

the VOICE

...a collection of writing by Halifax youth about their lives.

ISSUE 14 | YOUTH IN CARE NEWSLETTER PROJECT | MAY 2014



2013 Launch



Living in care

How has care changed me as a person?

By Shauna Crane



Being in foster care is definitely a journey, to say the least. I've been in care for most of my life on and off. I've been in many foster homes — some positive environments but mostly not.

This has taught me a lot of life skills and how to look out for myself and to grow up quick. In my opinion you can get something positive out of the most horrid situations.

Moving so many times means I've met oodles of people and this has taught me a really important lesson: no matter what, there's always someone who has it worse and to be grateful for what we have in our lives no matter how small.

Being in care also taught me to be compassionate and that bad things can happen to good people. I'm also fairly good at adapting to change and tough situations because there's been so many times I faced them.

Being in care definitely has its benefits. Things like sports, groups, music lessons and recreational activities are paid for and you can join. When it comes time, there is help with job searching, schooling, classes, anything really. There is so much activity that's covered and available to us.

I'm so thankful because I know if I didn't go into care I wouldn't have received the support I needed to get where I am. The things I've experienced in life have been hell, but I don't stop trying because I want to better my future, as cheesy as that sounds.

The journey has been hell but I'm so thankful for all the love and support I get from being in care. I've made the decision to have a bright future. That's how being in care has changed me.

Care

By Breanna Latter



When I hear the word 'care' or think about it, the first thing that comes to mind is caring for someone you love and taking care of someone, when they're sick and can no longer take care of themselves.

I think when you start to care too much it means you love something/someone so much.

To care is to love and there is no greater strength than that.

In the shoes of a child

By Tamara Cooper



I've learned to love my family. My name's Tamara and this is part of my story. I was the child who followed the wrong people. I made myself feel cooler than I was, a rebel some would call it. But when it came to school I was the most innocent of the innocent.

I got bullied a lot. I was called names, treated differently, and no one would stand up for me, not even my so-called "friends". I was alone at school and at home. I got grounded for stupid things for long periods of time. I want to point out this wasn't my mom's wrongdoing.

My mom had two sides to her: one side that was sweet and like a lot of moms, and one side you never wanted to see.

I went through a lot living at home. Sure, everyone's got it worse and I get that, I do. That's why I said this is part of my story. I used to disrespect my mom to the lowest. I called her names, talked bad about her behind her back. I was the worst daughter. My mom had scared me and I wanted to make her aware of exactly what she did to me. I never felt bad for what I did to her growing up, because I always felt inside that she deserved it. I really didn't care about her pain.

It wasn't until I came into care that I really did care about all the things I said about my mom. She brought me into this world and I need to respect and thank her for that.

Being in care is one of the hardest things a person can go through. If you have siblings you may not have the luck of being with them. You're away from your family a lot. Some people don't have contact with their parents until the next visit, if that.

Judgmental people are the worst. Yes, there are children out there who put themselves in care through wrongdoing. But a lot of time it's the parents' and families' wrongdoings that get a child put where they are. People will bully you and make you feel bad -- kids at school and even adults.

Say you make a new friend, you meet their parents, and you start talking about yourself. I used to have a friend and I met her parents, told them I was a child in care. They said to their daughter she couldn't be my friend anymore.

Although I'm old enough to know that's not okay, imagine how a little girl or boy in elementary school would feel. The way people treat us isn't okay.

While being in care for three years I have learned to first love myself, love others and love my family. I will never disrespect my mom again the way I used to – EVER.

Living in care

A positive memory in care

By Alex Randolph



In 2012 I was very insecure about my teeth. They were crooked and I always got made fun of since grade 5. I knew while I was in care I could get them fixed because they might be able to pay for braces so I looked into it with my dentist. My dentist was so kind enough to go out of his way to write a letter saying I needed them — even though they were kind of cosmetic and the agency would only pay if they were needed.

It was very nice; the letter came back with approval. That day was the happiest day of being in care because I knew from there on I was going to start my life of the “new me”. I wouldn’t get bullied anymore.

Certainly my mother could not afford to get me braces and I understand now because they are very expensive, but honestly braces changed a part of my life.

Living in care

By Kimber Wesley



Being in foster care hasn’t really changed me. In some ways I’ve kind of adapted to being in care, it’s part of my life now. I have been in and out of foster care since I was six weeks old so I’m not really used to anything different.

But moving around to different foster homes has really taken a toll on me. I have a hard time attaching and connecting with people. I prevent myself from being hurt in case I have to move around again and never seeing the people I care about ever again, like in the past. I also avoid making future plans with people to avoid disappointments.

Care

By Nathaniel Gorman



To me, care means to cherish what is important to you and your life. Family and pets are always here to a point. However friends and partners can always come and go as they please.

No matter how much you care it doesn’t last forever. While we are all living today, cherish what we HAVE or what has happened and maybe learn from them. Never worry about what will happen, let life play its game.

