

THE VOICE

ISSUE 26 / JUNE 2026

**Redefining our identity
through chaos and creativity**

BACK: Jasper Falkenham, Shauna Crane, Nate McCarthy, Desmond Dewolf, Vaughn Gilkie-Stevens, Devonte Brownie.

CENTRE (standing): Jay Lundrigan, Ammy Purcell, Victoria Elder. *FRONT (seated):* Patricia Lingley Hagen, Sky Brochu, Brandy Warman, Madeleine Slack.

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

THE TEAM



DESMOND



DEVONTE



JAY



JASPER



MADELEINE



NATE



PATRICIA



SKY



VAUGHN



VICTORIA



AMMY



BRANDY



SHAUNA



COOKIE



Left to right (standing): Jasper Falkenham, Shauna Crane, Brandy Warman, Desmond Dewolf, Ammy Purcell, Devonte Brownie, Victoria Elder, Nate McCarthy, Vaughn Gilkie-Stevens
Left to right (sitting): Jay Lundrigan, Madeleine Slack, Sky Brochu

FINDING OUR VOICE

Who We Are and What We Do

Nate

We are *The Voice*! We are a group for youth in foster care and group homes, and we accept everyone, no matter who they are. We talk, we do assignments, we mainly have fun and all that. We have a break and all that, so you can, you know, loosen your mind or whatever you need to do.

What I Can Contribute

Sky

I can contribute a lot of open and honest feedback and my opinion. I can help others find their voice, just as the program has done for me. To show that in a world where we're told that we are too much, need too much, talk too much, there is a place where we belong, and that we were never the problem, but the world around us just wasn't made for the people us—the people who were different.

Why I Came to The Voice

Victoria

I first heard about *The Voice* when I was 7 years old. *The Voice* was brought up in conversation during supper one night, and I remember my older foster sister talking about the launch for the magazine, and that's when my foster mother asked me if I would like to go to the launch. Ever since then, I have always wanted to join *The Voice*. And to be honest, my own foster siblings weren't even my inspiration to want to join *The Voice*. I wanted to join once I went to my first ever launch and I saw the youth read their stories. Thinking back to being at the launch for the first time and listening to the youth speak I realized that I wasn't alone. I felt that I actually had a voice.

Nate

I come to *The Voice* to talk, have fun, meet new people, and do something in my spare time because it gives me something to do.



HELLO HALIFAX! Using Our voices at the top of Citadel Hill

PERSONAL REFLECTION + GROWTH

Growing into Ourselves

2025 Reflection

Vaughn

2025 was a strange, heavy, and defining year for me. It was a mix of growth, passion, anger, and hard lessons. At the start of the year, I discovered my true passion: music—rap specifically. I already knew I could write, but rap unlocked something deeper. I became obsessed with learning how it worked—the beats, rhythm, flow, and the culture behind it. It wasn't just music anymore; it was something I studied.

Not long after, I was introduced to *8 Mile*. That movie became part inspiration, part education, and eventually my favourite film of all time. Watching Eminem's journey helped me understand the honesty, hunger, and pain behind great rap—not just the sound, but the mindset. I wrote my first real song, *If I Could*, and for the first time, I stepped out of my comfort zone and asked a girl out. That moment pushed me to quit drugs for the first time, though it wasn't a clean or easy change. There was real chemistry there, but I wasn't healed. I let my past, my insecurities, and my emotions bleed into something that could have been good. That became the first thing in my life I truly regret. After that, I spiralled. I let anger take control, which led to a relapse and some moments where I came dangerously close to throwing my future away.

Even during this time, I threw myself into rap battles, using them to express my rage and frustration. They were intense, raw, and chaotic—just like the emotions I was wrestling with. That period was a turning point—the moment I realized I had to take responsibility for my life before I destroyed it. From there, I started taking therapy seriously. As summer ended and school began again, I found myself calmer, more focused, and more self-aware. I began working on an album titled *Life's a B—*, a project that mirrors where I am in life—unfinished, honest, and still in progress. I'm still working on that album today, just like I'm still working on myself. Despite everything, I'm proud of the growth I made this year. I'm hopeful that 2026 will be my glow-up year—not just physically or creatively, but mentally. I want to do it right this time.

Self-Reflection

Nate

I've grown so much in the past few years. Like I've gotten bigger, stronger, I've been allowed to go out with friends and family to the mall and all that, that's about it.

