

# Haines and Friends Fund Report

ONTASC  
c/o Abram R. Katz  
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The *Digital Storytelling* program was an eight-week arts and literacy program wherein students wrote, edited, and record digital stories based on their unique life experiences and passions. The health benefits they received from this process were truly a gift to behold. Students were asked to self-reflect on a challenge in their life. They were then supported to find an inner strength that they will use to surmount this challenge through the creative writing process. Many students in marginalized communities struggle with feelings of low self-worth, depression and suicide. Over 50% of our students reported a lack of confidence in the ability to express their thoughts and emotions. After the class, 98% of students felt that they were more capable in this area and our partnering teacher reported a “*positive shift*” in the overall classroom atmosphere.

ONTASC is committed to positive change through youth development and community-school partnerships. We provide opportunities for students to dive deep, to self-reflect and process through their, often difficult, life experiences within the safe and structured environment of their regular daytime classes. The health benefits of self-expression and creativity are invaluable to both students and teachers alike. Our programs strike a balance between personal and academic growth, and this impacts the entire classroom environment in a positive way. Please check out this quick video:

[Digital Storytelling: Better Than Therapy.](#)

([https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=nCheWbF1KBM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=nCheWbF1KBM))

Adapted curriculum was developed specifically *from* our young people’s interests, and therefore truly engaged students in their schoolwork. These stories were then shared with the broader community in order to raise awareness, and bring dignity and hope to our students who may not otherwise be able to find it. There are many serious mental health issues that go unnoticed in public schools for a myriad of reasons. The health benefits that students receive from sharing their life stories, finding common ground with their peers, and being honored by the community, have lasting effects; it can literally mean the difference between a trip to the E.R. for cutting because they feel alone in the world, or a trip to the park with new-found friends that truly understand them.

ONTASC provides unique opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their students, engaging everyone in the learning process, and bringing much-needed awareness of our shared human experience. Our ongoing partnerships provide endless opportunities for private funders to be involved, as our curricula and pedagogies are ever expanding and adapting to the needs and challenges of the diverse populations we serve. See you next year! ☺

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