



LUCKY
JEFFERSON

2025
ANNUAL REPORT



designed and illustrated by Annelise Wu



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Letter from the Founder

Dear Friends, Supporters, LJ Squad,

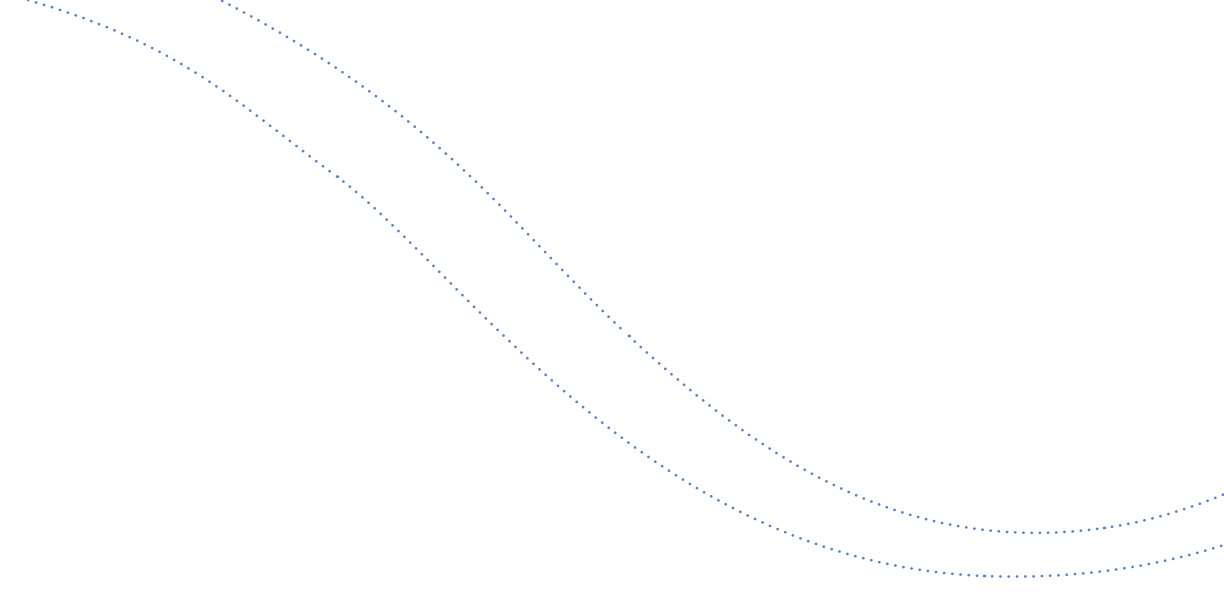
2025 was a transformative year for Lucky Jefferson—a year of scaling our impact, deepening our commitment to community, and laying the foundation for growth.

We published four exceptional print publications: our Cataclysm zine, Making the World Soft in collaboration with 826NYC, Fissure, and Estallido, our second Latine collection celebrating the richness of Latine voices.

Through these publications, we secured work from 18 previously and currently incarcerated writers and artists, including those navigating the carceral system as friends, family, educators, and advocates.

Our second exhibition, Everyday Monuments, setting the course for our first Photography Fellowship in partnership with Buddy, launched at the Chicago Cultural Center, a milestone that elevated visual storytelling alongside our literary work.

We expanded our educational programming dramatically, hosting 6 FREE virtual poetry workshops, 4 in-person workshops, and 3 media literacy workshops, reaching people of all ages across geographic and institutional barriers. We also launched our newsroom, 15 West, creating new



With \$90,663 in revenue and a commitment to investing 72.5% of every dollar directly into author compensation and programs, we achieved financial sustainability while staying true to our mission of paying writers and artists fairly for their work.

As we look to 2026, we're doubling down on community and building more structured systems to protect the communities we serve.

The \$31,776 surplus from 2025 enables us to launch free in-person workshops at UIC, Hyde Park Art Center, and other spaces, including offer additional media literacy and photography education.

Thank you for believing in our vision of a literary landscape where all voices—especially those most left out, are amplified, compensated, and celebrated.