My 2025

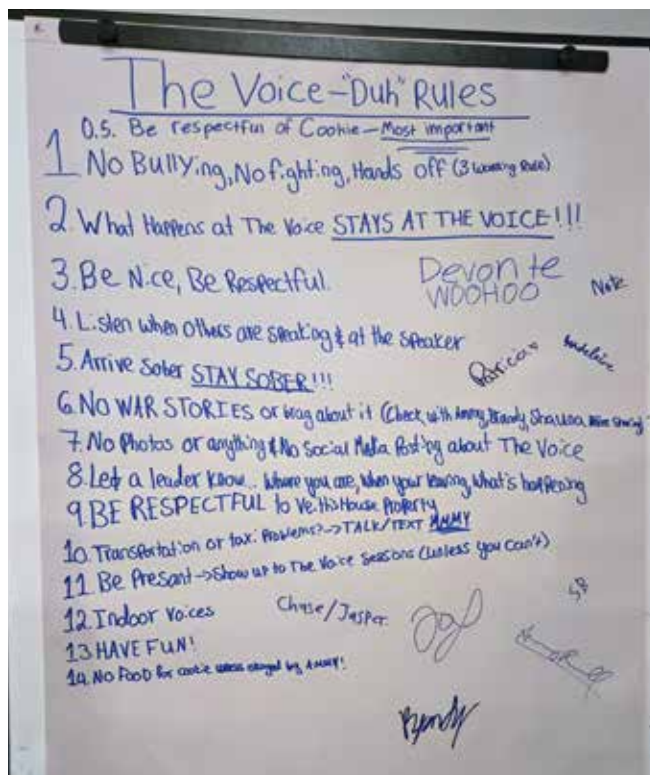
Sky

My 2025 was a year of happiness. I got to stay at my placement because of the people around me who love and care for me. And they help me see my mistakes as opportunities to learn, not as if I have failed them. Natalie is one who I want to mention for a reason. She has met me with patience and understanding when I expected to be yelled at. She loves me even on my worst days and shows she loves me despite my flaws. She is my calm in the storm around me, she is my quiet space when the world is too loud, she is my sounding board before I have difficult conversations, she is the one person who I can be myself around and be met with acceptance. But that doesn't mean she won't hold me accountable for my actions. She never yells or holds it against me. We talk about it, and then we move on. I call her mother because she is the mother I never had, but needed.

What I Expect from the Year

Sky

I expect a year of making new friends. I also expect a year of fun. I expect that this will be a year of big changes as I transition into full adult life and prepare to switch to the Disability Support Program (DSP) and eventually to live on my own. In the next year, I expect to learn to write my own story and work through the process of my trauma. I also hope to see where it's best to let go of people who have hurt me and/or continue to hurt me. I hope to see who I can trust. I want to learn who I am meant to be. I hope to learn to set boundaries and to enforce them. Learn how to make a decision without fear of others' opinions.



What do I expect from this year

Madeleine

I expect to become better friends and to get closer with people within *The Voice*. I want to make memories, just like I made last year, that I will carry throughout the rest of my life. I want to have the opportunity to share common experiences with my peers, something that I don't always have with my friends outside of *The Voice*! My favourite part of going to *The Voice* each week is getting to share what happened during the past week. It's an opportunity to share your highs and lows of the week and have people who support you instead of "feeling sorry" for you. I can't wait to continue with *The Voice* this year and gain more highlights to look back on in the future.

What I Expect from The Voice

Jay

I expect to get a lot of help with what I need, and to get money. I am very broke, so I need money. I would love to get some food, that is another thing I expect, as well as a safe space. I hope it will be a very safe space.

Dear Younger Me

River

I know you're probably scared right now, thinking and wondering if and when I'm going to hurt you and leave you and blame you. But the truth is I never will. I see every tear you cry and hide from everyone. How you say, "I'm fine" so casually when someone asks how you are or "what's wrong?" I see every time you asked for help and were met with "why can't you do anything for yourself" or "that's not my problem." I see the way you used to believe people when they said "...I'm here for you if you need anything," but how you hesitate to speak for fear of saying the wrong thing or being a burden. I see how you used to pray to a lord you weren't sure you believed in, that you wouldn't wake up the next morning or get in a big accident to see if anyone would care. I see how you tried so hard to be good enough for everyone. I see how you struggled to earn love. How you learned that you will never be enough no matter what you do. Well, you are enough for me, and I'll always be there for you. All I can really say is stop trying because it doesn't matter what you do, it will never be enough. And as you get older, it doesn't change. Sorry to make you wish that holding on a little longer instead of ending it all when you had the chance, maybe things get better because they don't.

Who Am I?

Vaughn

Who am I? I'm an average guy with anger issues as a side effect. Are these issues bad? Well, of course. It breaks friendships and relationships, causes people to dislike or never take me seriously again. But is that all I am? No! I'm also a growing man who hopes to change the world someday with the art of music. I'm someone who loves to meet people and step out of my comfort—bit by bit, step by step, day by day. I'm someone who loves to learn from my past mistakes and make different decisions next time. So, am I just someone who has anger issues and a rough past? No! I'm just a guy trying to live and make a difference, just like everyone else.

