



Deep Center Annual Report



2022 - 2023
Savannah, Georgia

A Letter from Executive Director Holly Whitfield, PhD, CFRE



Dear Deep Community,

Thank you for making the past year another remarkable one for Deep Center, marking 15 years of service to the Savannah area. The dedicated staff has done an incredible job at expanding the breadth of Deep's work while simultaneously strengthening our programs and fortifying our role in our community.

As I have settled into my role as Executive Director, I have been honored to witness the way Deep and our community partner with our youth. Whether through creative writing, visual art, slam poetry, or advocacy and community organizing, Deep is committed to creating avenues of expression and increased opportunity for Savannah's youth and our larger community. I am excited to celebrate our continued programmatic excellence with all those who support us.

As we reflect on the past year, we cannot help but look ahead at what will come next in the 2023-24 program year. In this reflection and anticipation, Deep is emboldened by the concept of **Critical Hope**, a rethinking of "hope" that not only encourages but requires a realistic assessment of one's environment through a lens of equity and justice that also creates space to envision a better future.

CRITICAL HOPE DEFINED

Based on the work of Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade inspired by the writing of Paulo Freire

Traditional definitions of "hope" center wishful thinking, often without facts

As a disposition and analytic, **Critical Hope** refuses both despair and toxic positivity

It evokes action through the necessary critique & understanding of inequity (Duncan-Andrade)

Through our work, we see the realities of inequity, cultural suppression, and silencing that our youth and community have historically navigated and are currently experiencing.

And yet we do not succumb to hopelessness but rather use that critical awareness as the fuel to strengthen our belief in the power of intersectional and inter-generational community voices calling for change, celebrating resistance, and spreading their hope for tomorrow through art, advocacy, and the written word.

We recognize the world as it is and strive for a brighter tomorrow anyway.

From youth writing workshops to our educator programs, **Critical Hope** will continue to guide all of our work as we shine a light on the rich fabric of resistance and power evident in Savannah's history and imagine the ways we can continue to resist oppressive systems through creative opportunity.

Thank you for wholeheartedly being a part of the work and mission of Deep Center thus far. We are stronger because of it and look forward to what next year has in store!



Deep Center's 2022-2023 Story

Deep Center's mission is to empower Savannah's young people to thrive as learners, community leaders, and agents of change. Through creative writing, cultural production, and art, Deep creates platforms for the city's youth and the village of support around them, including their families and adult allies, to share stories, engage in debates, and make Savannah a more just and equitable place.

Our work is **trauma-informed, culturally responsive**, and promotes a **roots-cause model** of youth and community development through
Direct Service | Narrative Change | Systems Change



Deep Center uses **writing, art, and culture** to fuel the creative fires of Savannah's **YOUNG PEOPLE**, helping them connect their learning to their lives, their lives to their communities, and their actions to transformational change.

Through Deep's award-winning youth programs, we continued to deliver high-quality arts, cultural, and advocacy education across Savannah in 2022-23.

512
Youth Served
in Direct
Programs

35
School and
Community
Partner Sites

69
Local Artists
Providing Arts
Education

We continued expanding our work with **ADULTS, including reaching 90 direct educators through 14 workshops**, to make sure youth are seen in their full humanity and to advocate for administrative and legislative policies that make Savannah a safe place for all young people and their families.



"...at Deep it is okay to be yourself. There, they have cultivated a space where youth and staff can embrace their individuality without being ostracized or shunned. I am so grateful for all the accepting personalities, and everyone's willingness to cooperate in spite of our differences."

Bashiah McNutt, Slam & Block by Block Participant

Deep's Youth Programs

Deep Center offers six award-winning literacy, arts, and leadership programs for majority-BIPOC and low-income youth in Savannah and Chatham County.



