



Annual Report - Fiscal Year 2021
July 2020 - June 2021



WRITE. SHARE. INSPIRE.



"So amazing to see my words on a published page!"

— Summer 2020 Alum
Student Writers And Readers Meet!
Author in *SWARM! Volume One*



"Young Writers & Leaders has been one of the best experiences of my entire life. I'm so grateful for The Telling Room."

— Khalil Kilani
Young Writers & Leaders Alum
Author in *Shadowboxing* and
No Time for Rehearsing



"The Telling Room has helped me to see the magic of writing and storytelling."

— Youmna Mohamed
Young Writers & Leaders Alum
Author in *No Time for Rehearsing*



"My favorite part of The Telling Room is the community of writers; getting to know the other fellows and their books has been a highlight of this year."

— Sofie Matson
Young Emerging Authors Alum
Author of *Amateurity*



"Every time someone reads something of mine, it blows my mind a little bit, to know that the words somehow traveled from me to them and made them feel something."

— Alexa Barstow
Young Emerging Authors Alum
Author of *Truth Be Cold*



"Before The Telling room, I never really liked writing. I used to think it was useless. But ever since The Telling Room I like writing and I don't think it's useless anymore."

— Chance Woodcock
Oceanside Residency Student
Author in *Here We Are Today*

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
& BOARD PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

He says “You’re a cracked shell.”
I say, “I am still keeping my shape.”

So writes Telling Room author Simona Ickia Ngaullo in “Cracked Shell,” a poem she wrote in the Young Writers & Leaders program and published in *Shadowboxing*, a book dedicated to what we lost and what we found this past year.

Like the speaker in Simona’s poem, many of us have learned to see what’s holding us together through the cracks. In fact, we spent the year exploring what it meant to have The Telling Room cracked by COVID and its many crises while still maintaining our shape. What would our afterschool programs feel like outside of our cozy Commercial Street space, with its lime green cabinets and well-worn chairs? We wondered if we would be able to make and maintain connections with students far and wide as we reimagined our operations and events. Were engagement and creativity still possible in an online learning environment?

The virtual world quickly became our space.

We forged connections and broadened our reach. Our staff invented brand new statewide digital programming to connect students in isolated areas of Maine. Our Ambassadors and alums hosted Instagram Live Open Mic Nights, and we held energized student readings over Zoom. These were all such successes that we sometimes even forgot that we were virtual. Sometimes.

In the spring of 2021, we ventured back into a few classrooms, both virtually and in-person. We dusted off our tables and

WRITE.



INSPIRE.

brought our students safely back into our space on Commercial Street. By the summer, The Telling Room studio was abuzz once more with staff and young authors with pens in hand!

By prioritizing community — and community-building — The Telling Room kept and strengthened our dedication to youth empowerment. We maintained hope and held space for one another, even though that space might have looked and felt a little different. Our students continued to write, many of them processing the dual pandemics of COVID and racism. We had a special visit from former president and acclaimed author Barack Obama. And inaugural poet Amanda Gorman wrote the introduction to our best-selling student poetry anthology, *A New Land*, not just shining a light on youth voices across the country, but embodying what we see young writers doing at The Telling Room each and every day: finding their voices and raising them up to reshape our communities for the better.

Because of all of you — students, readers, teachers, parents, guardians, friends, supporters, partners, volunteers, the list is long — we’ve been able to share youth stories throughout the year. We continue to empower and amplify youth voices that define The Telling Room and our community.

Thank you for helping us navigate these most challenging times. Your support has been a life force for Telling Room students and staff. We hope you’ll see in this report how powerful our voices can be when we join together, how through this year we’ve kept our shape, and how we are emerging even stronger than before.

