

LIFE CHANGING RESULTS OF



Documentary Songwriters



2023-2024 REPORT

Documentary songwriting is a step-by-step method of collaborative songwriting. We work with people with any or no musical background to transform their personal stories into meaningful songs that strengthen connection, nurture creativity, and awaken compassion.



SEED IMPACT

ANALYSIS &
REPORT BY
SEED IMPACT

Letter From Our Executive Director

Dear friends,

This past year has been marked by intentional growth. Through strategic partnerships, innovative programs, and a focus on evaluation, we've expanded our reach and deepened the impact of our mission by transforming stories that matter into songs we need. Here are some of our accomplishments this year:

- Collaborating with the Onion Foundation and Vertical Change, we employed the Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT) to evaluate DocSong's organizational effectiveness. The report identified our assets and areas of improvement, allowing us to capitalize on our strengths while strategically tackling challenges.
- We also collaborated with SEED Impact, a nonprofit capacity-building organization, to develop an evaluation framework enabling us to enhance and communicate our impact.
- We successfully launched two new projects, The New Mainers Project and the Unlocking Harmony Project, both of which will culminate in in-person concerts later this year.
- We continued our work with the Survivor Stories Project—adding virtual opportunities for survivors of domestic violence to write songs with DocSong teaching artists.
- We established program advisory councils comprised of past storytellers whose valuable insights and perspectives contribute to program development, implementation, and evaluation to ensure our work stays relevant, impactful, and community-focused.
- We partnered with Oberlin College to offer our first Documentary Songwriting Training for college credit. Seven Oberlin college students participated in a three-week long winter term course to become certified DocSong teaching artists.
- We launched the DocSong Continuing Education Series, offering quarterly workshops on relevant topics such as “Bringing Documentary Songwriting to Your Community” and “Leveling Up Your Recording At Home” to better support our growing community of teaching artists.
- Through generous grants from the Onion Foundation and Maine Community Foundation, we opened the first DocSong recording studio in Portland, ME. This studio allows us to record documentary songs and upload them to streaming platforms.

Our progress has been guided by thoughtful planning, collaboration with partners, and an unwavering commitment to the communities we serve, which together lay the foundation for future growth. This document outlines our Theory of Change, developed with SEED Impact, and assesses our impact this past year.

Your continued support is vital for our journey ahead. I look forward to working with you to build on this momentum and honor the stories that connect us to each other. Thank you for believing in DocSong's mission and for being an important part of our community.

With gratitude, always,



Caroline Rex-Waller

Executive Director

The Stories, Songs, and Programs That Connect Us

Documentary songwriting is an outgrowth of the ancient oral tradition of people singing about their lives. The Documentary Songwriting Method, first established in 2009 by Malcolm Brooks and Hanna Batley, is a unique, step-by-step method of collaborative songwriting that allows anyone, regardless of musical background, to transform a personal story into a song. With storytelling as the foundation of our songwriting, we write songs to strengthen connection, nurture creativity, and awaken compassion.

[Click here to learn more about our history and key milestones](#)

"I am touched by the aims of DocSong: to give voice and agency to those whose voices and stories might otherwise never be heard."

- **DocSong Newsletter Subscriber**

The Documentary Songwriting Method was once described by one of our teaching artists as a way to care for people, reminding us of the importance of listening, honoring, and to sharing the stories that connect us and remind us of what makes us human. This method is at the heart of DocSong's four **Core Programs**.

The Teaching Artist Training Program



Launched in 2020, this flagship program trains musicians in the **Documentary Songwriting Method**, equipping teaching artists with the skills to implement documentary songwriting projects in their own communities. There are now over 50 trained DocSong teaching artists located around the world. Projects from DocSong Teaching Artists have been featured on TEDx and NPR's Morning Edition.

The Survivor Stories Project



Partnering with Finding Our Voices and other domestic abuse advocacy organizations, the **Survivor Stories Project** connects teaching artists with women who have experienced domestic violence to write songs that help survivors reclaim their stories and provide a way to process trauma. The project aims to reduce isolation, offer a space for healing, and raise awareness about the ongoing impact of domestic violence in the United States.