In gratitude,

NaBeela Washington,
Founder, Editor in Chief

2025 at-a-Glance

4

Publications Released

1 Zine: Cataclysm
3 Print Publications: Making the World
Soft, Fissure, Estallido

18

Incarcerated Writers &
Artists

including those navigating
the carceral system as friends,
family, educators, and
advocates



\$90,663

Revenue

72.5% invested directly
in writers, artists,
education, and programs

Newsroom Launched
Partnership with 15
West

4 FREE Community Workshops

6 Virtual Poetry Workshops

3 Media Literacy Workshops

Photography
Fellowship &
Exhibition

Second exhibition at **Chicago Cultural Center** in partnership with Buddy

224%

Growth

from \$28,368 in 2024 to
\$90,663 in 2025

7

Major Grants

including \$50,000 IFF - Chicago's Cultural Treasures



2025 Highlights & Achievements



Cataclysm (Zine)



Fissure

Publishing Program: Four Distinct Voices

Making the World Soft

In collaboration with 826NYC, this publication is an otherworldly anthology shaped by the minds of 9 young writers who dared to dream beyond the ordinary. This partnership amplified youth voices and created a bridge between Chicago and New York literary communities.



Estallido

Our second Latine Collection Building on the success of our first Latine anthology, Estallido celebrates the multiplicity of Latine experiences, languages, and perspectives.



Incarcerated Writers & Artists Program

In 2025, we secured work from 18 previously and currently incarcerated writers and artists, including those navigating the carceral system as friends, family, educators, and advocates.

This program represents our commitment to amplifying voices that are systematically silenced. Through correspondence services (JPay, GTL, Securus) and dedicated editorial support, we created pathways for incarcerated writers to reach broader audiences and receive fair compensation for their creative work.

Investment

\$1,031

in correspondence services, plus editorial time and contributor payments

Impact



Breaking down barriers between inside and outside, honoring the creative work of those most impacted by mass incarceration, and expanding the definition of who gets to be a “published author”

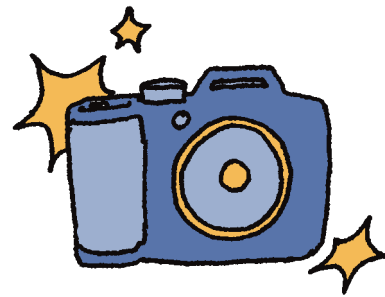
Photography Fellowship & Exhibition

Our first Photography Fellowship, in partnership with Buddy, culminated in our second exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center—one of the city’s most prestigious cultural venues.

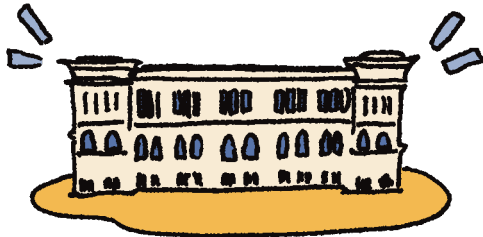
This fellowship provided Englewood photographer, **Brittany Norment**, with:



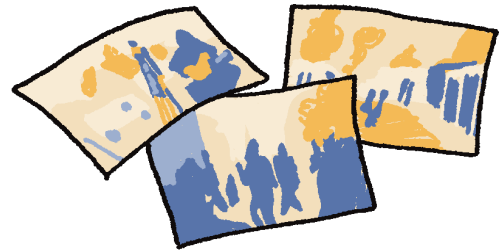
Mentorship and editorial support



Equipment access (cameras purchased through grant funding)



Exhibition opportunity at a major cultural institution



Professional development in visual storytelling

This success positions us to offer more photography education, further expanding our commitment to visual artists.

Newsroom Launch: 15 West

15 West is a resident and volunteer-powered newsroom dedicated to connecting people mile by mile, block by block, throughout Chicago's West Side and neighboring suburbs.

Made possible by Cook County's Digital Equity Impact Grant and fiscally sponsored by Lucky Jefferson, we're building one of the first newsrooms designed for readers of all abilities, from the ground up.



Our Mission: Make news easier to understand and reduce misinformation about the world around us. We're neurodiverse-first, delivering accessible journalism to everyone, no exceptions.