PERSONAL REFLECTION + GROWTH

Patching Wounds

Patricia

Shortly after peace was found,
The loud of the quietness began,
Seeing it creeping in,
Unknowing how long it chose to stay,

As days passed,
The holes began to patch,
Slowly not fast,
Until there were none left,

In a new life,
They've shown love,
Never loneliness,

With a single plan,
No longer an act,
They were bold in their decisions,
Eventually becoming,
One of them.

Proud of myself

Victoria

When I think about something or someone that I am proud of, there are two things that stand out to me. As a person, I feel like I don't give myself enough credit most of the time. I'm always paying attention to how other people feel and how I can help them but I don't give myself enough credit for the things that I do or for the things that I accomplish. So one of the things that sticks out to me, and that I have actually taken time to appreciate, is how I always put other people first, and I try my best to make sure everything is okay and that people know that I'm there for them. Another thing that I am proud of is pushing myself to finish high school. I'm in my last year of high school, and to be honest, I thought I would end up dropping out. School can be stressful to the point where you want to give up or it's like it doesn't even matter. I am proud to say that out of my dad's side of the family, I am one of the few people to have completed their grade 12 education. I am proud of how far I've come and what I've become. I describe myself as a kind-hearted, caring young lady. I always try my best to put others' feelings and needs before my own. I love helping other people, especially those who I'm close with.

My Independence

Brandy

It's been two years now since I moved out of my grandmother's and started living independently with the support of the post-custody agreement, while I work on getting my bachelor's degree in sociology at MSVU. It's been a challenge navigating living on my own. Between taking on new jobs and navigating university, it's challenged me to grow. Most people going through this stage of life usually have their family to support them during this time. But when you're in foster care, that support system isn't there. What do you do then? Who do you call when you need advice or need to know things about the adult world, such as credit cards? All those situations end up being on you to figure out. Over the past two years, I've struggled with feeling alone. It can be a very lonely process building your life on your own.

I chose to do some hard things when I first turned 20; it was finally time for me to move forward with my life and make it my own. I had to leave behind family that would not support me in being my own person. Having to accept that I'll never truly be part of my family was one of my biggest challenges. It was comforting to know that I don't share the same hatred they do. But hard to feel like an outcast in your own family.

Post-care has helped me get to this place in life where I have my own apartment, I'm able to go to school, further my education, and take care of someone who's been neglected for a while. Myself.

Now I live alone with my two cats and work two jobs. I feel a sense of security and control over my own life.

Something that I haven't been able to have before. I'm working every day to move forward in my life and create something meaningful that I know I deserve. I might not have gotten the love I needed while I was young and in my teens, but I'm providing myself that support every day to become the role model I always wanted.

I'm not okay

River

I've been trying so hard to act like I am, but I'm really not. My weight is off. My energy is gone. My body doesn't feel right, and it honestly scares me. I'm so tired all the time, not just sleepy, but drained, and I don't know how to explain how hard it's been just to get through days like this. I didn't want to say anything because I didn't want to be a burden. I kept telling myself I should be able to handle it, that I should be stronger than this. But I can't. I'm struggling more than I let anyone see, and it's become too heavy to keep carrying alone. I don't know what I need. I just know I'm not okay, and I really need support right now.

About Halloween

Madeleine

I'm growing up, and Halloween no longer means the same thing as it does to a young child. But I miss being little, and the joy trick or treating used to bring. This year I brought my two younger brothers out trick-or-treating. Instead of going to a party like many of my peers, I was able to go out and get candy door-to-door for one last time and look back on my memories of being young. Next year, my brothers will probably be at their father's house for Halloween, so I wanted to enjoy it with them this year. Next year, I'll probably go out to a party with my friends like everyone else, but I am so thankful for getting to say a proper goodbye to my younger self!



Halloween crafts at Veith House: making ghosts out of cheesecloth and paper lanterns

FOSTER CARE + SYSTEM EXPERIENCES

My Experience with the System

Sky

My experience with the system has not always been good. In my experience, being in the system meant learning to deal with change, rules, and decisions I didn't always understand. Today it has all changed. I had court and was granted permission to stay at my placement and remain in care until the age of 21. I cried when they told me I was staying there. I had never had someone come into my life and truly want me to stay, even after they'd seen sides of me that were the reason others had walked away.

Victoria

As a youth growing up in the foster care system, I have had a mixture of good and bad experiences. I never really liked being in care. I was taken into care at the age of seven, so at the time, I kind of had a clue what was happening, but not really. I was separated from my older brother and stayed with my older sister. At first, I was moved from home to home, and my social workers kept changing, so it felt like everything was continuously starting over every time I would go to a new foster house or get a new social worker. I didn't really get to see my older brother a lot once I was taken into care. I saw him very rarely, except for visits. Our relationship fell apart and still isn't the strongest.

