



The Voice

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE

ON THE COVER: Social work students visit the Newsletter Project: Ammy Purcell (program director for Youth Voices), Victoria Dumbuya (Dalhousie social work student), Brandy Warman, Nathan Gorman, John Langer, Kaitlin Scott (Youth Voices volunteer and Dalhousie social work student), Sarah Hayward (Dalhousie social work student).

Why I chose *The Voice*

By Brandy Warman

The reason I came to the newsletter project was because I thought it would be a good way for me to meet new people and get out more. The thing I want to accomplish is getting better at writing and making more friends.

By Nicole Van Tassle

I came to *The Voice* tonight because my brother told me that it was fun and he really liked it so I decided to try it. It seems okay. If I stay with the project, I hope to learn more about myself and start writing again because I used to really like writing.

“Be a voice, not an echo.”
— Albert Einstein

Emotions

Happy

By Brandy

I am most happy when I'm not busy because that way I am not overwhelmed and I can just relax.

Happy

By Nicole

I'm most happy when I'm with my boyfriend because he is really caring and he is really protective.

Happy

By Brandy

One of my happiest moments was when I started getting visitations with my mom after being taken into care. I was so happy to be able to get to see her since I hadn't seen her in a while. Now I get to see her at family gatherings and sometimes on the weekends.

By John Langer

I come to the Newsletter each and every week for a handful of different reasons. Each week I get to dive into the past mountain of struggles and accomplishments the previous seven days have caused.



I come to the Newsletter for the purpose of communication, and team building — growing closer to the ones you discuss your life with every Wednesday. *The Voice* is a get-away from everything else. It's a learning experience, but different than a school environment. The social skills you learn, the relationships you build, and the people you meet, are truly extraordinary.



By Brandy

To me, my future looks good. I wanna have a good job so I can afford to live on my own. In my future, I wanna get out more and meet new people.

By Destiny Chirkoski

In my future, I want to know how to fight. I also want to help others and be successful.

Balancing Work & School and Area Decisions

By Nathan Gorman

I have just finished my high school, and have been enrolled at the Nova Scotia Community College, Kingstec Campus. At first I was excited, but the more I thought about it, the more I found I would dread it. I have visited Kentville twice and for me, it was enough to base my decision.

I just got a new job in Dartmouth that I actually like. In order to transfer locations (of my job), I need to work at my location for a minimum of six months. Also my decision for NSCC was a quick decision. With DCS extending my care, I'm expected to go to school within the year.

about care

My time in care

By Nathan

Through my time in care, I've had my happy and sad moments.

My most memorable time in care was going to Cuba with my foster family. My worst time is the situation I'm currently in. Back in December, my social worker and I went to court to extend my care because I was considering going to Nova Scotia Community College. I have since changed my mind about school and decided I'm going to work instead. As of this moment, my social worker and I are not seeing eye-to-eye on this matter.

Because of this, I have discussed with my social worker the process to terminate my care and she advised me of the court process. So now, I am in the process of termination.

For me it's a bit of mixed emotions, however I feel this is the best choice for me.



Being in care

By Brandy

Being in foster care is hard.

When you are first being put into care, it's one of the biggest challenges you can face because it is overwhelming. Some kids are too young to even know what is happening to them. Nothing can make that easier — the feelings of confusion, helplessness, and feeling paralyzed. Trying to understand what is happening is difficult because you haven't been through anything like that before. That's what makes it really hard.



Group Living Life

By Nathan

Living in a group care situation can be a struggle especially for people who are not used to it. Sometimes it feels like it's a power struggle and neither side wants to give in. The more people that live together and don't want to, the more frustrating the situation can become.

I am currently in my fourth group living experience and some have been better than others. This most recent one is a smooth sail for me, at least. I live with people who don't want to follow rules and break curfews, which has an impact on other residents.

My placement prior was in Ontario and my counselor, social worker, and youth worker didn't anticipate what it was like. It was also my most difficult living circumstance. Video and audio recordings in every room and hallway except bathrooms and bedrooms — nothing could happen unless there was a staff member by your side.