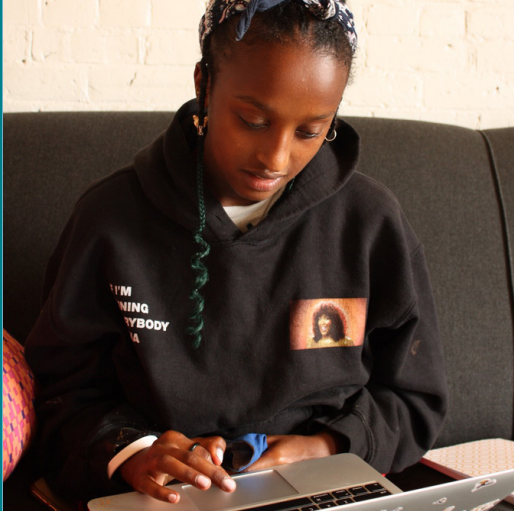
With hope and gratitude,



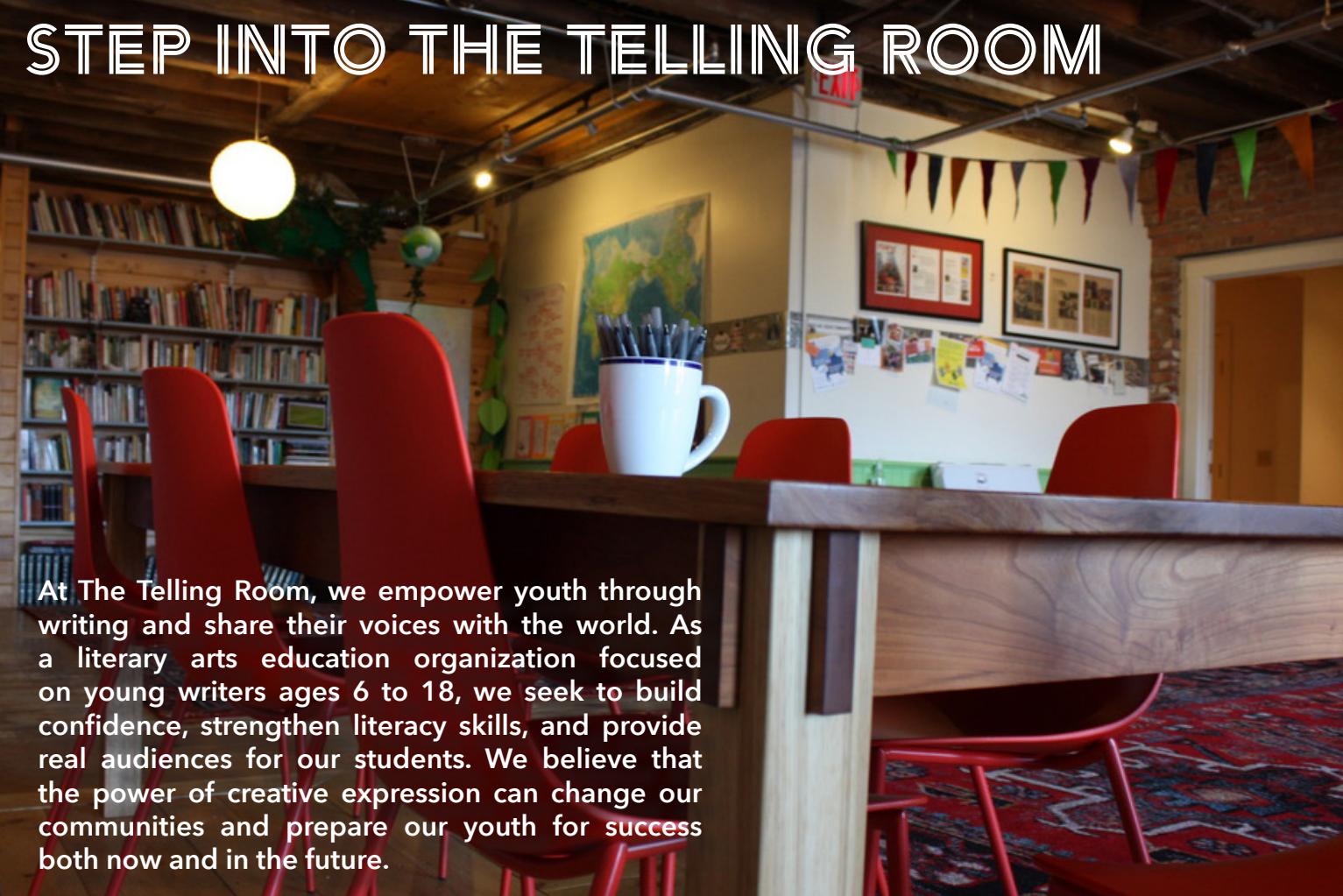
Celine Kuhn,
Telling Room
Former Executive
Director



Anya Endsley,
Telling Room
Current Board
President



SHARE.



At The Telling Room, we empower youth through writing and share their voices with the world. As a literary arts education organization focused on young writers ages 6 to 18, we seek to build confidence, strengthen literacy skills, and provide real audiences for our students. We believe that the power of creative expression can change our communities and prepare our youth for success both now and in the future.

OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

Students Served Through Our Writing & Publishing Programs and Events: 1472
Program Hours: 1117
Books Published: 11
New Authors: 282
Readings & Events: 20

"Anybody who enters the Telling Room's doors knows that they have a place in the world."

— Amanda Dettmann,
Telling Room Author, Alum, and Ambassador



WRITING & PUBLISHING ACROSS MAINE... ...AND THE COUNTRY!

82

Towns were served through our afterschool programs, summer camps, and statewide writing contest.

Augusta	New Paltz, NY
Alfred	New York, NY
Alna	North Berwick
Bangor	North Monmouth
Bass Harbor	North Yarmouth
Bath	Oakland
Belfast	Old Town
Belgrade	Orono
Berwick	Owls Head
Biddeford	Palmyra
Boothbay Harbor	Peaks Island
Bowdoinham	Philadelphia, PA
Boston, MA	Port Clyde
Bridgewater	Portland
Bridgton	Presque Isle
Brunswick	Raymond
Cape Elizabeth	Richmond
Casco	Rockland
Corinna	Saco
Cornish	Sanford
Cumberland	Scarborough
Dedham	Seal Beach, CA
Dexter	Springdale
Durham	Springvale
Dresden	South Berwick
Falmouth	South Gardiner
Farmington	South Portland
Farmingdale	St. George
Friendship	Telluride, CO
Fryeburg	Tenants Harbor
Gardiner	Thomaston
Gorham	Topsham
Harpswell	Unity
Holden	Waterville
Houlton	Wayne
Kennebunkport	Westbrook
Kittery	West Gardiner
Limerick	Windham
Mapleton	Woolwich
Monticello	Yarmouth
New Gloucester	York

A NOTE FROM OUR PROGRAMS TEAM

In March of 2020, I had to write the hardest email of my eight-year tenure at The Telling Room. Here's an excerpt of what I said to our teaching artists:

I don't think anyone knows exactly what the future holds. I can't promise that this hiatus is only two weeks, nor can I make any guarantees about programs scheduled for this spring. I just know that we have to start here, for the health and safety of everyone in our community.