NEW!

The New Mainer Project



Partnering with the Immigrant Music Connection, the **New Mainers Project** connects teaching artists with members of Portland's immigrant community to transform stories into songs. The program provides an accessible arts-based program to recently-arrived immigrants, using stories and songs to provide an increased sense of belonging and representation in the Portland arts scene. The project will culminate in a final concert hosted at Mayo Street Arts in October 2024.

NEW!

The Unlocking Harmony Project



Spearheaded by Mimi Bornstein and Malcolm Brooks, **Unlocking Harmony** works with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals to transform personal stories into songs, fostering critical interpersonal skills and a healthy dialogue about criminal justice in the U.S. The final songs are turned into choral pieces, recorded, and performed at public concerts. The project aims to influence public opinion, foster empathy, and encourage prison reform by shedding light on systemic issues and the potential for rehabilitation and change.

DocSong's Theory of Change

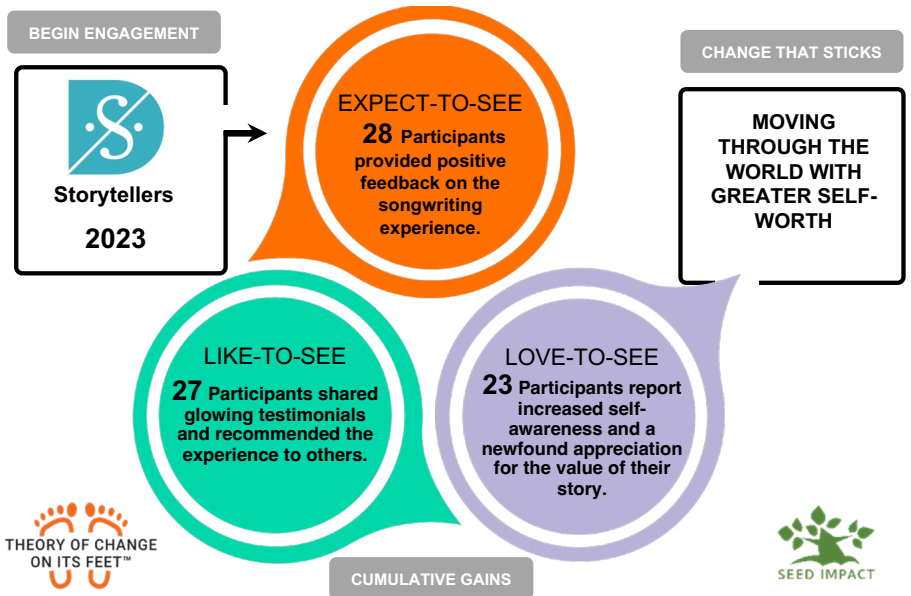
Our vision is that shared stories and music connect us to each other, creating thriving communities committed to deep listening, empathy and mutual care. To measure our success in achieving our vision, we use SEED Impact's **Theory of Change on Its Feet™** framework. Numeric and narrative data captured throughout the year in our SEEDing Social Change data management software guides our visioning, goal-setting, and reflective practice.

Our theory of change, below, highlights three progressive stages of outcomes for our core participants: storytellers, teaching artists, and partner organizations. Each section includes what we “expect to see” as we begin an engagement, would “like to see” as cumulative gains, and would “love to see” as evidence of change that sticks.