In the community, people are always thinking or saying "oh look, it's a foster kid. Wonder how bad his/her parents are?" That attitude — that the parents are always at fault — causes stigma for the kids who lost parents. So the youth begins to lash out and have no other place to turn but group care.

Other times, kids act out while living in care, which also adds to the stigma — well, if he/she lives there they must have f***ed up their life and they're going to ruin our home town now.

Living in Care

By Destiny

My family made me feel ignored and lonely. After feeling those emotions I felt forgotten and empty which led to feeling unwanted and worthless. My friend came along and made me aggravated and depressed. After being scared and misled for year I just felt so broken and helpless which made me wonder if life really is worth it. I just want someone to care and make me feel wanted.

What have I learned about myself in the past year that I did not know before?

By Nicole

I learned that if I try hard, I can complete my goals easier and faster. I also learned that WSC doesn't actually help you unless you want the help and accept the help.

Executive Director's message

Sandy MacDonald

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS CALL IT A "REBUILD", a time to rethink and then reset the conventional way things are done. It's a calculated process to improve on past success with an eye to a brighter future.

So the Newsletter Process is in a rebuild. It's been 17 years since Andrew Safer conceived and started the Newsletter Project, and been nine years since I took over from Andrew. Through all the years, we've provided a safe and nurturing environment for youth in care to share their experience while improving their basic literary and lifestyle skills.

The first big change this year was bringing on Ammy Purcell as program director, leading the weekly Newsletter sessions while developing some changes in the curriculum. It's been a learning year for Ammy, who has been involved with the program for 16 years — first as a youthful participant, then as a facilitator and youth mentor, and now in a strong leadership role.

Kaitlin Scott, a first-year student in the Dalhousie School of Social work, joined the program as an adult volunteer and has contributed much to the sessions this year. Her experience

working closely with youth in care has brought new perspective to her classroom studies.

We will soon be welcoming several new and enthusiastic board members to Youth Voices of Nova Scotia, each bringing their own skills and passion for bettering the lives of young people in this province. The Board will undertake a major strategic plan over the summer to re-imagine the Newsletter Project and determine how it can best deliver powerful and relevant programming for youth in care.

As we wrap up this year and look to a bright future for the program, I want to thank Ammy for her dedicated work this year. Thanks also to Paul Schwartz for his help in smoothing Ammy's transition as a workshop facilitator.



HAPPY GROUP: Brandy, Brody, Kaitlin, Ammy, Nathan, John, Jazzmyn and Destiny

Program Director's message

Ammy Purcell



LOOK AT ME! I AM NOW THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR of the Youth In Care Newsletter Project! Such a fancy title. It was 2012 that I wrote in my year-end reflection that I would like to “maybe even become the director of the Newsletter Project myself one day.” And I know I have been saying it for a lot longer than that. Well here I am!

I am so excited to be taking on this new role, although it has been a bit of a challenging year. Transition is always tough in the beginning but we pulled through. With the help of our two facilitators-in-training, John and Nathan, we took on some different things this program year — all their ideas I might add.

The most interesting assignment was gathering the perspective from the adults in the youths' lives. The youth each interviewed their foster parents or group home staff about what it is like doing what they do. The results were very enlightening and refreshing. I feel the youth each got somewhat of a feel of how hard it is to take on that responsibility.

The youth also wanted to get some answers to some tough questions from social workers, so they did. They came up with their own questions and each interviewed a social worker who bravely volunteered to come in to be grilled. Thanks to Stacey Greenough who helped me coordinate that evening.

I have learned a lot this year about what it takes to keep this program going and I can't thank Sandy enough for giving me the opportunity to do it. I also had a lot of great people to help me. Sandy continued to do all the behind the scenes work and was right there whenever I had a question or concern.

Paul Schwartz has been my facilitation mentor this year, teaching me techniques to keep the group engaged during the sessions, helping me along the way with session planning and even coming out to the sessions and engaging with the group himself. Thank you so much Paul for really taking an interest in the program and helping me find my feet in this new role.

