

# Deep Center Annual Report

23  
24

Savannah  
Georgia

Deep



# A Letter from Executive Director Holly Whitfield, PhD, CFRE

**Dear Deep Community,**

I am honored to lead the dedicated team of staff, board, and volunteers who make the work of Deep Center possible. Together we share a healing-centric approach that is anti-racist, trauma-informed, and systems-focused. Deep is committed to listening to the lived experiences of our community members—of all ages and backgrounds—and supporting their journey toward healing and transformation. Our work starts with individuals, and then broadens to ask how systems can be enriched and reformed so that all of Savannah can thrive.

This organization is incredibly unique. It has a phenomenal way of looking at issues, an approach that is holistic and asset-based, and that strives to meet our communities where they are. Deep doesn't just address a challenge from one direction; instead, we braid together education, advocacy, and community-building. Through intersectional practices of art-making and cultural expression, community organizing, and policy and advocacy, Deep builds community power that is rooted in a vision of justice and transformation.

Deep's organizational culture is special, and based in restorative practices. At Deep, we know that we can't lift up our community unless we're also lifting up each other. We check in with each other at weekly staff meetings to see what's bringing us joy, what's weighing us down, and how we're taking care of ourselves. This is how you foster belonging.

Deep Center is loved here in Savannah and respected nationwide as a leading provider of youth programming. As we position ourselves at the forefront of youth programming grounded in equity and justice work, we capitalize on the strengths that carried us here. I am excited to reflect on a year well lived and look ahead to what comes next as we deepen our commitment to racial and social justice in the next era of Deep's service and as a model for transformational change in the American South.

**Thank you for being part of the many ways that Deep celebrates, honors, and explores our community, creates spaces for belonging, and challenges the status quo to make way for real change.**



Holly Whitfield  
Executive Director



# Deep Center's 2023-2024 Story

Deep Center's mission is to empower Savannah's young people to thrive as learners, community leaders, and agents of change. Through creative writing, cultural production, and art, Deep creates platforms for the city's youth and the village of support around them, including their families and adult allies, to share stories, engage in debates, and make Savannah a more just and equitable place.

Our work is **trauma-informed**, **culturally responsive**, and promotes a **roots-cause model** of youth and community development through **Direct Service | Narrative Change | Systems Change**



Deep's award-winning youth programs delivered high-quality **ARTS, CULTURAL, and ADVOCACY** education across Savannah in 2023-2024...



**Youth Served in Direct Programs**



**Community-Based Program Sites Across Savannah**



**Local Artists Providing Arts Education**



**Educators Received Restorative Practice Support**

# A YEAR IN THE LIFE

## SEPTEMBER 2023

A year with Deep Center is packed with over 700 unique program sessions for youth and adults around Savannah! Take a tour of some highlights of another great year...



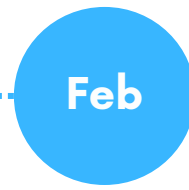
### New Drop-In Site

Deep was excited to start Drop-In sessions at the Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum in order to reach youth in the local communities of Yamacraw Village



### Programs Begin

All youth programs were in session across 25 schools and community centers



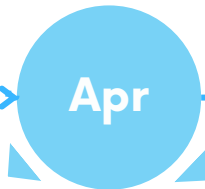
### Justice Day

In late February, Deep's Organizing team, along with the Work Readiness Enrichment Program (WREP), led panel discussions at the Justice Reform Partnership's Justice Day in Atlanta



### Deep in Atlanta

Attended Legislative Sessions at the Georgia State Assembly with Action Research Team (ART) and engaged in discussions with Spelman College staff on student burnout



### Youth Summit & Slam Competition

The Youth Summit was a gathering for young people to come together to discuss issues important to them, participate in art and self-care workshops, and create community. The day ended with a slam competition led by national slam artist Ashley Haze

### Deep Apprenticeship Pilot Program Launched

Five Apprentices in an eight-month program learned about nonprofit fundamentals to gain insight and practical skills to prepare them for job readiness in the nonprofit sector



### Block by Block (BxB) in Live Oak Public Libraries

To cap off a great year, BxB held a discussion and viewing of their Legacy Quilt, created with teaching artist Jennifer Mack-Watkins and quilter Audrey Andrews



# OF DEEP CENTER THROUGH AUGUST 2024



### Seeds of Change: An Unconference

Deep's second annual hosted conference featured workshops led by participants in Deep's Summer Writing Project. November also marked the kick-off of the **Adult Organizing Committee**