Although I've had bad experiences, I've also had a decent number of good ones during my time in care. I have met some of the most amazing people you'll ever meet. Some of my favourite memories of being in care include going on an airplane for the first time to find "Santa Claus". Another one of my favourite memories is when my foster mother, my younger foster sister, and I went on a canoe trip to my foster mother's family cottage on a lake. We had just gotten to the cottage and were bringing our bags from the canoes up to the cottage when a little garden snake and my younger foster sister made eye contact, and it looked like they were both screaming in fright.

Madeleine

Everyone has different experiences within the foster care system, and I've been quite lucky. I was never placed in a group home or even a foster home, but I was still torn away from the life that I knew. I was put into kinship care with my aunt three years ago, and she has since become my brothers' and my legal guardian. I'm super grateful to her for being there for me. I won't ever be fully free from the world of hurt in my past, but I can accept what's happened and live my life in the present instead.

Devonte

I have had a lot of experiences in CPS! But the worst one is meeting my dad, then losing him to cancer. I met him for the first time after seven years when I lived in Ontario. We lived with him for a while, but got taken away from him! We were having good, long visits, but then we found out he had cancer. He passed away on the last day of school!



Victoria and Patricia at Citadel High after her performance in *The Addams Family* musical

Finding My Place

Victoria

Being in the foster care system has shaped a big part of who I am today. It hasn't always been easy, and there were times when I felt unsure about where I belonged. Moving from house to house and constantly meeting new people again made it hard to feel settled. Just when things would feel normal, something would change.

One of the biggest challenges of being in care, for me, has been learning to trust people. When you're constantly meeting new people and being moved from one place to another, it becomes hard to open up because you don't know how long someone or something will be in your life. Because of that, sometimes keeping your feelings to yourself is the best option. But the truth is, the more you keep those feelings to yourself, the stronger they get, and eventually they take over the way you think, the way you feel and even the way you interact with others.

Although there were struggles, there were also moments that have helped me grow. I've had people in my life who showed me kindness and made me feel safe, even if only for a short time. Those moments have had a deep impact on me and could last a lifetime. Being in care has also taught me that no matter where you are, there will always be someone with a helping hand who will do their best to help you. I've learned to be independent. Learning how to handle situations on your own is hard because, growing up, we all need someone to depend on at some point. Sometimes I don't want to handle situations or figure things out on my own, and it isn't always easy, but it has made me stronger and more aware of what I want for my future.

As I get older, I think to myself how lucky I am to have the experience of being in care because if I weren't taken away from my parents, I wouldn't be who I am today. I've been in care for ten years now, and I've been at the same foster house for nine and a half. I don't know where I would be if it weren't for my foster parents and my amazing team of people who have been there for me and helped me become the person I am today.

My post-care experience

Shauna

I first went into care around age 6, having gone back and forth between my biological mother and several foster placements until I aged out at 17. At the time, I was in the most stable placement I have ever experienced, a place I still consider my forever home. Though I was in a loving and nurturing environment, I was too eager to start "adult life" when I graduated high school early at 17. My foster parents, as well as my social worker, encouraged me to stay at home and consider my options more thoroughly, but I was hell-bent on my big girl plans.

Having successfully enrolled in university and found an apartment for the following month after graduation, I was prepared to start my grown-up life. I had always wanted to be an Art Therapist and decided to first get my fine arts degree. Turns out, actually, I was woefully unprepared and had no idea what I was doing in the real world. Though my post-care and custody agreement covered most of my school and a larger portion of my living expenses, I still had to contribute financially in a way I was not prepared for. I had no idea how to budget or save money; I struggled to make ends meet and eventually decided to just drop out of school.

I seem to do things in extremes, so I decided to just completely drop out of life. I packed up my car and drove across the country, eventually becoming homeless after my car died in Alberta. I was fortunate enough to have friends who let me sleep in their trailer, helping me to get back on my feet and find a job.

After getting a stable job and housing, I seemed to learn many necessary lessons the hard way. I returned to Nova Scotia and worked many different jobs over the years in cleaning, events, hospitality, and service.

I felt a lot of regret for messing up my chance to receive financial support for my education, and I felt it would never be possible to return to school. I owed the university money for the semester I dropped out, as social services ended my post-care contract, which I understand as I violated it through my choice to drop

FOSTER CARE + SYSTEM EXPERIENCES

out and become a vagabond. For many years, I gave up on my dreams and just lived with the consequences of my actions.

