

THE VOICE

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**A hidden connection is stronger
than an obvious one**

ON THE COVER: *Back row:* Nate McCarthy // *Middle row:* Madeleine Slack, Ammy Purcell, Brandy Warman // *Bottom row:* Wesley Roberts, Cat Elder, Sky-Lynn Brochu, Lexxy Dodge, Patricia Lingley.

Cover + other inside photography: Ashley Blenkhorn / Graphic design: Lisa Neily

The Team



BRANDY



CAT



NATE



SKY-LYNN



PATRICIA



AMMY



WESLEY



SHAUNA



LEXXY



MADELINE



About The Voice

How has The Voice helped me

Patricia Lingley

This is my second year of being at *The Voice* and I have had lots of fun during those 2 years. On my first day at *The Voice*, I felt welcomed and quickly became friends with and warmed up to everyone because of how nice, positive, and supportive they were when I joined. If I ever have a problem with my life or things around me, they are always there for me. I am honestly grateful to have met the people at *The Voice* because I don't know where I would be in life if it wasn't for them.

How has The Voice helped me

Lexxy Dodge

I came back to *The Voice* because I got my life back together and noticed who my family is. I love each and every one of you guys. You all helped me through so much. Especially Ammy, I really can't thank her enough for what she has done for me and everyone else in this group throughout the years. If I could give this woman an award and a million dollars, I totally would because she deserves it beyond belief. I know I speak for everyone—we love you and you're our second momma!

The Voice

Brandy Warman

I started writing in the magazine when I was 14. It's odd to think back to a time where I was the same age many of these youth are. When I think about my experiences growing up in care, I'm very grateful to be able to have a group like *The Voice*. Having a place to speak with other youth in care and being able to build those connections is important to youth in our system. We need connections to feel like someone is not only supporting us, but listening to what we need.

Throughout my years working on *The Voice*, I was able to understand myself more and who I wanted to be in the future. Now I can finally say that the work I've put in is giving me opportunity to not only work for *The Voice* but to be able to run our sessions each Wednesday night. It was truly such an honour to be asked by Ammy to facilitate the sessions.

My creative style for engaging messages to the youth has been asking them for their feedback on what they do and don't like and want to stick with when it comes to our nights. A big part about our youth dynamic here is that we are a team that works together. We

collaborate, build connections, and respect each other.

Some of my techniques in sessions have been using interactive ways such as creating a visual PowerPoint that is colourful, relevant, to the point and fun with an activity planned after for better understanding.

I've been adding different things to sessions to help create a more engaging positive space for all, one of those things has been a new question at our weekly check-ins "what's your number for today?" This question is asked to get us to think about how we are feeling that day, maybe even just in that moment. A rating of 1 is low while 10 is amazing. It's a good way to understand the room's dynamic that day and who has energy and who is lower on energy today.

I've created activities for our sessions that reflect on character development, building relationships and forming a positive mindset. The youth have been enjoying the sessions very much and giving me their honest feedback about how each session went.

Working with the group this year has proven the point that it should always be power **with**, never power **over**. When we work with youth in the foster system, we can achieve so much. A lot of our youth struggle with the lack of power or control that they have in their lives, and they need a chance to work with a group and have leaders that listen to their concerns and give them the space to be themselves. This space gives them that opportunity.

Each day I am grateful to be surrounded by inspiring youth of our future. I am looking forward to my future with the program and to facilitating the growth of this group.

Our new executive director

Sauna Crane

Ammy Purcell became Program Director in 2017, the same year Brandy joined the newsletter. This year, she has been promoted to Executive Director. Being a former youth in care and cornerstone of the newsletter, Ammy has worked tirelessly outside of her other careers as not only a director of the program, but as a mentor for the youth who walk through the door each week, including Brandy and me when we were little teens. She still plays a key role in the newsletter every week, with her endless patience and assistance in whatever the group's needs may be at the time. And

of course, the snacks! She never forgets a plethora of goodies. She brings the best variety of food every week and is beyond thoughtful to cater to group members' requests and needs.

This year has been a progressively vibrant year for the group, growing and changing with time. It is important to reflect how far *The Voice* newsletter has come over the years. I encourage everyone to read past issues available on our website.

The past, present and future success of *The Voice* is, as always, heavily influenced by the leaders that have gone through the foster care system as youth and emerged unstoppable forces of nature in every aspect of their lives and careers.

Our newest program facilitator

Shauna Crane

Brandy Warman first joined the newsletter as a participant in 2017, she put in many years of dedication as a talented writer, while going through her journey in the foster care system as a youth. Currently she is studying to become a Child and Youth Care Worker at Mount Saint Vincent University. Brandy has settled into the early years of adult life, while balancing the troubles and barriers of a former youth in care, in school.