The world’s our King and we are it’s Pawns.

How has living in care changed me

By Morgan Spencer



The way living in care has changed me is that I am stronger than most. I understand so much more about the world and how things work. I have had my own share of hard times, more than most I think. I have lived in many places, been denied access to see my family. I have also been mentally abused. These are the negatives.

But there are more positives than negatives to being in care. I have met tons of amazing people, I have had so many opportunities and done things that a lot of kids and youth don’t get to do. When I was ten I went with *Dreams Take Flight* to Disney World in Florida. I have been horseback riding and I learned how to cook.

I was on a swim team, I have gone on a few sea school trips and I am a part of the Dream Team with the Council For The Family and I am a member of *The Voice*.

In the last ten years of being of care, going through what I have gone through, I have learned that courage and hope are more important than how much you know. Even when I was at my lowest, courage and hope kept me together.



Ammy Purcell leads the pack at the summer party at Kartbahn

Living in care

Negative memory of living in care

By Tamara Cooper

We all go weeks at a time without seeing family at some point in time while in care.

A lot of children have more freedom than others and can talk to their family outside of visits whenever they want. But me, I go weeks at a time without hearing from my mom.

That means if something big happens in my life I have to wait days upon days to even tell her, meaning most times all the excitement is over and has become less and less important. I go through a lot in a run of a lifetime from drama to love/hate relationships.

I am 18 years old and a few steps away from living on my own. The freedom of a normal 18-year old girl is no longer in my pathway. I don't talk to my mom everyday, or have those silly little arguments over who will help wash dishes or even the sweet sensitive conversations young ladies have with their mother.

Don't get me wrong, I love my foster parents as if they were my mom and dad, but it's not the same as having a conversation with my mom about these things. My negative memory in care has been being denied the opportunity to call my mom whenever I want and have her be there for me through my darkest days.

Different Personalities

By Alex Randolph

In group homes, there are lots of different people that pass through, and most of the personalities are very hard to live around, physically and emotionally.

It is hard because you never know who will be moving in next and unfortunately there is a lot of emotional energy around you most of the time in dramatic situations.

There are residents who will continuously try to create drama and it's not a pleasant thing to be around.

Living in Care; pro and con

By Shauna Crane

Apro of living in care for me is meeting all the wonderful people through my journey in care. Hearing other inspiring stories gave me hope and insight about the future.

There are so many cool people in the "world" of social services and there are a lot of opportunities available being in care. My foster parents are some of the people that have really changed my life for the better. Some days they are my best friends and always are my support group, no matter what.

A small con to being in care is not living in the same place for a long time. It's hard to uproot and settle in over and over again.

I've lived in seven different places and it's really hard getting comfortable and calling anywhere "home". I don't really remember what home feels like but I'm pretty happy where I am now.

It's still tough adapting and calling these strangers your parents and starting your whole life over. I've learned not to get attached because eventually everything ends. But I feel like where I'm at now is my best permanent home, so I feel settled.



Collage on the theme of My World, My Future

Executive Director's message



Despite the best efforts of Mother Nature to scuttle the Newsletter Project this long winter, we enjoyed one of the best years yet. It seemed week after week, blizzards blew in on Wednesdays, the same evenings our Newsletter group meets. Black ice on the roads, school cancelled, snow piling up to the windows, and then my inevitable call to scrub the

session for fear of putting drivers and youth on dangerous roads.

But despite the shortened year, we had a very productive season with an outstanding group of young people involved in the project. It was a lively and very personable group that came each week ready to participate.

The heart of the Newsletter Project is developing supportive communication among the participating youth. Each of them comes from a different situation, with their own unique story and circumstance. Yet they all have the shared experience of being in care, of having to forge their own path with an unconventional support group.

The Newsletter Project brings together young people who are working to make the most of their lives, and facing challenges most adolescents never have to stare down. They write about some of those challenges in this issue of *The Voice*.

Morgan writes about living in care on page four. Shauna looks ahead to her future on page eight and Stefan offers a thought about what could change his life for the better on page four.

This year we welcomed new participants Shauna Crane and Nathaniel Gorman, who have both contributed to the energy and lively discussion in the group. Others who were involved in the past moved on to new and different stages in their lives. We update the lives of a few of the former Newsletter group on page 12.

One sure way to beat the winter weather is to embrace the cold, bundle up and get out and make the most of it. We did just that one evening, lacing up skates for an evening at the Emera Oval. With borrowed skates and helmets, the group hit the ice — literally and figuratively! Great fun and everyone welcomed a hot drink and a treat at the end of the evening.

Over the past few years, we've developed a close connection with the Dalhousie School of Social Work. In previous years, a few of the Newsletter group were invited to meet the first-year social work students and share their experiences of living in care — both the challenges and benefits.