Grant Support

\$10,000

from The Field Foundation

\$7,500

from Cook County Digital Equity
Impact (City Bureau)

This initiative represents our expansion into community-centered journalism, creating new opportunities for writers to tell urgent, community-driven stories.

Educational Programming: Workshops & Accessibility

6

FREE Virtual Poetry Workshops

Removing geographic barriers, our virtual poetry workshops reached writers across 20+ U.S. states and 15+ countries. These workshops focused on craft, creativity, and emotional wellbeing.

Impact

77

participants across all workshops

Philosophy

All workshops were offered for FREE, ensuring accessibility regardless of economic circumstances. We believe education in the literary arts should not be gated by ability to pay.

3

Media Literacy Workshops

In an era of misinformation and digital overload, our media literacy workshops equipped participants with critical tools to decode misinformation, critically engage with media, and craft their own narratives through hands-on training in digital publishing and community journalism.



Organizational Growth & Sustainability

Major Grants Secured in 2025:

\$50,000



\$10,000



\$7,500

Cook County Digital
Equity Impact

\$5,000



\$4,560

Illinois
ARTS
Council

\$1,000



\$900

CLPM Professional Development
Consulting

**THE AWESOME
FOUNDATION**

Infrastructure



\$5,475 in professional camera equipment for photography fellowship and documentation



\$2,793 in technology infrastructure, including web development, project management, and improved communications platforms



\$10,000 towards equipment and systems to support long-term growth

Financial Milestone

Achieved financial sustainability with a \$31,776 surplus, enabling programmatic expansion in 2026.

Looking Ahead: Doubling Down on Community

2025 was about scaling. 2026 is about deepening.

As we grow, we're becoming more structured to protect the communities we serve - building systems that ensure sustainability, accountability, and long-term impact.

Improving Literacy through Photojournalism

Building on the success of our 2025 fellowship, we'll bring photojournalism workshops to Chicagoland residents, providing everyday individuals, and visual artists with mentorship, resources, and opportunities to tell their stories and deepen media literacy.



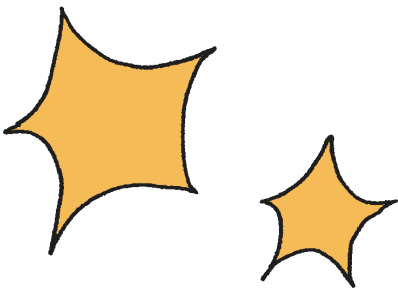
Free In-Person Workshops

UIC
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Hyde Park
**ART
CEN
TER**

National Poetry Month Workshops

4 workshops available to any
artist, anywhere



Structural Investments

- Enhanced legal protections (media liability and general liability insurance)
- Formalized systems for contributor payments and contracts
- Compensation models for our team
- The formation of Lucky Jefferson Press
- Volunteer advisory and community town hall structures



Our Star

Every decision we make is guided by our commitment to the communities we serve—paying writers, creating accessible pathways to publication, and amplifying voices that are too often ignored.

By the Numbers 2025

Financial

\$90,663

Total Revenue
224% growth from 2024

72.5%

Budget Invested in
Communities Served
& Programs

7

Major Grants Secured

\$31,776

Surplus Enabling
2026 Expansion

Publications

4

Publications Released

1 Zine (Cataclysm)

3 Print books

1 Collaborative publication (826NYC partnership)

Writers & Artists

18

Incarcerated writers
& artists published

69 Total contributors
across all publications

100% of contributors
compensated

Programs

1

Photography
Fellowship awarded

2

Exhibitions mounted
(including Chicago Cultural Center)