She is selfless in all her efforts and actions to assist others who have gone through similar experiences to herself. Much like every other facilitator of the newsletter, it takes a special, patient person with the experience and compassion to facilitate the needs of the group.

With Brandy's first year as a Program Facilitator, she has provided a creative and unique approach to facilitating each week's activities. She works to incorporate fun engaging workshops that fit the very unique needs of the group which has resulted in some very amazing pieces of writing for the 2024 newsletter.

SHINE

SKY BROCHU

THIS IS YOUR DAY TO SHINE, YOUR DAY TO LET YOUR SPARKLE OUT INTO THE WORLD.

NOW IS THE TIME TO JUST GO TOWARDS YOUR DREAMS WITH ABANDON. NOW IS THE TIME TO JUST GO TOWARDS YOUR GOALS WITH FIRE IN YOUR BONES AND PASSION FLOWING THROUGH YOUR VEINS.

NOW IS THE TIME TO FLOURISH YOUR MIND AND BODY AND TAKE CARE OF YOUR SPIRIT.

Adult Volunteers and Facilitator

Ammy Purcell

Shauna Crane

This year we welcomed back Shauna as our adult volunteer. Her enthusiasm and love for this program is undoubtedly received well by the entire group. We appreciate her presence and guidance each week. She brings a sort of energy that is indescribable, but in a good way. Her raw and honest experience within the system, as well as leaving care, is something the group can relate to and hopefully look up to. Thank you, Shauna, for your authenticity, creativity and your continued support. I appreciate you making time to volunteer with us around the busyness that is adulthood.

Wesley Roberts

This year was Wesley's first year as a volunteer. As an adult now who has been through the program multiple times, he has decided to continue as a volunteer. He proved he can provide guidance and assistance to new participants and is a welcome fixture of our group. I have watched him grow up into an adult and I can't imagine not having him as part of our group. Thank you, Wesley, for continuing along with our journey.

Program Facilitator, Brandy

One of my first actions as Executive Director of this program was to promote Brandy. She has been by my side since I began as Program Director and I couldn't see it any other way than to have her as my number two. She has come such a long way from the "I can't do it" girl that I met way back in 2017. She is now more of an "I can do anything" girl and I love to see it! She has gone from DESPISING school, to looking for more ways to further her education, first by completing the Child and Youth Care Worker program at Success College to upgrading that at Mount Saint Vincent University. Brandy has brought her own flair to the weekly sessions by changing up the dynamic of the sessions with interactive displays using the TV and interesting discussion topics. The group has welcomed her influence and respect her in her new role. I know Brandy will do amazing things in this world and I am so happy to be a part of it by allowing her to shine within our program. Congratulations Brandy in your new role as program facilitator.

Executive Director's Note

Ammy Purcell



I can not believe that I am writing the Executive Director note this year. It has been such a journey for me to get here. As many of you know, I started attending this program as a young teenager, new to the foster care system and not really giving a crap about what life had in store for me. Back then, I couldn't care less where I ended up as an adult. I went through the motions of adolescent life pretty quietly. Sure, I fought back with the authorities here and there, not wanting to go to school, running away from my foster placement. And hanging out with the wrong crowd did manage to get me in a tonne of trouble. However, looking back now, it was definitely my way of trying to be seen. I truly believe this program changed my ways for the better. I started to realize that I wanted to be seen for the good things I can do, not just the trouble I can get into. I never realized that all I needed was for someone to see potential in me. I strive everyday to be that for these young people. They all have incredible potential in this world. I've seen many of them grow up right in front of my eyes, making me prouder every year.

As for the program itself, we are coming up on our 25th year! We've come through some tough times, with staffing changes, board of director changes, funding challenges, location difficulties, and not to mention a global pandemic, but we are still going strong! We need to make this next year the biggest and best yet. We are equipped to handle a much larger group, but we need help to get there. Getting youth to stay involved isn't the hard part; it's getting them to us in the first place that we find challenging. That initial introduction needs to come from the adults in their lives. Please help us, help you, to help them, find their potential, their purpose, and maybe even their chosen youth family, by referring them to our program.

The next program year will begin early October 2024. Email me today at edyouthvoices@yahoo.com or Ammy.thevoice@yahoo.com for more information. Thank you for your continued support and I hope to hear from you soon.

Shout out to our Board of Directors. Thank you for donating your time and energy to support this program and keep things running smoothly throughout the challenges of change. With Dianne Hussey as your fearless leader/board chair, I know we can only grow bigger and better from here. Thank you all, for everything you do.

Another shout out to Lisa Neily, graphic designer since day one, and Ashley Blenkhorn, photographer for the last three years, for the amazing look of our magazine. Ashley works so great with the group, and they always have so much fun on photo shoot day. And Lisa always knows exactly how to put all of their hard work together to make a stunning magazine that we are so proud to show off to the world. Thank you both for sharing your incredible talents.