After Christmas this year, our whole group went to Dalhousie one evening and the youth spoke courageously in front of the university students, sharing their very powerful personal life stories. The Dal students sat transfixed through the emotional evening and later (at Nathaniel's urging) asked some questions and even shared some of their own stories about why they were drawn to become social workers.

Now into our 14th year, the Newsletter Project is the only program of its kind, created for youth in care and youth living on income assistance. We start in the autumn and meet weekly through early June, offering a different session each week based on issues that are important to adolescents — developing emotional literacy, setting personal goals, improving writing and communication skills, creating employment tools and meeting inspirational people from our community.

Each youth keeps a journal through the year and is expected to write on a number of topics — what are your goals for the future?, what does the word “care” mean to you?, what does the idea of family mean to you?, write about a memorable gift you received. Then we gather up the best of the writing and include it in *The Voice*.

For some of the youth, writing is a natural expression of everything that's going inside their busy minds. Words tumble out onto paper, unfiltered and uncalculated. It's pure writing from the heart and that makes it very powerful.

For others, writing is truly a struggle. Words come slowly and never fit together neatly. But as the year rolls on, they all find their inner voice and improve their skills at expressing those thoughts. Personally, the best moments are when the youth volunteer to read aloud what they've written. They take pride in their thoughts and their efforts, and their confidence grows each time they share their writing with the group.

Once again, some friends of *The Voice* came to the sessions to share their life stories and help out the program. Shauntay Grant, the renowned Halifax writer, came one evening to lead the group through some writing exercises. Her warmth and intelligence are always uplifting and inspiring.

David Swick, a professor at King's College School of Journalism returned to the group to help work with some of the youth in refining their writing. Thanks to Shauntay and David for dedicating their time to helping with the Newsletter Project.

This essential program could not continue without the support of many people and organizations. A heartfelt thank you to the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, the Department of Education, The Halifax Youth Foundation, the Halifax Region Children's Aid Foundation and the United Way of Halifax Region. Each of these organizations has faithfully provided financial support and continue to partner with us to provide this unique program to the youth of our community.

Enjoy the stories in *The Voice* 2014.

Facilitators' messages

By Ammy Purcell



This year went by way too fast. Mother nature seemed to have it out for us this winter, sending us snow storms almost every Wednesday. Because of that we missed a lot of time together, and when we did get a chance to have our sessions, everyone had so much to talk about and catch up on we would have loved to just have check-in for the whole two hours.

The group was so close this year, many of them being returning youth from previous years. We did have a couple new additions, but they fit in so well that it felt as though they have been with us for years.

The check-in is always my favourite part of our sessions. I look forward to hearing about how they are doing in school, how their visits went with family, and what they did over the weekend. Sometimes we talk about new placements, and how it's going, or how they resolved issues they talked about the week before.

They all offer each other advice and support or even just an open ear to listen. As a facilitator I can really see a connection between most of these young people, and to see them really listen and offer support to each other is really heart-warming. But I swear if I got a nickel for every time Breanna said "like" in her check-in, I would be set for life!

This year I got to do something I've wanted to do for many years. I was asked to lead a session on my own. I have led my own sessions in the past, being a facilitator, but this time I was filling in for Sandy. I knew exactly what I wanted to do the moment he asked me if I was up for it.

We had an open group discussion on the pros and cons of living in care and then they were asked to choose one topic from the discussion and write about it. I really enjoyed running the show and I hope that I get to do it more in the future.

All in all, it was a short, but great year. Lets just hope that mother nature chooses a different day of the week next year to host her snow parties. How about Mondays? Nobody likes Mondays.



By Jennifer Robichaud



This, being my first year as a facilitator-in-training, has been a learning experience for sure.

I was very intimidated but honoured to be asked by Sandy to do this. I wanted to help others who joined *The Voice* to find their inner voice.

I appreciate *The Voice* magazine because it lets me feel like I have done something meaningful. I write all the time but it all feels empty when it only sits in the bottom of a box or deep hidden in my hard drive.

That is what makes the program special. It not only teaches youth in hard situations that they have a voice but that it doesn't have to be a voice only for them to use. It allows us to know we're not alone. Everything I write for the newsletter is in the hope that somewhere someone is reading it and no longer feels so alone.

So being a facilitator-in-training is my opportunity to help other youth express their voice, to help them show their talents and experiences. So I'd like to thank Sandy for this opportunity and experience. The transition from youth to facilitator has been a strange experience but I hope that I can continue next year to help this program and everyone in it to succeed.

The Newsletter Project also had two more dedicated helpers this year. Rebecca Moore, who has been part of the program for several years as a participant and as a facilitator, started the year with us. But work commitments meant she couldn't spend as much time with *The Voice* as she'd have liked.

Catherine Murray was a participant a few years back as a youth in care. Last summer she contacted Sandy about getting involved again. So she started in the fall as an adult volunteer. Her input and easy connection with the youth helped bring her life experiences to the group. Catherine is a student at NSCAD and also works a part time job, so we didn't see as much of her as we'd like.

