



Invites You To

Imagine....



ROOTS + REACH



A HOME FOR COMMUNITY, CULTURE & WELLNESS
THE CAMPAIGN FOR STREET POETS





When I first began volunteering in a Los Angeles County Probation camp for boys, I had no idea how radically that experience would change the course of my own life. I was there to offer the practice of poetry writing, as well as my open heart and ears, to boys who'd been silenced, demonized and written off by lawmakers determined to appear "tough on crime." That first Street Poets workshop soon became a sanctuary within the system, a breathing room within which their stories, their joy and their pain, their laughter and their tears, were welcome. Poetry helped free the dreamer in all of us, and opened pathways to a future we never could have imagined.

In the 29 years since, our future has included youth mentoring missions to the Navajo and Apache Reservations in Arizona, as well as to Africa, Northern Europe, and Central America. We've built deep collaborative relationships with other youth-serving organizations and advocated for change in a juvenile justice system with which we are all too familiar. Formerly incarcerated Street Poets have performed their redemptive verse before tens of thousands in the schools, probation facilities and the projects and parks of Los Angeles County, including Dodger Stadium. **Our Poetry in Motion van has become a source of poetic medicine, and over**

15,000 youth – boys, girls and non-binary alike – have summoned the courage to tell their stories on the page and stage in our middle school, high school, and probation writing programs.

We see our new home as a Great Grandmother Tree, with ancestral roots that run deep into our diverse histories, and branches that provide shelter and inspiration for our growing community of poets, healers, and dreamers in these dynamic times. We hope you'll consider offering some of your own resources to its roots, and that you'll join us in the shade of its branches after the sun rises on this new day for the youth of Los Angeles.

Metaphors be with you!

Chris Henrikson

Founder, Firekeeper, Campaign Co-Chair

CONNECTING TO OUR COMMUNITY

I am excited to lead Street Poets, as its Executive Director, during this transformative time in our organization’s history. I am thrilled to usher us into our new home, the Street Poets Center for Community, Culture & Wellness which will be equipped with a stage, recording studio, media lab and community spaces.

My hope is that our Center will be a second home for the youth in our community. As we provide them with a safe space to engage in programming and discover new creative outlets, I know students will be liberated with each word they write, speak or sing. I envision a space where those who may feel unseen or unheard can show up and be their most authentic selves. By connecting their thoughts, feelings and emotions through poetry, music and other art forms, our students will create a new world and new path for themselves. By experiencing the arts, they can tap into their broken places and begin to heal, grow and deepen their social emotional development.

The Street Poets Center for Community, Culture & Wellness will also be a convening space connecting the branches of various community organizations, as well as arts educators and wellness practitioners as we collaborate to further our reach. The Center will help us build bridges that strengthen our roots and expand the fruit of our tree.

Our Center is directly across from John Adams Middle School, which one of our alumni Jason Quezada attended years ago. On my first day at Street Poets, Jason joined one of our signature weekly programs Seeking Peace. He mentioned, “Seeking Peace is like a mother welcoming you home.”

It is my hope that everyone who enters our space and participates in our programming will feel that deep sense of belonging, being welcomed and feeling at home.



Help build our new home!

Shanae Sharon

Executive Director

BROADENING OUR REACH



It is my pleasure to invite you to join our healing circle and to become an active participant in building our new home, the Street Poets Center for Community, Culture & Wellness.

When we started talking about the idea of a permanent home for the organization a few years back the question came up, “Why is this the right time for Street Poets to start a capital campaign?” We were in the middle of the pandemic, which then prompted uncertainty and change across many institutions and areas of our lives. In addition, the country

was in a state of political and cultural upheaval and reflection. We were forced to confront inequalities and take steps toward the right kinds of intervention. All of these factors could have been reasons to retreat from, or postpone a bold vision and significant investment for our organization.

However, in the midst of this, it became very clear to me that these shifts and forms of destabilization highlighted why Street Poets is needed more than ever. Our work calls us, more powerfully toward each other, and sets our collective compass on what’s most important. We offer the very medicine which people are searching for when they reimagine a society that contains community-driven healing. I truly believe that every community needs a Street Poets, but I knew we could lead the way in Los Angeles by creating a permanent home for our work to make this organization as impactful as possible.