**Block by Block (BxB) Winter Showcase**  
BxB participants performed original works after a semester of exploring music and art and learning about the history of the drum as a symbol of resistance and the evolution of protest music



### New Year, New Collaborations

Deep's Healing Schools team debuted a new eight-week workshop series, "Fierce Self Compassion for Educators," and BxB kicked off the year with a new collaboration with the Savannah Jazz Academy

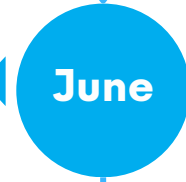


### Book Publication

Final touches on the spring Young Author Project (YAP) and BxB book publications of youth original work



See creativity in action at the **Sunday Soiree**



**Sunday Soiree**  
End-of-year showcase for YAP, Slam Team, and BxB programs to display published art and perform original works



**Barbershop Series begins**, bringing community organizing to the community spaces people already trust in order to host honest discussions on justice reform issues  
**Slam Team competes nationally** at Brave New Voices in DC, with one member taking first place in the MC Olympics with prepared pieces and freestyle rounds



# Young Author Project

Engaged 279 young writers at public middle and high schools with language and their stories to help them grow as learners, celebrate their lives and communities, and express themselves with skill, confidence, and courage.

**28** unique programs across 14 middle and high school partner sites

**55%** of measured youth experienced English Language Arts grade increases during semesters engaged in the YAP program



# Block by Block

**BxB participants partnered with 11 Teaching Artists across artistic mediums to explore the role of music and Identity**

Participants explored the connection between music and fine art through sessions like “Funk and Fantasy” and working with teaching artists to discover the history and connection between punk music and zine-making.

In the spring, BxB worked with the Savannah Jazz Academy through a four-part workshop series combining original youth poetry with the youth jazz musicians’ rhythms and beats.

Student original work, artist features, and more make up their annual anthology; this year’s is titled **“Rhythm Blues & Light”**



# Slam Team

This group of dynamic youth artists collaborated with adult artist-allies to bring Savannah’s spoken-word slam culture to the next generation of voices and make Savannah a more just and equitable place.

Deep’s Slam Team hosted their own competitions around Savannah and had the opportunity to perform at multiple venues, including at the Juneteenth Youth Arts Festival and the Tybee MLK Commemoration.

The team competed at the national level at the 2024 Brave New Voices conference in Washington, D.C., where one member won gold at the MC Olympics.

# Community Drop-In

**142** youth ages 7-18 engaged in Drop-In programs regularly across **four sites** around Savannah

**Song Writing**

**Fashion Sketching**

**Movement & Drama**

**Poetry**

**Hair Braiding**

**Yoga**

**Acrylic Pour Painting**

**Monoprinting**

**Floral Arranging**

**Zine & Comic-Book Making**

In addition to furthering its goals of creating easy-entry and accessible spaces for positive youth development across Savannah, Drop-In continued its mission to be a welcoming space for low-income and systems-impacted young people.



## WREP

The **Work Readiness Enrichment Program** continued to serve as a model in the Savannah area for restorative alternatives for youth in the juvenile justice system.

This year, **WREP engaged 11 young men** with a trauma-informed approach and sought to reimagine narratives and build opportunity through collaboration with program youth.

### Justice Day in Atlanta

Three WREP youth joined Deep staff on an intergenerational panel discussing the preventative measures and restorative practices that could have and should have been in place to divert them from the juvenile justice system.



## Action Research Team

In ART's program year, 14 participants:

**Hosted a Youth Summit**, facilitating a panel with local youth activists and holding listening sessions on school improvement themes

**Visited the State Capitol** to learn about advocacy and met with a professor of multicultural education at Spelman College

**Compiled a Research Report on Student Burnout** and held dialogues with student stakeholders on the challenges facing them in their school settings

**Hosted the Fourth Annual Freedom School** to explore youth organizing



*Check out more details here*



In 2023-24, Deep's **Healing Schools** initiatives have continued to make strides toward education justice through work with both students and adult allies.

## Healing Schools Programs

We continued expanding our work with **ADULTS**, including reaching **123 direct educators through 16 workshops and countless hours of individualized support**, to make sure youth are seen in their full humanity and to advocate for administrative and legislative policies that make Savannah a safe place for all young people and their families.

### Second Annual Unconference

A reimagined conference for educators, led by educators from the Deep Writing Project. The conference was keynoted by Omkari L. Williams, author of *Micro Activism: How You Can Make a Difference in the World (Without a Bullhorn)*.