Storytellers

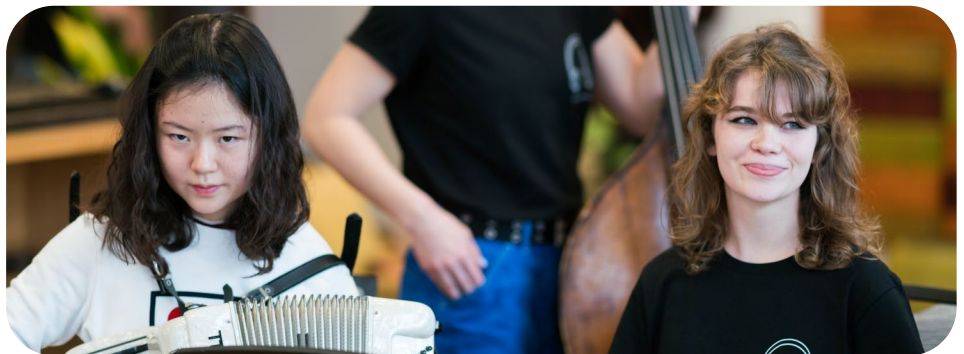
Storytellers share personal stories and work in collaboration with teaching artists to turn their stories into a song. They actively participate in the songwriting process, offering ideas and feedback throughout the writing and arranging stages. They are critical creative partners in shaping the song, ensuring that it effectively conveys the central message and emotions embedded in their story.



“Writing my story with the Documentary Songwriting Method changed my life; I am proud of how I opened up and supported others.”

- DocSong Storyteller

In 2023, DocSong engaged 32 Storytellers, with 28 achieving our expected outcomes in engagement and participation. Twenty-three moved through the “expect-” and “like-to-see” stages and reached the “love-to-see” stage, reporting increased self-awareness and a newfound appreciation for the value of the story they told.





“The experience was exceptionally unique. I’ve shared my story countless times with both strangers and friends, but this time was truly unlike any other. Discovering that my story could be transformed into music somehow alleviated the pain I’ve carried for many years. It made me more willing to open up about memories I had long attempted to bury. I believe the teaching artist instilled a sense of trust in the creative process and allowed me to share my story exactly as I wanted it to be remembered.”

- DocSong Storyteller

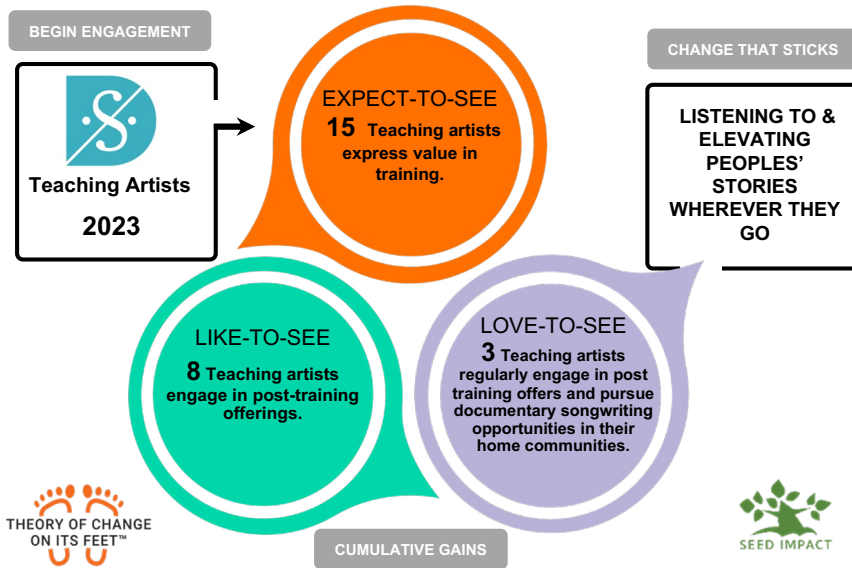
“Everybody needs a chance to tell their story. Some people may have never been heard. And all they need is to be heard. Writing a documentary song was therapeutic for all of us. My story is now a song that is in the world. And it may be heard by someone else who can understand and relate to it. I released this story and I am free.”

- DocSong Storyteller



Teaching Artists

A teaching artist combines teaching skills with artistry to help others create their own work. In documentary songwriting, they listen deeply to the storyteller, guide them through the process, provide feedback and contribute songwriting expertise. Their goal is to help the storyteller create a unique, emotionally resonant, and meaningful song.