Thank you to Veith House for giving us a place to call home each week. We love our meeting space and the inclusive environment you provide.



Brandy graduating from her Child and Youth Care Worker program

Growing up

Notice

Sky Brochu

Don't let your life go by unnoticed. Life is made of moments full of beauty and magic, waiting for us to see. You must not let the distractions and busyness keep you from experiencing it out in nature. Slow it all down. Watch more sunrises with only the intention of watching the sun gloriously rise. Look at your partner's face deeply and tenderly, with the only intent of truly seeing them.

When life feels like it's spinning around you and you can't catch up, return to the beautiful moment of now, where everything is exactly as it should be. Notice your breathing, notice where you are. Tense, release. Breathe. Feel. Notice.

Moving out of care

Cat Elder

Young people that want to sign themselves out of care: DON'T DO IT.

Last year I thought I made the best decision of my life, and it was to leave my foster home and run away to my girlfriend's because I felt as if my treatment there wasn't good and was affecting my mental health negatively. But boy oh boy was I wrong!

Living with my girlfriend and her family was amazing. They treated me as one of the family, but it put a lot of stress on our relationship to always be perfect because we were constantly under supervision. Leaving the foster home did improve my mental health in the long run, but it also sabotaged my relationship with my biological family. Now I don't get to see her often. I constantly think about her hoping she knows I love her more than anything and I'm extremely sorry for not saying goodbye before leaving but it wasn't planned, and I never meant to hurt her by leaving.

My girlfriend and I broke up so I went to live with my family. It was going really well until it wasn't and then it started to get really bad. So I started to couch surf while trying to find my own apartment in this crazy housing crisis, never thinking that I would be homeless and then it was. I was officially homeless.

I spend a lot of my time looking for places, going to viewings and spending time with my dog as he is getting babysat until we have our own place.

Do I regret moving out of foster care? The way I did it, yes. Instead, I could have gotten more people involved, but instead I gave up, as I was tired from trying. When signing yourself out of care, you don't get the help or support from your social worker and government like you did before.

If I could go back and redo everything with what I know now, I would go back and do it differently in a heartbeat.

Path Program

Brandy Warman

The Department of Community Services has set up the Path Program for youth who have aged out of the foster care system where they receive a certain amount of yearly income based on their age. To help support youth in our province, they are paid biweekly until their 25th birthday. This pay has helped a lot of youth with coming to terms with adulthood after aging out of the system at 19.



Scan to learn more about Path

The Path Program has benefited me this year. I recently started my studies at Mount Saint Vincent. Starting university has been very busy with classes and assignments. I was working two childcare jobs before being connected with the program.

After being connected, I was able to take some time away from working to focus on my education and was able to secure housing at the beginning of March. I am very grateful for this opportunity to have and still be connected with Department of Community Services. They've helped me through these years to get the support I need.

Trying my best

Sky Brochu

There are many situations where I could have acted more appropriately, but I wouldn't go back and change them, because my experiences have made me who I am today. As I grow up, I try to always learn from my mistakes and view them as challenges to overcome, or opportunities to improve. Also, I would like to make more time for self-care and taking care of my physical, mental and spiritual health. I believe that by prioritizing my well-being, I would be able to perform better in my personal and professional life and get along better with the people that I interact with.

Adulthood

Lexxy Dodge

Adulthood is terrible. Well, some parts of it. I like my life as an adult more than a child and adolescent because my life wasn't all the best so I'm making up for it during my adulthood. Adulthood is a scary thing as well though. You always need to have money for rent, bills, groceries and don't forget, any emergency that could possibly happen. In our world now, that's not even realistic. Everything is just too expensive and sometimes we're not gonna have everything we need. But it is our responsibility as adults to manage those situations in an "adult" way, which can be pretty difficult honestly. All adults are just learning as we go!

Family

Madeleine Slack

The person that is the closest to me in my life has changed a lot, but for the last 6 months it has been my aunt. I was placed in her care a year ago, and I used to blame her, but after I realized that she was on my side, she became more than just my guardian. I am now closer to her than my own mom and can talk to her about almost anything and she'll listen. She is a really fun person to spend time with, and she supports me with what I choose to do. If you don't know her, you may think that she can be strict at times, but she's the person who lets me do most things within reason. I feel lucky to get to live with her, especially since the alternative is most likely living in a group home.

Life as a transgender woman

Patricia Lingley

It's been a total of four years now, almost five, since I've been transgender (trans) and I thought I'd tell you my story of being a 15-year-old transgender woman.

