**The arts empower and support the homeless - April 2018**

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**As part of a small group communication class project, Thomas Martinez, junior at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, was tasked with raising funds for an organization in the Omaha area.**

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**Martinez knew he wanted to find a unique way to give back to the homeless community. He found inspiration from his hometown, Los Angeles, California, where homelessness is extremely prevalent.**

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**Each year since 2010, the Los Angeles Poverty Department has hosted the**[**Skid Row Arts Festival**](https://sitebuilder.homestead.com/~site/builder/stage.jsp?pageId=x4e6577732d616e642d4d656469612e787066)**. The event was created for the homeless community living in Skid Row, an impoverished area in downtown Los Angeles, to share artwork, music and spoken word.**

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**Martinez decided hosting an open mic on UNO’s campus would be a great way to do something similar with the arts and support the homeless community at the same time.**

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**The open mic took place at UNO on Friday, April 13, and was open for anyone to share poetry, music or any kind of spoken word. The only entrance fee was a donation of food, clothing or hygiene products for the**[**Siena Francis House**](https://sitebuilder.homestead.com/~site/builder/stage.jsp?pageId=x4e6577732d616e642d4d656469612e787066)**.**

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**“When you’re homeless, you’re in need of emotional support, physical support and financial support,” Martinez said. “As a student, you’re also in need. Sometimes we don’t know it though. I feel like we can incorporate both needs with this event.”**

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**During the open mic, several students took turns sharing poetry and stories that were very personal. Martinez emphasized that the open mic was an opportunity to help the homeless, but it was also an influential outlet for students to share their voices.**

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**“I think it’s incredibly inspiring that an event set up by a student can do something actively to benefit others without getting anything in return,” said Gordon Ip, one of Martinez’s classmates.**

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**The open mic raised several donations for the Siena Francis House. Martinez said he hopes to host another open mic for the Siena Francis next semester and will continue to encourage the arts in as many outlets as possible.**

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