

THE VOICE

ISSUE 15

YOUTH IN CARE NEWSLETTER PROJECT

MAY 2015



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



CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF TELLING OUR STORIES IN OUR OWN VOICE!

2014 LAUNCH



Clockwise from top: Another successful year!; Andrew presents the Andrew Safer Award to Morgan Spencer, Breanna Latter also received the Safer award in 2014. Youth Voices of Nova Scotia Board: (left to right) Ammy Purcell, Sonya Ferrara (chair), Andrew Safer, Kay Rogers-Lidstone, John Odenthal (treasurer), Rebecca Moore.; Shauna and Breanna at the podium.

WHAT IS HOME?



My definition of home

By Alex

Nothing is better than coming home to an evening when you can just chill in simple peace and quiet. Having structure and security in your home

is one of the most important factors in making a living situation "your" home.



Home

By Breanna

Home can be defined in many ways. It's often a refuge from the outside life. A home is also not defined by its structure but by the people in it.

You can travel the world to search for what you need but when you return home, you'll find it.

They say that home is where the heart is.

Home

By Sally

I am from different homes
To parents and siblings
From the "I love you" to "I hate you"
I am from depression and stress that I carry everyday
And hate and losing everyone I love, as if yesterday it all began

I'm from harm and Danger from my parents I love
I am from drugs to "keep-it-a-secret"
From "stop crying" to "grow up"
And love that never showed up

I am from saying "good bye" to "I'll miss you"
From the promises people broke
And holding it all in to letting it all out
Inside I am angry and it grows stronger each day

I am from abuse that I dream about each night
So I put on a mask that hides the pain everyday
So I can remove my anger each night



The Newsletter group with Shauntay Grant

Home

By Chantel



I'm not 100% sure where home is yet. I realized it one day when I was sitting in my living room, just after I had started college and I just started feeling really lonely. I had been lonely before this, and for the longest time I didn't know why. It was a gut-wrenching loneliness that felt like someone had just stabbed me in the chest. And I thought to

myself "I want to go home".

Hold the phone, what? I can't want to go home, I'm already sitting in my house. But I realized, I wasn't home when my parents were together. I wasn't home when it was just my mom and us. Though she did her best, we fought a lot. I was anything but home when I lived with my dad. I wasn't home in any of the group homes. My foster parents' were wonderful but I didn't feel completely "home".

When I lived on the west coast, everything was amazing — the people, the scenery, I lived five minutes from the beach and swam every day. But I was watching my siblings grow up through a phone, so that wasn't home.

But I know the world is big, and everyone belongs somewhere. So maybe I belong in a little fishing village in Norway, or a bustling metropolis like Tokyo.

I'm going to start looking and hopefully sooner rather than later I'll find home.

Collage

By John



The images I put into the collage I worked on with Beri were a microphone, a motorbike, some hockey images, and a camera. These images represent my future in a few ways.

The microphone is representing my dream job, Radio/Television

Communication Broadcasting. The bike represents the way I want to live my life: with speed. People say that time flies when you're having fun. I don't want a slow and boring life; I want a fast paced life filled with excitement and the things I love.

The camera shows my interest in taking pictures and videos to save precious moments in life. And the hockey is there because I like hockey.

Homeless man

By Kimber



Last night I saw an advertisement with a picture of a homeless man that read: "We keep making better things, why can't we make things better?" and it really made me think.

Once upon a time this earth was just a big beautiful rock. Then, whether you believe in the big bang theory or some type of God, people were brought on to this rock we now call Earth. We, as the people on this earth, have had the opportunity to make this earth into anything we wanted.

Now millions of years later, this is what we created. We have people killing themselves, people killing each other, war, poverty, incurable diseases, racism, global warming and many more problems.

But are we worried about that? No, we're worried about new technology, money, cars and other materialistic things. Since when did things become more important than people?

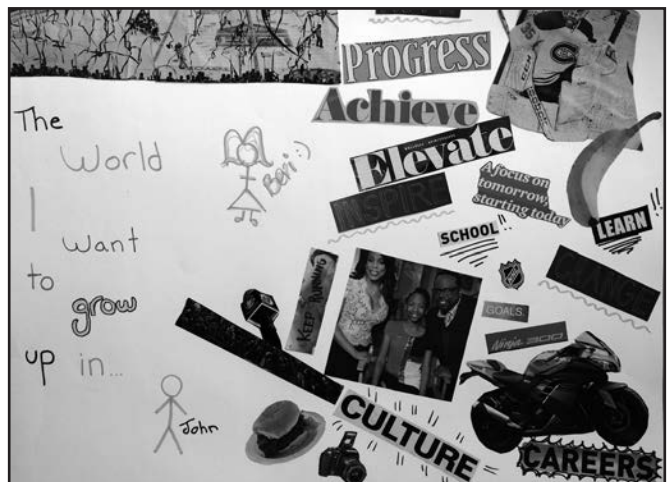
Get involved

By Beri



The key message I would like to expand on is that being a youth in care, you should take advantage of any and all opportunities offered to you. Being in care, it's important to use the system to your advantage because some things will not be offered to you again.