Being accepted: It's really hard to be accepted for who you are sometimes, and I understand the struggles and feelings of those moments. There are two sides of acceptance, the good side and then the bad side. The good side is that I do have friends that support me through the struggles and some of those friends are also part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community as well. But the bad side is there are so many people who choose to bully me and say and/or throw untrue, negative, and hurtful things at me which I choose to ignore because they might eventually understand, but some of those things that they say can be extremely hurtful and can get to me.

Finding a healthy relationship: Love is great, love is painful, love is everywhere you go, love can be pretty but can also be nasty depending on the person and relationship between you and them. It's really difficult to find love while being transgender. Why you may ask? Because some people think or feel weird dating a trans person and I kind of get that but with all the negativity happening it makes our love standards a little more difficult. There has been a lot of people who don't care if their partner is transgender and that's what I like. But behind every successful trans person's good happy relationship there is always the struggles they had to go through before having a healthy good relationship and I can tell you I went

through lots of struggles. I do have a boyfriend that accepts me for who I am, I'm grateful to have him in my life.

Insecurities: I've been insecure all of my life, but my insecurities kept on getting worse and worse when I became trans. This was because of what I've been told by others. When this happens, it gets into my head and messes me up. This basically just makes me hate myself because of what others say and as much as this hurts to say, it's life. Lots of people go through this and they are not even trans. One thing that I'd like to point out is there will be people along that path of life who's gonna drag you down and it can be hard to manage, but hopefully, you will have that someone in your life, whether it's a friend, a family member, or a partner who's gonna step into your life and bring back that spark of light that you lost and support you through those tough moments when you are insecure.

OTW

Shauna Crane

Yeah, I'm a silly little guy, on the way
I don't take myself too seriously these days
I refuse to ignore what I bring to the table
I am wonderful, bountiful, completely capable
from the start

Calm, cool and conscious of my actions
I'll stumble, shake, and slide my way
Into my own magical life

The life I have always wanted for all
the silly little guys on the way

Mental health

Deep dark: struggling but you are never alone

River Underwood

It hits you all of a sudden. It's the middle of the day, you're surrounded by friends and the sun is out. But something isn't right. There is this feeling, a very uncomfortable feeling in your mind, in the pit of your stomach. You want to leave and go somewhere that is quiet and dark. You are being consumed. Consumed by your own thoughts. So dark and so horrid, you are afraid. It's wrecking you from the inside out.

But what can you do? Suffer? That's what many of us do and did. But sometimes the suffering gets too much. You can't handle the darkness that's pulling you into an eternal abyss and you decide that the only way to stop the darkness is to join it. You take your own life. Suicide. Simple as that.

I lost a very close friend of mine to suicide. It sent us, their friends and family, all into a cage. We felt trapped, we felt deep inside us this horrible, disgusting feeling and all you wanted to do is cry. That's how suffering feels. This constant feeling of being trapped and not being able to do anything to stop it. That's how people with mental illnesses feel constantly. It devours us. Fear eats our insides away until we are nothing but bones. Fear controls us. Fear puts us on autopilot and does whatever it wants.

That feeling you have in the pit of your stomach when you are about to do something that makes you nervous. That's how anxiety feels. It's how living with a mental illness feels. It runs our lives, and we can't stop it. Admitting to someone that you have a problem is probably the hardest thing to do. Admitting to my best friend that I have anxiety, depression and OCD took me months.

Every night I would run it around in my head, what and how will I tell my friend that I am crazy, and I can't control it? Will she be OK with it? Will she laugh? Is she going to stay being my friend? And that's the problem I am trying to write about. Admitting you have a mental illness. It's not easy to do and that's why more than two million people are struggling. They can't tell anyone.

Lucky for me, I have an amazing group of friends that understood, while some aren't so lucky. A lot of friends and family reject their siblings or children or friends because they don't know how to deal with a mental illness. Dealing with a mental illness, whether you have it or someone else does, is like a tripwire. You have to

be so careful with your words or one bad move and it can devastate someone.

Do you remember the part where I mentioned a friend I lost to suicide? Well, her name was Abigail, but her friends and family called her Abby. Abby was obsessed-scratch that-dedicated to One Direction. They kept not only her happy, but everyone happy. Their music helps people, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Abby also told me, before she passed, that One Direction was the only thing keeping her going.

Now, you might ask, where am I going with this? Well, what I am trying to do here is get One Direction to notice Abby's story, get them to talk about mental health and let people, especially young adults, to realize that they are not alone in this battle with mental illnesses. No matter what the illness, no one is ever alone, no matter how lonely it seems.