The YOUNG AUTHOR PROJECT (YAP)

is Deep's introductory youth literacy program. Savannah-Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS) and its dedicated teachers make YAP possible, coordinating with Deep to recruit and retain youth and **hosting programs in 14 middle and high schools in 2022-23.**



WREP & DROP-IN

- **The Work Readiness Enrichment Program (WREP)** is a partnership with the Juvenile Courts and SCCPSS, and supports court-involved young men in completing high school.
- **Drop-In** engages youth in community settings who have significant barriers to learning enrichment participation.
- Drop-in was held at **three unique sites and served 164 youth.**



BLOCK BY BLOCK (BxB)

In 140 program hours, BxB engaged high-school-aged artists and storytellers who have a passion for deepening their writing, expression, and civic engagement. Youth conduct community research, discover Savannah's unfolding stories, and find their place in the world. **In 2022-23, BxB partnered with ten local arts and cultural organizations.**



ACTION RESEARCH TEAM (ART) and SLAM TEAM

- Deep's most advanced youth programs draw from YAP, BxB, and the broader community. In 2022-23:
- **ART** was made up of 14 creative and civic-minded young people who hosted a **Youth Summit Conference** and provided testimony at the Georgia State Capital during legislative sessions on education issues that directly impact them and their peers.
- **The SLAM Team took seven poets** to their capstone event, the **Brave New Voices Festival** in San Francisco, CA.

Youth Original Poems

Created by participants in the 2022-23 Young Author Project

BITTERSWEET

By Jordan Taylor

I don't know what to say.
Nor do I know what to write.
All I do know is that this is me
and only me
for the very first time in my life.
Not the me who's trying his hardest to be
a good son,
not the me who desperately clings to
those around him,
not even the me who has "earned" the
respect of those around him,
but instead it's just me:
the me who's scared far beyond straight,
the me who's stressed far beyond his
mind,
the me who's lost far beyond recover,
the me that no one hears,
the me that even I don't hear sometimes,
but I've always been here though,
begging, crying, dying to be heard,
but much like a bird trapped in its cage,
I'm only ever seen,
and barely at that,
for no one wants to listen to a bird
whose song is bittersweet.

Writer with the
New Hampstead K-8 School
Young Author Project

POWER OF MY VOICE

By Najoia Thompson

My voice is a sound
My voice is a drum
My voice is a weapon
My voice is a gun
My voice is a tool
My voice is a match
My voice is something you
will never catch
My voice is a sound
Fills everything around
My voice is a drum
It vibrates to the tongue
My voice is a weapon
You can say it's bittersweet
My voice is a gun
Deadly for the fun
My voice is a tool
It's known to attach fools
My voice is a match
Ready to attack
My voice is something you
will never catch
And would never win it in a bet

Writer with the
Sol C. Johnson High School
Young Author Project



2022-23 Highlights

Sequential Arts Programs

Young Author Project

Re-entered classrooms in person for the first time since March 2020 to reach 227 new young writers.

27 Unique programs across 14 middle and high school partner sites

45% Of measured youth experienced English Language Arts grade increases during semesters engaged in the YAP program



Block by Block

BxB participants partnered with arts organizations around the city to:



- **Gain exposure and practice** working across artistic mediums, including film, photo, fine art, and painting
- **Leverage new methods of expression** to showcase both their stories and the stories of their community through photo series, documentary filmmaking, poetry, and self-portraits
- **Expand their artistic networks** through relationship-building with organizations including DOC Savannah, Sulfur Studios, and Nomadic Photo Ark



SLAM Team

This group of dynamic youth artists collaborated with adult artist-allies to bring Savannah's spoken word slam culture to the next generation of voices and make Savannah a more just and equitable place.

SLAM Team artists competed regionally and nationally, and gave voice around the nation to Savannah's stories of identity, joy, injustice, belonging, and transformation.