We thank them both for their dedication to the Newsletter Project and hope they can return next year.

(Left) Ammy & Sandy receive a donation from Walmart for the Newsletter Project

My future

My World, My Future

By *Shauna Crane*

Sometimes the future was all I had to look forward to. The future holds so many surprises, good and bad. I want to control my future and success. Family always has been important to me, I want a cosy home surrounded by people I love; a cosy farm house with a big barn with lots of horses and cats.

I plan to be an art teacher or an art therapist. But that's pretty far down the road. For now I plan to get a job in the spring, and start saving to get my beginners driving licence.

I got invited to go to Cuba in March and I think that would make my life. But most of all I just want to have fun experiences and spend time with the people I love in the immediate future, and in the distant future, because in the future for me, my success can't be measured in money, only happiness.

My Future

By *Kimber Wesley*

When I grow up I want to be married and have one or two children, preferably a boy and a girl. I plan on going to college and having a career. I am not exactly sure of what I want to do yet but I do plan on working.

When I retire I want to volunteer to be a Guardian Angel just like my nanny. I want to live in a house somewhere in Halifax with a beautiful garden.



Nathaniel & Becky

My Future, my world

By *Deanna Alvarez*

We all think about the future more than once a day, multiple times. There are many people out there who believe the only way out of this hell we call living, some days is suicide. It could be bullies, love, hate, drugs, alcohol, threats, or problems becoming just too much to handle.

Today's society makes me sick. If it wasn't for my younger sisters and my ex-boyfriend (who have been there for me many times and I can never thank them enough), I probably wouldn't be here today. If it wasn't for them, I'd be up in heaven alongside Greg, a fellow student and my great uncle, as well as many other beautiful angels who didn't see the rainbow beyond the rain storm.

Why, you say? Well, I used to be this really strong young lady, who would do anything for a friend in need. I used to be the one stopping other people from hurting themselves. Until one day, life wasn't enough, or so I thought. I gave up on everything.

The man I love, he held on as long as he could. I put him through things he wished he could help me with, but no seventeen-year old boy can make the changes I needed help with. He got tired of listening to my problems, not in the sense that he didn't care but because he cared too much and I didn't see it like that. I made him look like a monster and within that, I found the demands inside me were hurting the man I love. I could never say sorry enough, I started to hurt myself more, not caring at this point. I couldn't deal anymore, I gave up.

I wanted to end it, but I couldn't. Why? Because of my little sisters, letting them down and the man I love, whom I wish could forgive me for all the silly mistakes I've made in the past all because of negative words from people who didn't even matter.

I guess what I'm getting at is Greg. I wish he could have thought of someone or something that cared. Heaven gained an amazing angel who I never got the honour to speak to, but I know people who have. I never, not even once, saw him frown, he was always putting a smile on everyone else's face. I catch myself thinking about this because I never, ever saw it coming. Even though I didn't know him, I was still affected by it. I still lost a classmate, a graduate to be, and someone everyone could count on.

We all have a huge future ahead of us to look forward to. Greg was one of those people as much as the next person. May he rest in peace never to be harmed again.

Goals

The best way ahead

By Anna Hayes

My goal for the future is to stay away from hard drugs, or at least not let them take a toll on my life.

I have seen what drugs can do to people. Drugs have ruined my family and I want to be someone in my family that isn't messed up on drugs all the time and live a decent life.

I don't want to be on welfare like everybody in my family is, not that there is anything wrong with welfare but I just want to make my own money.

I have the advantage of being able to go to college so that is very good for me. No one in my family has graduated, and I am graduating this June! I am named after my mother's best friend who was murdered before I was born. I feel like I should live the life that she should have and could have if she didn't go down the wrong path.

Goals

By Jennifer Robichaud

Iwant happiness. I want simplicity. I want to have time for family and time for friends. I want time to sing and time to walk. I want music and silence, company and solitude. I want to be unstressed and happy with where I am, what I am doing and who I am.



Morgan, Nathaniel & Shauna at the Emera Oval

My goal for the future

By Alex Randolph

As a seventeen year old, my plans are just getting started. Part of my dream is to finish high school with decent marks, spend the summer going to a flight attendant academy to be trained, then start college doing a Bachelor of Business Administration for about four years.

While going to school, I will probably be training to be an infantry soldier in the Canadian Forces. But I am planning to join the reserves this summer while still young. After college, I plan to run my own business.

Thank you, Clete!



After several years as the first mate at the Newsletter Project, Clete Deschamps wasn't on board to help out this year. Due to scheduling conflicts and immovable commitments, Clete reluctantly bowed out of the program. And he was sorely missed. Clete drove a carload of youth each week to the Newsletter sessions, then stayed to help in any way I asked. He was always a solid and dependable member of the Newsletter Project team, and his calm demeanor and unflinching punctuality has been missed this year. So from Ammy and me and all the youth who passed through during his time with the program, a huge thank you!