CROCODILE TEARS

POEM ABOUT CHILDHOOD NEGLECT

SHAUNA CRANE

HOLD 'EM IN, TIGHT TIGHT TIGHT
MAKE A SNAP, GRR GRR GRR

MAYBE IF I'M SILLY THEY WILL BELIEVE ME
MAYBE IF I MAKE THEM LAUGH, I CAN FEEL HEARD

TAKE A LAP IN THE SWAMP
BREATHE IN THE THICK, HEAVY AIR
LET IT BURN YOUR NOSTRILS WITH EVERY BREATH

Quiet voices

Sky Brochu

Growing up with mental illness they called me crazy, annoying, and angry. They looked at me differently. They'd even talk about it amongst themselves, but never offered guidance. That's the problem with society these days. Everyone loves a party, but no one wants to clean up the mess. There are many reasons I have chosen to enlighten my readers on severe clinical depression. Not to get pity for my actions and blatant disregard from others. I write for awareness because, so many people today need help, and no one really knows how to help them. Often someone's first cry for help is his or her last and I just don't think that's right.

Letters

A letter to my mother

Patricia Lingley

Dear Mother,

You may not have understood the things in my life that have affected me, but you have been there for me no matter how tough life gets or how messy it is. You're still here but sometimes you add more troubles to my problems, and it makes me drown in the water even more. So, I'm writing this to you so you can get a better understanding of my life struggles.

School: It can be fun at times, and you may think it isn't bad at all, but trust me, it's really hard and it can really suck at times. I do really well with my work and sometimes I struggle with some questions, but I'll eventually get it right. It's really just all the unnecessary drama that happens at school and fake people. I have trusted so many people in my school only to find out that I've been back stabbed. I didn't do anything to them, but I guess hurting me will maybe make them feel better.

My Life: I have lots and lots of things happening from left to right and it can be hard to manage. I also have so many things that I want to do and am happy to know what I want to be later on in life. But sometimes all of this negative stuff can get to me, and it screws up or tears up everything while putting on a fake smile when I'm screaming inside can be really difficult and stressful.

My Relationships: I have my friends there to support me especially this one friend where I always spent time and talked things out with her before going to church but there is only so much that she can do, and during all of this I have to do my part in a friendship relationship, so it doesn't end. I also have my boyfriend by my side, and he's never left since we met, and I am really thankful to have met him. He means the world to me, and I have to do my part to keep the love relationship going as well while focusing on myself and him, but he doesn't make things hard for me. He's there for me when I need him and I'm there when he needs me as well! There is only so much that these people can do to help me because they aren't built to be my therapist, they are people too and have feelings just like I do.

My Mental Health: with all of these things happening it is really hard to survive through my thoughts which can scare me to the point where I have panic attacks. I can't tell anyone except my therapist, but they won't

be here for me my entire life, nor would they be able to help with everything, because there is going to be sometimes in my life where it's all up to me to go forward and figure out what to do in those situations while praying to God that I made the right decisions. I have been through these moments so many times, but the worst time was when I was in foster care, which tore me all up and made me look at the world differently, trying to survive and having fun. but how can I have fun when all of this drowns me out.

My Family: I love my family so much, I really do. but things are slowly falling apart and it's really difficult to live through all of it. I just hope I can get through this even though it hurts like hell. I lost my father in February. I had mixed feelings about him, but this isn't the place to go into it. I lost my childhood dog that made my childhood better when things got tricky, I lost one of my older siblings and that tore me apart because she was the one out of all my siblings that I was closest to.

Those are some of the things happening in my life. Some of these things, other teenagers have to deal with and end up out of this world because no one listens to or checks in on them. So, in the future, always listen because they might be trying to tell you something and would want you to be there for and support them.

Love Patricia

The besties

Nate McCarthy

Iona: The first time I met Iona she was nice. I see her every day and our relationship is pretty good. Iona supports me a lot because she is my foster mother, and she loves me a lot.

Troy: The first time I met Troy he was nice I see him once in a while and our relationship is pretty good. Troy is like a big brother to me and he's nice.

Natalie: Our relationship is pretty much unbreakable. I knew her since I was born, she is nice, and I like when I get to see her because I enjoy being with her. She is my big sister and I love her.

A letter for someone who has always been a large part of my life, in ways both good and bad!

Madeleine Slack

I don't know if I love you or hate you right now. I feel a little bit of both!! In the beginning I used to not blame you, and I would lie to myself and say that you were trying, and that other people didn't understand. But the longer you choose to stay away, the more I realize that what I'm told about you is true! I hope that in time you can realize what is most important and that I can see you again, but I'm not holding my breath. Time seems to have stopped for you, and I don't think you realize that I'm growing up and am no longer your baby. My life will keep on going, whether you want it to or not. Sometimes I wish that I could stop time, maybe even go back to the way it was before, but then I remember that I wasn't happy! I'm happy now that I can be a kid for once, and that I'm not constantly blamed for everything that happens! I really do want to see you, but I can't wait for you. I need to live my life!