I came back to *The Voice* as an adult volunteer at age 23, having been a participant as a teenager. After spending some time working with the program, I started to believe in myself again and see that I was capable. **That truly is the magic of this program. It helps people to see their contributions as individuals and find themselves through a sense of belonging.**

I started my degree in Recreational Therapy at Dalhousie at age 25. I am currently halfway through my four-year degree. I am extremely thankful for the post-care tuition waiver through Dalhousie, which has allowed me to further my education, as it would not have been financially feasible otherwise. I hope to work with youth, particularly those in care, as I know firsthand how powerful finding a sense of belonging through recreation can be for personal development.

I am beyond grateful for my position in ***The Voice* program, which continues to inspire me to believe in my own potential.** Though some of my choices led me to struggle, they have also given me the perspective to be where I am today.

Changing the System

Victoria

If I could change or improve anything about the foster care system, it would be the amount of time children and youth in care interact with their social workers. I know that social workers are busy and there aren't enough social workers for each individual child or youth in care, but something I would change is the contact between our social worker and us. For me, I feel that if we are given or told we have a social worker, then we should be able to have a stronger, more personal relationship with them.

My relationship with my social worker isn't the strongest, and I feel that if I had a stronger or more personal relationship with her, I would be able to talk to her more openly about my problems, and people would get to know me better. I know and understand the difference between a strong and a weak relationship with a social worker because I've had strong relationships with previous workers during the early stages of my time in care. Sometimes, I feel that my relationship with my social worker isn't the strongest, and people know that I have been in care for a while, they think I don't have problems, but the truth is, as we get older, there are more problems as we are able to understand and see things more clearly. As a youth



Open House Pizza Party at Veith House: first meeting of *The Voice* for 2025-26

in care, I've seen the changes and what it's like when things don't feel right.

I also feel that just because I have been at a well-known foster home or have a well-known foster parent, people think that they are going to be one of the best people to live with. At times, I have felt almost unwelcome, left out, and as if things were working against me. Sometimes, a long-term living placement can change over time, or who you call family can change. I feel that having a social worker should also mean you can talk to them, but in my circumstances, I feel like I can't. Say that you're supposed to see your social worker every three months or so, but I don't. I feel that because my foster parent is so high up and takes on a lot of things or roles, my social worker feels like they don't have a job or I don't need them, which is not true.

I would like to be able to talk to my social worker one-on-one instead of having other kids around or having my own foster parent around. For me, when my foster parent, other foster children or people in general are around, I feel that I can't fully be myself and express my feelings or problems. So, one thing I would change about the care system is the role of social workers. Another thing I would change about the foster care system is the amount of training and services available to foster parents. I feel that over the 9 years that I have been in foster care, rules have changed, and sometimes I feel like that isn't such a good thing.



At the 2025 Outstanding Youth Awards (OYAs) with Brandy and Shauna hosting



Team photo from *The Voice* 25th Anniversary celebration at Best Western Chocolate Lake

IDENTITY+ ACCEPTANCE

The Transgender's Valentine Curse

Patricia

Oh...I did it again,
I fell for him,
Even though I know it probably would never happen,
I still fell for him,

I'd fall for someone who makes me feel special,
I'd create these silly little moments in my head,
I'll laugh and get all warm about him,
I'll tell my best friend all about him,
But it always ends with them liking someone else,
The world around me crumbles,
I've been hurt again,

Am I misinterpreting the signs?
Am I doing something wrong?
Or maybe this is my curse,
The Valentine curse,

Rarely someone might catch feelings for me,
But once I speak my truth,
They get weirded out and then...Gone.

I have supporters and people I can trust,
But is it too much to ask for a bond stronger
than friends?
I'm human, aren't I?
So why am I being treated differently at times?
Why the hate?
Why can't I just be myself?
Why can't this curse be broken?



**Nate, Devonte, Patricia and Madeleine
at Citadel Hill**

The Judged Cover

Patricia

Living a life as someone you're not,
Is never the way one should go,
But being someone you are,
Trouble follows you,
No matter where you stay,

What others don't see,
Is we're human just like them,
We bleed red, we laugh aloud,
We cry, we hope,
And we heal,
Yet we don't qualify,
For rights, or views of our own,

They claim that we gave an invitation,
To hurt us, to bully us,
And to decide, who's defective,
Who isn't, who's normal,
And who isn't.

We want to feel accepted,
To feel human, to feel like us,
To feel supported, and to feel proud,
Why can't they understand that?
Why can't they acknowledge that?

We're told and encouraged,
To feel, to think,
And to stand for what we want,
But in the end,
We're given zippers or locks,
Instead of ears and a voice.

