



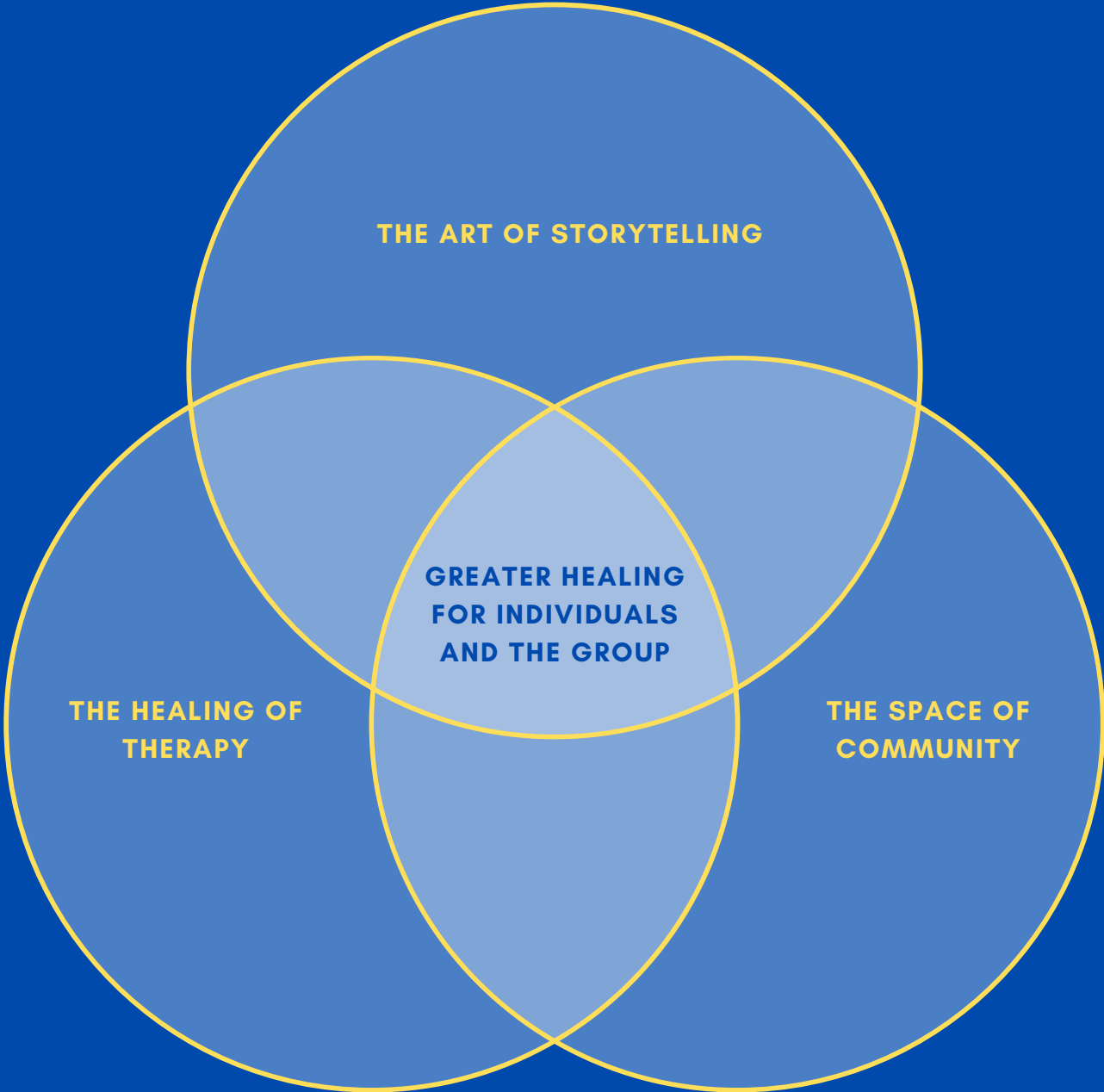
THE DIANE PLOTKIN WRITING PROGRAM

**CLAIMING OUR SPACE:
STORIES OF
HOPE & COURAGE**

IMPACT REPORT
YEAR THREE: FALL 2022

PREPARED BY THE KEDZIE CENTER & 2ND STORY

Through this program, The Kedzie Center and 2nd Story have confirmed our belief that our work is stronger together. The art of storytelling plus the healing nature of therapy, done in community with each other, has an amplifying effect for both the individual and the group.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

100%

of participants felt affirmed, validated, heard, and supported by staff and peers.

100%

of participants felt they had opportunities to safely share their experiences and stories.

100%

of participants felt that they successfully crafted their own story/narrative.

100%

of participants would recommend this program to their peers.

80%

of participants felt they learned storytelling skills that they can apply to future opportunities.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Now in Year Three, the Diane Plotkin Writing Program Claiming Our Space: Stories of Hope & Courage is a collaboration between The Kedzie Center and 2nd Story. Designed to respond to the increased stress and isolation reported by immigrant students due to ongoing uncertainty and changes in immigration policy, Claiming Our Space offers a space for healing, community, and storytelling for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and undocumented students in the Chicago area.