POETRY

SHINING RIBBONS

By Morgan Spencer

Throughout my life I have met many wonderful people I
think of as friends.
They are precious to me because of the way I have lived
my life,
Never spending much time in one place.
I sometimes think of my friends as beautiful ribbons
made out of spun gold
and no matter how much money you offered me
I would never part with my ribbons.

There are times in my life where my friends have been
taken away from me
I see myself as lucky to have the friends I do,
I feel that they try to understand what I have been
through.
Some of them have been there themselves,
Others listen and understand as best they can.
I am proud to have people I can trust and call my friends.
They are my beautiful shining ribbons and I shall never
part with them.

NOTHING LESS

By Tamara Cooper

His big brown eyes,
The way they look at me.
The bright smile,
That makes me melt.
The feeling in my tummy,
Whenever he's around.
The words "I love you",
That can never be replaced.

PROGRESSION OF DEPRESSION

By Shauna Crane

The weeping of the willows
the sadness of the rain
another heart be broken
another love to gain

PROMISE YOURSELF

By Breanna Latter

Promise yourself:

To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.
To talk with a kind heart and happiness to every person
you meet.
To make all your friends feel that there is something in
them
To look at the bright side of everything and make your
optimism come true
To think only the best, to work only for the best and to
expect only the best
To forget all the mistakes of the past and press on with
the future
To wear a cheerful smile at all times and give every
person you meet a smile
To give so much time to improvement of yourself that you
have no other time to criticize others
To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong
for fear and too happy to permit the presence of trouble
To think well of yourself and to proclaim this fact to the
world, not in loud words but in great deeds
To promise yourself that there is no greater good than to
help someone in need
To promise yourself that as long as you're on the earth
that you will make a great impact on others around you
And always promise to be nothing but true to yourself.

TRICKLING TEARS

By Tamara Cooper

They trickle down your cheeks,
People ask questions,
But you dare not tell,
They trickle faster and faster,
You lock yourself away,
Away from the world,
As they continue to fall,
No one sees,
Nor asks what's wrong,
You bury your face into your pillow,
Whimper a little more, and let those tears,
Trickle a little faster.

SUNRISE

By Morgan Spencer

Dawn breaks
as we see the sky on fire.
Reds yellow and gold
slowly glowing brighter
into pink and orange.
The sky going from black to grey
to mist to blue.
A beautiful day slowly on its way

LIFE

By Shauna Crane

My thoughts on how life works - life is like a rodeo,
sometimes you have good rides, and can hold on. Other
times you fall off and land in a pile of shit.

SNOW

By Tamara Cooper

Falls like diamonds in the sky,
Sparkling with beauty,
Brings joy to all children,
Soft, Cold, Crisp,
Millions of different shapes,
None the same,
Brings to life Christmas,
Making snow angels,
Brings Frosty back to life,
Finger tips freezing,
But you still keep playing,
Till mama says supper,
Snow, the biggest joy of Christmas.

YESTERDAY

By Shauna Crane

A lone tear trickled down her crimson-powdered cheek.
'Tis a shame to ruin her perfectly made face. She batted
her mascara-coated eyelashes and her bright blue eyes
shined through. She took a gasping breath trying to hold
the tears, the man with the many wrinkles shot her a
wondering look. She let another eyeliner tear fall. Her
name was Willow, but he called her yesterday.

DREAMS AND CLOUDS

By Morgan Spencer

In my dreams I am happy as can be.
I am floating on a cloud
as white as white could be
Fluffier than anything imagined.
Softer than soft.
I am floating on a dream,
Wilder than animals on earth,
More dangerous and deadly than the most poisonous
poison,
Sharper than the thinnest blade,
Sweeter than purified sugar,
More peaceful than a quiet summers day.
I am a dream floating in the clouds
Waiting to be known.

#NSVICVNP tumblr

WAVES CRASH

By Tamara Cooper

Waves crash,
Just like crashing thoughts.
They make you feel special,
Scare you.
Give you chills,
Chills that make you shriek.
These waves you see,
Are fear,
Fear of continuing to climb,
Climbing higher and higher as the days pass.
Do I get a say in changing my fear I ask?
Change as you will, make a difference a voice says,
Be fearful.

Where are they now

Jessica Blakie



Jessica is living in Dartmouth with her fiancé and working at the IWK children's hospital.

"*The Voice* helped me come out my shell and become a better writer, expressing my thoughts and views in ways I couldn't before."

Jennifer Clarke



Jennifer is living in Truro.

"I'm working as a disability support worker and am a certified Child and Youth Care worker. I was involved in *The Voice* for two years. *The Voice* gave me a positive outlet, and the confidence to go forward towards higher education and

follow my dreams of helping people."