I like to reflect on that email periodically. Virtual programming went well at The Telling Room — in fact, we decided we're going to keep one program virtual and make at least one other hybrid! The biggest beneficiaries of our remote programming were young people who live beyond the Portland area. And when we say beyond the Portland area, we're talking about every county in Maine. For the first time, we had students who live more than a four-hour drive away from our studio attending weekly programs.

Like many places, the story we're telling of the pandemic is one of resilience, resourcefulness, and gratitude. Resilience because we've made the most of virtual learning, going from knowing absolutely nothing in March 2020 to giving advice on best practices in professional development workshops in June 2021. Resourcefulness because we started a new virtual program and in the process made connections around the state that will serve us, Maine's youth, and our community in the future. Gratitude because we've received tremendous support from all our stakeholders throughout, and had the good fortune of doing work — writing — that translates reasonably well to a virtual environment. All you need is a blank page, something to write with, and a little imagination to get started.

— Nick Whiston
Program Director



IN-SCHOOL RESIDENCIES & WORKSHOPS

OCEANSIDE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Rockland

At Oceanside Middle School, teacher Catherine Sally was determined to have The Telling Room back after her March 2020 residency was canceled after just one day due to COVID. Students wedged themselves into spaces all over the school and at home to log in and participate, connecting with classmates learning remotely. We celebrated the launch of their chapbook, *Here We Are Today*, outdoors in a garden planted by the students, whose writing had grown alongside the vegetable patch.

SHAPLEIGH SCHOOL

Kittery

Despite the pandemic's disruptions to our usual residency calendar, we successfully ran our first two virtual residencies ever, both with long-time educational partners. At Shapleigh School in Kittery, we led a personal narrative residency for a 6 - 8th grade group and two 4th - 5th grade groups. Though it created long days online for our teaching artists and students alike, the writers were fired up and published a beautiful chapbook, *Excited to Look Around*. The book is 164 pages of short fiction featuring 134 authors, as well as dragons, playgrounds, and the worst-tasting food ever.



MAST LANDING SCHOOL: Freeport

With some of the technology wrinkles of spring 2020 ironed out, our Mast Landing virtual poetry workshop was a smooth success. To accommodate hybrid schedules and students attending at home, we split the usual group into two smaller cohorts. Throughout, we witnessed students passionate about writing develop their craft alongside reluctant writers, and all produced work they could be proud of. Although our six meetings were virtual, we were excited to be able to gather socially distanced and masked in the elementary school's cafeteria for a heartening final reading.

MARCIA BUKER ELEMENTARY: Richmond

One of the highlights of our year is collaborating with the 4th and 5th grade teachers at Marcia Buker Elementary School in Richmond. After a long hiatus from inviting outside groups to come in, we jumped at the opportunity to visit as soon as the doors reopened to visitors in spring of 2021. Using our theme of "Mystery," we got kids outside investigating mysterious places and inanimate object characters around the school grounds. The two mystery poems they wrote were wonderful, but the most fun thing was the shared delight of being back in the classroom with students — and having a blast writing and sharing in community.



RESIDENCIES

134

STUDENTS SERVED IN:
3 PROGRAMS
8 CLASSES
96 PROGRAM HOURS

WORKSHOPS

329

STUDENTS SERVED IN:
11 PROGRAMS
23 CLASSES
145 PROGRAM HOURS

CAPE ELIZABETH HIGH SCHOOL: Cape Elizabeth

Another highlight of our long-awaited return to schools was a college essay workshop in Cape Elizabeth, and it was worth the wait. Through the hybrid format, we were able to spend multiple sessions with each student teasing out potential topics and writing. We can't wait to check in with them this fall to see how their essays have been coming along!



WRITING & PUBLISHING AT THE TELLING ROOM

WELCOME BACK, WRITERS BLOCK!

14 STUDENTS SERVED IN:
1 PROGRAM
10 PROGRAM HOURS

After many months of isolation, we joyfully (and safely!) reopened our doors in April of 2020 to bring one of our most in-demand programs back from hiatus — Writers Block! For the first time in over a year, we welcomed students into our space to write and connect in-person in a low-pressure, fun, creative way. Two cohorts grouped by age (students 9-12 and 13-18) joined us in a supportive environment to meet new friends and engage in writing through choose-your-own prompts suitable for multiple genres and levels. A diverse group joined us from Kittery, Westbrook, Cape Elizabeth, Cumberland, Portland, and South Portland, and we were so glad to hear the sound of pencils scratching on paper once more!

STUDENT WRITERS AND READERS MEET!

153 STUDENTS SERVED IN:
17 HIVES
190 PROGRAM HOURS



In summer of 2020, we launched SWARM! (Student Writers And Readers Meet!) to connect students from all across Maine virtually during the pandemic. It was our first foray into virtual teaching, and a big success! Our first SWARM! was led by four teaching artists and offered a platform for students to write and publish a piece about their experiences during this unprecedented time. After the first four 'hives' met and were published in their chapbook, we've offered this program every semester since, broadening our focus to include other genres and themes so students can submit their writing to our annual anthology. We will continue to offer SWARM! moving forward so that youth living anywhere in Maine have a way to connect with The Telling Room and write with one another.