It's good to get involved in and educated about as many things as possible. Being in care can show you a whole other world than that of not being in care.



My Future

By Shauna Marie



At one point in this year, our Newsletter group wrote about what we wanted in our future. My goal at the time was to stay alive, and sometimes it was not the easiest and I doubted my success.

The wonderful people in my life were not going to let that happen, and were not giving up on me, at any cost. Sometimes it took tough love, sometimes it took all-nighters and many visits to the IWK.

But I've made it, and it's safe to say I can finally stand on my own two feet. Slightly beaten by the winds of life, I can stand tall and proud because I am strong. I owe it to my gracious selfless foster parents for their love and support. I honestly could not thank them enough, or all of my family for that matter, including the people of the IWK Garron centre, and my wonderful family at The Voice.

Because of these things I can start to think about and plan my future. I already have a part-time job, am focusing a balanced amount of energy on keeping myself healthy and staying positive, and also succeeding in school.

If I could show last-year me to the future that is me now, I would have been more optimistic. My future is bright and beautiful and full of crazy adventures just waiting to happen.



Future

By Tamara



The future is untold. Anything can happen. We can hope and imagine and dream and believe but in the end, God will make his mark.

Everyone has a different thought on the future. Things are different in all of them. Me, I just want happiness. I don't want to be sad anymore. I want to have hope and bravery.

I want to be proud of who I am, I want to feel accomplished. I want to be me and do me, always.

Dream

By Heaven



Since I was little, every once in awhile I would have this dream. The dream was about me driving in a car, then I fall asleep in the dream and then I'm in a gas station. But when I try to pump gas there's weird crab spiders everywhere! I eventually run through the gas station screaming that I'm thirsty and end up stealing a bottle of water from the store and get knocked out somehow.

Then I end up in an alley yelling at an old woman that I don't want any cheese. From there I get arrested and put in an asylum because everywhere I look I see cheese.

What is your dream job?

By Alex

Flight Attendant — Real estate broker — Entrepreneur

I would like to start out being my own boss as an innovative entrepreneur and a hard working independent strong female figure.

Then I'll work my way up in the business side of the world by becoming a determined real estate broker that works all around the world, persuading customers to buy big gorgeous houses in the most beautiful cities that you could imagine.

From there you never know what situation the world will place you in.

Dreams

By Breanna

Dreams, so hard to remember but so vivid. Every morning waking up thinking "did that just happen and did I just relive it in my dream, almost as a memory?"

My dreams almost always seem so real. Even when I fall asleep or trip in my dream, my body actually jumps and I get the feeling in the pit of my stomach that I have really fallen.

My dreams are my own little exciting world, where anything can happen. My dreams are real too, as if it has happened in my past and when I dream, it's just like a reminder of that memory.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



How long ago was the year 2000? It was before 9-11 and the war on Terror, before Beyonce split from Destiny's Child and even before Facebook took over the world.

It was the same year that Andrew Safer conceived of an innovative program for local youth in care, and called it the Newsletter Project. It started modestly, but has grown in the past 15 years into a nationally-regarded literacy and life-skills program for youth in care.

Ever since Andrew handed the keys of the Newsletter Project to me in September of 2008, I've learned so much about the character and resilience of the scores of young people who have been involved in the program.

Some of their personal stories are beyond heartbreaking but they each show such toughness, perseverance and a willingness to make the best of a bad situation.

This year's group has been no different. We welcomed some new faces to the group including Liv and Heaven, two of the youngest ever participants. John is the only boy in the group and almost as big a Habs fan as I am. And we

welcomed back Beri, who had been involved a few years ago and came back this year, excited to be part of the group again.

Some others started with us but for a variety of reasons moved on with their lives. So what this year's group lacked in numbers, it more than made up in enthusiasm, lively discussion and some really wonderful writing.

In addition to our regular Wednesday sessions, the group braved the cold again to skate at the Oval. We welcomed the holiday season with a dinner at a restaurant and an exchange of gifts.