Kaitlyn Scott, our adult volunteer, who is also a Dalhousie University social work student, was a major help this year as well. She dedicated her Wednesday evenings to attending the sessions and helping whenever needed, whether it was helping with writing an assignment or just reminding a “certain someone” to stop texting during the session. She also got some of her fellow social work students to come in for a Q&A session with the group. Thank you so much, Kaitlyn, for everything you did this year — you were a great help.

I know I have said this many times before but this program truly does mean the world to me. I am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to take on this new role as program director and I hope to make everyone proud. I can't wait to start planning for next fall.

If you are, or know a youth who would like to join our group in the fall, please email me: ammy.thevoice@yahoo.com.

Message from our newsletter volunteer

Kaitlin Scott

AS A VOLUNTEER WITH *THE VOICE*, I have been able to see and understand first-hand what it is like to be a youth in care. This was the first time I have worked with this population and these youths have changed me for the better. To be surrounded by individuals with such unfortunate life experiences but are persevering, achieving their goals and becoming incredible young adults has given me further clarification that this is the population I want to work with in my future social work practice.

Each week at *The Voice*, I grew closer to each youth, and learned how to work with them to complete assignments and present goals with the Newsletter Project.

My biggest achievement with *The Voice* was organizing Dalhousie University bachelor of social work students to attend a session with *The Voice*. During the session, the social work students were able to hear the struggles the youth

have faced with the social service system but also the positives. These sessions allowed the students to understand first-hand what happens when a child gets placed with a foster parent and how their social workers work with them. The youth at *The Voice* were also able to ask the students questions about their future career. The evening was a learning experience for both the students and the youth.

I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from the youth, gain practical social work skills and use the information I learned in class and apply it to the sessions with *The Voice*.



interviews



Brandy Warman interviews social worker Ashlee D'entremont

Brandy: Why did you become a social worker?

Ashlee: "I became a social worker because I initially was interested in psychology and psychiatry. But as I was going through school for those things I felt like something was missing. And social work kind of made up those missing pieces that I felt were there — like talking about oppression in different groups that face oppression and struggle in today's society. I felt like psychiatry and psychology did not account for that stuff. So I felt like social work was the right fit and I think I made the right choice."

B: If you could determine your own caseload, what would it be and why?

A: "I would stay with children in care. I felt like it is a better fit for me compared to protection. I was a case aid for a while which I loved. Then I did child protection for a while — I just felt like children in care was a better fit."

B: What does a case aid do?

A: "A case aid would be someone who supervises access between kids in care and their parents... and transports kids to some of their appointments. When I was doing it we used to do kind of a big sister program. It's called an alternate worker but that's not part of the program anymore."

"I just like working with the kids more directly. I felt like when I was working in protection you worked with the kids but you were more focused on working with the parents. I prefer working with kids and youth, people who are not adults yet."

B: What propels you to continue?

A: "Seeing small steps happen and (the youth) believing that small steps can turn into bigger steps, depending on who the person is. I got a phone call from a kid the other day that I would have never thought in a million years would ever even want to talk to me or even call me on the phone — so that was just that little step."

"Some people I talk to on the phone all the time. But before, he would have had someone else (call) because it made him anxious. For him to be able to pick up the phone and give me a call was a major step. It may be little to some people but like I've been talking about it 24 hours because it was just so exciting. So little things like that is what drives me to continue."

B: What has been your most memorable/impactful case?

A: "I don't really have one. There a bunch of different files which stand out for me — different clients and different kids and moms and dads that have stood out for different reasons. So no one

really specific — some kids going to university, some parents getting their kids returned to them, some kids making really great strides with their mental health."

B: What parts of your job keep you up at night?

A: "Wondering if I could do more. Working really hard to do as good of a job as you can but worrying if there is something else you're missing, or worrying if there is that other resource you could have put in place to make a difference, or if you could have that one more conversation with them if that could make a difference. So you're just always thinking if you could do better, that's what keeps me up at night."

B: You're the boss now. What would you change and why?