It is my dream to see the Street Poets Center for Community, Culture & Wellness become a courageous sanctuary, from which our youth can write, dance, sing, drum and dream us forward. It will ground us in cultural practices and ways of being together that will contribute to a sustainable future for us all. And because our new home is highly accessible, and near public transportation, it will offer our youth a safe place to be present while finding, nourishment for the body and soul.

We are well on the way to success. I am confident that, with your help, we can make the Street Poets Center a beacon of healing and transformation for many generations to come.

Please join us!

Nick Streets

Board Chair



Community partner
Rhythm Arts Alliance

MISSION

Street Poets harnesses the healing power of poetry and music to build community and inspire our next generation to write, rap and dream a new world into being for us all.

VISION

We envision a circular society that reflects the balance, wild diversity and creativity of the natural world, and cultivates the seeds of imagination and compassion in our next generation of change-makers.



682

Hours Serving
System-impacted Youth

Over 682 hours directly serving system-impacted youth across the greater Los Angeles area.

63

Unique Locations Across
Greater Los Angeles

Facilitated customized programming at 63 unique locations across the greater Los Angeles area.

5000

Youth Reached in all
Street Poets Programs

Attendance totalled almost 5000 youth in all Street Poets programs across the greater Los Angeles area.

99%

Retention Rate

School Programming
An average of 99% retention rate in Street Poets programming in schools across the greater Los Angeles area.

121%

Community
Programming
Growth Rate

Community Programming
An average of 121% growth rate in Street Poets community programming across the greater Los Angeles area.

117%

Criminal Justice-Impacted
Youth Programming
Growth Rate

Criminal Justice-Impacted Youth
An average of 117% growth rate in Street Poets programming in criminal justice system-centric locations across the greater Los Angeles area.

90%

Criminal Justice-Impacted
Youth Served

Approximately 90% of all programming directly served youth under 18 across the greater Los Angeles area.

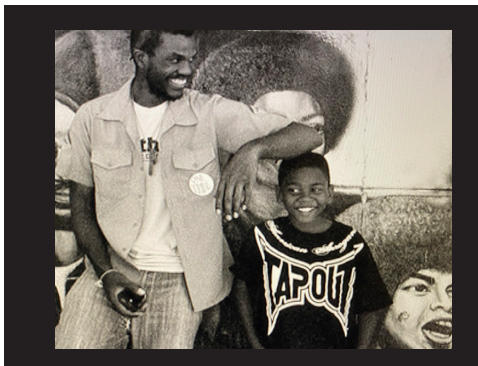
OUR IMPACT

The Need

A 2024 report by the LA County Probation Oversight Committee highlights that Latino and African American youth make up 94% of the juvenile hall population, with many from South Los Angeles, a community facing economic challenges. The report calls for targeted interventions to address the root causes of youth incarceration and shift resources from punitive to preventive approaches.

As part of the Youth Justice Reimagined Initiative, LA County is building positive rehabilitation networks to support marginalized youth before they become involved in the justice system.

The primary goal of the Street Poets Center for Community, Culture & Wellness is to offer a positive alternative to punitive rehabilitation in the juvenile justice system. We aim to create a sanctuary for system-impacted and underserved youth, providing tools and support for healing, growth, and a brighter future.



“When I first met Street Poets as a gang-affiliated 16-year-old at Camp Miller (now closed for good like many L.A. County Probation facilities), it was hard for me to imagine a future beyond bars, barbed wire and the streets. I sure as hell never thought I’d outlive that place, let alone be around to help create an inspiring community-based alternative to it.”

– **Taylor Code Maxie Jr.**

Street Poets Alum and Board Member



OUR IMPACT

Street Poets has long recognized the inequities in education and the lack of access to quality arts programming faced by Black and brown communities in Los Angeles, especially among youth who have been system-impacted. The mental health of these young people has been particularly affected, and opportunities to express themselves artistically are becoming increasingly scarce. Street Poets has risen to meet these challenges by providing safe spaces for healing through creative expression.

