



Presents

INVISIBLE WORDS

Invisible Words is an exercise in empathy expressed through a public art exhibition featuring a curated collection of signs made by people experiencing homelessness worldwide. The exhibit, events, and thought-provoking programs to inspire service and action will premier at **Martin Luther King Memorial Library** in Washington DC in March 2022.



Photo ©2020 by Invisible Words

Invisible Words features compelling statements that are seen but too often overlooked by Americans every day. The signs reveal a range of emotions: embarrassment, shame, desperation, anger; even humor and political insight. Their words are raw, emotional, and sometimes magnificently poetic. In stark contrast to the sidewalks and underpasses where these signs were purchased from their authors, the exhibition invites the viewer to linger. Pulling aside the scrim of our own discomfort, we can gaze directly at these powerful messages, freed from the awkward interactions and sideways glances with which we often confront them.

Social activist **Wendy Abrams** curated the exhibit. Abrams' previous work includes the public art exhibit *Cool Globes*: oversized globes showing solutions to climate change. Since premiering in Chicago in 2007, *Cool Globes* has toured across four continents and has been translated into nine languages. Regarding *Invisible Words*, Abrams explains that "homelessness is a heart-wrenching and complicated problem. I don't pretend to have the answers, and this exhibit is not intended to tell viewers what to do. Art has the power to make you think; this exhibit was put together to do that, to see things you didn't see before, or see them through a different lens."



Read about IVC's Impact

Invisible Words is brought to Washington, DC, through the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC) and the Eleven Eleven Foundation. IVC is a national lay Catholic organization that harnesses the expertise of individuals over fifty who have the passion and commitment to make a difference in issues impacting the world. IVC members serve among the materially poor in twenty regions across the US, reverently entering the lived experience of others while providing their skills to over three hundred social service organizations. By co-sponsoring *Invisible Words*, IVC seeks to offer a broader audience the opportunity to increase awareness and compassion for people facing homelessness and dire poverty. "Seeing with new eyes is what service corps members do. IVC presents the incomparable experience of *Invisible Words* as an exercise to open more hearts to empathy, and to inspire the service and advocacy that brings real and lasting hope," IVC President and CEO Mary McGinnity explained.

The mission of the Eleven Eleven Foundation is to support thought leaders, change agents, and organizations that work diligently to improve our planet, our health, and future generations. The Foundation feels a deep passion and sense of urgency for advancing society's approach to the Environment, Healthcare, and Education.

Invisible Words will be on display at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library from March 13 - June 30, 2022. The MLK Library is located at 901 G St NW, Washington DC 20001. The library's hours are 10-6 M-W, F, Sat and 12-8 Thursday, and 1-5 on Sunday. For more information, contact: Steve Eberle, Vice President for Advancement, Marketing, and Communications – 410-752-4686 or seberle@ivcusa.org.

Seeing with new eyes is what service corps members do. IVC presents the incomparable experience of *Invisible Words* as an exercise to open more hearts to empathy, and to inspire the service and advocacy that brings real and lasting hope,

Mary McGinnity

President and CEO
Ignatian Volunteer Corps

Touring the Exhibit

Slowly tour the whole exhibit reverently, spending just a moment in silence in front of each sign (the tour of the signs may take you about 20 minutes in total).

- Notice what, if anything, catches your attention—don't dwell too long. It could be due to the words and the way they make you feel (e.g., empathy, discomfort, confusion, merciful, sorrow); or, it could be the visual impact of the sign (e.g., the artistry [or lack thereof], the colors and materials used)
- Take note of any assumptions/biases you make/have when looking at the signs.

Be aware of the signs that have the greatest impact on you.

For Deeper Reflection

Choose Three Signs from the Invisible Words Exhibit and consider the following questions:

Sign #1

1. Notice the work. Look silently at it for a few minutes and record your observations. What do you see? What do you feel? What do you think the author is trying to say to you?
2. Think about how you see the world through your various lenses. These could be related to your role in your family, your age, your socio-economic status, your race, your ethnicity, your interests, your hobbies, your passions, or anything else about you.
3. What social conditions does the author invite us to think about? (Social conditions have to do with the role or state of people in a society or community. Examples include poverty, quality of housing, homelessness, educational attainment and quality, unemployment, wage levels, lack of control over the organization of work, racial residential segregation and other forms of discrimination.) What are the systems that create those conditions? What are their parts and how do they work together?

Sign #2

1. How might the author provoke us to think about systems of power (and powerlessness?)
2. How might the work provoke us to think about systems of care (and disregard?)
3. How might the work provoke us to think about environmental systems (and pollution?)
4. How might the author provoke us to think about systems of justice (and injustice?)

Sign #3

1. How might the work invite us to think about political systems?
 2. What roles do people's religious beliefs and assumptions play in the systems the work makes us think about?
 3. Does the author invite us to think about social change? Does it make us want social change, and, if so, what kind? How would systems need to be altered in order to bring about that change?
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If part of a group, consider these final two questions:

1. With a partner or small group, take turns talking about how you see or think about the work. You might see the work similarly, differently, or both. Try to see what your partner(s) notice(s) and ask questions to understand more about their perspective. Possible question starters: Say more about what you mean by.... Tell me more about why you see/think/feel... Take a minute or two to reflect.
2. What did you learn through your conversation? Did your thinking change, shift, broaden, or zero-in on something? If so, how? What new thoughts or questions do you have now?

For information about how to join the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, please contact:

In Washington, DC and Suburban Maryland:

Mike Goggin: 202-277-4447 or mgoggin@ivcusa.org

In Northern Virginia:

Mike Mothes: 703-534-4140 or mmothes@ivcusa.org

Sources consulted:

Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future, by Pope Francis: Simon and Schuster New York, 2020.

Project Zero: Harvard University: ARTC Handbook – “For Deeper Reflection” Questions



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Call to Action

Washington DC, Metro MD, Northern Virginia Ignatian Volunteer Corps Partner Agencies

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