- **Members gained performance experience** through various spoken word events including Earth Day, Brave New Voices, and Juneteenth celebrations

Community-Based Programs

Community Drop-In

164 Youth ages 7-18 served through unique non-sequential arts and enrichment programs

3 Program sites with 43 total program sessions. Themes ranging from tie-dye and TikTok dance to creative writing and abstract drawing.

In addition to the goals of creating easy-entry and accessible spaces for positive youth development across Savannah, Drop-In also sought to be a welcoming space for low-income and systems-impacted young people, meeting them in their home communities across Savannah and Chatham County. This is an ongoing goal of Drop-In, and Deep is excited to see it expand in upcoming program years.

WREP

The Work Readiness Enrichment Program continued to serve as a model in the Savannah area for alternatives to youth sentencing in the juvenile justice system. WREP validated and recognized young people with a trauma-informed approach and sought to reimagine narratives and create opportunity for program youth.

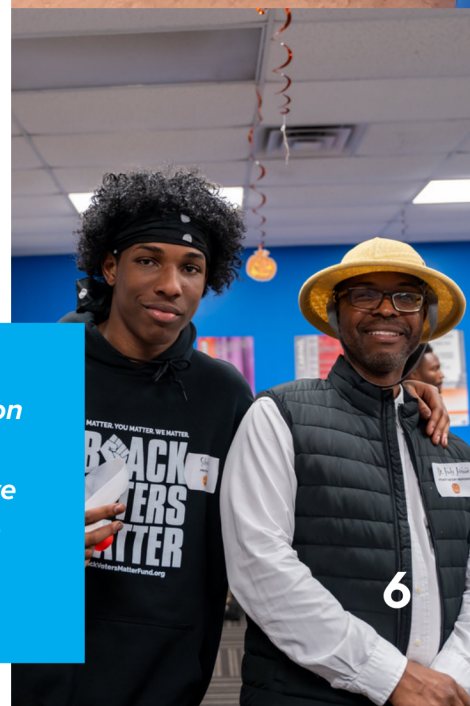
In WREP's 2022-23 School Year:

- 11 youth served over 36 weeks of daily programming
- 2 WREP youth were interviewed about their experience in the school-to-prison pipeline as a part of Justice Day at the state capitol
- WREP staff traveled with community partners to Los Angeles to visit Homeboy Industries, a national model for justice-impacted youth for training and collaboration



"In WREP, they care if you are something in life or not....Ever since I got here I've been trying to work on my future. I wasn't a good student, [but] I've been passing ever since. If you've got a dream or if you've got a plan for your life, this is where you need to be at."

- WREP Youth





BxB Reflection

Cat Bock shares about her experiences with Deep

When I first joined the Deep program as a shy and nervous sixth grader, I struggled. Then I began to slowly get better at expressing myself. After doing my best at spoken word at a showcase, something clicked. I realized how much more effectively I could convey my ideas if I were more expressive. From that day on, I became more outspoken, and I learned I could be a lot more confident in myself and my art....Deep helped me both improve my outlook and my writing.

The Deep community supports you from the icebreaker get-to-know-you beginning meetings to the rough draft critiques to the end-of-year performance when you go up on stage. It's so comfortable to be with others who see the same joy in the arts as you do....Everyone in your group is there to create, collaborate, and enjoy themselves. You get to befriend skilled people who genuinely want to help you become more confident and better at your art. Being with a group of like-minded individuals helps your growth. It creates a safe space to experiment with your writing, [and] group leaders give you so much creative freedom; they never twist your writing but instead offer genuine advice.

There are a lot of examples of accomplishments at Deep that I feel proud of looking back. I helped cook a good meal at a community kitchen with my Deep friends, even though I'm a disaster in the kitchen. There was the time when I sat through a critique session without feeling embarrassed or insulted (personal growth!). All the good writing that came out of the Block by Block sessions makes me proud to look back on it.

My poetry has drastically improved, and my spoken word performances (while not as grand as I wished them to be) are no longer the stuttering, hiding my face behind my hands messes they used to be. There are so many experiences I've had while in Deep that make me proud, not just for myself but for my amazing Deep friends.