A: "I don't think I've been around long enough to know what I would change. There are a lot of times where I might complain about something that I think should change. However I'm not the one sitting at head office or sitting in a government seat having to make the decisions. I think everybody in those positions wants to do well and to do best by the clients they are serving. I'm not the one having to deal with all the other stuff that comes with having to make those decisions. So it's easy for me as a front line worker to have all these wild and wonderful opinions about how things could be better — but I don't know if I could make that happen if I was sitting in that seat."

B: What is your favourite part of the job?

A: "Definitely the people that you meet — the different kids, the little toddlers and 5-year olds right up to the 19-year olds that you're helping get an apartment or go to university; the great foster parents you meet, the different resources you meet like professionals at the IWK; the professionals like coming here (to the Newsletter Project)! I couldn't have come here if I had another job."

"I just like all the different people I meet. And definitely my co-workers — they help alleviate all the stress that the job brings."

B: Have you gone to hell and back for a case?

A: "That's an interesting question because I think you work really hard on every file that you have. I don't know if I've worked harder on one specific file but some files make you work harder than others — whether it be with one specific family that needs a little bit more or a specific child that needs more resources than are allocated to that child. You advocate and fight for what you feel that child needs."

"I haven't been in the field that long but I've learned you really can't be the one doing all the work. So as a social worker you do the work and you have your specific tasks but the client, the child, the grandmother, whoever that other person is, also has to

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do the work as well. I've definitely learned that you can't work harder than the person you are working with. You're setting them up to fail ... if you're doing everything and they are not meeting you, then they are not able to do it on their own. Sometimes you're like a hamster on a wheel – you're running and no one is running with you."

B: What are some barriers that prevent social workers from returning phone calls?

A: "Emergencies come up. So everything we do is prioritised which might not be a nice thing to hear because everybody's time and question and phone call is important. But if I come into the office to check emails and phone messages, and I have a placement breaking down compared to someone wanting a call back about their clothing allowance, then I have to deal with the placement breakdown first. Unfortunately. But that doesn't really help the person needing the clothing allowance which we are aware of but... a couple weeks back I was on my way to deal with what I thought was a crisis and then a bigger crisis came up and I had to call and say I can't come and turned my car around to go in the other direction. So you really have to prioritise everything you do."

John Langer interviewed social worker Stacey Greenough

John: Why did you become a social worker?

Stacey: "I think I always enjoyed the helping field. I did some volunteer work and then I started doing youth work, and it just seemed like a natural progression for me. I actually started doing some work in my later teen years with some youth who were involved in the child welfare system, so it just kind of moved into that role. It's really been a fit for me, something where at the end of the day I feel like I'm happy with my choice in life."

J: If you could determine your own caseload, what would it be, and why?

S: "I would definitely choose a caseload of children in care. You see, you can choose whether you do intake, protection, or adoption into foster care – there are different roles for social workers. For me, I've worked in a number of different programs but I've always come back to working with children in care. I see us always moving toward positive outcomes for the children we directly work with. That is something always in the forefront for me, as a goal, it excites me."

J: What propels you to continue?

S: "Seeing the resiliency of the children. Over the years, I've seen youth come back, having made positive change in their life, or come through real adversity – that is what really keeps you going. Having the ability to try new ways, when something doesn't seem to be working, trying to be creative so we're able to change directions when needed. Always using a process to work through. Seeing those positive outcomes, being able to provide tools for success in life, that's the part that really propels."

J: What has been your most memorable/impactful case?

S: "There have been so many. Cases have really stayed with me, there are times I will think about 'what if we had tried something

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different?" I think it's important to question yourself, to move forward and make changes to future work."

J: What are you most proud of; your greatest success story?

S: "I don't believe that we are the ones, it's not our progress to be proud of. It's to help children in care be the authors of their own stories, and that we support them in that story. To do that, it is crucial for us to listen. We do the most work when we listen to what we're being told. Sometimes they don't necessarily know what they want, but seeing their actions proves we need to be aware and attentive to them. I'd say, supporting them, in their success. That's what I'm most proud of."

J: What parts of your job keep you up at night?

S: "Definitely had some sleepless nights of my own, it's most difficult when we're searching to find ways to respond that'll keep youth safe – Perhaps decisions that put them at risk, and engage them in services that they may need. When you can't find a way to see that happen, it can be really hard on a social worker."