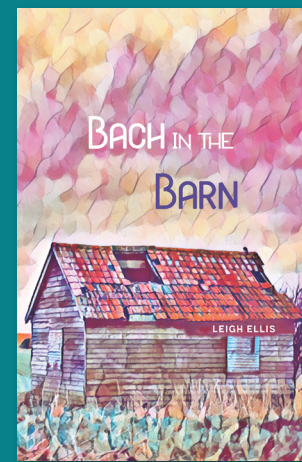
Alfred
Alna
Bath
Belgrade
Biddeford
Boothbay
Harbor
Bowdoinham
Bridgewater
Bridgton
Brunswick
Cape Elizabeth
Corinna
Cornish
Cumberland
Durham
Dresden
Falmouth
Farmington
Farmingdale
Friendship
Fryeburg
Gardiner
Gorham
Houlton

Kennebunkport
Kittery
Limerick
Mapleton
Monticello
Monmouth

North
Yarmouth
Orono
Palmyra
Peaks Island
Port Clyde
Portland
Presque Isle
Raymond
Rockland
Scarborough
Springdale
South Berwick
South Gardiner
South
Portland
St. George
Tenants
Harbor
Thomaston
Unity
Waterville
Westbrook
West
Gardiner
Woolwich
Yarmouth
York

54
towns
served by
SWARM!





We were able to meet in-person for the first time on a glorious spring day in April, and this summer we celebrated the launch of this year's books, including a biting social satire, a novel in vignettes, a tender family drama, and an imaginative LGBTQ+ coming-of-age story. This intimate, in-person celebration in our Commercial Street studio space was a festive and validating way to end an isolated year. We congratulate Leigh, Lerman, Maya, and Sofie for all that they accomplished.



YOUNG EMERGING AUTHORS

4 STUDENTS SERVED IN:
1 PROGRAM
75 PROGRAM HOURS

Writing a book in a year is a tall order — writing a book in a pandemic year is a monumental feat! In a time when many writers struggled to put words on the page, our four Young Emerging Authors students prevailed against the challenges COVID presented. Each student grew as a writer, and was pushed to think more deeply about their prose (we had four novels this year!), story structure, and audience. Through weekly Zoom sessions, we shared writing with each other and mentors, building community amongst our cohort. The mentorship component was paramount, and because of Zoom, mentors were able to join us from near and far. Our meetings became a bright spot for students during a year of remote learning and limited in-person interaction.





YOUNG WRITERS & LEADERS



STUDENTS SERVED IN:
3 PROGRAMS
120 PROGRAM HOURS



Young Writers & Leaders (YWL) began in July 2020, when we held a virtual one-week intensive, serving eight students who then submitted their work to two of our online publications, “Voice of a Pride” and “Stories.” In October 2020, we began our nine-month program virtually, meeting with two cohorts of sixteen students who represented seven high schools in Greater Portland and eleven different nations, including Angola, Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Iraq, Jordan, Kurdistan, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan.

Students began to write together, exploring their cultural identity and various literary genres, composing original poems and personal narratives with the help of their individual volunteer writing coaches, four of whom were YWL alums themselves! They had engaging visits from guest writers, and we celebrated their writing twice for virtual audiences, in collaboration with the Portland Public Library — sharing their words with 165 people in all. Students concluded the year by writing short fiction pieces inspired by portraits by fine art photographer Séan Alonzo Harris.

One of the highlights of our year with the YWL students was the opportunity to have a special conversation with acclaimed author and renowned world leader, President Barack Obama. Ahead of his visit, Crown Publishing sent a free copy of his presidential memoir, *A Promised Land*, to every student enrolled in the program and made the audiobook available as well. The 44th President of the United States conversed over Zoom with our students, and shared insights on writing, leadership, what’s on his favorite playlist, and the experience of growing up between cultures. He encouraged the students to continue to seek mentorship and education, and to continue writing beyond this program, leaving them inspired.

In June, we gathered at Thompson’s Point for a joyous launch of their chapbook, *No Time for Rehearsing*, and students were able to meet each other and their writing mentors in-person — many for the very first time! Friendship, warmth, and hope was in the air that sunny afternoon, and these students continue to inspire through their writing and leadership, joining the incredible family of YWL alumni in our community.



STUDENTS REFLECT ON SPEAKING WITH BARACK OBAMA

“You can’t change the world by yourself. You need other people trying to do the same thing as you to make it happen.”

— Simona Ickia Ngaullo, South Portland High School Senior

“I’m not in this [writing] alone. I’m going to get better with time. You just have to keep going.”