I'm so glad I joined Deep; it's been an incredible journey. It's an important program to me and many others. The memories I made will stick with me forever.



Deep Alumni Spotlight

Aly Keys reflects on Deep's impact on his life

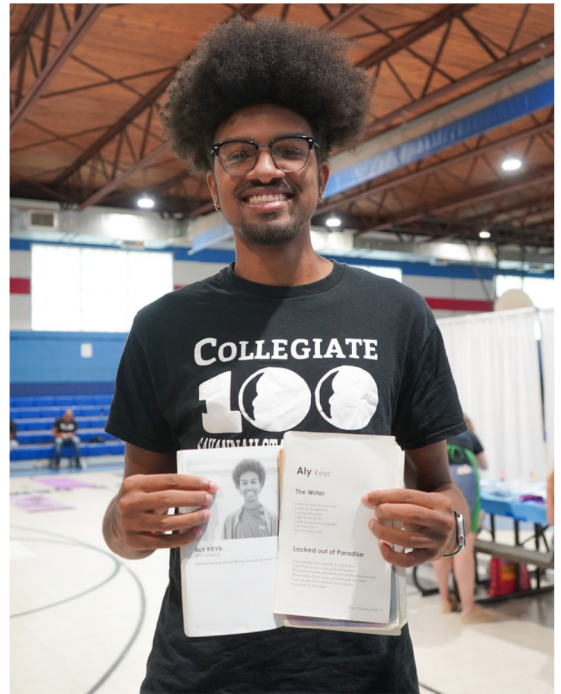
"When you're younger your level of imagination is so much higher, I regularly revisit my writings in my Deep books and it helps me with my current creative process; to look back and get inspiration from my writing."

- Aly Keys

Aly Keys, Young Author Project alumnus, shares that "Deep and the Young Author Project is the only reason why I'm in school for journalism....[Deep] helped me find what I'm good at." Aly was a member of Deep programming through his middle school years, joining at the prompting of his mom when he showed his gifts in English class. Hesitant at first, Aly now credits Deep for his path of writing and using words to express ideas.

Aly still recalls the pivotal moment that he first saw himself as a writer...

At a Deep slam poetry event downtown, we were all there to present our original works. One of my Deep mentors encouraged me to read the only short story that I wrote while in Deep even though I was more confident with my poems. I performed it and it did well! I thought, "wow, this is what it feels like to write something that people enjoy and connect with," and I remember thinking, "I can really write."



Aly Keys The Writer's Guild



Writers have come, young and old,
to have their stories told.
They tell stories of power, emotion, and gold.
They use ink and paper to make it be known.

They are rich in body, soul, and heart.
Always together when apart.
Ink and paper are their tools.
To write for the intelligent, not for fools.

It was a big boost for me and gave me the confidence to keep writing.

Aly is now a graduating senior at Savannah State University. In addition to majoring in journalism, Aly plays on their NCAA DII Men's Basketball team and is an active member of his campus through leadership with 100 Black Men of America and the campus group Juice Live, a social media event coverage organization. Aly plans to attend Grand Valley State to pursue a fully funded masters program in public relations.

Aly gives a wholehearted thanks to his mom, Donna, for getting him involved in Deep (and we echo the sentiment).

**Aly and one of his published poems,
2013 Young Author Project book**

Thank You to Our Volunteers and Sites

YAP Ed Fellows & Host Sites

Susan Torrance
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YAP Writing Fellows

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Roger Moss
SCCPSS Board of Education
Building Bridges Academy, Principals, Mr.
Bernard Bodison & Ms. Jameela Brown
School of Liberal Studies at Savannah High
School Principal, Dr. Gequetta Jenkins

And all the incredible administrators,
teachers, and education professionals of
SCCPSS.