### Regional & National Recognition

Presented with Advisory Council Board of educator partners at the Georgia Council Teachers of English Conference

Already trained in the Mindful Self-Compassion curriculum, our program staff adapted the curriculum specifically for educators to incorporate layers of systems analysis.

### FIERCE Self-Compassion Workshop

Hosted with Savannah High School to create space for open and honest dialogue between stakeholders and create a definition of what “restorative practices” means, specific to that school culture

### World Cafe Sessions



Hear our **Writing Project educators reflect on the program**

*[Deep] balances skill development and relationship/human development. I love participating in Deep's offerings because I know I'll be surrounded by amazing people.*

*- Teacher, Workshop Participant.*

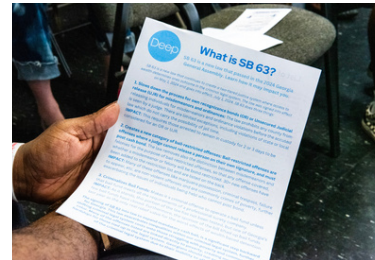


# Building Power

## Community Organizing & Advocacy

**Deep's Community Organizing** focuses on two key areas with both youth and adults: movement-building among grassroots communities and pushing for policy change through campaigns.

With that focus as our guide, a lot has been happening this year in our Community Organizing Team's mission to engage adults around the Savannah–Chatham communities:



### All Spark

A monthly workshop series for young adults to promote community building and information raising. It functions as an entry-level space for individuals to engage with the advocacy space and bring information and calls-to-action to community members, including justice-engaged young people.

### Adult Organizing

A space for mobilized stakeholders to come together around specific issues central to justice reform and equity. This team does it all: leading community advocates to promote policy awareness, partnering with community organizations to lead teach-ins on building a restorative community, sitting on panels with the Offender Alumni Association, and hosting expungement clinics with The DeVetter Law Firm.

### Barbershop Series

2024 also began a series of dialogues held in community-centric spaces like barbershops, covering topics including restorative justice, second chances, and citizen reentry. Program goals are community building, resource sharing, and storytelling.



*“Coalition building will be advocate-centric. It’s not limited to people already in a paid position ... It’s for any community member who wants to show up and bring issues to the floor.”*

*-Omari Fox, Deep’s Community Organizer*

# A Decade with Deep

From Young Author Program participant to Staff Member

Now that Deep Center is in our 16th year, we are starting to get asked where do our alumni go? Who do they become? **We sat down recently with one alumnus, Sam Poole, who engaged in every program Deep offered, starting in middle school.** Sam reflected on his first days with YAP: “When I first joined, they told us we were going to read poetry, and I was the only one who didn’t want to get into poetry, but I’ll never forget how that changed...”

“I remember the Writing Fellow mentor telling me that one of my poems was her favorite poem, but I didn’t really believe her. I had to perform it at a final show, and more people said they liked my work. I finally understood that she **meant** it, that she wasn’t just saying that. And that right there made me feel like a poet. And ever since then, I’ve been calling myself a poet.”

Sam went on to try out other Deep programs like the Action Research Team and was in the inaugural class of Block by Block. While in these programs, he and his fellow poets got to experience their first slam competition and expressed a desire for Deep to create its own slam team.



Sam Poole in BxB, 2017-2018



## NO VALUE. NO PRICE. by SAMUEL "THE ONE" POOLE

What is value if there’s no price?  
That’s what they ask me.  
I told them,  
Until you see rich heritage  
living with rich character,  
growing up with rich culture,  
you won’t see how priceless this is—  
money can never clean up the blood shed.

Yet they ask.  
I tell them,  
Until you taste meals  
prepared by the family in that small kitchen,  
until you hear how first and fourth cousins laughed in that  
den,  
until you see how the family mourned the dead.

Yet they ask.  
I tell them,  
You will never know until you’ve lived it.  
Until you’ve been upgraded from sleeping on the floor to  
a queen-sized bed,  
been supported by Grandma’s rocking chair,  
been burned by that raggedy stove,  
been washed in that small tub,  
been hugged in that same room,  
been told that you own that home,  
you will never know the value of my situation.

Yet they ask and ask and ask.  
And I say,  
there’s no price to love, pain, happiness.