Over the course of eight weeks, students learned how to tell and shape their own personal stories in an empowering and healing way. They also learned to cope with their status through social support, storytelling and writing, and other forms of expression.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

- Enhance the participant's ability to express their feelings and create and tell their own story.
- Increase their confidence, sense of belonging/connectedness, and perceived social support.
- Increase their access to additional supports and resources.

ABOUT THIS YEAR'S COHORT

In response to both student and facilitator feedback, we adjusted the fall cohort to be a writing intensive program for college students. We reduced the cohort to five participants so each student could receive individualized coaching and had more time to develop their stories. The result was a more complete finished project at the end of the program. Because of these changes, each participant received a \$500 scholarship for participation in and completion of the program.

The students were from the following schools:

Arrupe College
Lake Forest College
Loyola University
North Park University

The program ran from October 24 through December 12, 2022.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

OBJECTIVE ONE: ENHANCE THE PARTICIPANT'S ABILITY TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS AND CREATE AND TELL THEIR OWN STORY

"I'm feeling more comfortable with my story. For a long time I felt like I lived something that always had to stay hidden."

DACA RECIPIENT

"I improved my public speaking skills. Before I used to be really shy and through the help of this program, I became much more relaxed."

F.M.

"One thing that surprised me about the program was how easy it was to open up to everyone. Right from the beginning I felt at home."

KIMBERLY

"I learned so much about writing a story and the ways a story can be told."

FERNANDA

OBJECTIVE TWO: INCREASE THEIR CONFIDENCE, SENSE OF BELONGING AND/OR CONNECTEDNESS, AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

"I learned to embrace my story from this program and that other people had similar stories like me."

F.M.

"I learned that we all have something valuable to share. I learned a lot about myself and what matters to me."

KIMBERLY

"I was expecting people to be more like strangers, but it wasn't like that at all."

JOHNNY

OBJECTIVE THREE: INCREASE THEIR ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

"It helped me to start a healing process of past trauma."

FERNANDA

"This program allowed me to heal and confront the feelings I didn't know I felt because of my status. It also definitely helped me with my performance speaking skills."

KIMBERLY

"We all respect one another. There was an effort to have all voices hold the same weight and I feel like that environment made for a good space to grow with one another."

DACA RECIPIENT

YOU CAN DO IT TOO - BY KIMBERLY

"Is this Kimberly?" was what I heard when I answered my mom's phone from an unknown number from California. I was sitting at the kitchen table, doing my homework. It was during the pandemic, and I was trying my hardest to focus.

I could hear the sound of water running down the sink from my mom washing the dishes 6 feet away from me. I was scribbling some notes in my notebook, when I heard my phone ring. I picked it up from my lap to check who was calling me. It was an unknown number from California. I never answer unknown numbers, as I try to be safe from scammers.

I hit the red, decline button, and continued writing in my notebook. One minute later, my phone rings again. Frustrated, I picked up my phone and hit the decline button, again. I turned my phone on silent so that it would not ring a third time, and I kept on working. Two minutes later, I hear a phone ring, but this time it is not mine, but my mom's phone.

My mom stopped what she was doing, wiped her hands, and picked up her phone. She saw an unknown number calling her. My mom, not like me, always answers the phone, even if it is an unknown number. Lucky for me, she hit the answer button, and answered, "Hello? Who is this?"

I thought it was just one of her friend's calling her, so I didn't bother paying any attention. That is, until I heard my mom say, "Yes, this is Kimberly's mom." When I heard her say that, I quickly looked up from my notebook to listen closely to what was being said. My mom turned towards me, and told the person on the phone, "Yes, she is here!" I quickly motioned to my mom to pretend that I was not there, shaking my head 'no' to let her know that I did not want her to pass me the phone. But my mom ignored me and passed me the phone anyway. I quickly gave my mom an annoyed look, before I politely answered, "Hello? This is Kimberly."

I hear a man's voice, saying that I had just won a scholarship and that he had called my mom because he couldn't reach me on my phone. So that's who was blowing up my phone, I thought. The man started talking to me, explaining that he was proud of me for winning the scholarship, and that he would send the details later. The reason why I didn't seem that enthusiastic was because I thought that I had just won one of the \$500 scholarships that would only cover my books for a maximum of two semesters. Ever since I have submitted my college applications, I have applied to over 20 scholarships, hoping to accumulate enough money that can help pay for my education. And up until this phone call, I had not received any.

Four weeks back I was invited to a full-ride competition at Monmouth College, and was planning on playing D3 there for swimming and water polo. I tried my best, hoping for a call back, but was unfortunately rejected. I was invited to another full-ride competition at Carthage College. This was my last chance to get a full-ride, I thought. But again, I was rejected.