Letter to myself

Sky Brochu

Date: 01/22/24

Dear Sky,

Hope you're doing okay and all that is going on when writing this gets better. You may think life sucks, I know, because life is hard but don't stop trying. People come and go in your life, some stay and make you happy, some stay and hurt you, and some come and make you happy and make you feel like you finally belong somewhere then leave you like you're nothing and then you sit hurt and wondering what and where you went wrong. I know, but you just gotta keep going and push through. Life is hard and it's going to only get harder but if you keep working hard and looking at the positive side of things then you will make it through. If there is one thing that is true, it is not to give up. Don't let life stop you from reaching or exceeding your goals and dreams. Don't let others make the path in which you walk and let you stray too far from your home, family and friends. Let your heart make the most important decisions, not your head. You may think that people don't understand but they probably know more than you think or give them credit for. I know that some things may look or feel stupid but rather than fight or argue just get them done and you will save the time that you spent arguing to do something that you actually want to do. Life is going to give you reasons to give up but show the world that it will take a lot more than some struggles to make you even slightly think about giving up and always hold your head up and

smile. You will always have someone telling you that you can't or that you're not good enough but don't listen to them and don't repeat the things that they say in your head and don't believe what they say to you. Hold your head up and wake up everyday with a smile and say "good morning world. I'm ready to face whatever the day may throw at me" and repeat this to yourself until you believe it.

How to approach the kid that doesn't shower

Phoenix Wells

A kid that grew up neglected, won't be able to articulate that they were never taught important self care habits.

A kid with an undiagnosed genetic disorder won't be able to explain "why", or "prove" that they've woken up with migraines several times in a week.

A kid that got called "lazy" their entire life, won't be able to understand that they struggle with executive dysfunction.

The kid that fits every single textbook definition for severe depression, hair matted in the *shape* of a ponytail, and not even so much as bothering to take their shoes off to sleep, won't understand or articulate how dark of a place they're in.

These kids don't need passive aggressive/confrontational questions like "Why don't you shower? It's not like it's hard?"

The kid that had their hair matted down to the root and cut the mats out with scissors because the very idea of attempting to brush it out was just too overwhelming, doesn't need snide remarks like "looks like Edward Scissorhands got carried away back there".

A kid, or a person, that struggles to take care of themselves for any reason, doesn't need you adding to their shame, fuelling their self hatred and deepening the cycle of their depression. They don't need your judgment.

What they do need, is compassion. What they need is patience. They need to know someone understands.

I know I can't speak for every person or kid that struggles with self care. However, things only began to change for me when someone approached my needs with kindness. A supervisor in the facility I lived in gave me a bit of money and said, "why don't you go choose some self care products you actually want to use?"

Suddenly, I had a product I'd actually been excited to use. Slowly, self care started feeling like less of a chore. Of course, my life didn't change overnight. It still gets

bad sometimes, especially around the holidays. Healing takes time. In hindsight, however, for all the years I spent trying to hate myself into a person my parents could love - I can't help but wonder how things might have been different for me if more people thought this way initially.

Instead of "Why can't you shower? It's not hard?" What if you asked, "I can see there's some sort of block preventing you from doing this. How can I help you get past this?"

Instead of mocking the lopsidedness of their hair after they'd hacked off the mats to get past the root lock, what if you said

"I know that's been hard for you lately, hair will grow back. I'm proud of you for taking this step to take care of you."

Or, if you're both comfortable with it, offer to help them with their hair. Sit down with a bottle of detangler, a hair mask, put on a show or a movie, make it fun.

What if, instead of choosing their care products for them, you let them choose? Maybe you could go shopping together somewhere? Or do a soap making activity?

What if facilities reached out to cosmetics and body care companies for donations, so there could be products that might make self care more fun?

Some food for thought, from someone who's been there. The hope I had in writing this is that perhaps my words will reach not only the facility I stayed in during my time in care, but other facilities, and encourage some forward thinking.

Change

The universe with a change *Patricia Lingley*

Why does everything have to change? Why can't it be the same? Maybe because some people hate their position and want a change in life, or maybe it just happened out of the blue and you hate it, or maybe you like it. But why does everything that changes in my life have a negative impact on it? Sure, there are some positive changes that are okay, but negative overrides all of those positive changes.

I am just a teenager. Why does this feel like hell? I lost half of my family in only three years, I lost the people that meant a lot to me, I experienced foster care which I am not proud of, I lost myself. I am not that fun kid who loves to play tag, I'm not that joyful kid who never worries about anything, I'm not that kid who feels free 24/7. I'm not who I was anymore, I put on a fake smile and hope everything is okay. Sometimes I tell my friends and my boyfriend my problems, but that is not the only thing they are here for.