*“All the Deep programs, they came about because staff asked what we, as young people, wanted or felt like we needed—and then they listened. I trusted that what I said would be heard.”*

After graduating, Sam went on to join the Army National Guard and enroll in college at Winston-Salem State University. He sought out ways to engage in poetry, but came up empty on campus. With the support of mentors, Sam saw a need and filled it, starting a Slam Poetry Team and hosting open mic nights for peers—a legacy that lives on as a campus organization after his graduation.

**As of August, Sam has now come full circle with Deep Center.** He has gone from participant to employee as a proud Site Coordinator for the Young Author Project, stepping into the very role that lit a spark in him as a middle school student.

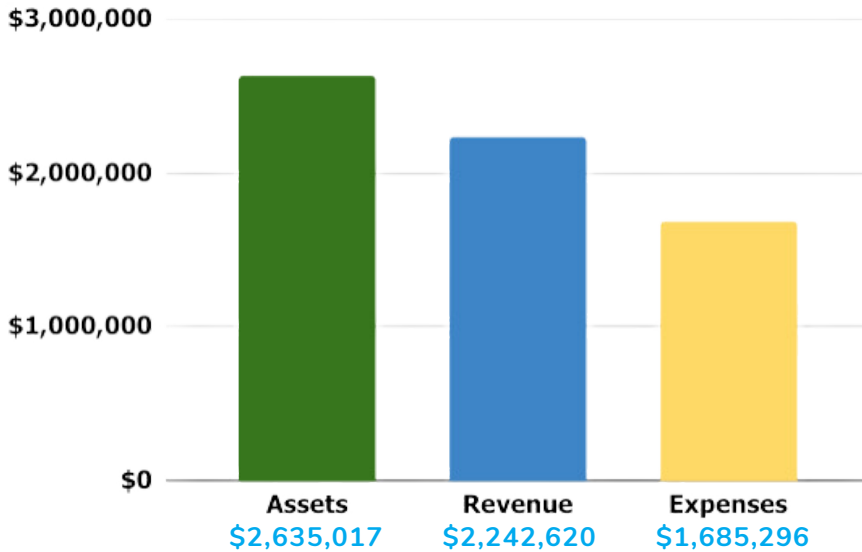
*“Try everything—don’t run from anything. At first you may think you can’t do it or that it isn’t cool, but later on you will find out that it might be something you will grow in life from and it may be a healing outlet for you. Deep is the healing outlet that we don’t always know we need.”*

*- Sam Poole*

# Organizational Health

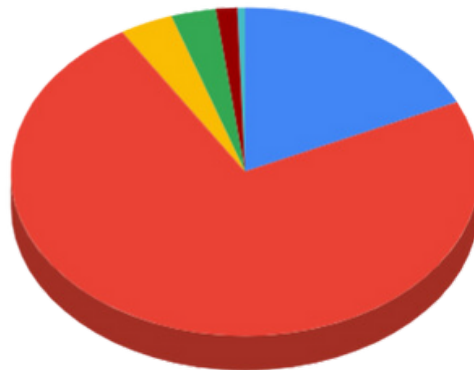
**Deep is strong and stable.** Expense increases over the 2023-24 year are a result of program expansion driven by increased community demand and income, along with staff salary increases in response to inflation. Surpluses are due to increases in general operating support and multi-year grants received in one year and allocable across multiple years.

Currently, inflation is moving faster than grant income, and consistent, engaged support from our donors will make it possible for Deep to keep pace with these new financial pressures.



## FY23 Income Sources

- Government - 18%
- Foundations - 73%
- Corporate - 4%
- In-Kind - 3%
- Individuals - 1%
- Earned Income - 1%

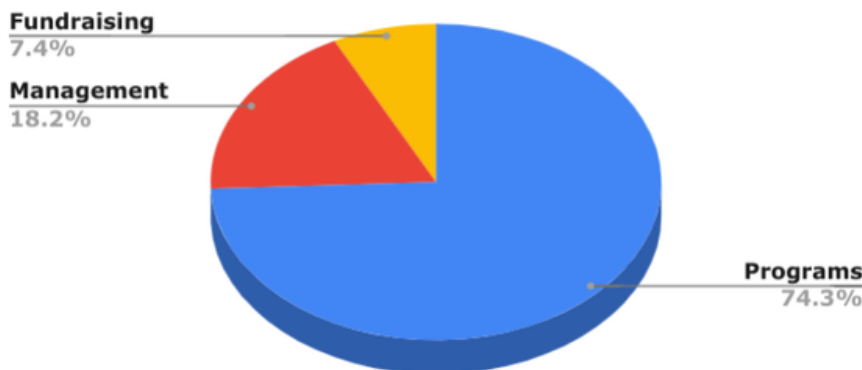


## Organizational Equity, Justice, and Reflection

Deep Center is dedicated to equity and justice, and to embodying the world we strive to create.

