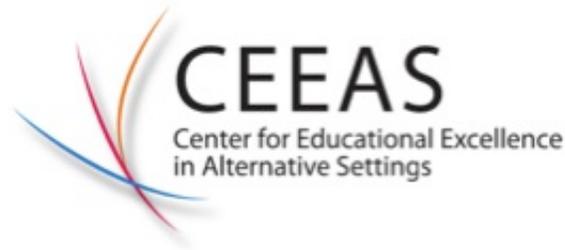


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***Untold Stories* Winners and Podcast**

“People think differently about kids ’cause they don’t know them. But what would you expect if you only see bad behaviors from kids? . . . If they don’t show their good side, how would you know that they’re good?”

That’s a quote from “Rydl,” a teen who is locked up near Salt Lake City, speaking during a podcast of *Untold Stories*. “Rydl” helped produce the podcast with [Spy Hop](#), a nonprofit that works with young men incarcerated in Utah.

In our Thanksgiving [newsletter](#), we highlighted excerpts from some of the winning essays from our nationwide writing initiative, *Untold Stories*. I wanted to send this follow-up newsletter to encourage our readers to take a few minutes to read some of the winning [essays](#) and listen to the [podcast](#).

If we want to understand the terrible challenges that many young people in the juvenile justice system faced growing up, the best place to start is with their own accounts of their early lives. For the vast majority, the past was rife with trauma, violence, and indignity—and devoid of hope, trust, and opportunity.

As a student wrote in an essay entitled *Raped*:
“Everything that has happened to someone in their life

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takes a toll on them, the way they think, and the way they are. . . . I'm not blaming my past for my decisions, but it does have something to do with who I am today.”

That’s the twofold challenge those of us who care about incarcerated kids must confront. We must push the juvenile justice system—and the schools in youth facilities—to truly meet the educational and rehabilitative needs of the young people in their care. At the same time, we must challenge the larger economic and political forces in our country that allow too many children to grow up in conditions that lead to an increased likelihood of juvenile justice system involvement.

The young men who worked with *Spy Hop* to produce the *Untold Stories* podcast offered candid perspectives on the essays. When asked what he hoped listeners would get from the podcast, Troy, one of the student producers, focused on the violence and tragedy that so dominated the essays: “It happens. We need to do something to stop it.”

I agree, and know that those of you reading this do, too.

Click [here](#) to listen to the *Spy Hop* podcast of *Untold Stories*.

Congratulations to all of the students who submitted essays as part of *Untold Stories*, including those selected as winners. An additional set of student essays will be featured by Richard Ross this spring in his forthcoming publication, *Juvie Talk*.

We salute Adam Sherlock and his team at *Spy Hop* for empowering the young men they worked with. You can listen to other podcasts they’ve produced at [Sending Messages](#).

And to Troy, Dream, Bryte, Angel, Rydl, Yroc, and Mighty Apex, the student producers of the podcast: thank you for putting your hearts into the production, and for reminding us to look for the good in *every* kid, even those who have made mistakes, might be hard to love, and are locked up.

David

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