This past Wednesday, the last Ign!te the M!c of the school year was held at the Bing Arts Center. There was a record amount of people there to enjoy the festivities, calling for a need for more chairs as the room filled up. It was awesome to see so many new faces there, many of those who even took to the stage to perform.

We had a number of return performers, such as Wendy Koomson. Koomson performed two touching poems she’d written, one that talked about working through issues, and another that she’d performed once before. Even hearing that poem (which is about the true colors of addiction) a second time was wonderful. Angela Haynes, another returnee, performed as well, reading two poems of hers, one of which celebrated self-love and the importance of being kind to yourself. Francheska Morales, an alum of Ignite the Mic, read six poems for the audience. Two of them came from a book by Nikita Gill titled, “Your Soul is a River.” The other four poems were ones she’d written herself, and one even went into detail about the realities of having panic attacks. Morales is truly a veteran of the stage, being that she first performed there when she was nineteen years old, and now she performed again at twenty-six years old, a whole seven years later. She even recited the first poem that she’d ever performed on stage, one she’d written herself called “Alone.” I performed again as well, doing another comedy routine. This one focused on the pitfalls and hurdles that come with being awkward.

There was an abundance of new performers, reaching nine in total. Erica Pickard sang, “When We Were Young” by Adele and did an absolutely wonderful job of it. She explained that she’d heard about the event on Facebook, and that this was the biggest crowd she’d ever performed in front of. But, she also said that she felt comfortable in doing so. Her sister Carly Pickard, a freshman at HCC, sang, “Issues” by Julia Michaels and later explained, “[Erica] is in a high school and she was practicing for a talent show, and we looked up open mic places, and we found this on Facebook. Everyone here was so great, so I decided to sing. This was the first time I ever sung on a stage, so that was crazy. I kind of still can’t breathe.”

Springfield College freshman Imani Vellon, another new come, performed a poem and said afterwards that she’s done spoken word in the past. She then went on to say that she’d strayed away from it since starting college. “I haven’t done it in college, I’ve just been trying to be by myself. But I decided it was time to come out of my dorm and actually do something.”

Raven Gayle, another Springfield College freshman, said that although she’d known about Ign!te the M!c for a while, Wednesday evening classes had stopped her from attending previously. However, with classes coming to a close she was able to finally attend. She summed up her experience by explaining, “I loved it! Everybody was performing, and I thought it’d bring me out of my comfort zone to perform as well, so I gave it a shot. I performed something that was what I personally need to work on, which is forgiving, and it felt good to perform that.”

Susan Suy, who usually sticks to mc-ing along with Andrew Torres, chose to share her talent as well. She read a very deep, intense poem that drew a lot of applause and left a lot of people moved.

Many people came to Ign!te the M!c with the intention of performing, but it’s no secret that those who perform often motivate others who had no intention of doing so. Janet Wangoe, a student at UMass, decided to go on stage for the first time ever, inviting the audience to “go on this journey” with her. After the show she said, “I saw Wendy go on, and she was really nervous and almost went off the stage. But then she was like ‘Nah nah nah nah, I got this,’ so I was like, okay, if she can do this, I can too. I felt comfortable. It was a really open space for me to go on.”

Tai Chi, also new to Ign!te the M!c, performed a very upbeat, reggae styled song called “Self-Employed” that he wrote himself. His song drew a loud round of applause from the crowd, and more than a few people were moving in time to the beat. His song can be found on SoundCloud (@taixchi). Two Springfield College sophomores, Marlon Cameron and Lucas Johnson, also performed songs they created themselves. Cameron did an R&B song and Johnson went acapella. After the show Johnson explained that they’d heard about the event at seven o’clock that evening and skateboarded there from campus in order to attend. Cameron commented, “I heard about it and I was like, you know what? Why not. I just started writing music back in December. It feels so organic, I feel like I have to do it. I started performing for my friends, and they were like, ‘Oh yo this is kind of hot.’ I put beats behind them, I made a SoundCloud (@Marlon Orlando). I have a lot of fun doing this.” Johnson summed up his own reasons for performing in this way: “I really take any chance I can to perform. Being a young artist who is passionate about trying to spring into his career, these types of events are really important for that. It’s not like there’s gonna be a world-renowned producer standing in the back every time, but having the ability to spread some love and connect with individuals you wouldn’t have any other reason to connect with, that’s what it’s all about.”

Felicia Lundquist, Director of Multicultural Affairs, performed a flute solo towards the end of the night. Poet Laureate of Springfield, Maria Luisa Arroyo, performed a poem that dissected the word “ghetto”, and it drew applause from the crowd as affirmation regarding the stigma that word carries. All in all it was a great night. Suffice to say, September, which is when Ign!te the M!c will start up again, can’t come soon enough.