1

Newsroom Launched:
15 West

13

FREE workshops
hosted

Community Impact

6 Virtual poetry workshops

3 Media literacy workshops

4 In-Person zine workshops

45+

cities across 20+
U.S. states and 15+
countries

**reached through
publishing**

3

Institutions
with incarcerated writers served

Incarcerated Writers & Artists Program

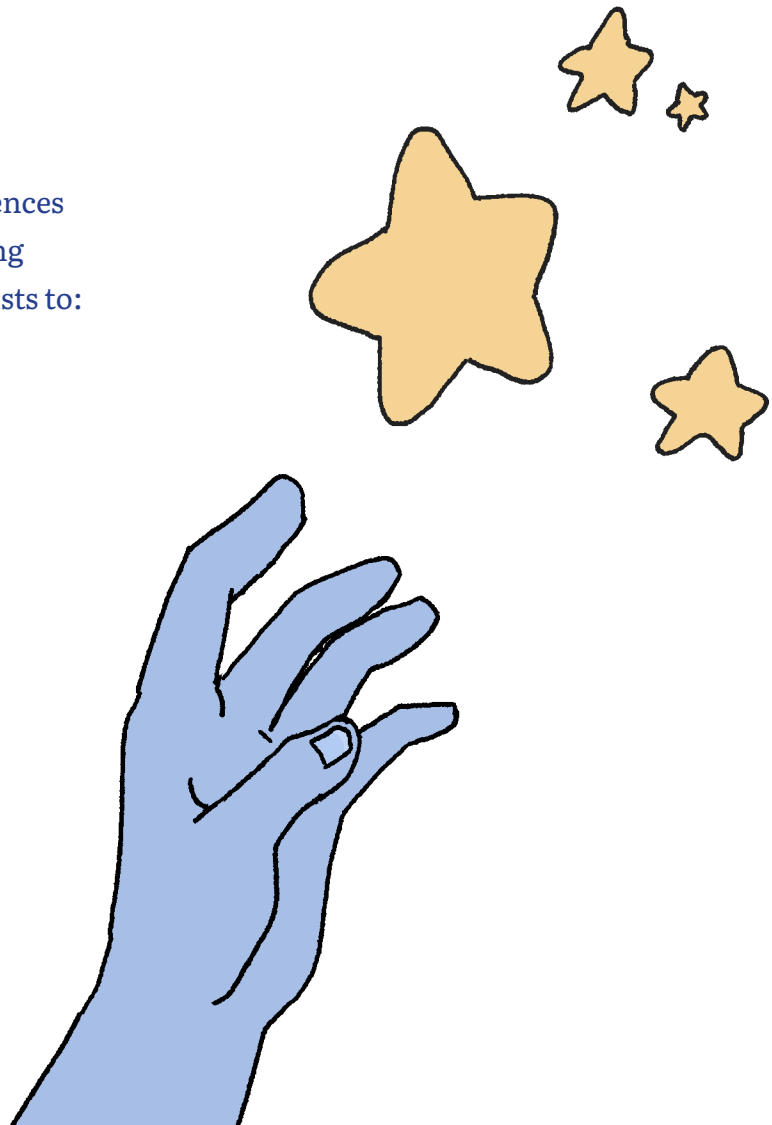
18 voices. 18 stories. 18 lives affirmed through art.

In 2025, Lucky Jefferson secured work from 18 previously and currently incarcerated writers and artists, including those navigating the carceral system as friends, family, educators, and advocates.

Why This Matters

The U.S. carceral system systematically silences the voices of incarcerated people. Publishing creates a pathway for these writers and artists to:

- Be seen as full human beings with important stories to tell
- Receive fair compensation for their creative work
- Reach audiences beyond prison walls
- Maintain creative practice and community connection
- Challenge narratives of who deserves to be published



How It Works

We work with previously and currently incarcerated writers through:



Correspondence services (JPay, GTL, Securus) to receive submissions and communicate with writers inside



Editorial support from our team, treating incarcerated writers with the same rigor and respect as all contributors



Amplification of their work through print publications and digital platforms



Fair compensation paid directly to writers or their designated recipients



The Ecosystem

Our definition of “incarcerated writers and artists” is expansive.

We honor not just those currently or previously behind bars, but also the friends, family, educators, and advocates navigating the carceral system alongside them. Mass incarceration touches entire communities, and we believe all those voices deserve space.

Investment & Impact

\$231

in correspondence service fees

\$600

in direct payments to
incarcerated contributors

18

writers and artists in forthcoming
publication on Feb 8, 2026

Immeasurable

impact on dignity, community,
and narrative change

Thank you to our contributors, supporters,
and community for making 2025 a year of
magical literary work.

Together, we're building a publishing
ecosystem where every voice has power.



Connect With Us
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