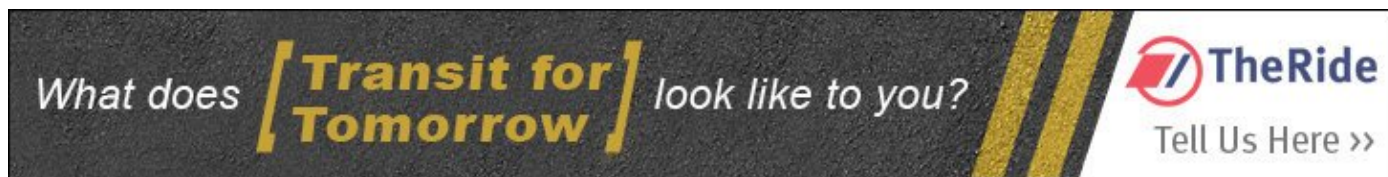


YpsiWrites collaboration offers free writing programming for all ages



During the grand opening for the [YpsiWrites](#) community writing center program, Mary Garboden witnessed the power that expressing oneself through writing can have on people of all ages.

The new program will offer free drop-in writing help for adults and older teens at all three [Ypsilanti District Library](#) (YDL) locations, plus special events for both adults and youth on writing topics suggested by the community, ranging from poetry to memoirs. Garboden, YDL's head of outreach services, was encouraged to see several teenagers who stumbled upon the grand opening on Oct. 19, but found themselves drawn to the writing exercises staff were facilitating.

In one case, a teenager spent two hours talking with two teachers who were volunteering as writing tutors for the program.

"A lot of the children I work with really take to one-on-one interactions with adults, because I think they don't (often) get that gift of time," Garboden says. "I think the writing center is going to have a really positive impact,

because it's not just about meeting life goals but about emotional support, and that moment illustrated that. We might have concrete goals (around writing), but it also helps us sort out our lives, and the younger we start doing that, the better off we are."

YpsiWrites is a partnership between YDL, youth writing and tutoring program [826michigan](#), and Eastern Michigan University's (EMU) Office of Campus and Community Writing. EMU professor Ann Blakeslee says the program is a natural extension of work all three organizations already do.

"The model for YpsiWrites is one of outreach," Blakeslee says.

The EMU campus already has its own writing center, and since Blakeslee's department's title includes the concept of "community", she says "it's a natural for us, in light of our other programs, to extend that outreach to the community."

Cathy Fleischer, a professor of English and faculty associate of the Office of Campus and Community Writing, says a community writing center has been a "dream" for her and Blakeslee for "quite a while." The department had already been working with faculty members to incorporate writing across the entire curriculum, as well as working on an initiative where EMU staff helped families to encourage writing in their own home and to identify as writers.

"We started thinking about ... if we could make it more of a sustained enterprise, and we started talking to librarians, brainstorming together, and came up with this approach," Fleischer says.

Catherine Calabro Cavin, education director for 826michigan, says her organization has been partnering with YDL on tutoring and free creative writing programs for a long time. Tutoring sessions used to take place at Beezy's Cafe but transitioned to YDL's Michigan Avenue branch last year.

"We were already running some of these programs, and so with the Office of Campus and Community Writing interested in offering programs like this to adults, we said, 'Wouldn't it be great if all these programs were run through the library together in one easy place to access?'" Calbro Cavin says.

The [Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living](#) recently joined the collaboration. A series of workshops targeting people ages 14-26 with disabilities are planned for 11 a.m. to noon Saturdays from Nov. 9 through Nov. 23 and Dec. 7 and 14 at YDL's Michigan Avenue branch. Calabro Cavin says the ultimate goal will be to publish an anthology of those writers' pieces sometime in the spring, as 826michigan does for its young participants' writing.

Another partner in the effort was [Washtenaw Literacy](#), a nonprofit that already has a long-term connection to YDL. Washtenaw Literacy gave input to help shape the program, and its staff will likely refer their participants to YpsiWrites for additional help.

"Their learners are already comfortable in our library spaces, because they're used to meeting with tutors there," Garboden says. "It's already a place that feels familiar and welcoming, and that means they'll be more likely to use it."

All YpsiWrites programs will be facilitated by trained community volunteers. Blakeslee says the partners recruited EMU writing center staff, writing consultants, and other faculty and colleagues at EMU, though volunteer opportunities are open to all community members. She says YpsiWrites already had more than 50 volunteers signed up ahead of the grand opening, and she anticipates that number will grow.

She says community members are welcome to bring in all types of writing projects, whether they are writing their first novel in their spare time or trying to complete a resume and cover letter so they can get a job.

EMU and YDL staff will focus on heading up the writing help and workshops for adults, while 826michigan will spearhead youth programming. Some programs will be multi-generational as well.

"We're facilitating, helping the writer with questions and developing ideas, and addressing things in their writing that they might want to work on," Fleischer says. "We're helping volunteers understand that our job isn't to edit somebody's writing, but to help them develop their voice as a writer."

Drop-in hours will be from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays at the Whittaker branch of the YDL; from 4-7 p.m. Wednesdays at the Michigan Avenue branch; and 4-6 p.m. Tuesdays at the Superior branch.

Support for community members participating in National Novel Writing Month and youth workshops on writing mysteries will be held throughout November. Upcoming poetry workshops for adults and youth are scheduled for 1-2:30 p.m. Dec. 7 at the Whittaker branch; 5:30-7 p.m. Dec. 4 at the Superior branch, and 6-7:30 p.m. Dec. 10 at the Michigan Avenue branch.

More information about drop-in writing help and writing workshops is available [at YDL's website](#).

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