Teens telling their stories, turning their words and life experiences into spoken word artistry. This is the VoiceBox, a teen spoken word open mic night presented by ArtServe in partnership with the Jason Taylor Foundation’s Omari Hardwick bluapple Poetry Network.

Held the fourth Friday of each month at ArtServe and offered free to the public, The VoiceBox is for teens, and presented by teens. “We wanted to create an opportunity for young people to gain real world experience, from the production of an event to presenting their work in front of a live audience, said Jaye Abbate, President of ArtServe.

The VoiceBox gives teens a chance to hone skills, share their stories and build the confidence they need to participate in competitions, and in life. It’s a true manifestation of ArtServe’s mission.

Douglas Goodridge, a teen VoiceBox regular and frequent event host, was recently asked by a reporter if he ever pictured himself as a poet. “Two years ago I wasn’t a poet. I wrote a rap. It didn’t work out. And it became a poem that changed my life. I got involved with the bluapple Poetry Network, I started performing around town and just the other day someone recognized me and shouted out one of my poems. It was crazy.”

Experiences like Douglas’ are not uncommon with students who participate in the bluapple Poetry Network. “The VoiceBox is designed to inspire, motivate and empower young people,” notes Seth Levitt, Executive Director of the Jason Taylor Foundation. “Spoken Word events have proven to help teens gain confidence, learn discipline and team work – all critical life lessons – while creating powerful stories through poetry.

We are thrilled to be partnering with ArtServe to help make this opportunity available to the students.”

The power of the poetry speaks for itself. Audiences of all ages become transfixed at a typical VoiceBox, but it’s the process behind the program that makes the VoiceBox such a vital educational tool.

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“A lot of teens don’t get a chance to express themselves,” adds Goodridge. “The VoiceBox gives them the opportunity. It teaches us to not just talk, but to speak.”