James Riley

James is currently living in Bedford, enrolled student at NSCC's ALP (Adult Learning Program) at the IT Campus.



"I'm working towards my last six credits for my High School Graduation and just gained employment through Bay Shore as a Patient Attendant. I was involved with The Newsletter Project for seven years, and it has given me the chance to have a voice & allow my story to be heard. As well I've gained what I call an extended family known as *The Voice*."

Chantel Arbuckle

"I'm currently living on Vancouver Island, graduating in June then probably moving back to Halifax in August where I plan on going to college to be a flight attendant and travel the world."

I was involved with *The Voice* for a year, give or take. It really was the first group of people who I feel actually believed in me and supported me, and that helped me believe in myself and to grow."



Amanda Murley

Amanda is living in Halifax and finished her degree in social work at Dalhousie University. She works at the Phoenix Youth Shelter.



"*The Voice* impacted my life from the first moment I was introduced to it. A group of youth involved in the Newsletter Project were interviewing youth in care and income assistance about their experiences; I remember the exact details because this was one of the first times that someone approached me and really wanted to know what my experience in care was and wanted my opinion!"

"Being a part of *The Voice* taught me the importance of having a safe space for youth in care and on income assistance to come together and share our experiences. I am thankful for my experience at *The Voice* and the opportunity I had to meet soo many amazing strong youth, who inspire and give me motivation to give back to our community. Love you all."

Visiting the Social Work Students



School of social work By Morgan Spencer

In March everyone from *The Voice* newsletter went to speak to the first year social work students about what it's like to be in care. We shared with them our personal stories and also told them what social workers should and shouldn't do.

Here's a few of our ideas:

- Stay in contact
- Listen to us when we have something important to say
- If we want a private conversation, make that happen
- Answer our phone calls or respond to our messages
- Don't dictate, we have our own voice
- Don't make all the decisions
- Never ignore us
-and most important, LET US HAVE OUR OPINIONS

I have witnessed both good and bad social workers in the last 10 years. Some of the bad ones blatantly lied and ignored phone calls. The better ones helped me when I needed help. A few of my former social workers to this day will help me if I ask.

Then there are a few in between good and bad. These are the more common ones, the ones that make honest mistakes and fix them when they can.

Being at Dalhousie, talking to these future social workers made me happy because it makes me think that maybe things can truly be changed for the better.

My impression of Dalhousie School of Social Work By Nathaniel Gorman

Injoyed going to the Dalhousie School of Social Work. I noticed they all took into their hearts what we were talking about. I noticed one student in particular took in a lot of information we talked about. It is nice to know there are people in today's society who know we're here and want to shape the world the way it should be today.

I would also like to thank that student for sharing her story with us. When I heard her life story, I took it to heart as well because I feel like I was able to closely relate to the story itself.

Speaking to the Dalhousie school of social work By Breanna Latter

Speaking to the school of social work has really opened my eyes. It helped me realize that everyone's got a past and everybody's stories are unique and that we're just still teenagers trying to find our place in this world.

Yes, you might have to make some mistakes through your journey. But to learn from your mistakes and to realize what you did wrong only makes you a stronger person, even if you have to make the same mistakes a couple of times. It doesn't matter as long as you learned from them.

Speaking to the school of social work also made me realize why I want to become a social worker even more. I want to help kids but I also want to make a difference in someone's life. It shows kids that not everything is bad — even though it might seem that things will get better, it just might take longer than you expect.

There is a reason for everything, Things will get better in the end. You just got to find the strength within yourself to find the good in everything and think positive and not let anything bring you down. That will make you a better you and you will feel a lot better about yourself. So I'm really glad that I got to share that experience with the school of social work and I think that we helped them too, to be better social workers when they finally get the chance. It's always nice to hear what kids have to say about being in foster care and how it can change everything — even sometimes for the worse.

Dal School of Social Work By Kimber Wesley

Visiting the Dalhousie School of Social Work was a very good experience for me. I had never shared my life story with a bunch of strangers. It felt good and I liked how they were interested in what I had to say.

I hope the stories we told were useful for them. I also hope they take the advice we gave them. It would be helpful for them as well as the future children they will have to work with.

Other writings

Show you care

By Kimber Wesley

If you care about someone it's always good to tell them so. Being honest and telling someone about your affection for them is important because you never know how much time you have with them. If you love someone, tell them. Everybody likes to hear how people feel about them and it's nice to know that you are cared about.

I have had people in my life that I wish I told them how much they mean to me. It sucks knowing I had so many opportunities to tell them and I did not do so. I have learned my lesson and I am working on showing my appreciation towards people I care about so I don't have to regret not saying anything.

Success

By Nathaniel Gorman

In life, we are told, that to achieve success we have to do what is expected of us, or what we have to do. We can't measure how much success we have.

I was speaking to someone the other day and he said to me, "Success isn't measured by how big your house is, how much money you have, or what car you drive. Success is measured by how healthy and loving your family is."

