

DESIREE MCKENZIE
Spoken Word Artist - Facilitator - Program Manager

Education

2024-present	University of Guelph Creative Writing Master of Fine Arts
2020	Social Service Work - Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning - 1 year completed
2014-2018	Bachelor of Creative Advertising - Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

Employment

2025-2025	University of Guelph Creative Writing Graduate Teacher Assistantship
2024-present	University of Guelph Speakeasy Reading Series Host & Organizer
2023-present	Established Artist Roster, VIBE Arts Toronto
2022 - present	iAM Program Manager, JAYU Toronto
2021 - 2022	iAM Program Coordinator, JAYU Toronto
2020 - 2022	Emerging Artist Roster, Unity Charity (Contract) Toronto
2020 - 2024	Emerging Artist Roster, VIBE Arts (Contract) Toronto
2020 - 2020	Festival Coordinator, JAYU Toronto
2020- present	Artist Roster, Poetry In Voice (Contract)

Teaching/Facilitating/Community Engagement (6-10 week programs/temporary contracts)

2025	Love Languages & Line Breaks Workshop (funded by Artreach)
2025	TO History Museums - Colborne Lodge Youth Arts Mentorship
2024	TO History Museums - Colborne Lodge "Fresh Words" Poetry Workshops
2024	Peel District School Board Spoken Word Festival Coaching
2024	Poetry Saved Our Lives - Toronto Public Library (Richview Branch)
2023	Poetry Saved Our Lives - Toronto Public Library (Weston Branch)
2023	Masterclass on Performance Poetry by Patrick Walters, Erik Flowchild
2023	Joshua 'Scribe' Watkis - Filter Through Skin Program
2022	Poetry Saved Our Lives - Toronto Public Library (Oakwood Village Branch)
2022	Poetry Saved Our Lives - Toronto Public Library (Albion Branch)
2022	Where I'm From: Poetry Workshops with YWAM Modesto (JAYU)
2022	Speaking Up Workshop - Shakespeare In Action (Summer)
2022	Speaking Up Workshop - Shakespeare In Action (Spring)
2022	Unity Charity Online Drop-In Program
2022	You Know That Artsy Thing you Always Wanted to Do? - Funded by VIBE Arts
2022	Where I'm From - Poetry Program - YWAM Modesto (JAYU)
2021	We've Been Here: Poetry Workshop - White Owl Native Ancestry (JAYU)
2021	Speaking Up Workshop - Shakespeare In Action

2021	Unity Charity: The Green Room Artist Development series
2021	Frontline Workers Poetry Workshop on Healing
2020	Unity Charity Weekly Workshop Series
2020	Joshua 'Scribe' Watkis - Filter Through Skin Program
2020	iAM Poetry Program: JAYU
2019	Irisa Cannabis: Pretty Elevated Pop-up @ Stackt Market
2019	Canadian Roots Exchange Spoken Word Workshop
2019	Brown Girl Diary Program

Performances

2025	TO History Museums - Colborne Lodge "New Words" Poetry Workshops
2024	Eden Mills Writers Festival - MFA Showcase
2024	Neilson Park Creative Centre - Creative Festival
2024	Exposé: Poet Showcase & Writing Workshop
2024	TO History Museum - Colborne Lodge Poets Talking Back Series
2024	CAMH Black History Month Kick-off
2023	Nia Centre: Homecoming Community Welcome Event
2023	Mosaic Institute Peace Patron Awards - Honouring Wes Hall
2023	TD Bank x United Way: High-Value Giving Reception
2023	The Toronto Consort: Time Stands Still - Trinity Saint Paul's Church
2023	David Delisca's <i>Right Beside You</i> Poetry Event
2023	Toronto Poetry Slam - feature performance
2023	Urban Legends Poetry Slam - feature performance - Ottawa
2023	When Sisters Speak at Harbourfront Centre
2023	Toronto Public Library Foundation 'Bibliobash' Fundraiser
2022	Opening Act for Rupri Kaur at Massey Hall - December 16
2022	Art Starts Caribbean Farmers Market
2022	Rivers of Hope Workshop Graduation
2022	AccessNow RightsCon Summit
2022	Soho House Black History Month Showcase
2022	ROSE Theatre / ACCIDA Brampton Black History Month Showcase
2022	Brown Girl Diary Networking Brunch
2022	RISE: Frequency Fridays - Flower Power
2021	Unity Charity: The Fix
2021	iBLV Dreamers Unconference
2021	Up From the Roots: When Sisters Speak
2021	Black Diamond Ball Toronto
2021	Freeflow Showcase & Open Mic
2021	Unity Charity: The Bounce Back
2021	Toronto International Festival of Authors: Soundtracks & Stanzas
2020	Take Back the Night York Region
2020	CANVAS Arts Action: Back Talk Workshop Performance

2020	Unity Charity "Unity Day" Showcase
2020	Toronto International Fest of Authors: International Spoken Word Show
2020	Ontario Nurses Association Anti-Racism Conference
2020	Unity Charity Midsummer Poetry Cypher (Performance)
2020	City of Brampton Culture Calls Weekender (Performance)
2020	The FOLD 2020 Poets Block Party (Performance)
2019	Rebel House Project at the Gibson House Museum (Performance).
2019	Toronto International Festival of Authors Spoken Word Showcase
2019	CBC 'Being Black in Canada (Televised) Special
2019	CBC Poetic License (Original commissioned poem + performance)
2019	Last RISE 2019 (Performance with Up from the Roots team)
2019	Up from the Roots Fundraiser Showcase
2019	MIMP Magazine Issue Launch
2019	Expozed Exhibit: Date Night
2019	BAM! Youth Slam x Up From the Roots Showcase
2019	The Big Draw Festival (impromptu poetry station)
2019	Purple Glow Mag: Behind Closed Doors