Life of a Gender-Dysphoric Non-Binary Person

Jasper

Being a person who's gender-dysphoric and also non-binary is interesting, yet a bit nerve-racking at the same time. Being both non-binary and gender-dysphoric has its ups and downs, and people sadly are homophobic and dislike LGBTQIA+ people. But that's the life of a gender-dysphoric and non-binary person for you.

Gender dysphoria (GD) refers to the emotional distress or discomfort that arises from a mismatch between a person's gender identity—their internal sense of being male, female, or another gender—and the sex assigned at birth. --Wikipedia

The Quiet Fight

Patricia

This is a story about a 13-year-old boy moving out of his home, thrown into the system with nothing but a small suitcase of clothes, his school supplies all shoved into one backpack, a violin in hand, and a big stuffed dog to keep him company. Things were never easy for him, and all he had was one true best friend he could always count on. She never let him down and was always there for him whenever he needed her. Then came New Year's, when he moved to another home far away from all he had known, feeling alone and scared, and maybe petrified if he dared to show it.

He questioned everything, started losing all hope and sight of the outgoing, fun little boy he once was. He lived his life the best he could, but kept getting bullied and having to move from one place to another because foster parents didn't understand him. He questioned himself more: did he feel like this person, or maybe that person? Did he belong here or there? Did they like him or hate him? Did he like this gender or that gender? Questions kept on racing through his mind until he eventually settled on being genderless, but that didn't spark with him at all.

Then one ordinary day, he looked at his reflection and saw the person he was forced to become. He realized one thing: it was no longer the story of a boy his parents forced him to be, but the story of a girl he wanted to be. She changed her clothes and identity, and felt proud of who she was.

Her biological family disapproved, but she didn't care because she was finally happy. She was finally herself, finally able to express who she really is. But that changed; she got hit with bullies at her front door every day, gender dysphoria jumping in, ruining her. Determined, she kept on being herself; she pushed every day to get what she wanted, which made her feel like a woman.

Finally, she met a lovely woman who changed her and shaped her into the woman she is today. Without her, she would have never known how it felt like to be loved.

Then she moved back to her so-called home which made things worse; they never listened to her, never cared for her feelings or desires. They never cared. All they cared about was turning that little girl into the boy she was never meant to be in the first place.

Therapy was the way to go, to learn about all she and her family needed to know about this transformation. They wouldn't give in or care, but they had no choice because Social Services was right there so they eventually did. That little girl was happy for the first time in a while.

A year later, everything got quiet; her father passed, but she didn't shed a tear. He ruined her life, he abused her, he did everything he could to hurt her. But she wasn't alone; he hurt others but gave her the worst of it.

The next year, she lost her grandfather, who gave her the world. He gave great advice, told great stories and filled the shoes of the father who was never there. She was in an interesting home at that time with a bunch of kids who all had different stories. Some were nice to her, some took it out on her, but she learned many things in that home that she still takes with her everywhere she goes.

Today, she's still that same girl, just a bit older. She still has that friend by her side, and her biological family is no longer in the picture. She was taken in by a family that wanted her and saw nothing but love in her, a family that saved her and helped her put an end to it all, a family that didn't care who she was before, only who she is now. Ever since she moved to that home, everything has been quiet, no more family fights, no more foster parents leaving her out on family gatherings, enjoying her first summer with her new mum and crossing out things on her bucket list. She's finally at peace, finally able to be free.

Many still wonder who that girl could be... And that girl...is me.



Shauna and Devonte painting treasure boxes

TRAUMA, HEALING + RESILIENCE

Trauma of childhood A Poem

Victoria

Deep inside a wounded heart,
Lies the memories of a childhood star.
There's aching pain that lies inside
Ghosts of memories that never died
Sometimes everyday feels like a fight
Darkness lurks within the light.
Haunted by what was done
Haunted by what is gone.
Echoes of voices that once were near
Become whispers of sadness that refuse to clear.
Every step feels like a struggle
Everyday a constant juggle.
But there's still a hope that shines bright inside
Healing is the road that lies ahead
Courage to move through the pain.
Happy childhood memories start to surface
The past may have left its mark
But it won't define one with a pure heart.
A bright future lies ahead
A new chapter waiting to be read.

Storms

Sky

I smile so no one asks,
I stay so no one worries,
Inside, I carry storms
That never make a sound
If surviving counts as strength
Then I have been strong
For a very long time

.....

***"But there's still
a hope that shines
bright inside..."***

.....

Dear past Vaughn,

Vaughn

I know you have a lot on your plate, and you don't know how to deal with it. But I can assure you, weed and alcohol are not the way. It may not seem harmful now, but come May 10th, you'll realize what you do to yourself.

