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Entertainment

Teaching the power of words

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By: Christina Troup
Special to The Examiner
April 12, 2009

For its 15th anniversary, WritersCorps honors the teachers who have been role models and mentors to children and teen writers from low-income communities.

The organization, which champions the arts and literacy in underserved neighborhoods in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and New York, has created a new anthology, “Days I Moved Through Ordinary Sounds: The Teachers of WritersCorps in Poetry and Prose,” featuring writing by those working in the literacy program.

To celebrate the book’s release, a reading at 7 p.m. Wednesday at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco includes appearances by storytellers Myron Michael Hardy, Elissa Perry, Milta Ortiz, D. Scott Miller, Chrissy Anderson-Zavala and Karla Robinson. Under Janet Heller, founder of the San Francisco WritersCorps, 15,000 youths have participated.

This year, 325 children and teens from juvenile detention facilities, homeless shelters and schools, as well as newly arrived immigrants, are participating in the program, which has been supported by the San Francisco Arts Commission since 1994.

“For a lot of people, the writing part of themselves is dormant,” Heller says. “What WritersCorps does — through writing poetry, writing fiction and performing — is give young people a sense that they can do something and contribute to the world.”

Despite the 50 voices presented in “Days I Moved Through Ordinary Sounds” — which was edited by Chad Sweeney, who taught for the San Francisco WritersCorps for seven years — the common thread



Encouraging words: Former WritersCorps teacher Karla Robinson, center, will appear at City Lights Bookstore on Wednesday.

behind each contribution is a passion to inspire the next generation of writers.

Eighteen-year-old Indiana Pehlivanova attests to how the program improved her literacy skills and shaped her as a writer.

Originally from Bulgaria and with little English under her belt, Pehlivanova was recommended to the WritersCorp program nearly four years ago while attending Mission High School.

With Sweeney's guidance, Pehlivanova found herself enraptured in a world of poetry, storytelling and playwriting and contributing to numerous publications.

"I've learned to appreciate the small things in life because that's what's most important," says Pehlivanova, who recently received news of admission to San Francisco State University and hopes to someday give back to WritersCorps as a teacher.

"I've learned that things are linked to each other; everything is connected. Sometimes you have to make choices on your own."

IF YOU GO

WritersCorps Book Launch

When: 7 p.m. Wednesday

Where: City Lights Bookstore, 261 Columbus Ave., San Francisco

Admission: Free

Contact: (415) 362-8193, www.citylights.com

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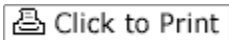
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