Competitions

2022	Canadian Individual Poetry Slam Qualifier Second Place
2020	Toronto Poetry Slam Team Third place in grand slam
2020	Canadian Individual Poetry Slam Third Place
2020	Women of the World Poetry Slam Placed 30th of 100 poets
2019	Canadian Festival of Spoken Word Won

Panels

2023	RISE Edutainment Business of Poetry Panel
2022	NIA Centre: Left of Center Building Your Brand
2022	VIBE Arts Desire Lines Artist Talk
2021	VIBE Arts NExT: The Future of Art Artist Talk

Commissioned

2025	" Confession #2: Never Been in a Relationship " on Bukola EP
2024	SWCIST 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) campaign
2024	" Firsts " - Poem for Humber Alumni - International Women's Day
2023	" TRIPPIN " - Spoken word poem and performance for Liyah Katana
2022	" Abundantly Here " - Christmas Poem for CBC
2021	" Be OK " - Kids Help Phone Community Creator Campaign
2021	" Grey " - Kids Help Phone Community Creator Campaign
2021	" Own Your Story " - Clearco Financial International Women's Day

2021	“Catch a Flower in Bloom” - ResilientTogether Exhibit
2021	“Detour” Spoken Word Poem for Leila Dey
2020	“Give a Sh*t” - JAYU Human Rights Film Festival 2020 Theme
2020	“Glance” - The Bentway Safe in Public Spaces Campaign
2019	“The Original Pandemic” - CBC Poetic License

Publications

2021	“Roots” - Living Hyphen Issue 2: Across Generations
2021	“Bertie’s Pepper Sauce” - Living Hyphen Issue 2: Across Generations
2020	Sisters In Stanza, with Shelly Grace Campbell (Chapbook)

Awards & Achievements

2023	ArtReach Grant: Connecting After COVID-19 Program
2023	RISE Edutainment: Poetry Award
2021	Digital Publishing Award Nomination for “The Original Pandemic”
2021	TO Live: Explorations Grant
2020	CUE Grant
2020	VIBE Arts: NExT Program Cohort
2020	RBC FutureLaunch Scholarship
2020	JAYU Arts for Human Rights Award iAM Artist Award

Mentorship/Professional Development

2023	VIBE Arts LaunchPAD Program - Mentored by Anique Jordan
2022	VIBE Arts Desire Lines Program - Mentored by Britta Badour & Anique Jordan
2021	VIBE Arts NExT Program - Mentored by Anthony Gebrehiwot

Voice Over

2021	Home Depot “Tradeworx” Campaign
2020	“Give a Sh*t” - JAYU Human Rights Film Festival 2020 Theme

Hosting/Moderating

2024	JAYU Festival of the Arts Poetry Slam
2024	Neilson Park Creative Centre - Creative Festival
2024	Neilson Park Creative Centre Black History Month Poetry Slam
2023	JAYU Human Rights Film Festival (HRFF+) Poetry Slam
2023	JAYU Summer Showcase
2023	JAYU Human Rights Film Festival (HRFF+) Poetry Slam
2022	Skills for Change: Diverse Women in Canada Panel

2021 JAYU Human Rights Film Festival (HRFF+) Poetry Slam
 2021 JAYU Last Tuesdays: Unapologetic Q&A with Bella BAHHS & Janae Bonsu

Exhibition

2023 VIBE Arts LaunchPAD Exhibit - Baby Teeth at Whippersnapper Gallery
 2021 VIBE Arts Desire Lines: Pattison Display at Spadina Station
 2020 VIBE Arts NExT Exhibit: St. Lawrence Center for the Arts

Community Memberships

2020 - present League of Canadian Poets: Full membership

Interviews/Press

2023 [City News - Spoken word poets inspiring kids to find their voices](#)
 2023 [CBC Our Toronto: When Sisters Speak](#)
 2022 [CP24: Black History Month/Kuumba](#)
 2022 [DNA Airwaves Podcast - Desiree Mckenize, Lyrical Wordsmith](#)
 2021 [The Place That Sustains Us Podcast: Gilad Cohen & Desiree Mckenzie](#)
 2021 [Toronto Star - Spoken word artist receives RBC Future Launch Scholarship](#)
 2021 [By Blacks- Art-ivist Desiree McKenzie Raises Human Rights Awareness With Charity JAYU](#)
 2021 [Kids Help Phone - Desiree Mckenzie on poetry, mental health and ending Stigma](#)
 2021 [CBC Here and Now: Desiree Mckenzie joins CBC's Here and Now to chat about the 10th annual Human Rights Film Festival](#)
 2021 [CIUT FM: Daniel Garber talks with Desirée Mckenzie about the JAYU Human Rights Film Festival](#)
 2021 [Howl 89.5 FM: Dwayne Morgan, Desiree Mckenzie & Shelly Grace In Conversation for Black History Month](#)
 2021 [Off the Charts Podcast - Dropping the Mic with Desiree Mckenzie: Finding Confidence & Community as a Poet](#)
 2020 [CBC Poetic License: 'Canadians are known for saying sorry but never meaning it': One poet's call for racial justice](#)