J: You are the boss now... what would you change, and why?

S: "We have a tremendous amount of change happening right now. There's been hard looks at policy – so now, we're taking the time to refine the policy. I think what we need to do is see what's working and what's not. I'd say we don't always have the answers, so we might be looking at provincial programs, or even ones from the United States to evaluate and test things out. Not reinventing the wheel, just polishing it up."

J: What is your favourite part of the job?

S: "People. When I say that, I don't mean just the ones in the office – children in care. Social workers give their heart and soul, but at the end of the day it's the children we do it for. I'd say that's my favourite part."

J: Have you ever gone to hell and back for a case?

S: "Every worker has, at some point. I would do it again. Sometimes it works; sometimes it's difficult because you feel like you're working day and night without seeing progress. That's hard."

J: What is the hardest part of seeing a child leave care, and what is the best part?

S: "Worry. Have we done enough planning? Have we given enough tools for success in the future? I would say the best part is knowing we've given those tools."

Nathan Gorman interviews social worker Brian Crawford

Nathan: Why did you become a social worker?

Brian: "More than 30 years ago, I graduated from Saint Mary's with Bachelor of Arts. I was working in a group home with the severely mentally handicapped – it was very violent and dirty work. A co-worker of mine was studying social work, and I realized that might be a better option for me."

N: If you could determine your caseload, what would it be and why?

B: "Children in care. You get to be creative, and you have some autonomy, in terms of getting out of the office and working with people. I enjoy that."

N: What propels you to continue?

B: "Doing it for 30 years, it's probably too late to leave now. I have a mortgage, bills to pay, and it can be satisfying sometimes. After 30 years you kind of get used to a job. I look forward to flexibility."

“ A LOT OF YOUTH DON'T SEE BEING IN CARE AS AN OPPORTUNITY, BUT WHEN THEY LEAVE CARE, THEY CAN MISS OUT ON THE HELP WE PROVIDE. ”

N: What has been your most memorable/impactful case?

B: "I suppose the happier ones, where kids get removed from a bad environment at a younger age and put up for adoption. It's harder for older kids. A lot of damage could be done by then, but at a young age you can grow in a different way."

N: What are you most proud of/greatest success story?

B: "It's hard to say. How do you define success? – kids that get adopted?, but even that's not guaranteed. Sometimes you rescue kids from terrible circumstances."

N: What parts of your job keep you up at night?

B: "Worrying about people, say a 17-year old female when their group home placement breaks down because they leave and you don't know if they're coming back or not."

N: You are the boss now...what would you change and why?

B: "Less bureaucracy, with fewer layers of people to go through for decisions, less paperwork."

N: What is your favourite part of the job?

B: "Relationships with people. It's why I do what I do. Being in the community, out of the office, interacting and trying to be helpful."

N: Have you ever gone to hell and back for a case?

B: "Yeah. I've had conflict with superiors, (when) they made money saving decisions, and I was making child saving decisions. I was called to the manager to explain myself. But, as a worker with ethics, you need to be efficient."

N: What is the hardest part of seeing a child leave care, what is the best part?

B: "Depends if they leave successfully. A lot of youth don't see being in care as an opportunity, but when they leave care, they can miss out on the help we provide. What will they do?"

Brandy Warman interviewed her grandmother Rose

Brandy: What are your daily struggles raising a kid in foster care kid in foster care?

Rose: "There are not many daily struggles raising a teen – checking the internet, dealing with (child protection services), school work..."

B: What are your views on the child welfare system?

R: "I think the child welfare system works fairly well for the children. I think they need more funding to hire workers."

B: What would you like to see change in the system?

R: "I would like to see a quicker response time from the workers. I think the government needs to provide more funding to hire more workers."

B: What was it like to take in my sisters and what did you learn?

R: "The most difficult part was learning how to deal with the agency and the courts. Looking after the girls was not that difficult because I was providing most of their primary care for several years already."

B: Would you ever take another kid in – why or why not?

