

## ABOUT FFL

The Foundation for Letters promotes improved college access through engagement with writing by providing urban schools with a range of literary-focused academic and enrichment programs. We also provide schools with assistance in the development of their own external support organizations, which build networks of donors, volunteers and partners that support literacy-focused education at their schools.

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## Bronx Loaf Students Become Published Authors!



Workshop Leader Rich Villar with Bronx Loaf students and a copy of the anthology, *Breaking Bread*.

On October 28th, the Foundation for Letters hosted a celebration in support of Bronx Loaf, our annual conference for teen writers. Inspired by and modeled after Bread Loaf, the oldest writers' conference in the country, Bronx Loaf attracted students from over 20 high schools to the Bronx for a week in July to work on original pieces of writing with professional writers serving as workshop leaders. The workshop leaders conducted intensive workshops and conferences, as well as editing and revision sessions during the week. At the end of the conference, the student work was compiled and copy-edited, culminating in the publishing of *Breaking Bread*, the Bronx Loaf anthology.

At the celebration, held at the Time Life Building in Manhattan, 50 students were presented with copies of the anthology, making each of them officially a published author before graduating from high school! It was an exciting end to an amazing program. About the months of hard work that went into the program, FFL board member Brent Herbert notes, "Seeing the impact the program has had on the kids and their writing makes everything worthwhile."

Bronx Loaf graduates are a diverse group from public, private, and charter schools in New York City and beyond. Students chose one of five distinct workshop genres: memoir, poetry, short fiction, playwriting, and essay, each taught by a different workshop leader. The students review each other's work, and have multiple opportunities to read their own work in front of live audiences through dramatic performances and daily public readings over the course of the program. FFL board member Sarah Carson, who attended a showcase of the Bronx Loaf playwriting workshop students remarked "It was exciting to see the young writers' work brought to life."

# From FFL's CEO and Executive Director



Dear Friends of FFL,

Just over one year ago we officially expanded our Foundation's work to reach beyond a single school. This past year, FFL has provided urban schools with a blueprint for how to positively impact their communities through external support for writing-based educational and enrichment programming. We've done so with the generous support of individuals who have no natural connection to the urban schools we support, and without alumni or parental support from constituencies of those schools.

Our vision remains that in urban public schools, where resources are limited, external support for literacy and writing education can improve academic performance, increase college readiness and provide students with tools to become better global citizens. We support and implement programs that help students develop fluency with the "word" – written, spoken and performed.

In the past year we were able to expand existing and implement new programs at more schools with our partner organizations. The Bronx Loaf Writing Conference for Teens increased acceptance from 30 to 50 students, providing more students than ever with the chance to attend this one-of-a kind workshop. In early December, we conducted a very successful College Literacy Workshop at FFL's Writing Center at the Brooklyn Institute for Liberal Arts (see p. 6). This past summer, five students were given the opportunity to travel abroad to Senegal, Morocco, Spain & South Africa and are now working towards publishing pieces of writing about their experiences with our partners at Guernica magazine. We've grown so much and could not have done any of this without you. Thank you so much for your support!

Best wishes for this holiday season,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Jackson".

Mike Jackson  
Chief Executive Officer

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sarose Klein".

Sarose Klein  
Executive Director

## Students Head Abroad to Write



**Students pose at FFL's writing workshop before they head abroad.**

FFL partnered with the International Youth Leadership Institute (IYLI) and sponsored five students to attend their 2015 Summer Fellowship Program - a five week, intensive academic and leadership program in Senegal, South Africa, Morocco and Spain.

Before their travels, the students were taught principles of journalism and personal

narrative/memoir writing by Erin Lenahan, FFL Board member and former Bronx Academy of Letters English teacher, and Rachel Riederer, Editor of Guernica Daily.

The students kept daily journals and did extensive writing on the trip, using their journalism skills to chronicle events and report conditions, findings and conclusions, while using their memoir-writing skills to document their perspectives and reflections.

Students received real-time feedback on their writing from FFL volunteers while on the trip, and are now work-

ing with FFL's literary partners to convert their journal entries into published pieces of writing (journalism, poetry or memoir/personal narrative) about their experiences abroad.



