

## **Young Women with Heart, Soul, and Courage**

By Dawn Koch, WWf(a)C Program Manager and Outreach Co-ordinator

On May 6, 2014, nearly 40 young women affected by homelessness in Cincinnati arrived at Women Writing for (a) Change to share their words with each other and others from the WWf(a)C community. It was a day of celebration, a day of connection, and a day that marked the end of this year's weekly outreach writing program. The program, in existence since 2004, is a partnership between Women Writing for (a) Change and Project Connect. Both organizations are dedicated to giving voice to traditionally silenced individuals.

The program takes place in three public schools across Cincinnati. The girls, along with a WWf(a)C facilitator, a Project Connect consultant, and sometimes a school counselor meet once a week for an hour-long writing group. During these sessions the girls are guided on a path toward self-expression through poetry and prose, writing prompts, and discussion. Topics cover a wide variety of issues facing teen girls today from self-esteem to body image to relationships to school. The sessions also touch on the very serious issues facing these specific young women such as homelessness, sexual assault, race relations, loss, abuse, and poverty.

Each week the young women write together and share their words aloud in the group, offering each other a safe and confidential space in which to share the truth of their lives. The circles are confidential and the girls learn right from the start how important it is to maintain confidentiality. The growth and connection experienced throughout the program is remarkable. Girls who might have never spoken to each other become friends, bonds are formed, relationships develop and in the end, many come to see each other as sisters.

The program culminates each year in May at Women Writing for (a) Change where the young women come together to share a piece they wrote in group during the school-year. Each young woman is given the opportunity to stand at the podium, speak her name aloud, and read her truth to an audience of her peers and representatives from WWf(a)C and Project Connect. There's a pizza party for lunch and an opportunity for the girls to connect with each other, share common bonds, and relay stories from the program. Each young woman is also given an anthology of writings collected from the program that year, published by Beyond the Trees, Inc.

This program is an essential component of the WWf(a)C Outreach Program. We are grateful for partial funding received in recent years from The Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation and for an additional anonymous grant in 2013. Women Writing for (a) Change and Project Connect hope to continue and to grow this program for years to come. Donations are always appreciated and can be put to use for our upcoming 2014-2015 session.



**2014 Project Connect Seniors!**

**Photo credit: Rebeka Beach of Project Connect**