R: "It would depend on the situation. I don't ever wanna see (my) family be placed in the system."

B: Would it be easier to raise me as a kid or from my age now?

R: "I think it's easier from a young age."

B: What can I do to make your job easier?

R: "Be more responsible with electronics, work harder at school and stay out of trouble."

B: How different would your life be if you weren't a foster care parent?

R: "It wouldn't be a lot different because I always have kids around. I would probably have a lot more time on my hands for myself but I also would find it a bit lonely."



Nathan Gorman interviewed two Child Youth workers

Nathan: Why did you choose to be a CYW?

Clint: "I always had family involvement with the child welfare system — my mom and dad always said if a kid needs a home that they could come to our house."

N: For you, what's the hardest part of your job?

Nikki: "Watching youth come from hard backgrounds."

N: After work, when you leave, is there anything that stays on your mind?

Clint: "Back stories and how I can help."

N: If you had the choice to go back to school, would you choose a different profession?

Nikki: "No. I like to help youth and my end goal is to be a social worker."

N: If you could, behaviour and background being a factor, would you consider fostering or adoption?

Clint: "Yes. For me it feels natural and normal. Everyone deserves someone who loves them and gives 110%."

N: Is there anything you worry about coming into work? If so what and why?

Clint: "Just the unknowing coming to work everyday."

N: Do you see corruption in the child welfare system?

Nikki: "Not corruption, but lack of funds. For instance, there's never enough funds for the youth to do things."

N: If there was anything you could change, in relation to child welfare, what is it and why?

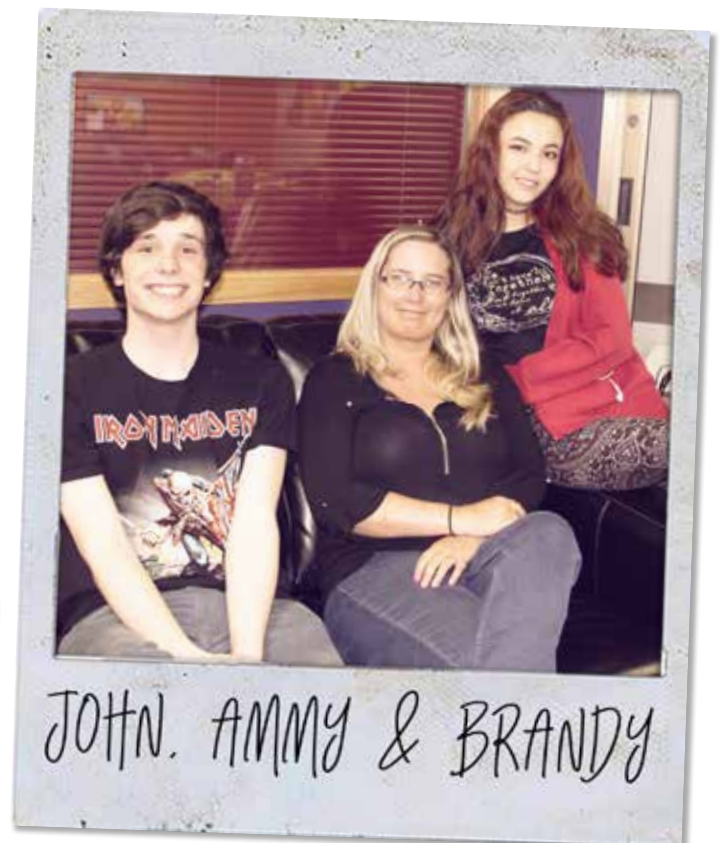
Clint: "Yes. Listen more to the youth care workers — we spend more time with the youth and are able to give more advocating opportunities."

N: Is there anything the youth can do to make your job easier?

Nikki: "Nothing. Our job is to support the youth and help them succeed."

Clint is a Child and Youth Care Worker at Edwards House.

Nikki has a B.A. and Double Major in Psychology, and Sociology, and splits her time between Edwards House and Brockwell House.



An Open Letter to the Ones Who Need It

By Phoenix

THIS IS AN OPEN LETTER TO ANYONE WHO'LL READ IT.