- Minority-majority board, 86% people of color.
- Deep’s population served is 80% youth of color. Adults served track with youth demographics.
- Deep’s staff is 65% people of color; 45% of staff identify as LGBTQ+.

## FY23 Expense Distribution



Our staff works intentionally to ensure our organizational practices reflect our values of equality around race, class, gender, language, and physical ability.



**SCAN HERE** For more information on how to support our work

# Thank You to Our Teaching Artists & Volunteers

## YAP Ed Fellows & Host Sites

Susan Torrance  
Charles Ellis Montessori  
Academy

Sarah Harper  
Coastal Middle School

Laura Beecher  
Garrison School for the Arts

Thomas Boland  
Godley Station K-8 School

Dr. Lee Alexander  
Robert W. Groves High  
School

Aaron Zimmer  
Hesse K-8 School

Dr. Meghan Quinlan  
Sol C. Johnson High School

Shante' Smith  
Mercer Middle School

Dr. Josephine Foster  
Myers Middle School

Dr. Michele MacIver  
New Hampstead K-8 School

Monica Roland  
Oglethorpe Charter School

Christine Kirkland  
Savannah-Chatham  
E-Learning Academy

Venecia Whyte-Foster  
STEM Academy at Bartlett

Dr. Laura Hooks  
West Chatham Middle  
School

## YAP Writing Fellows

Tifara Brown  
Elsie Carmain  
Jozlynn Carson  
Nicole Fernandez  
Torrey Gregerson  
Sam Keesling  
Cai Macler  
Sarah Mason  
Maxie McCoy  
Claire Nelson

Alex Newman  
Cindy Otis  
Ava Parrillo  
My'Kayle Pugh  
Brendan Riney  
Julia Ritchey  
Socks Rizk  
Krystell Sanchez-  
Romero  
Maddy Stevens  
Eden Turner  
Alayna Williams

## Drop-In Teaching Artists

Nikki Banks  
Latifah Best  
Alyssa Canepa  
Mia Crews  
Le Diego  
Cheyanne Dupont  
Kiki Dy  
Bruxanne El-Kammash  
Michelle Fleegal  
Alia Freeman  
Nae'Keisha Jones

Shaleah Lewis  
Khalil Muhammad  
Maria Offutt  
Ashley Potter  
Daniette Thomas  
Zackery Turner  
Justice Von Maur  
Elle Warren  
Christin Warren  
Cyasia Zackery

## BxB Teaching Artists

Tifara Brown  
Benje Daneman  
Ka'Dia Dhatnubia  
Sue & Crissy Finkle  
Jennifer Mack-Watkins  
Tanya Milton  
Crystal Moon  
Julia Pierce  
Dr. David Pleasant  
Nancy Price



# Impact Partners

## Regional & National Partners

**Ban the Box** | Atlanta, GA  
**Berkeley Law Policy Advocacy Clinic** | Berkeley, CA  
**Black Voters Matter**  
**Debt Free Justice Campaign**  
**Education Law Center**  
**Forward Promise** | Huntsville, AL  
**Fair Fight Action** | Atlanta, GA  
**Fund Georgia's Future** | Atlanta, GA  
**Georgia Applesseed** | Atlanta, GA  
**Georgia Budget & Policy Institute** | Atlanta, GA  
**Georgia Equality** | Atlanta, GA  
**Georgia Southern University, Dr. Peggy Shannon-Baker** | Statesboro, GA  
**Georgia Youth Justice Coalition** | Atlanta, GA  
**Highlander Research and Education Center** | New Market, TN  
**IMAN** | Atlanta, GA  
**Intercultural Development Research Alliance** | San Antonio, TX

**Justice Reform Partnership** | Atlanta, GA  
**Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights** | Washington, D.C.  
**National Writing Project** | Berkeley, CA  
**Offender Alumni Association** | Savannah, GA  
**People's Agenda** | Atlanta, GA  
**Rights Restoration Coalition** | Atlanta, GA  
**Savannah State University NAACP**  
**The Southern Center for Human Rights** | Atlanta, GA  
**Southern Economic Advancement Project** | Atlanta, GA  
**The Southern Poverty Law Center** | Montgomery, AL  
**University of Georgia** | Athens, GA  
**Vera Institute for Justice** | New York, NY  
**Voices for Georgia's Children** | Atlanta, GA