Remember that girl you liked? The one you crushed on for months? Yeah, you get her number. But here's the twist: you slip up and talk to her under the influence. She will not like that. You agree it's a bad habit and you drop it. It's great, you're fine. You guys talk, finally go out, and it's super awkward. Okay, cool. You guys decide to plan again. Except the next day, May 10th, you lose it and cannot control yourself. You text her constantly, apologizing for the awkwardness and showing major red flags and insecurity.

She friend zones you. It hurts, but you try to make that work. Newsflash: you can't. And things get awkward with the dynamic. She tells you she isn't in a place to date, and ghosts you. The next day, she's flirting with another guy. You're annoyed, but say nothing... You decide you aren't worth much and relapse. It gets intense, and your head rushes with anger, anxiety and other thoughts I cannot explain here. But what I'll say is, you come close to it, but you make it. You get into a fight with someone you have never even met before. This is when you finally realize you have crossed a line.

So, you step back, drop the drugs, hit a gym and get yourself together. And finally, after a painful few months, you can breathe normally. You can confidently walk around, knowing that you're unbreakable and no longer precarious. You can finally step foot into the real world.

Now, why did I give a story that sounds made up to my past self? Because you, my friend, lived through a growth spurt of life and survived it without guidelines or tour guides. You did it all and mended it. The tiny cracks are what make the seal possible.

The idea of a father

Madeleine

I've grown up without a dad, and so I've never felt the need or even the point in having one. I was curious about him, though, mostly because he was a bit of a taboo subject in my house growing up. Last year, I decided to reach out to him, not for him to be my dad, but to know who helped conceive me and who shares my DNA. I reached out to him without any high hopes about who he might be. He seemed happy to hear from me at first, but that was only until he realized I had my own life, thoughts, and feelings.

I've never felt like a dad was necessary, and I don't feel like I would be better off with one in my life. All of that said, I sometimes find myself wishing he could be a good dad, like most of my friends have had the opportunity to have in their lives. Many of my friends have dads in their lives who love and care for them and want to hear how their days went when they get home from school. I can be jealous of this, not because it's something that I need in my life, but because it's something that I've never had.

In these moments, I have to remind myself that even though it would be nice to have a full family who cares for me, every family is different. What may seem like the dream family, with a mother and father and a large family to spend holidays with, isn't always the best family for everyone. All of this depends on your family's dynamics and relationship. For me, my family isn't good for one another. So even though I sometimes wish I could be in a better, bigger, more loving family, I would never wish for my family members, such as my father or mother, to be in my family again. I feel loved by the family that I do have, my aunt and two younger brothers in particular, and I am very fortunate to have them.

Trust Issues: A Poem

Victoria

How can I trust someone who promises things they don't mean
How do I trust someone who lies to me
How do you trust someone who has torn your heart apart and made it bleed
You put trust in someone you love
You put trust in someone you think cares
But what if they just break it?
What if their words are only empty sounds
What if you loved them, but they weren't careful with your trust
What if they tossed it in the trash once you gave it to them
How do you give your trust over and over again to someone you know will destroy it.



Madeleine and Sky with Cookie at Citadel Hill

TRAUMA, HEALING + RESILIENCE

The Unspoken Journey

Patricia

In a past life, nothing was enjoyable,
No fun or happy moments,
Is this what a home should feel like?
Surroundings of activities or friends,
Never was enough,
To bring that little kid's mind at ease,

Sometimes it got quiet,
Filling the air with dreams and comfort,
Shortly ending,
As the finished puzzle falls,

Living in different homes,
Facing various challenges,
Seeing a once beautiful painting,
Splattered with sorrow,
But it didn't last for long,
Or so I thought,

Reaching the storm again,
Tiny emotional memories floating in the sea,
Growing and growing,
As waves pass,

Then something pushes me in,
Struggling to get out,
Screaming for help as if possible,
To be free from one so deep.

At last, a hand reaches out,
Scared but strong,
With a grip so firm,
It's hard not to be grateful.

She introduces herself as Mother,
Very sweet, accessorized, and stylish,
Feeling confident and safer,
By the mark of her presence,

Noticing how the world was once loud,
Changed to silence, one final time.;

The painting was no longer splattered
with sorrow but love,
The broken puzzle was rebuilt, then glued,
And the storm that lasted for years,
Is gone, For good.



Shauna, Ammy, Sky (with Cookie), Madeleine, Brandy, Nate, Patricia, Devonte, Destiny and Jasper at Citadel Hill enjoying a view of Halifax following our group limousine ride around town

CREATIVE WRITING

The Bottomless Pit

Victoria

The bottomless pit, it's so draining. There's no escaping. Sometimes I try to mix new things, hoping there might finally be a change. It has become almost good enough, but still, there's no escape. And maybe one day I will be good enough. It becomes tiring, and I try to fix myself and let my feelings out. But somehow the insides still bleed. It hurts and shows. It damages the outside surfaces.

