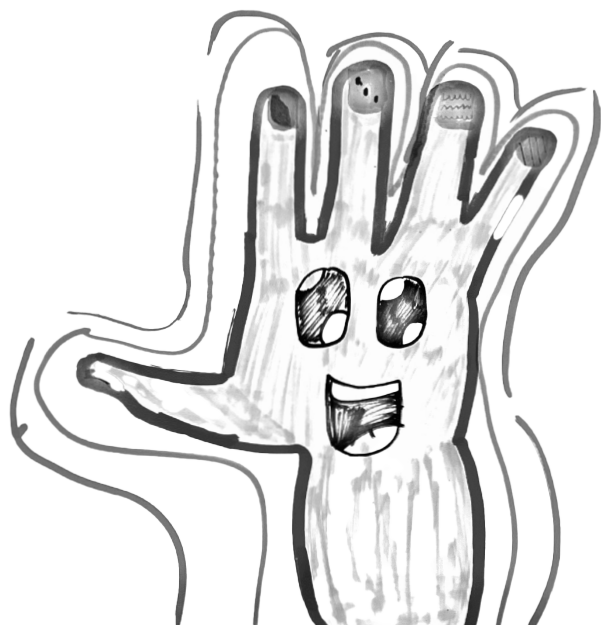
**“My overall idea on how to stop bullying is we need to educate students on why we can’t have bullying because it will harm the student and make them sad and frustrated. Everyone, especially schools, needs to take action when bullying is happening.”**

— Angel, 14

**“Art is hard in the beginning, but later you will have fun with it, as you have no limitations when you draw and no boundaries to what you can and cannot draw. Art shouldn't feel like an assignment or someone is making you do this. You should do art just because you want to do it for yourself and you enjoy it. There's never a time where you can't be better at art, because there's always room for improvement as art is infinite and there's so much possibilities that we have not thought about.”**

— Joel, 14





**"I think that people should care about each other. Like it doesn't make sense. Why wouldn't you care about the person standing right next to you? Like what in the world? But then I realize: Everybody learns differently. Everybody develops in different ways. And I hope that everybody understands this too: Don't pressure someone to learn. Although it's needed, it's also idiotic. Nobody who is in a mindset that is closed off is going to let in something they think is an intruder."**

— Carter, 15



**"This: can get you out of your comfort zone. You feel comfortable listening to it, but you also just feel free. You can listen to any genre and any era. And what that is is: music."**

— Sanaa, 16



## Anti-violence

Violence is bad, sometimes it even make others sad just because your influenced to do it, just screw it.

Don't do it, tell them what they're doing instead of being influenced to do it just tell and keep it moving. keep on moving.

## **Some distressing facts that keep us up:**

Newark, Atlantic City and Camden consistently top the state's charts in gun violence, according to NJ's Department of Law and Public Safety. Our Mighty Writers kids live in cities where gun violence is a threat to their safety and well-being.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics' [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org): Children who are exposed to violence on a regular basis often experience many of the same symptoms and lasting effects as children who are victims of violence themselves, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These kids can feel emotional and physical "aftershocks" for months or even years. They can relive the event again and again in their minds, and be less able to function normally in their day-to-day lives. Some may become more aggressive, violent and self-destructive. ("Childhood Exposure to Violence")

# **WHAT DO WE KNOW? WHAT CAN WE DO?**

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**Providing a safe space and safe adults to mentor and teach our Mighty Writers kids is what we're all about. With security, guidance and support, our students will become the change agents, the violence interrupters, and the joyful voices our communities need.**

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## **We take root in our kids' neighborhoods because:**

- a safe place to connect and play with other kids while learning from adults invested in your success makes a difference,
- mentors and credible messengers from your city make a difference,
- access to lots of exciting paths for your future makes a difference,
- developing your own voice — and knowing your stories are powerful — makes a difference.

# Anti-Violence Resources for Parents and Kids

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## Child Sexual Abuse

- Stop It Now! 1-888-PREVENT (1-888-773-8368), [stopitnow.org](http://stopitnow.org)
- Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673), [rainn.org](http://rainn.org)

## Crime Victims

- National Center for Victims of Crime:  
1-855-4VICTIM (1-855-484-2846), [victimsofcrime.org](http://victimsofcrime.org)

## Dating Abuse

- Love Is Respect: 1-866-331-9474, TTY: 1-866-331-8453, text LOVEIS to 22522, [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

## Domestic Violence

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233), TTY: 1-800-787-3224, [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)

## Homelessness

- Covenant House: North Jersey, 973-621-8705, South Jersey, 609-348-4070, text: 844-912-1291, [covenanthousenj.org](http://covenanthousenj.org)

## Human Trafficking

- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888, TTY: 711, text: 233733, [humantraffickinghotline.org](http://humantraffickinghotline.org)
- NJ Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-855-END-NJ-HT (1-855-363-6548), text: 211

## Missing and Abducted Children

- Child Find of America, Inc.: 1-800-I-AM-LOST (1-800-426-5678), [childfindofamerica.org](http://childfindofamerica.org)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678), [missingkids.org](http://missingkids.org)

## Runaway and Homeless Youth

- National Runaway Safeline: 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929), text: 66008, [1800runaway.org](http://1800runaway.org)

## Teen Support Hotlines

- Samariteens: 1-800-252-TEEN (8336), [samaritanshope.org](http://samaritanshope.org)
- Teenline: 1-800-TLC-TEEN (852-8336), text TEEN to 839863, [teenlineonline.org/talk-now](http://teenlineonline.org/talk-now)

## Suicide Prevention

- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988 or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), TTY: 1-800-799 4889, [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

***For more extensive resources, please reach out to mental health providers, school counselors, medical doctors and local police departments.***



# Get Involved

All Mighty Writers programs are free to kids and families. We have after-school, weekend, and evening classes available for ages 2-17, and we're always looking for interns and volunteers. Find all our information online at [mightywriters.org](https://mightywriters.org), or reach out to the site nearest you.

## **Mighty Writers Camden**

1801 S. Broadway  
Camden, NJ 08104

Director: Derrick Gallashaw  
dgallashaw@mightywriters.org  
609-315-9093

## **Mighty Writers Newark**

59 Lincoln Park  
Newark, NJ 07102

Director: Angelle Whavers  
awhavers@mightywriters.org  
862-359-1271

## **Mighty Writers Atlantic City**

15 N. California  
Atlantic City, NJ 08401

Director: Tom Sykes  
tsykes@mightywriters.org  
609-412-1767

## **Want to lend a hand?**

We offer online and in-person volunteer opportunities for all ages. Sign up online or contact one of the directors above to get started. [mightywriters.org/volunteer-application](https://mightywriters.org/volunteer-application)