**FFL Board Member Erin Lenahan helps student Keshia Maryat with her journaling technique.**



**Gandel accepts FFL's Distinguished Service Award.**

## Stephen Gandel takes home FFL Distinguished Service Award

Founding Board Member Stephen Gandel was awarded the Foundation for Letters Distinguished Service Award on October 28<sup>th</sup> at the FFL Benefit at the Time-Life Building in Manhattan. Mr. Gandel, contributing writer at Time and Fortune magazines is also a devoted husband and father of two. Gandel's friends, parents, wife and daughters were all there in support of him that evening, along with Alan Murray, Editor-in-Chief of Fortune Magazine.

Steve has been an integral part of the growth of the organization since 2003. As a board member for the Bronx Academy of Letters, a public school supported by FFL, Gandel spearheaded grant-writing efforts and served as Treasurer of the board. His deepest impact however, was felt as a senior member of FFL's programming committee, where he consistently advocated for adherence to the mission - keeping the focus of the organization's educational support on programs with a strong writing and literary base. FFL board member Matt Hicks credits Gandel with helping keep the Foundation focused, adding, "I've always respected Steve for consistently voicing his opinion - he definitely deserves this award."

Upon presenting the award, FFL CEO Mike Jackson shared that Gandel "has been a steady supporter of our school and our Foundation for more than a decade, showing a noteworthy commitment to urban education, public education, and underserved communities of kids." Jackson concluded that, "the most frustrating thing about this guy is that he's so humble he doesn't even know how much he's accomplished by volunteering for 12 years. He doesn't realize how having a person of his stature advocating for kids and writing has helped legitimize our Foundation."

## FFL Announces Partnership with IYLI

**FFL CEO Mike Jackson speaks at IYLI's leadership panel at NYU**



In 2015 FFL officially partnered with the International Youth Leadership Institute (IYLI), a national, not-for-profit organization committed to preparing African American and Latino high school students for success in postsecondary education and careers and effective citizenship.

FFL, through its Writing Abroad program, sponsored five students to attend IYLI's 2015 Summer Fellowship Program (see page 3), a five week intensive, college-level academic and leadership program taking place in Senegal, West Africa and Morocco/Spain during July and August. The program, where students studied renewable energy, immigration, and entrepreneurship, introduced students to global issues critical to low income areas in developing countries, with the goal of promoting social change.

For IYLI's 2016 Summer Fellowships, FFL's role will expand significantly after the success of the 2015 program, offering its writing workshops to all IYLI fellows.

## Clarke-Mercogliano Husband-Wife Team Fuel Bronx Loaf Conference

The Bronx Loaf Director and Managing Director duo, Christian Clarke and Laura Mercogliano, made magic happen again this year at the Summer conference for teen writers.

Clarke, who created Bronx Loaf and has directed it since its inception, has been teaching 11th Grade English Language Arts and 12th grade drama at Brooklyn Tech since September 2014. Prior to that, he taught at the Bronx Academy of Letters for 9 years, where he met Mercogliano, now a 10 year veteran English teacher at Letters.

Clarke, a natural orator, is the lifeblood of Bronx Loaf, drawing his inspiration for the concept from the time he spent at Bread Loaf, the revered writers' conference on a mountain in Vermont. Laura, a 10-year veteran English teacher with stronger administrative skills and a more understated style, complements Clarke, making them a great team.

FFL Executive Director Sarose Klein notes that "Christian and Laura not only demonstrate how fulfilling a career in writing can be, but their dynamic energy from day one sets the tone for an amazing workshop."

Their passion for kids and writing has led Bronx Loaf through three successful years. Planning has already begun for a fourth conference, which promises to be the largest yet, hosting approximately 100 students!



# Student Poets Dazzle at Benefit

Student poets stole the show at FFL's Annual Benefit, the Publishing Party for *Breaking Bread*, the Bronx Loaf Anthology.