The healing impact of Street Poets is more critical than ever. The creative arts serve as a powerful tool to improve their mental health, helping them develop social-emotional skills, a sense of personal agency, and stronger community connections. Through these programs, Street Poets empowers youth to imagine and create a healthy, sustainable future for themselves and their communities.



Street Poets don't just change lives – they save them. Many of my students reported an increased sense of self-confidence and self-worth, as well as an embrace of poetry as a practice for dealing with negative emotions or trauma when they previously would have turned to substance abuse, self-harm or fighting. Having an inspiring program like Street Poets to keep them off the streets and make them look forward to coming to school has been an incredible blessing for my students.”

– **Bridget Valles**

English Department Chair, College Bridge Academy – Watts

If Street Poets had been here in this community when I was growing up, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have joined a gang and taken such a hard road to get to where I am today. I had to get locked up to find Street Poets. With this new community center, we'll be catching lost kids before they get caught up in the System. I'm just grateful I've survived long enough to be a part of the solution in the same neighborhood where I used to be a part of the problem.”

– **David Sanchez**

Street Poet Alum, Board member,
teaching artist, and business owner

Who We Serve

Annually, Street Poets reaches 700 underserved and system-impacted youth and young adults ages 11-25 yearly directly; we also reach thousands more via our open mic, poetry in motion van and hybrid programming. Street Poets demographic participant breakdown includes; 25% African American, 65% Latino, 5% White, and 5% Asian/Pacific Islander. 99% of youth served are from low-income families; many have spent time in foster care, and some have been homeless and identify with the LGBTQ community; 50% or more of our youth participants are female. Street Poets works primarily with these more marginalized populations because it recognizes that our most visionary agents of change are likely to come from among those who are less invested in and served by the status quo.

Results

The impact of Street Poets' work is measured by the diverse artists and youth collaborating to create transformative art that fosters personal and poetic growth. Key indicators include increased skill development in artistic expression (100%), enhanced social-emotional growth including improved self-confidence (85%) and trauma processing skills (95%), and the positive influence of mentorship and community on youth (95%).

The Street Poets workshops have created a sense of community in my classroom that is unparalleled to anything I have experienced before. Street Poets teaching artists encourage students to open up and share their stories. They build a collective sense of empathy through the writing, sharing and reading of poetry. They create the space for students to discuss and make sense of their lives and the world around them. Rarely do we see this happening in schools today."

– Jerica Coffey

Teacher, Locke High School



Street Poets is putting down permanent roots in South Los Angeles at our new **Center for Community, Culture & Wellness**. Ideally situated across the street from John Adams Middle School just south of downtown, our location is in a neighborhood where we have inspired people through poetry for over 25 years.

This exciting development comes at a time when the LA County probation facility where Street Poets first began working with incarcerated youth, Camp Fred Miller, is closed for good. In fact, Los Angeles County is consolidating its old network of juvenile detention facilities and reorienting resources toward community-based solutions to trauma. Today many of the alumni of the original Street Poets workshop continue to serve on both our teaching staff and Board of Directors while working to create an inspiring alternative to that old system. **The Street Poets Center for Community, Culture & Wellness** is the fruit of that labor, and the realization of our collective dreams.

ROOTS + REACH



AN OPERATIONAL HUB for poetry-based educational programs which reach schools, youth probation facilities, and the streets of Los Angeles. The Center includes training and administrative space and training space for our program directors and teaching artists, a hub from which to conduct our virtual programs, and a berth for our *Poetry in Motion Van*.

A COMMUNITY SPACE for our youth open-mic events, poetry readings and performances, as well as after-school drumming and dance classes.

The Metaphorum stage is the platform from which we center, celebrate, and uplift the art and practice of poetry while cultivating a creative community in the heart of historic South Los Angeles.