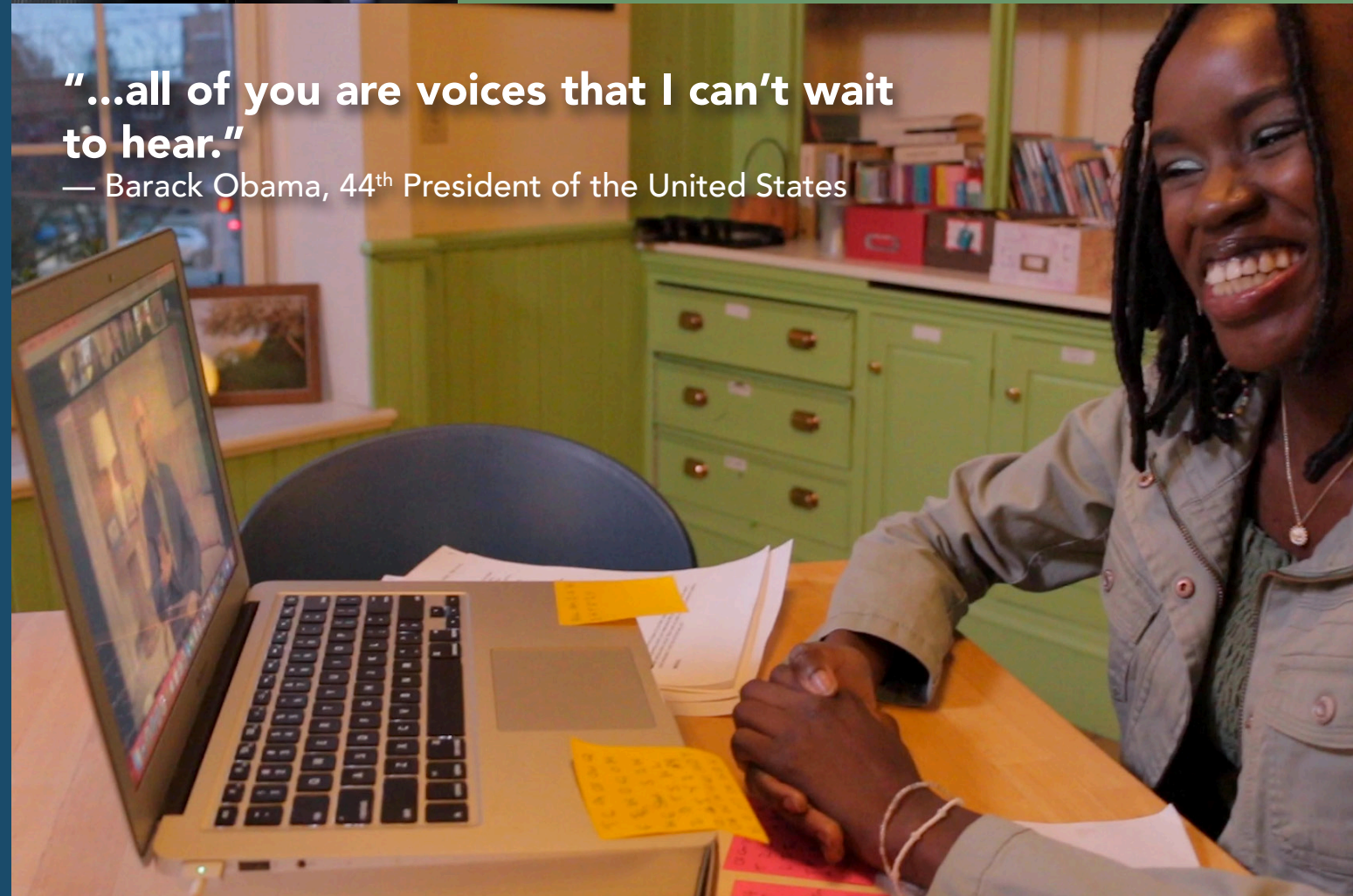
— Alia Usanase, Deering High School Junior

“He was in our shoes at one time. Your path isn’t always clear, and look at him, he became president, and he’s here talking to us. It gave me inspiration . . . anything is possible and he made that very clear.”

— Khalil Kilani, Waynflete Senior

“...all of you are voices that I can’t wait to hear.”

— Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States





PUBLISHING WORKSHOP

12 STUDENTS SERVED IN:
2 PROGRAMS
32 PROGRAM HOURS

In the fall semester of Publishing Workshop, seven students and one Telling Room alum worked virtually with the program leads, Molly McGrath and Clare LaVergne, to brainstorm innovative marketing ideas for The Telling Room's newly published collection of best-of youth poetry, *A New Land*. We looked at marketing trends in the U.S. publishing world and developed strategies that eventually became part of the comprehensive promotional plans for *A New Land*, in tandem with the 25th anniversary of National Poetry Month.

In the spring semester, three students and two Telling Room alumni worked with the program leads to serve as editors of The Telling Room's annual anthology of student writing, which centered on the theme of "Lost and Found" this year. We flexed our typically very

interactive process of reading and discussing submissions, weighing in on cover design decisions, and planning a launch celebration in a virtual format. Thirty student voices spanning Telling Room programs, residencies, and workshops, are collected in this new book, including the three Publishing Workshop students, along with an introduction collaboratively written by program participants and a cover designed by Publishing Workshop participant, Telling Room author and Ambassador Alicia Brillant.

After losing the chance to work together in The Telling Room's physical studio, in June we found our connection with each other once more as twenty-two authors, their families, and friends gathered with us on Portland's Eastern Promenade to celebrate the launch of *Shadowboxing*. Nearly all of the authors came up to take the mic and read from their selections in the book and signed each other's copies, while two of our authors, all-star alumni from Publishing Workshop, emceed the event. This collection brings together writing from all of our programs and the young authors who came together to produce published work stayed the course throughout the pandemic. We couldn't imagine a higher note to end the year on!



SECOND STORY

11 STUDENTS SERVED IN:
2 PROGRAMS
30 PROGRAM HOURS

"The world needs us."
— Second Story participant

Nine students wrote with us in the fall as we fell in love with poetry and spoken word. Three poets (all current or former Telling Room mentors, staff, and/or Ambassadors), Nyamuon Nguany Machar (Moon), Amanda Dettmann, and Samaa Abdurraqib, joined us as guest artists and inspired our students by sharing writing and performance tips. The semester culminated in a Zoom performance, open to the public, to celebrate these dedicated young authors.