Anyone who needs it. Anyone who thinks they're watching their world crash down around them. Trust me sweetheart, I've seen my world end enough times to know it's not really the end, but just the beginning of whatever you want it to be. And sometimes, when chaos burns like wildfire around you, all you can do is fall in love with the warmth.



I know that sometimes the hardest thing about waking up in the morning is remembering what you were trying so hard to forget last night. I know how it feels to cry in the shower so no one can hear you. To wait for everyone else to fall asleep so you can fall apart. For everything to hurt so bad you want it all to end. To feel worthless, hopeless, like you don't belong, and no one would miss you if you just disappeared.

I know how it all feels. And to be quite honest, time doesn't heal wounds. Pain never goes away. You just make room for it. But someday, you will look back, and understand exactly why it had to happen. In order to love who you are, you cannot hate the experiences that shaped you.

The world is big, and everyone belongs somewhere. There are far better things to come than anything you've left behind. And what lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. The thing about pain is it demands to be felt. And I often question how emptiness can be so heavy. But happiness can sneak in a door you didn't think was open. And I promise you are never as broken as you think you are. Sure, maybe you have a few scars, and a few bad memories. Doesn't every superhero?

For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must first come completely undone. Its shell cracks, its insides come out. Everything changes. To someone that doesn't understand growth, that must look like complete destruction. Growth is painful. Change is painful. But nothing is as painful as being stuck somewhere you don't belong. The comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there. Feeling unsure and lost is part of your path. Don't avoid it. See what those feelings are showing you and use it. Take a breath. You'll be okay, even if you don't feel okay right now.

I've learned a lot this year — that things don't always turn out the way you'd planned, or the way you think they should. I've learned that things go wrong and they don't always get fixed or put back together the way they were before. I've learned that some broken things stay broken, and you can get through hard times and keep looking for better ones, as long as you have people that love you.

I've also learned that one of those people needs to be you. The most important day is the day you decide you are good enough for you. It's the day you set yourself free. We must learn to love even the parts of ourselves no one claps for. And that no one has truly loved you or is truly your friend until they have seen every dark shadow inside of you and stayed.

This life will hit you, hard. In the face, and then wait for you to get back up just to kick you in the stomach. But sometimes getting the wind knocked out of us is the only way to remind our lungs how much they like the taste of air. And you know, maybe life isn't about avoiding bruises and dodging bullets. Maybe it's about collecting scars to prove we showed up for it. It's a beautiful thing that we've got lungs to breathe and legs to climb mountains. It's a shame sometimes we don't realize that's enough.

The world is heavy. But your bones, ounce for ounce, are stronger than steel. Atom for atom, you are more precious than diamond and stars have died so that you may live. You need to remember these things when you are feeling weak and worthless. We all break sometimes, and that's how light gets in. And many times, you end up stronger at the parts that had been broken. You fall, you rise, you make mistakes. You're human, not perfect. You've been hurt, but you're alive.

Always remember what a precious privilege it is to be alive, to think, to breathe, to chase the things you love. Sometimes there is sadness in our journey, grief, heartache. But there is also beauty, love, and laughter — the sunshine that chases winter from your face. You have to keep putting one foot in front of the other even when you're hurt, because you never know what is waiting for you just around the bend.

At times, the world can seem like an unfriendly, sinister place, but believe me when I say that there is much more good in it than bad. All you have to do is look hard enough, and what might seem to be an unfortunate series of events, may in fact be the first steps of a journey. There will be people who don't understand your journey. They don't have to, it's not for them. Life is unpredictable. It changes with the seasons. Even the coldest of winters happen for the best of reasons. And although it may feel like winter is eternal, like all you'll ever do is freeze, I promise spring is coming. And with it comes brand new leaves.

Be soft. Softness is not weakness. It takes courage to stay delicate in a cruel world. Don't let the world make you hard. Don't let pain make you hate. Don't let bitterness take your sweetness. Take pride in the fact that, even though the rest of the world may disagree, you still believe it's a beautiful place. Build someone up. Put their insecurities to sleep. Remind them they're worthy, tell them they're magical. You never know how long your words can stay in someone's mind after you've spoken them. Be a light in this too often dim world, and I promise you it will feel better than any form of self-destruction.

