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Interviews: Jamies Tworkowski of To Write Love on Her Arms  
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I got to catch up with Jamies Tworkowski of the non-profit organization To Write Love on Her Arms last weekend at Bamboozle.

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## **Please state your name and your role in To Write Love on Her Arms for our readers:**

My name is Jamies Tworkowski , and I am the founder of To Write Love On Her Arms. I might officially be the president, but that's kind of cheesy, so I try to just go with founder.

## **President's pretty official.**

Yeah, president's kind of weird. I think on paper in the government's eyes I'm the president, but I'm just the founder. It basically grew out of, you know, I wrote a story, and we tried to help a friend, so it's grown from there and I guess I've lead it since then, but now there's a whole team of people that I get to be a part of.

## **Are there a lot of people involved in your organization?**

Yeah, it's grown to where this summer we actually have a dozen interns coming in, and so by this summer between volunteers and interns and our staff we'll have about 20. Some of those people are on the road, like with Warped Tour. Most of us are in the office back in Florida.

## **What exactly is To Write Love on Her Arms, if you could describe it briefly.**

Well now it's basically a non-profit organization. Sometimes we say a non-profit movement, and basically we talk about depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide. We're in a position just to talk about those issues, which are issues that people don't talk much about and to try to encourage people that need help to get help. We work to connect people to help and then to really just invite people and challenge people to begin to learn about these issues and talk about these issues and learn how to help take care of our friends that may be struggling with these things. We also invest in treatment, and really, the unique thing is that it all grew out of an attempt to just help one person, and we started printing these t-shirts to raise money to pay for our friend's treatment, and it's all kind of grown through there.

### **When did the organization begin?**

We met a girl named Renee and wrote a story two years ago, so I met her the end of February 2006 and it's all grown since then.



### **And how is she doing now?**

She's good, she just celebrated two years sobriety. We just posted a [video](#) on our site that's just her kind of talking about the two years and what that means to her and what that's been like. She's done some speaking on our behalf, and she'll start to get more involved. We've really tried to put her privacy and her recovery first and not make a celebrity out of her, but obviously there's a lot of people that would love to hear from her, get to see more of her, so we're just trying to be careful with it.

**It seems as if a lot of bands are in support of the organization. Has there been one band in particular or a few bands who have been outstanding in helping out?**

Yeah, there's definitely been a few. My friend John from Switchfoot was literally the first human being to wear one of our shirts, so they've been friends for years and have been really supportive. We've been a part of a tour with them for the last month and just finished that up. They're really dear friends. The Anberlin guys, the same way, we're both from Central Florida, and they were friends before all of this, so they've been really supportive, especially Deon, their bass player. We basically named a shirt after him; he kind of made a special request early on, and it turned out to be our best-seller, so we just call it the Deon. They've been great. Paramore's been great. Thrice, especially Dustin Kensrue from Thrice, has become a good friend. Aaron Gillespie of Underoath and the Almost has become a great friend and has been really supportive. The guys from Bayside, really those are kind of the top of the list. So many people have been quick to lend the stage and lend their voice to what we're doing so it means a lot.

**What makes To Write Love on Her Arms different than other non-profit organizations such as Sub City's Take Action!?**

I don't know a lot about Take Action! specifically, but I just think we never meant to start a non-profit, and I didn't grow up wanting to run one so there's kind of been a lot of freedom in that. In a way, we never read the rule book so we've kind of gone about it a different way. We've just tried to be honest. I feel like we're not, or even I'm not smart enough to fake it, and these are issues that are really difficult, and so we've just tried to be honest about them, and we really value creativity, like we value music and even writing and just kind of poetic language and so we've tried to approach things and continue to value those things. I think a lot of times when you see these issues you see them presented in a way that is really depressing, really painful. You'll see an image of a girl with a bleeding arm or someone who's really skinny or someone who looks really sad. We just feel like it's not really necessary-- that maybe people can relate to pain. If someone lives in the ghetto, you don't have to show a picture of the ghetto to move them- they already live there. I think we're a lot more interested in trying to build a bridge to hope and help and try to build a bridge that feels relevant to where people live.

**Now is the Switchfoot tour, is that the first tour To Write Love On Her Arms has sort of sponsored?**

No, and I wouldn't say we've sponsored it, we've just sort of been a part of it. We were out with Anberlin for seven weeks last spring- Anberlin, Bayside, Meg and Dia and Jonzetta. We were on all of Warped Tour, we were part of a nationwide tour with Bayside last year, we did a week on the road with the Almost, and then I did two weeks in the U.K. with the Rocket Summer, so we've done a bunch over the last year.

**I read that Hot Topic carries your shirts now. Has that given the organization a lot of new exposure?**

It's all brand new. The funny thing is that after about four days in the stores we were told that the shirts sold really well, after about four days they actually pulled them out of the stores because of the language in the story. So we fixed it, it's going to take some time. As of today, when we're doing the interview, there's no shirts in their stores.