**Nicole Chapko recites an excerpt from her piece on stage at the publishing party.**

*Remember that though your smile may be different too,  
You are still beautiful*

**When Love Leaves -  
Nicole Chapko**

*I am a girl with a beautiful back  
that tells stories that none of the books I love so much  
have the spine to carry or unpack.*

**That Girl - Aniqah Tasnim**

*picture frames of weddings and grateful days  
that do not come anymore  
they have disappeared  
dissolved into  
adolescent screams*

**The Upheaval of my Former Youth - Lucia Hassen**

*Painted smiles hide the tears you  
cry behind closed doors  
Painted smiles will never be real smiles*

**Painted Smiles - Tamari Francois**

## Guernica Joins Forces with FFL

Guernica, an award-winning online bi-monthly magazine of ideas, art, poetry, and fiction, partnered with FFL in 2015 to provide writing, editing and publishing support to FFL's Writing Abroad program.

Working with Guernica, which boasts an all-volunteer staff of over 30 writers and editors, is "one of the best things to happen to FFL this year," according to

FFL Executive Director Sarose Klein.

Guernica's publisher, Lisa Lucas, former director of education at Tribeca Film Institute, worked directly with FFL on the program's curriculum, and worked directly with students to transform their Writing Abroad journal entries into publishable pieces of writing.

Going forward, FFL hopes to work with Guernica to deliver several



**Rachel Riederer and Lisa Lucas work with students to prepare their work for publication**

other types of journalism/writing-based programs to kids.

## FFL Volunteers Help 35 Students With Their College Essays

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 26 FFL volunteers spent the day at the Brooklyn Institute for Liberal Arts (BILA) as writing mentors for 35 high school seniors who had not yet completed the essay portion of their college applications. Richard Capozzi, an English teacher at Brooklyn Tech, led trainings for both volunteers and students, covering FFL's principles for writing successful college essays.

Following the trainings, volunteers spent time getting to know the students and their college essay goals. In the first half of the workshop, the volunteers helped students generate ideas, craft, refine, and edit their essays, which had arrived at varying stages of completion. Students were then given time to revise and incorporate the principles from the training and the volunteer feedback into their essays. In the second half of the workshop, the progress the students made was shared with the volunteers, who then sent their students home with a plan to finalize their essays. After the workshop, students submitted additional drafts to volunteers who provided "virtual" feedback on the overall quality of each essay, and how well the student made the adjustments suggested at the workshop.

Students, teachers and staff at BILA were thankful for and impressed by the results of the day-long workshop. One student noted, "This workshop was great. I am super confident about my essay and I love my mentor she definitely helped a lot!" To end an already great day, CUNY application fee waivers were raffled off to 10 lucky students!

**Brooklyn Tech teacher Richard Capozzi speaks to students about college essay writing.**



## Writing Center Opens in Brooklyn



**FFL Board Member Arlene Amador addresses College Essay Workshop volunteers in the Writing Center.**

The Foundation for Letters worked with the Brooklyn Institute of Liberal Arts to launch a school-based writing center where high school writers work with each other in an effort to become more effective writers. The writing center's philosophy is that writing at all levels is a complex, interactive process. It operates using a peer-to-peer tutoring method, where writing across the school's entire academic curriculum is the focus. Adult guest tutors, mentors and lecturers are invited to provide additional support.

FFL seeks to make writing centers a part of school culture in urban schools, believing that school environments should value the written word and focus on the development of both good writers and those who are struggling. Writing Center leader John Downes Angus, an English teacher at BILA remarks, "A writing center should be a place where the writing standards throughout a school's curriculum can cohere - the nexus for all things writing at a school - not a sterile place for writing remediation."

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**Chief Executive Officer**

Mike Jackson  
mike.jackson@foundationforletters.org

**Executive Director**

Sarose Klein  
sarose.klein@foundationforletters.org

902 Broadway, Floor 6  
New York, NY  
10010

Phone: 646-737-3146  
Email: info@foundationforletters.org

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# SAVE THE DATE

## Run for Letters

Charity 5K Race benefitting  
the Foundation for Letters

**Sunday,  
April 17,  
2016**



**Prospect Park,  
Brooklyn, NY**

**STAY TUNED FOR REGISTRATION DETAILS**