Spring welcomed new students to our program with different writing goals and needs. Youth across Maine were feeling the effects of an extended year of remote learning, lockdowns, and virtual programming, and many craved a less structured creative space where they could feel supported and safe. Poets Myles Bullen and Maya Williams, whose work is often steeped in topics of mental health and identity, joined us as guest artists, and we found inspiration from other youth writers in *A New Land*. We pivoted to more collaborative writing exercises like drafting group poems, and each participant was floored by the enchanting final product. As this young program continues to grow and evolve, we were proud of how our flexible staff and students pivoted to meet the moment during a challenging year.



A NOTE FROM OUR PUBLICATIONS TEAM

We are indeed living in “a new land,” a prophetic title that the poets surely weren’t imagining when they wrote courageously about their identities, climate change, immigration experiences, and more, in *A New Land*. Yet this year, despite the obstacles, we worked with young people who showed up to write and to be published, turning them from writers into authors of a whole new shelf of gorgeous books. And in our new landscape, we faced the challenge of meeting our writers, editors, and designers virtually, reimagining what a book launch could be and how far our authors’ visits to classrooms could go.

From the editorial ideas bouncing from home screens into each other’s heads during virtual sessions of Publishing Workshop to the beautifully designed, brand new books mailed safely to readers, youth publishing persisted. As part of our mission “to share youth voices with the world,” it was heartening to see that people still bought and read books authored by youth, and more important than ever for these youth who saw each other only on screens to be published in a tangible object that marked their accomplishment.

This was a banner year for many of our authors who enjoyed being in print and were celebrated widely in their communities, raising the profile of Telling Room books to a statewide audience through broader outreach to educators across the state, bolder partnerships with the Maine Department of Education, Maine Humanities Council, and the Governor’s Office — taking our marketing efforts to new heights.

We are excited to see this next group of authors visit even more classrooms and libraries, and represent youth publishing at more readings and events in this next year. Be sure to stock up on Telling Room books for your shelves on our website, grab a copy from your local library, or order from an independent bookstore near you!

— Molly McGrath
Publications Director

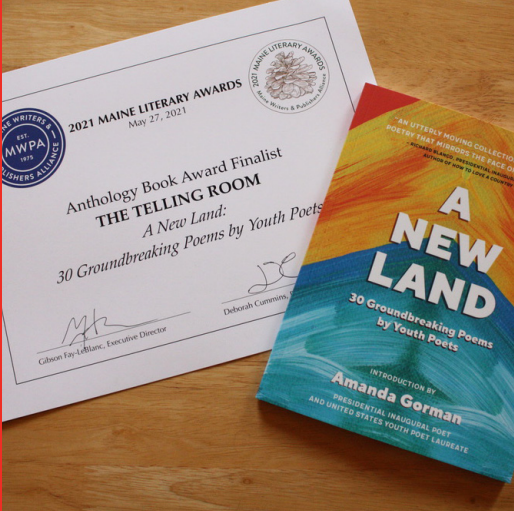


A NEW LAND

“I find it ridiculous when poets are automatically waved aside as ‘aspiring’ or ‘emerging’ due to their age. If I ever doubted my conviction, this collection just further verifies it.”

— Presidential Inaugural Poet Amanda Gorman
from her introduction to *A New Land*

Featuring 30 poems by Telling Room authors and an introduction by the incandescent Amanda Gorman, *A New Land* was released in November of 2020 and celebrated in April of 2021 in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of National Poetry Month.



606 DOWNLOADS & COUNTLESS LISTENS

The poets in *A New Land* hit the airwaves through a podcast aired as a special broadcast on Maine Public Radio and co-created with Maine’s Poet Laureate Stuart Kestenbaum, who sat down with our poets last summer at The Telling Room as they read their work aloud and discussed the themes and inspiration behind their words. This series was generously made possible by the Academy of American Poets with funds from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

224 COPIES MAILED TO MAINE HIGH SCHOOLS

A New Land was mailed to every single high school in Maine, and was a hit with each one! It was an incomparable joy to get to work closely with the poets in the book, many of whom came back as engaged alumni to create an educator toolkit for teachers of writing prompts, videos, and audio resources to accompany the book, which received endorsements from the Maine Department of Education, Governor Janet T. Mills, Maine Humanities Council, Indigo Arts Alliance, Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance, and The Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center.



2021 FOUNDERS PRIZE

Excerpt from “Samosa Story” by Leaticia Hannah, Young Writers & Leaders
Winner of the 2021 Founders Prize

The Founders Prize is awarded annually by the three founders of The Telling Room: Susan Conley, Sara Corbett, and Michael Paterniti, to the author of the best piece of writing to come out of a Telling Room program.

When I was five years old, I was really close to my grandparents. We lived together with the rest of my family in Mwene Ditu, a big city in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was supposed to help my grandma on small things around the house, like going to buy bread or milk or anything she needed for cooking. This allowed me to leave our family’s compound and walk on the street, which young children normally weren’t supposed to do, according to my grandpa’s rules. I liked having the responsibility. But only when I wasn’t already busy with my toys or my friends. Sometimes, my grandma would ask me to buy something for her, and I would refuse because I was more interested in playing with my friends. And if she really insisted, then I would start crying. And my grandmother would smile at me and say, “Even if you are crying, you are still going forward.”