**Really?**

Basically they ended up buying all of the shirts and donating them to their employees because they couldn't sell them. Their policy is basically not to go near religion and not to go near profanity, and our story, in their eyes, touched on both. There's a bad word, and there's some language that represents what we believe, or what I believe. And so the shirts have been pulled out, but basically within about three weeks from now, they'll actually have more shirts in I think 650 stores around the country. And yeah, we're excited about it, not just from a marketing standpoint, but just from the standpoint that we think these issues are important because these issues effect people, and we think people shop at these stores, so on a really simple level we think it's special.

**I was going to ask you if Hot Topic limited- had any restrictions of any kind that the shirts that you put out, but I guess that's answered with that, which is strange because Hot Topic will sell things that blatantly sell things with curse words.**

Well it's funny to think we're trying to do a good thing and that it was too controversial for Hot Topic, but at the same time, they make their own rules, they make their own policies, it's not our place to tell them what to sell. So I think we just had to decide, we could either say, "Hey, the shirt's come with the story" and either say, "It's all or nothing," and walk away, or we could decide that it's worth writing something new and we love the idea of presenting hope and help in a place like Hot Topic. A ton of people walk through those doors around the country and just felt like it was worth thinking about and so that in the end we feel like it's a really good opportunity for us.

**Is music the main or only outlet for raising awareness for the organization?**

Oh, no, I think that music is a big part of our story going back to the beginning, you know, I spent five days with a girl named Renee and that was the story that I wrote, and I think two of the five days we went to shows. Music was something that meant a lot to her, meant a lot to me, and I think that a lot of us can relate when things are painful or difficult that songs can be like friends, you know? It helps you through those moments. I saw a girl yesterday that had just gotten hurt, someone fell on her, I think during Paramore, crowd-surfing or whatever,

she was in a lot of pain and the paramedics were coming, and I remember Paramore started to play the next song, and this girl was in so much pain, and she just kind of smiled and she said to her friend, "Oh, I love this song." It was a good reminder how much music means to us, but we definitely don't just see it as a vehicle. A lot of times people assume there must be this marketing department or these sponsorships, it's not that way. We really believe in the art that our friends create, and it means a lot that they would maybe say the same thing- that they believe in what we're trying to do. We just feel like it's significant- that it has the ability to move people and remind us that we're still alive and that it's okay to ask questions, and it's okay to be honest. We've definitely seen a lot of support. I feel like we're in a unique place in this community- in the music community. But we feel like we don't want it to be a requirement where you have to listen to certain bands to be a part of what we're doing. We just think like at the end of the day this is about people who are in need of help or hope, and at the same time, we love music, we love certain bands.

**I read that you filmed a feature for NBC Nightly News. Is that something you're excited about?**

Yeah, it's really huge. The cool thing is I was really nervous because they say that something like 9 million people watch that show every night. We've never been a part of something that big in terms a story, but the team from NBC was just really kind and down to earth and really humble and just made us feel really good about what we were doing, like we got the sense that they were rooting for us. So they came and spent a day at our office, and then they spent a day on the road at one of the Switchfoot shows. It's something we're super excited about and can't wait. I think it's going to air sometime in June.



**What sort of plans does To Write Love on HA have for the future, for rest of 2008 and beyond?**

We've been on the road, or even I've been on the road almost all year, so I go home two days from now, and it'll be good to get a break, at least a break from

the road and just kind of sit still and plug back into our team. There's a lot of new faces that are showing up and will be showing up over the next few weeks, and it'll mean a lot to me to be a part of that and not feel so disconnected. We get to be a part of great things on the road, but I think there's something special about just this idea that we're trying to create some of the stuff we're talking about on a smaller scale. We want to try to create a community back in Florida. We have all these people coming from all over the country, some from other places, like we have a girl from Australia, we have a friend coming in from England. It'll be exciting to be a part of that. We just have our hands in a few different things at once, like the internet and touring and music, and we get to speak at colleges and churches and just some surprising doors that have opened. I think we just want to continue to try to be brave and creative in those directions. We're definitely gearing up for the Warped Tour this summer. We had a great time last summer and just had the chance to meet a ton of people, whether it was people coming to the shows or bands and crew or catering behind the scenes- it just felt really special. It's what we're really looking forward to this summer, and just talking about other events and tours and things we might be a part of in the fall or in the future. We're redoing our Web site right now and so hopefully that will be done in about a month, and that's something we're really pumped about as well, so a little bit of everything.

**Is there anything else that you'd like to say to readers?**

I think we just want people to know that they're not alone, we just want people to know that their story matters. It's not just the band that you love, or this girl Renee whose story we started to tell, we really believe in the idea that all of us have a story, and every one of those stories is significant and important. So often people feel alone when they wrestle with these things, and these things tend to stay quiet, and so we just want to invite people to be honest. We think maybe one of the greatest things that happens on this planet is this idea of friendship, just the idea of community, that we meet other people and have the opportunity to connect with other people, and we think that's something really significant that we hope for everyone. We know that pain is real, we don't think we have to convince people of that, but we think it's an honor in the face of that to say that we believe that hope is real, and help is real, and we just want to invite people into that conversation.

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