A RECORDING STUDIO AND MEDIA LAB to teach music, video, and podcast production. We expect to further develop and amplify the authentic voices of our youth while opening pathways to Los Angeles' creative economy for young adults with previously limited access.

AN AFTER-SCHOOL DROP-IN CENTER where middle and high school students can take poetry writing and performance workshops, music and video production workshops, African and Mexica dance and drumming classes, and receive academic tutoring, mentoring, and counseling services.

A COMMUNITY-BASED DIVERSIONARY ALTERNATIVE to Los Angeles County's increasingly outdated and ineffective juvenile probation system, providing gang prevention and intervention services for youth at-risk of falling into the criminal justice system.

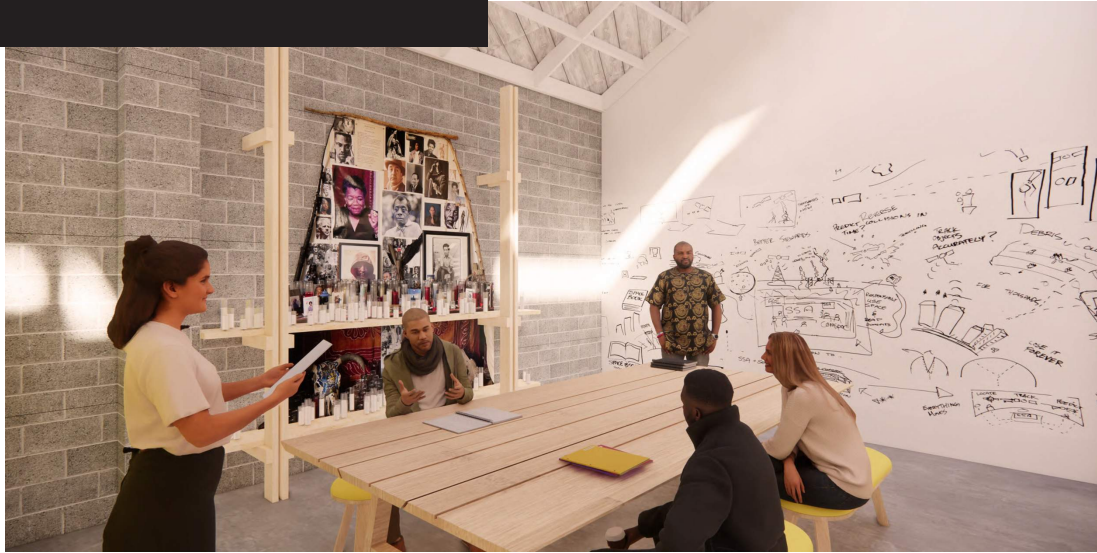
A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONVENING SPACE where Street Poets hosts "creative well-being" training and mutual support circles for teachers, social workers, youth workers, community organizers, musicians, and artists with whom we collaborate. As a founding member of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network, Street Poets is committed to ongoing programmatic collaboration with our many partner organizations, including but not limited to Youth Mentoring Connection, Rhythm Arts Alliance and Wolf Connection. We look forward to expanding our local and national network of collaborators and school partners from our new home.



OUR NEW HOME



OUR NEW HOME



Workshop/Conference room and The Shrine



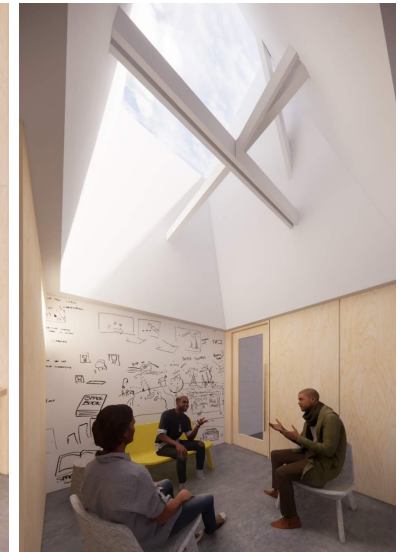
Looking from street looking into front garden (Roller door open)



Poetry Library



Staff Workroom



Healing Room

OUR LEADERSHIP DONORS

Thanks to generous capital grants from the Annenberg Foundation (explore.org) and the Snap Foundation, Street Poets has purchased a 4,860-square-foot building as the future **Center for Community, Culture & Wellness**. Our new home will include a recording studio, media lab, and a community space for youth poetry performances and writing circles, as well as African and Mexica/Aztec dance and drumming workshops.