I didn’t realize how important those words would become in my life. Going forward would always matter.

Read the full story at: www.tellingroom.org/student-work/samosa-story



Leaticia Hannah was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and she grew up in Kinshasa. As a teenager, she moved to Luanda, Angola, where she went to the French school. Now she’s a senior at Deering High School in Portland, Maine. Leaticia is also the oldest sister in her family and an adventurous traveler. Her goal is to go as far with her education as she can, and she dreams of being a lawyer and an author so she can speak for people who don’t have a voice.

SUMMER CAMPS

Youth from all over the state joined us for a mix of virtual and in-person camps at The Telling Room in the summers of 2020 and 2021! What we saw in these summertime writing and publishing experiences was humbling and energizing as youth throughout Maine picked up their pencils, pens, laptops, and iPads and wrote with us no matter where they were, from their homes to a city farmer’s market to a farm in the countryside.

CAMPERS JOINED US FROM...

27 COMMUNITIES
21 CITIES & TOWNS IN MAINE

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Bass Harbor | New York, NY |
| Belfast | Philadelphia, PA |
| Boston, MA | Portland |
| Bowdoinham | Raymond |
| Cape Elizabeth | Saco |
| Cumberland | Scarborough |
| Falmouth | Seal Beach, CA |
| Freeport | South Portland |
| Fryeburg | Topsham |
| Gorham | Waterville |
| Harpswell | Wayne |
| New Gloucester | Westbrook |
| Bridgewater, NJ | Yarmouth |
| New Paltz, NY | |



VIRTUAL SUMMER CAMPS

114 STUDENTS SERVED IN:
15 CAMPS
274 PROGRAM HOURS



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS

We heard time and time again that this was by far the most challenging academic year that teachers of all experience levels had faced. To support our schools and students, we strove to collaborate in creative new ways throughout the year with one of our most vital partners — our educators.

Program Director Nick Whiston and Lead Teacher Marjolaine Whittlesey teamed up with the Maine Department of Education on their initiative, Maine Online Opportunities for Sustained Education (MOOSE). These online learning modules are aligned with the Maine Learning Results, project-based and student-centered, free, and open to all for use. Catch Telling Room student writing and our teaching philosophy in several units, including the The Poet Tree, A Whole New World: Constructed Language and Worldbuilding, and Cultural Connections: Understanding Elements that Contribute to Cultural Identity modules.

Alongside our National Poetry Month campaign to send *A New Land* to each high school in Maine with tools for educators, we hosted two virtual statewide workshops in the spring for teachers across the state exploring how to teach poetry and short story writing. Students and alumni joined us to share their work, experiences, and classroom tips from those now teaching themselves. Educators were particularly curious about how to support students through constructive feedback and the revision process, and excited to learn different ways to approach writing when the empty page looms large. These short sessions were a wonderful way to connect with educators in our state and build connections that led to author classroom visits, curriculum collaborations, and more!

In June we shifted our Summer Institute for Educators to a virtual setting and met with twelve teachers and community members from across the country to share The Telling Room’s approach to empowering students through writing. This intensive three day workshop left our group feeling uplifted, inspired, and well-equipped to support youth through the challenges ahead.

PROGRAM PARTNERS

- Brown Elementary
- Cape Elizabeth High School
- Colby College
- Dexter High School
- Dyer Elementary
- Ironwood Maine, Therapeutic School
- Kaler Elementary
- LearningWorks
- Mahoney Middle School
- Marcia Buker Elementary School
- Mast Landing School
- Memorial Middle School
- Oceanside High School
- Oceanside Middle School
- Portland Public Library
- Shapleigh School
- SidexSide
- Skidompha Public Library
- Skillin Elementary
- Small Elementary

“You really inspired so many young, thoughtful people and you have such a welcoming, authentic presence while presenting remotely. . . I really appreciate your willingness to visit my class, share your stories and invigorate so many minds!”

— Kate Muzzy,
Maine Educator



70

Educators accessed
Telling Room virtual
professional development
workshops



224

High schools in Maine
received *A New Land*
and the poetry month
educator toolkit



169

Views of The Telling
Room’s MOOSE learning
modules





AMBASSADORS

In 2020, we reimagined our Ambassador program to engage Telling Room program alumni to advise and engage on strategic organizational decision-making opportunities across The Telling Room, ranging from programming, publications, development, and curriculum design. Our five Ambassadors, **Edna Thecla Akimana, Alicia Brillant, Amanda Dettmann, Rachel Iradukunda, and Ladislav Nzeyimana**, shone throughout the community in so many different ways!

From creating and hosting presentations with community members as Telling Room alumni and authors to celebrating National Poetry Month at Tandem Coffee Roasters through an Instagram takeover, and as key members of our Executive Director search Hiring Committee, these alumni were essential and innovative envoys of The Telling Room's mission, values, and students. We are so grateful to them for bringing their time, creativity, and enthusiasm to the following events and partnerships:

COMMUNITY

Academy of American Poets
 Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival *
 Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine
 Greater Portland Council of Governments *
 The Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center
 Indigo Arts Alliance
 LearningWorks
 Leavitt Area High School Arts Gala *
 Maine Bicentennial Commission
 Maine Department of Education
 Maine Humanities Council *
 Maine Initiatives *
 Maine Philanthropy Center *
 Maine Public Radio
 Maine State Library

*Indicates Ambassador collaboration

SHOW & TELL: A LITERARY SPECTACULAR

Necessity drove us to new heights of creativity as we re-imagined our signature literary variety show to be a virtual event! Fearless filmmaker and director Sean Mewshaw adapted one of our largest performances of the year into an intimate evening at Portland's historic State Theatre that Telling Room community members could tune into from home. We were joined by the talents of Lady Lamb, authors Phuc Tran and Kelly Corrigan, and the evening was joyfully emceed by two Telling Room alums — Amanda Dettmann and Salim Salim. Poems by *A New Land* authors Lulu Rasor, Benedita Zalabantu, and Siri Pierce came to life through video as our community rallied around The Telling Room's mission and students in a whole new — and highly successful — way!