In 2023, all 15 teaching artists achieved significant milestones in DocSong programs. Based on their feedback and engagement, three teaching artists reached our “love-to-see” stage: They exceeded the “expect-” and “like-to-see” stages and are actively engaging in post-training offerings and pursuing documentary songwriting opportunities in their home communities.





Teaching Artists' Voices

"The training helped me to better understand the value of collaborative art, and I hope to bring that with me into the rest of my life. It also helped me understand aspects of music theory that I hadn't been familiar with and expanded my ideas of what a song can be."

- DocSong Teaching Artist

"The training has helped me to better learn how to talk with others and emotionally empathize with each other."

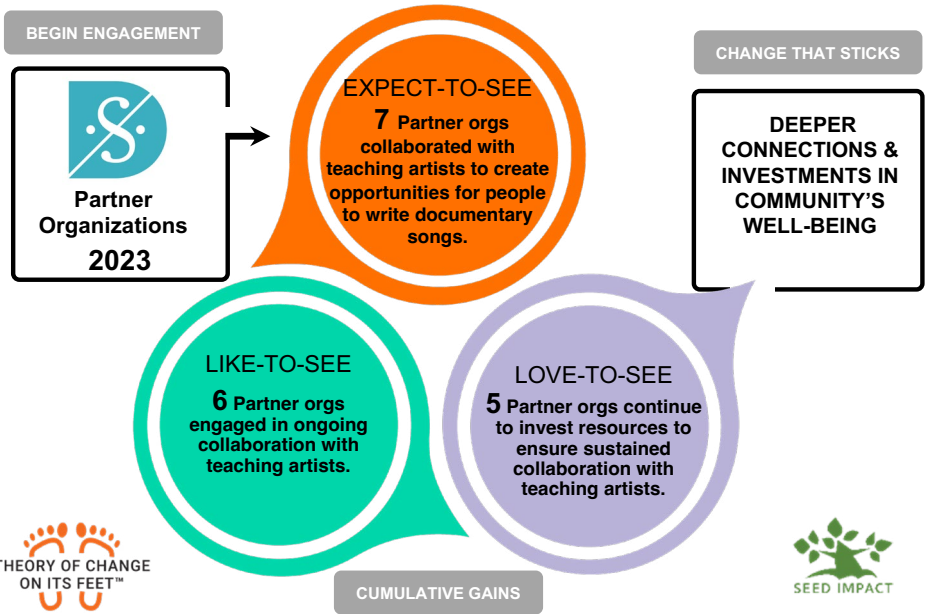
- DocSong Teaching Artist





Partner Organizations

DocSong collaborates with partner organizations to develop programs that reach a broader audience that can benefit from the power and impact of documentary songwriting.



We are thrilled to see observable growth in our seven partner organizations. Five reached our “love-to-see” stage: They met and surpassed the “expect-“and “like-to-see” stages. They are now embracing the power of documentary songwriting by actively investing in sustained collaboration with our trained teaching artists.



Voices from our Partner Organizations



“Documentary Songwriting has allowed us to connect with our community in meaningful ways and amplify voices that often go unheard. It’s really been a gift for us to have this method as a way to do these things while also creating something of beauty that can be shared with others. We never saw ourselves as composers or songwriters prior to receiving DocSong’s training, so we’ve also seen our personal artistic horizons grow in a way we hadn’t expected.”

- Renovare Music

“Music is powerful, it is very powerful when you are hearing someone’s personal journey face to face. Unlocking Harmony completed a group setting at our facility this past week. I was able to see the final production at the end of four days. To say it was moving would be an understatement, the residents who participated shared their story through music. The program targeted the core values and mission of our department, as evident in the discussions and feelings shared between staff, residents and volunteers. I highly recommend the program to any area where you are looking to strengthen the culture and engage with people at a different level.”

- Maine Correctional Center

If you are interested in becoming a trained DocSong Teaching Artist or partnering with our organization, please contact crexwaller@docsong.org

Special Thanks to DocSong 2023 Funders & Donors

DocSong is grateful to the Onion Foundation, The Maine Community Foundation and many generous donors whose visionary supports make our work -and our impact—possible.

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