“The Snap Foundation is honored to help Street Poets realize its dream of opening the Center for Community, Culture & Wellness. Our foundation’s mission is to develop pathways to the creative economy for underrepresented youth in Los Angeles. Street Poets is building the next generation of creative talent in our community—diverse voices from throughout the City of Angels—and we proudly support their vision”

– Joel Arquillos

Snap Foundation



“I’ve been a devoted supporter of Street Poets from its earliest years because I’ve seen the transformational impact this organization has on the youth it serves - up close and personal. To put it simply, Street Poets changes lives. The Annenberg Foundation is a founding partner of their new Center for Community, Culture & Wellness because our city needs more creative spaces where youth feel seen, heard and welcome. Like Street Poets, we believe in the potential of our youth to become tomorrow’s artists, healers and visionary leaders, ensuring that Los Angeles remains a world-renowned creative cultural center.”

– Charles Annenberg Weingarten

Annenberg Foundation

OUR FUTURE

Street Poets has touched the lives of thousands of young people during its 25+ year history. As the world emerges from the pandemic—and the ongoing demands of racial healing—the need for its services have never been more urgent. The population it serves experiences a high level of chaos and uncertainty. For many members, Street Poets has provided the only stability in their lives. It is crucial that Street Poets remain a steadfast presence in the community and in the lives of the youth it serves.

A permanent home ensures that Street Poets can thoughtfully and strategically plan for the future. The Center for Community, Culture & Wellness allows Street Poets to keep our focus clear and unwavering as it empowers our next generation of poets, artists, healers and change-makers to imagine and create a brighter future for themselves, and for us all.



Street Poets has a stronghold in our community, and a new center is where they can do their best work helping young people find their voices. We have seen tremendous trajectory with Street Poets over the years and now they can put roots down and continue to be a positive force connecting with youth.”

– **Jacqueline Chun**

Associate Director at the Center for Strategic Partnerships

Formerly Chief Programs and Operations Officer, with the Carl and Roberta Deutsch Foundation



JOIN OUR FIREKEEPERS

At Street Poets and among indigenous cultures throughout human history, fire represents not just a source of light, warmth and potential nourishment, but a portal to the wisdom of all those who've come before us, our ancestors. Without that flame of inspiration burning in our hearts and at the heart of our village, we would have been lost long ago.

As Street Poets moves towards breaking ground on the Center for Community, Culture and Wellness, we look to our family and friends to help keep our fire burning brightly. Like the firekeepers of the past, our community is gathering now to ensure the creation of a new home dedicated to nurturing the gifts of future generations of poets, artists, music-makers, healers and visionaries here on the streets of Los Angeles.

We invite you to become a Firekeeper. Your contribution will keep the unique healing spirit and energy of Street Poets alive and thriving for generations to come.

There are many ways to participate. For more information please contact:

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Chris Henrikson

Founder, Firekeeper, Campaign Co-Chair

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“We cannot heal from the ongoing economic, political and spiritual fracturing unless we bring poetry to the center of the culture. Poetry is the truth and beauty of being. Poetry and all the arts are the building blocks of what we must be as a people, a country, a world. Poetry is both the question and the answer. It’s the shadow within which we hide our deepest shames, conflicts and contradictions, and the beacon that shows us the way out. Street Poets is living proof that poetry is central to any transformation from trauma, trouble and doubt.”

– **Luis J. Rodriguez**

Los Angeles Poet Laureate (2014-2016), and author of “Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in LA”

“Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays a foundation for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.”

– **Audre Lorde**

Author and Poet Laureate of New York
(1991-1992)

STREET POETS CENTER FOR CREATIVITY,
CULTURE & WELLNESS





Thank you!