Ever since that conversation I have been trying to do better, do what I am asked, to get to that point in life to achieve the same success he has. This person was in care, just like I am today. He used to be a not-so-good kid, now he's 50-something years old, and owns his own company.

The thing that would change my life for the better

By Stefan Illsley

The one thing that would change my life for the better is if I won the lottery, so I could pay off all my bills and help my dad out with starting his own company again. I could help him renovate the house and help pay off his parent's debt, because they've been there for me and my brother through everything.

I'd also probably pay for the house on the corner from my dad's because I'd like to stay close to the family. If I was to buy the house, I'd have my daughter living with me.

Struggles

By Breanna Latter

Nobody knows what I go through. I wish somebody could put them self in my shoes.

Life is a struggle and it's hard to pretend that everything is okay when you're hurting and just struggling to keep a smile on your face and to laugh through all the pain. All you really want to do is break down and cry your heart out, because you can't stand to keep pretending that everything is okay.

All you hear is people telling you that things are going to get better, and all I do is think that day will never come 'cause things just seem to get worse. You might not see it but it doesn't mean that the pain isn't there. There's always a mask someone is hiding behind.

Life is a struggle and not everything is going to come easy. You've got to work hard for what you want but wanting something isn't always enough to help the pain in your heart. It's something much more than that. This is not a life I would have chosen for myself.

Nobody knows what really goes on in my life and just 'cause there is a smile on my face doesn't mean I'm happy. It just means I don't want people to see the real pain behind my smile. I'm still waiting for the day where everything is going to make sense, and to see a smile that is true on my face.

Two Years Eleven Days

By Maye Jones

When I came back to city two years ago, I was emotionally broken. I didn't know how to react to anything. I wasn't really anyone.

The only reason I am still alive is because of one of the girls I lived with at a former foster home — she helped me. I can't explain how but she saved me from killing myself.

At the time I ended up believing I was nothing, that I couldn't do anything on my own. It was about a year and eight months of being emotionally beaten down by others and myself. I didn't know how to express myself properly at the time. I ended up going a bit crazy, and police were called. It was the only way I knew how to let anyone know how miserable I was. It was the only way I knew to leave.

It's been a few days over two years now. And sometimes I still don't know how to react to things people say or do. I spent a year out of school just getting back social skills and figuring out who I am.

I just wanna forget and continue on as if that time in my life never happened. But I can't deny the fact that it did.

Other writings

Suicide

By Kimber Wesley

When you lose someone to suicide it's a wake-up call. You realize that people aren't here forever and you shouldn't take someone's presence for granted. You realize that it's important to tell people how much they mean to you and how much you appreciate them. You never know when your last time with them will be. Anything can happen, that's just part of life

It's really different when you've lost a friend to suicide. Usually when someone dies, it couldn't have been prevented and there is nothing you could've done to help.

But suicide can be prevented. You feel like you have failed to be a good friend, even if you weren't close to that person. You really learn a lot from losing a friend to suicide — it's a very hard thing to go through.

What I have learned from my experience of losing a friend to suicide is to tell people how much they mean to you. If you don't, you're left with a heavy feeling in your chest because it hurts to know that you have so much to tell someone but you can't, because they are gone forever.

Losing a friend to suicide opens your eyes and makes you view the world, life and the people around you differently.

Sophie

By Stefan Illsley

She's been here such short time, but it feels like I've known her forever.

My daughter always keeps me smiling even when she's acting up. I've managed to work and look after her in all the ways that I can. It warms my heart to hear her talking to me, to wake me up and to hear her laugh and seeing smiles throughout the weekends.

I need help, but I don't like asking for the help unless I'm doing something productive. I've learned how stubborn I can be and the responsibility of looking after her somewhat on my own.

The love she and I share is incomparable to anything in my life. In many ways, it has made me a better person and I can't wait to see how this chapter of my life is going to end. I hope in many ways she gets almost anything she wants in her life even if I have to work five or six jobs just to help her get it.

Favourite piece of writing

By Nathaniel Gorman

What Hurts The Most, written by Rascal Flatts

*What hurts the most
Was being so close
And havin' so much to say
And watchin' you walk away
And never knowin'
What could've been
And not seein' that lovin' you
Is what I was tryin' to do.*

This piece of song lyric is my favourite because when I am upset, I can listen to it. It reminds me of my placements through the good and the bad.

The lyrics show how I was able to build through life and it shows my strengths and weaknesses. It also helps me find where I made mistakes in life and how to correct them.



Jennifer & Nathaniel present their collage poster



Morgan & Tamara at Nova Scotia Sea School
March camping adventure

Gifts

A Gift

By Jennifer Robichaud

I don't know if a letter counts as a gift, but the letter I received as a child from my father gave me hope. Every time things got hard, when I was crying or afraid or angry, I would pull out the letter he'd sent me, and the few short words gave me comfort.