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Front Porch Multi-Agency Resource Center
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 Student Action Network for Equity
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 Vera Institute for Justice (New York, NY)
 Voices for Georgia's Children (Atlanta, GA)

Local Partners

Book Lady Bookstore
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 Chatham County Safety Net
 Chatham County Youth Commission
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 City of Savannah Office of the Mayor
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 Pennsylvania Avenue Resource Center
 Savannah African Art Museum
 Savannah Jazz Academy
 Savannah Police Department
 Savannah Repertory Theater
 Savannah VOICE Festival
 Savannah Youth City
 Savannah-Chatham County Public School System
 E. Shaver, Bookseller
 Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum
 Sulfur Studios
 Step Up Savannah
 Tabernacle Baptist Church
 Telfair Museums
 Wandering Rootworkers
 Wesley Oak Church

In 2022-23, Deep's **Restorative Program**, comprised of **Healing Schools** and the **Action Research Team**, made far-reaching progress toward education justice through work with both students and adult allies.

Healing Schools Programs

by the numbers

1st

Hosted Deep's **1st annual regional educator conference**, a participant-driven event curated and hosted by Deep Writing Project educators with interactive sessions led by teachers and students to support area teachers' continuing professional development

14

Intensive teacher and school staff trainings and workshops, including two Restorative Trainings held at partner school sites

90

Unique educators reached through direct support within Savannah-Chatham County Public School System sites

10

Deep Writing Project educators received intensive support in the intersection of writing and language teaching with restorative and trauma-informed practice

"[Deep Writing Project] was one of the more fulfilling, educational, and eye-opening classes I've ever been a part of....The instructor not only challenged us but also facilitated [a] space where....participants could be vulnerable and form a learning community somewhat like a family. My experiences in the [Deep Writing Project], and the focus on the concept of 'critical hope,' made me not only rethink my approach to teaching, but also made me rethink my approach to life."

- Teacher, Deep Writing Project Participant.

Action Research Team (ART) 2022-23 Highlights

14

Youth
Presenters

YOUTH SUMMIT

- 38 youth participants
- Day-long event led by young people, for young people, to organize, network, and learn about effective ways to make change in their communities

8

Youth
Testimonies

CAPITOL VISIT

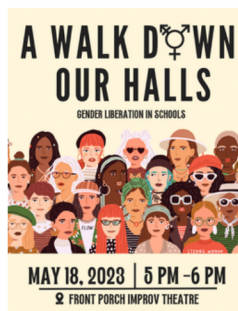
- Members traveled to the state capitol to attend legislative sessions on education issues that impact them and their peers
- Youth researched and presented on legislation being considered

1

Original
Play

“A WALK DOWN OUR HALLS”

- The 2022-23 Action Research Project resulted in a play on how gender and sexuality are reflected in schools
- Written and preformed live by team members followed by a panel discussion with audience



6

Days of Social
Justice Study

FREEDOM SCHOOL

- 19 youth participants
- 7 youth co-facilitators
- Summer program that explored historic and current justice themes, policies, and ways to impact change



“One of the things I really appreciated about Deep [is that] it is a bridge between younger people and adults working in systems....There are so few spaces in the Savannah community and also the broader societal community to have conversations and have laughter, to be together in a way that—where adults are not just someone older than me, [where] we can talk together like we are all human.” - Lee Nease, ART Member



Building Power

Community Organizing & Advocacy

The policy and community organizing teams have filled the past year with events designed to create an abundance of change agents and shed necessary light on issues of vital importance to Savannah and the South, including:

- **Juvenile Justice Reform**
- **Equitable Education**
- **Rights Restoration for Returning Citizens**



Youth Community Organizing Committee

Voter registration and rights were key initiatives of the Youth Community Organizing Committee (YCOC). YCOC partnered with VoteRiders, Migrant Equity Southeast, and the A. Philip Randolph Institute for a series of successful voter clinics. These clinics succeeded in registering new voters and assisting citizens in accessing essential identification documentation.