Everything now seems depressing, I'm struggling with mental health, stupid diagnosis. Why can't everything go back to when it was fun again? All those days sitting on the couch in an air-conditioned room eating ice cream, feeling knocked out from all that fun I've had in those summer days. I've always wished to be an adult, now I wish I were a kid again. I regret wishing to be an adult. If I had the chance to relive those moments just one more time, I'd take it! Everyone says that you

can still be a kid when you're older but what they don't know is that it will never be the same, you still have to worry about everything so you can't truly be a kid again, they don't understand when everything gets way more chaotic, different and everything starts to crumble until we start realizing the hard way that this is REALITY, and it SUCKS.

So, kids enjoy your life while you still can because you will never truly be a kid again!

Change *Madeleine Slack*

Change is hard. I hate change. Unfortunately, no one gets to choose when their life changes, and it just kind of happens! My life has changed a lot throughout the time I've been alive, and it will keep on changing. Change doesn't have to be a bad thing. There are plenty of good things that come from change. Unfortunately, I tend to remember the negative changes that happen in my life, more than the positive ones! Everyone has a different scenario in their head when they think about change. For me, my scenarios happen to be some of the most traumatic things that have happened in my life!! I have needed to move a lot throughout my life, and when I think about change, I think of my whole life being uprooted. I sometimes think of all of the different places I've lived in. Sometimes I even think about how my life would be if I still lived in my first house, but then I think about it, and I realize that I wouldn't be me if I never had to

go through those difficult times. No matter how much I sometimes wish that my life was different, and no matter how much I wish that my life could be perfect, it isn't. I've gone through so much change, and it's shaped me into me! No one's life is perfect, and that's reality. Everyone deals with change, but it's up to you to choose how you'll deal with it!

Flowers and Cats: How I deal with change

Shauna Crane

My foster parents are my inspiration for pretty much everything I struggle with as a young adult, but especially how to keep going. I struggle to move forward, to cope with change, and to get out of my own dang way. Now we could focus on why, like I have for years, but that memoir is coming at a later date.

Today I choose to focus on getting to where I want to be in this world. I am trying to keep this energy even when things do not go my way and I see the face of failure yet again which unfortunately is inevitable at every stage in life, even when you would least expect it for yourself.

I have never felt like I've failed my foster parents though. Even at my absolute rock bottom, they met me with the same energy and showed me that whatever I was going through does not have to define me. I have grown to see this for myself lately. I can, and will be, whatever I choose in this world, and I am beyond grateful to have these two people as my guides through life at every unexpected change.

They are the flowers to my cats. This phrase was used as a place holder when I was unable to say I love them, now I try to say this as much as possible. It is always followed by a flowers and cats, because they taught me how to love, and be loved, even through the most difficult changes and hardships.

Change

Cat Elder

It is happening all around us even if we aren't fully aware of it or whether we want it to happen or not. It is completely out of our control, but we aren't fully powerless against it because we can control how we react and respond to everything around us. How do I cope with change and the stress that comes along with it? I don't. I just bottle everything up until it explodes, breaking my mental health. I don't trust people, so I find it very hard to open up when I constantly feel like everyone is out to get me, ruining my body adding on to my scars as I try to manage the stress. whether that be by punching a wall or banging my head against it.

Now that I'm older and wiser I understand how to deal with change and stress. Like writing is a great escape for me to get away from reality or watching a comfort movie, going to therapy is also a great. I have found coping skills like reaching out to people I do trust enough to talk about what's troubling me like my online friends or my girlfriend or my family at *The Voice*.

URGES

CAT ELDER

I FEEL THEM TAKING OVER, IT'S GETTING HARDER TO STAY AFLOAT.

I HEAR THE VOICES SCREAMING LOUDER, IF YOU LISTEN CLOSELY
THE VOICES ARE TELLING ME TO RUN.

RUN AWAY AS FAR AS THE OXYGEN IN YOUR LUNGS WILL CARRY
YOU, ONE DAY I'LL GO MISSING WITHOUT LEAVING A SINGLE CLUE.

UNTIL THE DAY THAT HAPPENS, MY LIGHT BEGINS TO DIM, SO
DOES THE HOPE INSIDE WHILE ALL I EVER DO IS TRY.



The Voice team enjoying the Splatter Room Experience at HaliMac Entertainment

Emotions

Anxiety

Lexxy Dodge

Anxiety is something I could write about for ages honestly. I have struggled with anxiety my whole life and it definitely isn't easy whatsoever. Throughout my adult life, my anxiety has got progressively worse but I have been taking steps so I can make my life anxiety free. The main thing I think I struggle with most is going out in public or having people come over to my house. It is the most indescribable and unwelcoming feeling in the entire world, and I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemy.

I have to keep in mind that I am slowly getting better, and healing does take time. I wish I had the words to describe to someone how I feel because a lot of people don't understand me and it's very difficult to keep friendships with so many mental health issues. Luckily, my current partner is very supportive and understanding of my anxiety. As long as I continue counselling and all the steps I need to take, I will be okay!