There has never been someone like you and never will be again. Show the world who you are and what you can do. Make sure you are not a carbon copy of those who came before you, a by-product of society. We need you to be you. Stop focusing on all the things you don't know how to do and start cultivating the things you do know how to do. You have something beautiful to place in this world. Don't keep it buried inside your soul because you are afraid it isn't good enough.

If you're sad, I won't tell you to have a good day. Instead, I will simply advise you to have a day. Stay alive, feed yourself well. Take a shower, wash off the day. Drink a glass of water. Make the room dark, lay down and close your eyes. Notice the silence, notice your heart still beating. You made it, after all. And you can make it one more. Don't give up on yourself just yet. Every Saint has a past. Every sinner has a future. You're doing just fine, and I'm so proud of you.

What do you think it is like to be a social worker?

By Brandy

I think it's hard to be a social worker because there is so much you have to do. You have to make sure that kids have everything they need and so much more.

Things I would do differently would be maybe spend more time with the kids I'm working with and talk to them to see how they're doing. And I would be sure all their appointments are set up because that stuff is really important to have and sometimes social workers don't always get that stuff done.

Spur of the moment

By Nathan

I was struggling to sleep one night and I was on Facebook at 2 a.m.

This came to me at 1:52 a.m. I was awake, scrolling through Facebook videos, when I came across one titled *The Speech that Made The Whole School Cry* by former wrestler Marc Mero.

I choose to write about this because he was talking about his mother — how she cared so much about him but he sometimes pushed her away. He talked about being in Japan for wrestling and there was a knock on his hotel room door at 3 a.m. When he answered he realised it was a Japanese promoter. All he said to Marc was "You need to call home, there was an accident."

When he called back he was informed that his mom passed away.

The point of this piece is that we all take much for granted, youth especially — not just in care but in general everywhere. Kids take advantage of parents but they're there for us when we need them; they're there to set examples for us, and care for us.

So next time you tell them to screw off, just remember what's the last thing you want to remember saying to them — I love you or I hate you?

Think it through before you actually say it. Do you mean it, or is it out of anger or to get out of trouble?

Getting better

By Brandy

I've been thinking a lot about this lately.

Since I've been getting in trouble a lot lately, I'm gonna start getting better and doing the right things. And by that I mean not doing stuff that would get me suspended or grounded. So that way I can gain back some trust and go out more often.

Trapped

By Nathan

(The Newsletter Project group went to Trapped, a real-life escape room game in Halifax. Participants are challenged to figure out how to escape from a locked room, using their wits and logic.)

We had a great time at Trapped. I feel that Trapped was a great team-building exercise, allowing everyone to work together and think outside the box. The tasks that were presented were near impossible to do individually.

At Trapped, you have to use all kinds of different mind sets which involves more than one person. When we began, we decided who would search for what, with the ladies at the helm — Ammy, Brandy, and Kaitlin, and myself following behind.

Lowest time in my life

By Brandy

The lowest time in my life was when I found out I was being taken away from my parents — I was only 9 years old and I had no idea what was going to happen to me. I didn't know if I was ever going to see my mom again.

It was a very confusing day. I remember my mom calling my nan as she helped me pack my bags. She packed my clothes and some of my toys. I remember asking her in a panic where I was going and what was going to happen to me. She told me I was going to stay with my sister till everything is figured out.

Staying at my sister's was hard. I didn't really feel like I had a place to call home, so I stayed at my sisters for 6 months.

Nobody told me what was going on and why I wasn't allowed to see my mom. I was basically put in the dark. It made me feel like all the questions I had about everything going on weren't really important.

I am content

By Jazzmynn Johnston

I take pride in the things I do and who I am.

I carry way too much jealousy in my heart.

I am constantly depressed.

I love my boyfriend.

My mind, body, and emotions are disengaged from the world. I am content with who I am, who I am with, and everything I've stood for.

THANK YOU!



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