## Local Partners

**Book Lady Bookstore**  
**Chatham County Safety Net**  
**Chatham County Youth Commission**  
**City of Savannah Office of the Mayor**  
**Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition**  
**DayClean Tours with Jamal Toure**  
**DeVetter Law Firm**  
**DOC Savannah**  
**E. Shaver, Booksellers**

**Forsyth Farmers' Market**  
**Foxy Loxy Cafe**  
**Healthy Savannah**  
**Live Oak Public Library System**  
**Loop It Up Savannah**  
**Migrant Equity Southeast**  
**Movement Matters**  
**Office of Neighborhood Safety & Engagement**

**Savannah African Art Museum**  
**Savannah Jazz Academy**  
**Savannah Police Department**  
**Savannah Youth City**  
**Sulfur Studios**  
**Step Up Savannah**  
**Tabernacle Baptist Church**

## System & Site Partners

### Site Partners

Frank Callen Boys & Girls Club  
Gateway Services Chatham County Clubhouse  
Park Place Outreach  
Pennsylvania Avenue Resource Center  
Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum

### Savannah-Chatham County Public School System

Superintendent, Dr. S. Denise Watts  
Board of Education President, Roger Moss  
SCCPSS Board of Education  
Savannah High School of Liberal Arts Principal, Stacie Pottenger  
And all the incredible administrators, teachers, and education professionals of SCCPSS.

### Chatham County Juvenile Court

Front Porch Multi-Agency Resource Center  
Hon. Thomas L. Cole  
Hon. Roxanne E. Formey  
Hon. Linda Kramer  
Theresa Owens, Court Administrator  
Alisha Markle, Chief Deputy Court Administrator  
Barbara Davis, Deputy Court Administrator

### District Attorney's Office of Chatham County

We thank our **incredible donors** for their support of Deep Center.

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Anonymous, Brad Baugh and Kristin Russell, Elizabeth Beaver, Ira Berman and Helen Borrello, Hon. LeRoy Burke, Clara Fishel, Toby Hollenberg, Mr. and Mrs. Kim Iocovozzi, Peter and Laurie Katz, Jeff and LeeAnn Kole, Harold and Susan Lamb, Steven Malk, Paul Selker, Whitney Shephard, Jaqueline and Ken Sirlin, Michael St. Louis, The Sullivan Family, Zelda and Sheldon Tenenbaum, Dr. Steve and Raine Theis Charitable Fund, Peter and Pamela Voss

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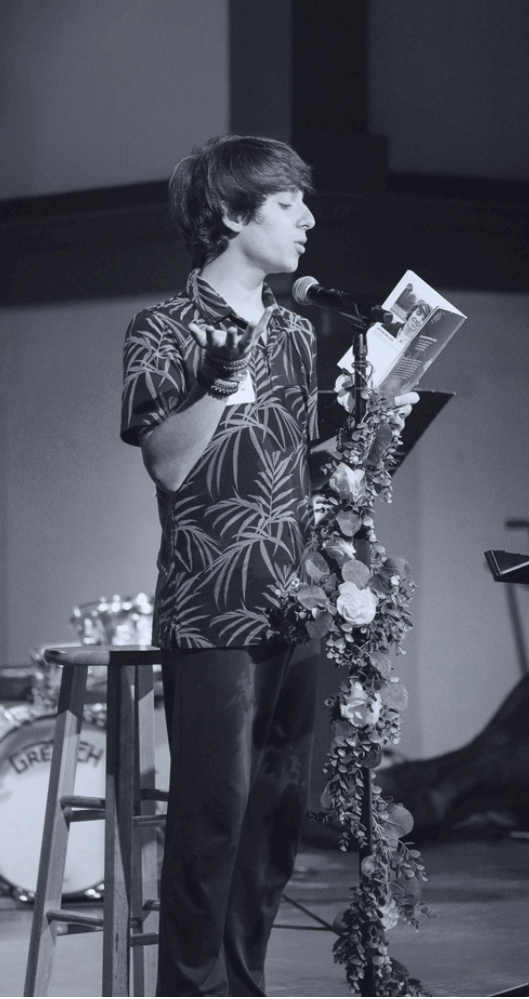
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SCAN HERE to Support the work of **Deep Center**

# Deep Center

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