What makes me happy

Sky Brochu

Sleeping in a freshly made bed makes me happy, as well as snuggling on the sofa with a loved and/or trusted person. A freshly made bed because nothing beats bed sheets that have been air dried on the line in the fresh air. Snuggling with a loved and/or trusted person because who does not want to be close to someone trusted and/or loved?

Negative

Cat Elder

Emotions are very overwhelming, and I personally suck at handling or regulating my emotions in a safe and healthy way. They always come out at the worst time and no matter if it's positive or negative, I still suck at expressing it. My biggest challenge is showing people that I'm happy because it always comes off as me seeming annoyed and never excited that you're talking to me, but I swear even with my resting face I can be happy too. Another big challenge of mine is when I'm upset or angry.

Sadness is extremely hard for me to control. I usually lie in bed for days not brushing my teeth or hair, just lying there wondering what my purpose in life is. Crying helps a lot, but it also makes me feel like I'm a weak person for expressing my emotions. I also blast metal

music in my head until my thoughts are sane enough for me to deal with. When I'm angry, I don't think before I speak and because of this I have lost many good relationships.

Who am I?

Madeleine Slack

I can find it hard to tell people about myself, especially because I haven't quite figured out who I am yet. I know that I am a sixteen-year-old girl in the foster care system. I know that I enjoy reading and doing art. I know that I enjoy acting and spending time with my friends. But I still have to figure out so many things about my life. Like what things do I stand for? And how I might want my life to turn out like! But not knowing what's going to happen isn't necessarily a bad thing, because I also like mysteries. I've learned that it takes time to figure out who you really are, and I'm still on that journey.

Video games

Nate McCarthy

I like video games because they calm me down, but they also make me mad. Why? I don't really know why, but they do.



The Voice team at Halimac Entertainment having a pizza party!

Connections

Life's challenges

Madeleine Slack

Everyone has some sort of disadvantage in life, whether that's not having enough money, not having parents who care for you, or maybe you just don't realize how lucky you are. There is always someone who has more than you, and someone who has less than you. It can be really hard realizing how lucky you may be. I've spent most of my life thinking about all of the ways I'm not lucky. I now realize that if I dwell on those things, I won't be able to live my life. I am so lucky for everything that I have. Like a warm bed and a roof over my head, two little brothers who I love very much, and food on the table. Many people aren't so lucky, and so I do my best not to take these things for granted. Even if you're at a low point in life, there's almost always worse, so you have to remind yourself of what you are lucky to have. No one picks who they're born to, but you can choose who you want to be.

Tangly Spider: Group Connections Activity

Shauna Crane

We created a colorful paper chain of our own personal connections, into a vast and expansive rainbow spider that represented what connects us as a group and the importance of sharing experiences and holding space for others that may have something similar in their past, present or future.

As we started to share what we had written for our own chains, there were very few seconds where the group wasn't connecting with each other. This spider grew quickly, entangling its legs together as we shared and attached our paper chains.

There were some very positive connections that surprised us, like our hobbies and fashion sense. As well as some difficult connections like grief and trauma. Even when tackling hard subjects like this, the youth at *The Voice* are always able to provide insight to each other's experience and support one another on the highs, and lows of life.

Aside from all having varying experiences in custody of the province, a lot of us found we lived in the same areas, same schools, and took part in similar pastimes in our past and present. A good number of group members have similar goals and aspirations. This was all very refreshing to focus on. We may all be foster kids at some

point, yet this does not have to hold a negative pressure on defining who we are as individuals contributing to this world. A tangly rainbow spider was the perfect way to demonstrate this as an activity! Cutest spider I have ever seen in my humble opinion.

Meaning of Connection

Lexxy Dodge

To me connection means having some sort of tie with someone. It doesn't necessarily mean to have things in common but to feel somehow about a person. You can easily connect with people through trauma and experiences, but that connection isn't as strong as the one you make within. Having a connection also means little things, such as maybe seeing something in public and it is reminding you of that person or just having random thoughts throughout the day about someone. All I really know is I love and care for every single person that I share a connection with.

Connections

Cat Elder

We did an activity where we all made our life tree, but as a paper chain having one person read from their list while the others are trying to find a branch to connect with theirs. I thought it was creepy because I didn't have a lot of branches for everyone to connect to but to my surprise we were able to connect everyone around the table, showing me if you just look around your surroundings a little bit harder, then you could bump into your best friend or your soulmate. I thought it was cool to see how everyone and everything around me connected. I enjoyed doing this a lot more than normally just drawing our own tree of life.



THANK YOU



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YOUTH
FOUNDATION

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The Voice Launch 2023