Through the kind support of the Sun Life "Share the Stage" program, we were able to take all the youth to Neptune Theatre's production of A Christmas Story in early December. It was the first live professional theatre most of the youth had seen and was certainly a memorable evening.

Thank you to everyone who made this year's program possible, from the generous funders to the dedicated drivers, volunteers, social workers and the many friends of the Newsletter Project.



Hot chocolate and a Beavertail take the chill off a night of skating at the Emera Oval

Facilitator's Report

By Ammy



Wow! 15 years! I am so happy that this program has been around for so long. As I think back on all the many years I have been involved, I can't help but get emotional. I think about all the amazing people I have met and life-long friends I have made.

I think about all the people who have touched my life in ways I can never explain. I have made life-long connections that can never be broken with people who truly care about me as I do them.

"THE NEWSLETTER TAUGHT ME THAT PEOPLE DID CARE, AND PEOPLE WOULD LISTEN TO WHAT I HAD TO SAY."

When I joined the Newsletter 14 years ago, I was a young teenager who didn't know what was happening to my life and I was angry at the world for it. I felt as though no one cared what happened to me or what I wanted.

But the Newsletter taught me that people did care, and people would listen to what I had to say. Even if they couldn't fix all the problems or answer my many questions, they listened. Andrew Safer, and in later years Sandy MacDonald and all the adult volunteers who have been involved over the years, were always there to offer advice or help in any way they could. They helped with homework or a letter of reference for a job and even my university application, or talking me through some tough times in my life.

I can't thank them enough for the impact they had on helping me grow up and become the person I am today. Even now at 27 years old, I know I can go to any one of them if I needed help with something. Ha, I ask Sandy for random life advice all the time.

Now I'm in the position to turn the tables and be the person who will listen and try to help however I can. It's an amazing feeling and I will never let that go. Here's to 15 amazing years! Let's get started with the next 15!

Becky and Jenny

After many years of involvement with the Newsletter Project, Becky Moore stepped away this year to turn a new page in her life. She left for Vancouver in the midst of the long winter, looking forward to some travel time and new adventure.

She began her involvement with the program as a young participant, creating some lovely poetry, writing and drawings for the Voice. She became a facilitator and has helped keep the Newsletter sessions running smoothly.

Becky is a very creative person, drawing on her aboriginal roots to create beautiful art and jewelry. She joined Ammy, Lucas and me on a trip to Ottawa for the National Youth In Care conference in 2012.

We will miss her at the Newsletter with her calm presence and ever-supportive words for the youth, and wish her the best on her life journey.

Jenny Robichaud took on the responsibility last year as a facilitator-in-training, developing leadership skills within the Newsletter Project. She also started a demanding library and information technology program at the NSCC, a large life change for any young person. As a youth in care, she moved into SAP and took on a lot more responsibility in her own life.

Her dedication to her schoolwork limited Jenny's involvement this year but we always enjoy her friendliness, commitment to the youth and her quirky humour. Good luck Jenny.



Becky and Jenny at the 2014 newsletter Christmas party



Friendship

By Breanna

Since we met, you have made me a better person. It's like I have known you my whole life, and I know I can tell you anything and you won't tell a soul. I know you're always there when I need someone to lean on.

We might get mad at each other for stupid shit, but that can never tear us apart — it only makes us stronger. I am so glad I am able to be comfortable around you, and show you the real me and never have to worry about you judging me.

You are amazing in so many different ways — you're my other half, forever and always and most of all you're my sister. It's like you know me better than I know myself. I just thank you for accepting me for who I am and never trying to change me into something I'm not.

I honestly don't know what I would be doing in my life or if I would still be here if it wasn't for you. I am so thankful to have someone like you in my life. I love you so much. I hope we never lose the friendship that we have, and it means a lot to me.

What is true friendship? A true friend says what their friend needs to hear even when they might get angry. A true friend doesn't leave because they're afraid to be with you, a true friend doesn't leave when the fun stops and things get uncomfortable. A true friend recognizes the value of friendship.



Drawing by Breanna Latter

Friends

By Liv



Friendship is from the first time you meet to taking your very last step. It's from holding each other's hands before graduation or dancing the night of the prom.

Friends can also be the hate and sadness you feel after a fight. But friendship is the best love you will ever have.

Love Myself

By Kimber

Most of my life I have been told that I "don't open up". Therapists have told me it's the result of traumatic experiences and moving around a lot. For years, I thought it was true.

I have realized what the problem is. The problem is that there is no problem. I am just independent. I have become self aware and realized that when you are born, you are born alone; when you die, you die alone. When nobody is around, you are alone.



