During 2015-16, the Writers Guild Initiative continued to develop innovative and responsive programs designed to share the tools of writing with underserved populations. Here are a few highlights of our work this year:

Writing Workshops for Wounded Veterans and Family Caregivers

For a sixth year, we continued our workshops for wounded veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and their family caregivers. We renewed our partnership with Wounded Warrior Project to offer six weekend-long writing workshops, led by accomplished writers. To reach veterans and caregivers throughout the nation, workshops took place in New York, Denver, and San Antonio. For a second year, we also offered a storytelling workshop in partnership with The Moth to alumni of our workshops.

The workshops provided a deep and intensive two-weekend experience to over 100 participants. Participants responded: “The entire workshop from beginning to end was incredible. I felt accepted, challenged and proud.” wrote one. Another commented, “The workshop was an emotional high. The love, respect, patience, attention and dedication of the mentors and staff were life changing. Having someone to actually listen and be interested in my writing was such a gift, one that we caregivers seldom receive.”

The workshops have had a powerful impact on writing mentors as well. Mentor Susan Kim writes, “I’m stunned and humbled by the extraordinary stories each of these men and women have bottled up inside of them—stories of valor and loss, deployment and coming home, pain and healing. A caregiver writes of welcoming home a beloved husband whom PTSD has transformed into a stranger. A vet writes a fairy tale to help explain his uncontrollable outbursts to his children. An Army chaplain writes of her own experiences with abuse and how that informs her work. I’m even more stunned when I see that few of them realize how important these stories are: for themselves, their families and friends, and anyone who’s been affected by trauma. Vets and their caregivers are a hugely diverse bunch with life experiences, memories, dreams, and fears that are as varied as they are. Working with them to get their stories onto the page has been one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done in my professional life.”