

# Teens start the conversation about violence with written words

By Reesy Floyd-Thompson  
Special to the Beacon

*"He tells me he loves me  
"I mean he calls me  
names God wouldn't ..."*

Members of the Hampton Roads writing community recently embraced "L.O.V.E., a lyrical performance of the effects of domestic violence," written by 16-year-old Emeka Onyirimba.

He was the winner of the "More than Broken Bones" creative writing contest. More than 40 spectators, including former Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf, attended the award ceremony Feb. 18 at the Meyera Oberndorf Central Library.

The contest was a new undertaking for Samaritan House's education and outreach director, Angela Lawrence. The goals were to commemorate Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month and to spark a dialogue among teens.

"I chose a writing contest because so many young people already use writing as an outlet to deal with difficult emotions," Lawrence said.

*"... how dare he take  
those demented finger tips  
to my neck*

*"my morality is in this  
hands with a constricting  
grip..."*

Audience members were treated to a double dose of "L.O.V.E." when Emeka, a member of Teens with a Purpose who lives in Norfolk, performed a special encore in honor of his mother. Speaking just a few moments, the impact of his words lingered.

"On paper, his words were powerful," Lawrence said. "Hearing them live is amazing."

Winning entries were judged on originality, creativity, artistic quality and



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**Emeka Onyirimba of Maury High in Norfolk recently won the "More than Broken Bones" creative writing contest, intended to raise awareness of teen dating violence.**

adherence to theme. Winners were notified days before the event and invited to recite their work at the ceremony.

Lawrence searched for an open-mic-night venue to host the awards. Partnering with Hampton Roads Writers, and its established forum, provided a captive audience for the teens to showcase their work.

The three winners, their schools and their works:

- Emeka Onyirimba, Maury High School, Norfolk: "L.O.V.E."

- Elizabeth Doyle, Bayside High School, Virginia Beach: "Complication"

- Dequon James, Lakeside High School, Suffolk: "Untitled"

They were awarded scholarships to Hampton Roads Writers 2nd Annual Writers Conference, in September.

Recipients will be able to attend workshops on publishing and the craft of writing, amid a community of novice and professional writers, including literary agents and

editors.

Lauran Strait, president of Hampton Roads Writers, said offering the contest winners a scholarship aligns with the group's mission of promoting the craft and passion of writing.

"We'd like to include more young writers in our workshops to help develop their craft and to allow them to find their voice," Strait said.

With the success of this event, both organizations agreed to make the writing contest and scholarship program an annual event.

*Open-mic nights are every month at the Meyera Oberndorf Central Library. For more information, visit [hamptonroadswriters.org](http://hamptonroadswriters.org). Samaritan House has provided shelter and support to those in need for more than 25 years. Visit [samaritanhouseva.org](http://samaritanhouseva.org).*

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