PARTNERS

Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance
 Maine Youth Action Network *
 NAACP in Maine *
 Natural Resources Council of Maine
 New England Youth Identity Summit *
 The Office of Governor Janet T. Mills
 POETRY Foundation
 Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce *
 Portland ConnectED
 Print: A Bookstore
 Side x Side
 The State Theatre *
 Tandem Coffee Roasters *
 Waynflete *
 WERU *

Partnerships enrich our community, help us cultivate readership, create vibrant events, and amplify the voices of our students and authors. Thank you to these organizations for their collaboration!



OUR 2020 - 2021 TEAM

STAFF

Celine Kuhn, Executive Director
Peyton Black, Program & Volunteer Manager
Keith Cormier, Teaching Artist
Rylan Hynes, Communications Manager (2021)
Amy Kimball, Teaching Artist
Blaire Knight-Graves, Communications Manager (2020)
Clare LaVergne, Publications Manager
Moon Machar, Young Writers & Leaders Teaching Artist
Molly McGrath, Publications Director
Jenny O’Connell, Teaching Artist
Hipai Pamba, Young Writers & Leaders Co-Teacher
Laura Poppick, Teaching Artist
Rachele Ryan, Operations & Development Manager
Sarah Schneider, Development Director
Sonya Tomlinson, Young Writers & Leaders Lead Teacher
Meghan Vigeant, Teaching Artist
Nick Whiston, Programs Director
Marjolaine Whittlesey, Lead Teacher
Kathryn Williams, Lead Teacher

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Ninette Irabaruta
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Sean Tabb

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Anja Hanson
Patty Howells
Lily King
Ari Meil
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Michael Paterniti

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Catherine Richards Olney
Laura Shen
Bob Zager

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Sarah Schneider, Staff
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Pam Wheeler, Community Member
Bob Zager, Community Member

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Rob Gould, Board Member
Tanuja Desai Hidier, Board Member
Rylan Hynes, Staff
Alisan Kavookjian, Board Member
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Rachele Ryan, Staff
Sarah Schneider, Staff
Laura Shen, Community Member
Heather Shields, Community Member
Peg Smith, Board Member
Ruth Story, Community Member
Emma Wilson, Community Member

SHOW & TELL: A LITERARY SPECTACULAR

Alisan Kavookjian, Co-Chair, Board Member
Kate Malin, Co-Chair, Board Member
Peyton Black, Staff
Renee Cabot, Community Member
Susan Conley, Advisory Board Member
Rob Gould, Board Member
Ann Hayes, Community Member
Samar Jumali, Community Member
Lily King, Advisory Board Member
Celine Kuhn, Executive Director
Sean Mewshaw, Director
Rachele Ryan, Staff
Sarah Schneider, Staff
Sonya Tomlinson, Staff

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Anya Endsley, Board Vice President
Patty Howells, Ex Officio
Celine Kuhn, Executive Director
Tim Schneider, Board President
Donna Simonetti, Board Treasurer
Beth Stickney, Board Secretary



THE FINANCIAL STORY

FISCAL YEAR: JULY 1, 2020 - JUNE 30, 2021

Take a look at our books to learn more about how we brought the power of storytelling alive this fiscal year.

INCOME

Total: \$710,222



- **Book Sales & Earned Revenue:**
\$14,711 (2.07%)
- **Corporate & Business Grants:**
\$27,125 (3.82%)
- **Event Income:**
\$54,633 (7.69%)
- **Federal & State Grants:**
\$76,000 (10.70%)
- **Program Income:**
\$79,764 (11.23%)
- **Foundation & Trust Grants:**
\$135,000 (19.01%)
- **Individual Contributions:**
\$322,989 (45.48%)

EXPENSES

Total: \$694,540



- **Special Event Production:**
\$13,210 (1.9%)
- **Book Production:**
\$18,136 (2.61%)
- **Fundraising:**
\$112,914 (16.26%)
- **Administrative:**
\$170,392 (24.53%)
- **Teaching & Program Delivery:**
\$379,888 (54.7%)

Notes:

Total Income does not include \$100,000 in grant funds received in fiscal year 2020 - 21 and restricted for use in the 2021 - 22 fiscal year. See our 2020 - 21 financial statements for more information at: www.tellingroom.org/annual-report



THANK YOU!

We are so grateful for all the generous individual, corporate, and foundation donors who supported us this past year. See our full list of contributors at: www.tellingroom.org/donor-list

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ONLINE

For an electronic copy of this report or to see our full financial statements, visit: www.tellingroom.org/annual-report

SUPPORT YOUTH VOICES

Our vibrant and generous community makes it possible for us to advance our mission to empower youth through writing and share their voices with the world. To make a secure gift, visit: www.tellingroom.org/donate



At The Telling Room, we empower youth through writing and share their voices with the world.

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