But are you really alone? No, you always have yourself. To me, nobody can understand you the way you can. You can have a friend or even a close family member do you wrong but you can always trust yourself to not do wrong.

That is why I love myself. I am my own support, my own best friend. And I think everyone should feel the same way about themselves.

Beauty

By John Langer

The word "beauty" is seen in different ways. Beauty can refer to a personality, an appearance, something done well and more. Beauty is what makes up our personalities, it defines us — our appearance does not.

The beauty inside is what keeps us going and stops us from second guessing. It is the fuel that we burn each day, the never-ending fire.



A big accomplishment for myself

By Shauna

I walked into a room with similar lighting to a hospital, a mix of many races and classes of people that were all here for some form of government approval — it's a necessary task, not an enjoyable one.

Access Nova Scotia is where you go to write your driver's test. The people there for that reason are the only people with an anticipated grin on their faces. Like me, my second time around, sign test passed, road rules failed.

But I can't let that get me down any more than it already had. Yeah, I'm bummed out, sitting here in an uncomfortable government chair, the color of weak coffee and depression.

I don't know what to think — am I going to really be a driver? This is a big thing. As my number gets called I once again grab my test. It looks similar, black and white like any other test. Smells like fresh printer ink.

As I go through the questions I feel confident, rather care free, far more relaxed than the first time. In a matter of 15 minutes I finish and hand the lady at the front desk my test. She has straight brown hair and is in her mid-30s.

I start to wonder about what her life is like as I wait for her to mark my test. How many kids does this woman have? When's the last time she went to see a movie in the theatre? My thoughts were interrupted by her calling me over in a very flat monotone voice.

I shiver with fear, she looks somber as she said that I passed and she stamped my form. I blinked. I blinked until my eyelashes were sore. I did it, I passed the test, Shauna Crane can now drive a car.

I felt the biggest surge of excitement over such a common thing. Freedom and independence means the world to me. As I walked out of the motor vehicle branch, I felt like a new person, I felt accomplished. Even though it was -15 outside and me without a sweater, I felt completely fine. There is nothing that can stop me now.

Define success and what it means to you

By Alex

Success could be two things; it can be used to describe a point in your life where you finally are happy and fulfilled your dreams, or it could be meant to describe someone as successful by how much they are worth. In my eyes success is just another word to measure how happy a person is with their life.

By Kimber

To be successful, I think, is thinking if you were to die, would you be satisfied about the way you have lived your life. If you think you would be, then you have been successful.

Success is about being happy and satisfied no matter if there were hard times.

“Surprise!”

By Chantel

When I lived on the West Coast last year, the DCS let me fly back to see my family for Christmas. My younger sister's birthday happens to be about a week before Christmas, so they let me organize the flight so that I would get there the day of her birthday while my sister was in school.

My mom happened to have a box that was roughly my size, and she put me in the box, wrapped me up, put a bow on me and videotaped as she unwrapped me and I jumped out and yelled “Surprise!”

That Christmas Eve, we made a fort in the loft in my brother's closet and tracked Santa and watched the *Nightmare Before Christmas* and we all slept up there.

AND IN THE BEGINNING...

Founder of newsletter project recalls how it all started.

by Andrew Safer

Back in prehistoric times—in the year 2000—Barrie MacFarlane phoned and asked me to come to his Quinpool Road office to brainstorm. (Barrie supervised social workers who worked with children in care at Children's Aid Society of Halifax—now the Department of Community Services).

The bread crumbs of this story lead to Gretchen Skye. She was working for the Nova Scotia Council for the Family as Coordinator of the Nova Scotia Youth in Care Network Project at the time. Gretchen had told Barrie that the Youth Employability Project had some funding available to support a program specifically for youth in care! Barrie called me because I had co-developed a school-based program for youth (*Healthy Relationships: a Violence-Prevention Curriculum*) and conducted some workshops for the Agency with parents and their children based on some of the activities from this program.

Barrie and I figured that if the youth could create their own newsletter, it would not only help them develop communication, collaboration and social skills, but it would also help them to collectively find their VOICE. And so the Youth in Care Newsletter Project was born. The first group started a few months later, and an awesome group it was! Trevor blew everyone away with his masterful illustrations. In his article "Occupational Foreshadowings", Trevor envisioned some cool work for himself: "I'd love to design and plan buildings, then see them come to life in 3D." Abigail, a prolific writer, shared this observation: "If social workers are here to help, then why does it seem that they are forever hindering our progress?" Lisa picked up where Abigail left off in her article "Being Ignored": "Although an increase in the social workers would help, the fact is that they are not listening to us now. They say they do the best they can, but ignore the important things we have to say. Unfortunately for them, we find ways to make ourselves heard, even if it is the wrong idea."