"Call me any time you want." That is all it said really, that and his phone number and "love Dad". It meant so much to me, and still does.

As many motherless or fatherless children do, I would pretend living with him would be better. And though I knew it was untrue, it gave me hope. It was my lighthouse in the storm, and without it I'd be lost to the sea.

Memorable Gifts

By Stefan Illsley

My most memorable gift was my beautiful daughter, because she's taught me so much about responsibility, and what it takes to look after a child as well as myself.

I've managed to learn to pay off my debt before I try to buy big ticket items, like my car and many other expensive items. Also I enjoy buying my daughter food that we both would eat.

A memorable gift I received or gave

By Nathaniel Gorman

The most memorable gift I ever received is my iPhone 4. My mom bought it for me as an early birthday gift and Christmas gift. She mainly got it so she can always contact me.

The phone has had better days, without a case but even with one it's on its last thread. It doesn't matter because in the end the phone and case came from my two parents and I love them.

Most Memorable gift

By Shauna Crane

There are so many wonderful gifts I've received over the years, but the most recent one is the one that sticks out in my mind. My foster mom had been secretly planning something for months. There was so much going on I barely noticed.

My first clue was when I got my passport pictures done, but I wasn't sure of what she was up to. Then one day in the kitchen, I'm just sitting cross-legged picking at my supper. Susan was going on about how she needs a doctor to sign something and my surprise was soon to be revealed.

She stopped making the dough she was making and looked at me and said, "I'll tell you now because you'll find out soon anyway". She told me my surprise and I was in literal shock for at least an hour.

She had entered my name for "Dreams Take flight" and I had won! I'm going to Disney World!



Shauna, Tamara & Morgan



Breanna, Alexandra & Kimber

Respect

By Morgan Spencer

To me respect is just common decency, essentially treating people how you want to be treated.

I also believe there are different types of respect based on a hierarchy. Some people in different jobs are treated with more respect so people will listen to them more often than not.

Respect is a complex thing that is hard to understand— it is also hard to define and simplify.

By Breanna Latter

To give respect to one another is to care for them like a sister or a best friend. It is to show someone that you really do care, to compromise and always be fair.

To get respect you have to earn it by being respectful back. Respect comes a long way just like trust. To be respectful you should show dignity, and also speak nothing but the truth.

To be respectful is to show forgiveness, to make someone feel wanted and not to laugh at someone's weakness.

Give respect to get respected back.

By Alex Randolph

For me respect is more than a few words put together. It is when someone goes out of their way to help and give moral support when people most need it.



Warming up after skating at the Emera Oval



Alex, Breanna & Kimber at Christmas Party



Stefan at the Kartbahn

A Huge Thank You

to our funders.
You make all the difference in the world!



**HALIFAX YOUTH
FOUNDATION**

Our thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their support of our project this year...

INDIVIDUALS

Troy Allen — driver
Sue Barr — United Way of Halifax Region
Curtis Davidson — driver
John Chiasson — photographer (*The Voice*)
Sonya Ferrara — Chair of board
Coleen Flynn — Dalhousie School of Social Work
Mary Anne Fraser — Department of Community Services
Shauntay Grant — board member, workshop facilitator
Emma Halpern — Nova Scotia Barristers' Society
Dr. Bill Hart — Halifax Region Children's Aid Foundation
Geoff Hood — Department of Community Services contact
Angie Kovic — book keeper
Marika Lathem — Department of Community Services
Nancy Pynch-Worthylake — Department of Education
Carole MacDougall — United Way of Halifax Region
Kyle MacIsaac — McInnes Cooper
Kilby MacRae — Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre
Jane Landry — Nova Scotia Council for The Family
Sandra McKenzie — Halifax Youth Foundation
Rebecca Moore — facilitator, Board member
Claire Munroe — Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre
Lisa Neily — graphic designer
John Odenthal — board member
Jennifer Robichaud — facilitator-in-training

Ammy Purcell — facilitator, board member
Kay Rogers-Lidstone — board member
Andrew Safer — advisor, board member
David Swick — guest editor

ORGANIZATIONS

Alderney Landing Theatre — Newsletter launch venue
Atlantic News — magazines for collages
Fusion Print — Newsletter printing
Halifax Region Children's Aid Foundation — funding support
Halifax Youth Foundation — funding support
Nova Scotia Council of the Family — funding support
Nova Scotia Department of Community Services — primary funding support
Nova Scotia Department of Education — funding support
Nova Trophy — award plaques
Office of the Ombudsman — Newsletter distribution
Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre — meeting venue
United Way of Halifax Region — funding support
Youth Secretariat — Newsletter distribution

The electronic version of this Newsletter, and more, are available on our website: www.youthnewsletter.net



The Newsletter Project after meeting with Dalhousie School of Social Work students



Shauntay Grant (third from left) with the group

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