



Lauren Lutz-Coleman
2023 Phyllis Bernstein Kuchner
Scholarship Award Recipient

Lauren Lutz-Coleman applied her Phyllis Bernstein-Kuchner scholarship funding to a writing workshop for preteens and teens at the JCC. Lutz-Coleman is an educational professional whose work centers around building a diverse library of youth literature that helps all readers feel seen. Research shows that students read and learn better when they see themselves reflected in the works they read, yet many demographics are not sufficiently represented within published literature or academic collections. The scholarship-funded workshop series enabled local young adults to pen stories that shared their diverse lenses, championing their identities and helping build a shareable body of stories by our youth, for our youth.

The writing workshop was held at the JCC during October 2023. Eight students – avid writers from local middle and high schools – participated. They were all eager to hone their writers’ voices and receive constructive feedback on their written pieces. They were also joined by a number of local guest visitors who served as experts in related fields such as education, creative writing, journalism, and communications. Each week, Lutz-Coleman guided the students through the steps of the writing process: from ideation and brainstorming, to drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

The students each wrote a short piece that shared an aspect of their identity, most of which were then printed in a collective keepsake book entitled Mirrors of Our Community: Stories from Four Weeks of Shared Storytelling. Some participants also elected to publish their works on Shoelace Learning, an educational platform that provides reading comprehension practice for students in Grades 3-8, so that their stories could reach and resonate with other learners. The writers walked away from this workshop educated, enriched and definitely empowered!

For Lutz-Coleman, the Phyllis Bernstein-Kuchner scholarship provided her the opportunity to consider JCC initiatives from lenses beyond her usual perspective as a community member and program attendee. As she partnered with JCC staff and affiliated stakeholders, she discovered and participated in the strong organizational and connected culture the JCC has established: one based upon values including trust, shared ownership and a propensity towards action.

In essence, the scholarship served as a mentorship for Lutz-Coleman, as well, as an opportunity for her to hone skills critical to volunteerism and community advocacy. Eager to continue to tap into the mission-driven work at the core of the JCC, Lutz-Coleman has volunteered to serve on the JCC’s Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Council and hopes to offer further writing workshop sessions for JCC and community youth in the near future.



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