Deep Center Legislative Campaign Toolkit

Deep created an advocacy toolkit as part of our ongoing efforts to provide citizens with the basic know-how and resources needed to have a say in the policies that affect our communities, schools, and members of our village.

The toolkit focused on Georgia State legislation in the 21-22 and 23-24 sessions. The kit equipped advocates with organizing tools and action steps that they can take to advocate for effective policy change while building community power.

Deep's 2023 Policy Brief

We Are Called to Be Brave

Deep's policy recommendations seek to disrupt, reform, and rebuild systems. **We Are Called to Be Brave** adds to Deep's continuing body of policy reform recommendations to build a community rooted in restorative justice from the local to the state level.

Deep continues to call for district, municipal, and state legislation and policy not only to prioritize equity and justice but to become a true means for proactive harm reduction and radically transform communities beyond reactionary systems.

To chart a better course means leaving behind easy and fear-based narratives, even while confronting the worst. This is a collective decision that will take leadership, vision, risk, and, ultimately, the residents of Savannah and Chatham County insisting that the city and county can—and must—be different.
2023 Deep Policy Brief



Scan & read
Deep's full 2023
Policy Brief at the
QR code below:



Organizational Health

Deep is strong and growing. Expense increases over the 2022-23 year are a result of programs expansion driven by increased community demand and income, along with staff salary increases in response to inflation. Surpluses are due to increases in general operating support and multi-year grants received in one year and allocable across multiple years.

However, we need your support to increase our internal administrative capacity to match this growth. Current inflation is moving faster than grant income, and consistent, engaged support from our donors will make it possible for Deep to keep pace with these new financial pressures.

For more information on how to support our work, visit www.deepcenter.org/give/

Audited FY 2022 Expenses	\$1,554,381
Audited FY 2022 Income	\$1,788,980
Projected to end FY23 with expenses in line with committed income	\$2,131,177

Sources of Income

62%	Institutional Funders
28%	Gov't & Public Funds
5%	Corporate & United Way
2%	Individual Donors
3%	Earned Income

Organizational Equity, Justice, and Reflection

Deep Center is dedicated to equity and justice, and to embodying the world we strive to create.

- Minority-majority board, 86% people of color.
- Deep's population served is 80% youth of color. Adults served track with youth demographics.
- Deep's staff is 65% people of color; 45% of staff identify as LGBTQ+.

Since 2020, Deep Center has been working with an external facilitator to conduct a series of internal equity retreats. Our staff works intentionally to ensure our organizational practices reflect our values of equality around race, class, gender, language, and physical ability.

We thank our incredible donors for their support of Deep Center.

Major Donors

Betsey and Einar Andersen, Brad Baugh and Kristin Russell, Elizabeth Beaver, Ira Berman and Helen Borrello, Hon. LeRoy Burke, Don Callahan and Mark Conway, Dolly Chisholm, Clara Fishel, Peter and Laurie Katz, Jeff and LeeAnn Kole, Kevin and Kim Iocovozzi, Wade Livingston, Steven Malk, Vikram Mulchandani, Susannah and Jason Pedigo, Matt Prickett and Jane Griffin, Turner Ratrie, Joel Rosenstock and Blake Caldwell, Paul Selker, Whitney Shephard, Jaqueline and Ken Sirlin, Marti and Austin Sullivan, Zelda and Sheldon Tenenbaum, Dr. Steve and Raine Theis Charitable Fund, Margaret Utley, Strozier-Viren Family, Peter and Pamela Voss, Josh Yates

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whose talents and passion drive our impact.



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Program Manager

Megan Ave'Lallemant
Program Manager

Crystal Bridges
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Life Navigator

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Jezmin Daniels
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Omari Fox
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Coco Guthrie-Papy
Director, Public Policy &
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ART Coordinator

Mel Kutner
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