YOU CAN DO IT TOO - BY KIMBERLY

Rejection is something that I'm used to. Having to be turned down from internship opportunities, not being able to work or travel as my other siblings could, not because I was incompetent, but only because of my status. Rejection as an undocumented student is not only being told no, but being told no even though you know yourself that you are capable of achieving it despite your status. I was angry at my parents and often asked why they had to return to Mexico after my older brother was already born here in the US.

They told me that after 9/11 happened, my parents, like many others, were terrified and felt unsafe living in the U.S. out of fear that something like that would happen again. On top of that, my dad was struggling to look for a job. They were both unaware of the fact that my mom was pregnant. It wasn't until they returned to Mexico that they realized that my mom was pregnant, and so I was born there. It is difficult, and sometimes even frustrating to know that all of my other siblings were born here except for me. It sometimes makes me feel like an outsider within my own family, as I am the only one who has to go through certain conditions and navigate their life and education differently from my other siblings.

I was beginning to feel stressed because it seemed that I would have to end up in debt if I wanted to go to college. I felt bad for my dad, who is the sole provider for my family of six, and who is already helping pay for my older brother's tuition. I was angry at my situation. I was upset that because of my undocumented status, I couldn't apply for FAFSA or be able to work part-time to help me pay for college. I was more upset that I was putting more responsibilities on my dad's shoulders. During this time, my dad was hospitalized due to COVID. He went from coughing, to being isolated in his own room, to not being able to breathe and having to be rushed to the nearest hospital. I was scared that something would happen, I thought, it's not fair that this is happening to my family. It was a tough time for everyone in my family. My mom had to be the one to step up and disinfect everything. We relied on family friends and our Church to help us with food and groceries for weeks, since we had no other source of income. So there was not only the stress from college, but from home as well. That is, until the day the unknown number called our home.

I hear the man tell me, "You should get an email congratulating you on receiving the Dreamer Scholarship very soon." I quickly snapped out of my thoughts, and replied with, "Wait what? I'm sorry, can you tell me which scholarship this is for again?" The man excitedly replied with, "Yeah! This is the Dreamer Scholarship, from Loyola University Chicago!" I was shocked. I felt like I couldn't breathe, and my mouth slowly widened. The Dreamer Scholarship from Loyola is a full-ride scholarship that they give out to five undocumented/DACA students for their four years of undergrad. I had completely forgotten that I had applied for this scholarship. I remember not even wanting to fill it out because I didn't think I would be able to win it after having been rejected by two other schools. The only reason why I did was because my dad had told me it didn't hurt to try.

YOU CAN DO IT TOO - BY KIMBERLY

That was what he told me, but what I did not realize was that he saw the capability I didn't think I had at that time. I quickly started thanking the man. I told him how excited I was, and how this meant so much to my family. I cried tears of joy, and I looked to my mom, who was concerned when she saw me crying. I passed my mom the phone so that she could speak to the man herself. They were speaking to each other in Spanish, and my mom was telling him our family situation with my dad. I remember my mom telling the man, "Es de verdad? ¿No es una broma?", meaning "Is this for real? This isn't a prank, right?" After talking with the man, my mom hung up, and we hugged each other tightly. We quickly messaged my dad the good news, telling him how he no longer had to stress about where I was going to go to school, and how I was going to afford it. My dad told my mom how proud he was of me, and how this good news gave him even more motivation to fight the virus to return back home. I felt a great sense of relief. I was thanking God in my head, and felt that all this rejection was leading up to this moment. I was glad that things were beginning to look up, and I couldn't wait to begin a new chapter in my life.

Currently, I am in my third year of undergrad at Loyola as a Molecular Biology major on the pre-med track. My dream is to get into medical school to become a doctor. Sometimes I stress about whether or not I can make it, and I think about all the obstacles I have yet to overcome. I worry about having to get clinical hours without a social security number, I worry about being able to afford school, but most of all, I worry about being accepted into school with my undocumented status. But whenever I stress about these things, I look back at everything I've gone through to get to the point where I am today. And I think about everything that I am currently doing right now as well. I have amazing friends and family who are with me every step of the way and who remind me that I can do what I dream of becoming.

I understand that my path in life won't be the same as my other siblings, who were all born in the US. I know that I might have to do more than them and that I have to focus on my studies. As time passed, I have learned to accept that. What helped me was reading all these stories about undocumented students graduating from college and growing up to become these amazing people. I thought that one day I could grow up to become one of those people too.

During a time where there is a national panic about immigrants, I feel even more powerful and proud of who I am. Hearing stories about how immigrants are being treated is what motivates me to work even harder. Being undocumented is a part of my background. I no longer feel ashamed. I no longer see it as a bad thing. Instead of hiding, I use my situation to not only motivate myself, but to tell people my story and let them know that they can do it too.

"OUR STORIES ARE WORTH
TELLING!"

DACA RECIPIENT