The edges are almost healed, treated almost enough to stop the damage. Like the rust that stays even when the world collides, it still stands strong. A reminder of what has been there before. The world builds higher and higher, yet I feel so small, like I might disappear into a blank space and be forgotten.

Family and friends draw near, turning distance into a place where I can be myself, a place where there's no pain. But still afraid, afraid to trust the quiet, afraid to let go. I just want to push it all away. School becomes more draining each and every day. The weight becomes heavier with each step, yet there's a steady voice in my head telling me it's okay, I'm not done, and somehow it manages to tell me to stay.

I reach out

Shauna

In memory of my beautiful, departed mother, Coleen Holman

I reach out to your hand, awaiting to board the ferry
Remembering our trips to the big city, that is now my
everyday commute
I reach out, when I pass the historic houses we once
dreamed of living in
Much like the place I now call home
I reach out, to pass you my ice cream on the boardwalk
The same place where I hold a steady job
I reach out, to show you what I've made of my life
I miss you in every sunset that falls over the harbour
I reach out, because you're beside me in every moment

Justice League story

Jay

I teleported to the Justice League, where I met its members: Superman, Batman, Aquaman, and Green Lantern. And then I see a blur, and it's Flash. He says Flash here in the flesh, then I see a green arrow that comes flying across my face. It's the Green Arrow. He jumps down from one of the buildings; it's crazy. I've never seen such a thing. Then I see a star, but it's day. It's not any normal star; it's a flash, it's a blur. We forgot one person, it's Wonder Woman. Then we met the Absolute Joker. He is a beast; he is over 10 feet tall

Love

Jasper

February's here again, you know what that means.
Chocolates are being given around,
Flowers are given to our beloved,
We write notes saying how much we love our
girlfriends and boyfriends,
Thanking them for their comfort and embrace.
Thanking them for making us smile and showing us
how much they love and care about us.
No matter how we look, speak, and think,
Love is eternal, Forevermore. <3



Artwork by Jasper

MUSIC + PHOTO INSPIRATION

Photo of Wendy

Vaughn

In my photo, you see Wendy the Fancy Crested Gecko, smiling and being happy in her water bowl. She represents me in a loving way—she is my everything, my love, my life, and I don't know what I would do or be doing right now if she weren't around anymore. When she climbs, she shows me that you can climb the world yourself and create something new from it, to change it for the better. Whether that's through art of any kind, or just plain positivity.



Photo of trees

Madeleine

I took a picture of these two trees that I see every day on my way home from school. I love to admire the branches on them and how they look against the sky. All trees grow differently, just like people. The branches perfectly represent my life, twisting and forever changing. They're all uniquely shaped, and one will never look the same. Everyone is unique, and your uniqueness is beautifully intertwined with those around you.



Favourite Song

Nate

My favourite song is *Loving On Me* because I like it and I listen to it the most, and it's a good song to me. Some people might not like it, but you know it's about what I like, not what other people like.

Music

Devonte

When I lived in Ontario, I lost my mom to drugs. It really hurt, and I still am not over it. But there was one thing that helped me through everything. MUSIC!!!! And

when my mom passed, there was one main thing that I listened to! Adele's album 25! No matter what, if I listened to it, I would feel better. And I still listen to it when I get sad. Music was, and forever will be, my safe space or home away from home!

Music Assignment

Jasper

The song I chose was *Fade to Black* by Metallica. I chose this song because it represents the pain and sorrow that I feel. I lost six family members, a cat being one of them, and it makes me feel sadness, sorrow, and guilt. Every lyric of the song reveals the true colours behind the mask of happiness I wear.

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I look back on this past year, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of pride, gratitude, and admiration for the young people who make *The Voice* what it is. This year was filled with laughter, creativity, new friendships, personal growth, and unforgettable experiences. Every meeting reminded me of the strength, resilience, and talent that exists within this group, and it has been a privilege to watch each of these young people find confidence in their voices and share their stories.

This edition of *The Voice* showcases some of the most honest, thoughtful, and inspiring work our youth have ever produced. Within these pages, you will find stories of courage, healing, identity, belonging, and hope. I encourage you to take the time to read and reflect on each article. Behind every word is a young person who trusted us with a piece of their story. Their voices matter. Their experiences matter. Their perspectives matter.

To our youth, thank you for your bravery, creativity, and willingness to share your experiences. To our volunteers, supporters, caregivers, partners, and readers, thank you for believing in the importance of Youth Voices and helping to provide a space where young people can be heard.



I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed creating it.

Thank you for being part of our journey.

Ammy Purcell
Executive Director
Youth Voices of Nova Scotia Society

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THE VOICE LAUNCH 2025