Tracey illustrated her article "How Staff Treat Us" with a tennis shoe emblazoned with the word "STAFF" and it



was about to stomp on three youth in care. The last line of Seth's article "My Experience in Care" reads: "Kids should be able to be kids and not be forced to grow up way before their time." Trevor's brilliant illustration shows a young guy wearing a shirt and tie and a man's dress jacket that comes down to his calves, and tennis shoes with their laces untied. Amy wrote about how much she loved acting in a play and being coached by actors from The Irondale School of Ensemble Theatre. "We did four performances," she wrote. "Now they're all done with and one of the best things about it is we get paid for it."

This first newsletter was 14 pages, and the youth named it: "The System: It Doesn't Work For Us". Kudos to the Department of Community Services for funding the Newsletter Project since 2001, considering how much criticism the youth levelled at the system in the first newsletter. It's noteworthy that the level of criticism has abated over the years.

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Thank you

By Liv

How could I possibly thank you
enough?
The one who makes me feel whole,
The one who's there at nights to
tuck me in when I'm not feeling
right,
The one who helps me when I'm
crying,
The one who's an expert at picking
up when I was lying,
The one who sees me off to school
and spends the days alone, yet
somehow produces a smile.

Threads

By Morgan

Broken, shattered
Held together by fine thread,
Ready to fall apart at any moment.
Each of us comparing the glass of
ourselves.
Always wondering which shard
will be the one that makes us
fall apart,
Which thread will snap first,
As we pull on them to test their
strength with every breath we
take.

I never

By Shauna Marie

I never in my darkest nightmares
would think I would have to bury
both of my parents in the same
year.
I never in my wildest optimism
thought I would survive that year
Let alone make it as far into the
perspective of life that I am now.
I never believed such strength and
light could come out of all that
hurt and darkness.
So sir, I will set down my coffee
and answer your question.
I do believe in magic, and I believe
it can be conjured only in the
perspective of darkness.

Moments

By Breanna

Life has its moments
Its up and downs
Moments with smiles and with
frowns
Moments with pain and struggle
Filled with teasing and more jokes
Good times and bad times
We all go through it all
Life is a joy which will cause you to
shed a tear
But you can't hide behind your
emotion
Always keep going and rise up when
you are down

*"Accept yourself for everything you
are and everything you're not."*
by Morgan

Mask

By Liv

I look in my mirror and always ask what
mask should I place on my face today.
It can't be the sad one, it shows the world
my true feelings and it's too revealing.
The mask I wear camouflages the true me.
It's my public face, that I remove each night
when I stare into the mirror's bright light.
It's the mask that only my eyes can see.
It speaks of all my history, and all my girlish
ways and my young teenage dreams.
It tells of good times and pain so hard to bear.
So I choose my mask so carefully to cover the
face, which was given to me,
The one only meant for my eyes to see.

Stale Tea

By Shauna Marie

Stale tea and metro transit.
There are three things that are more true
Than unpaid bills and leaky roofs:
Man is controlled by passion,
Heroin has nothing on the music man,
We destroy flowers because we think
they are beautiful
We destroy ourselves because we think
we are not.

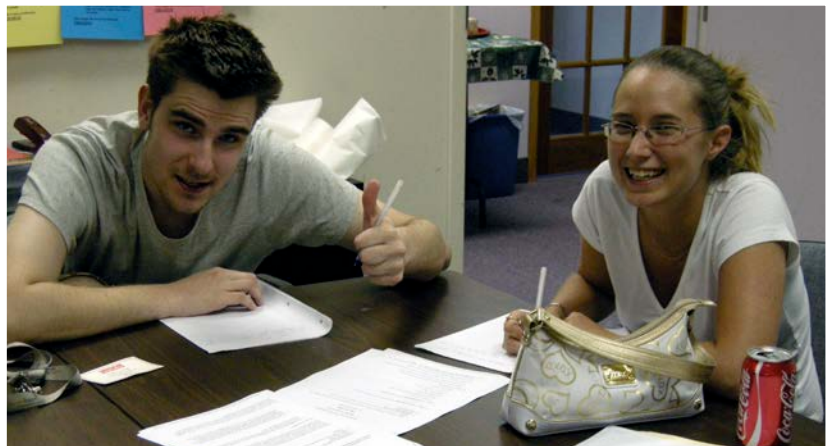
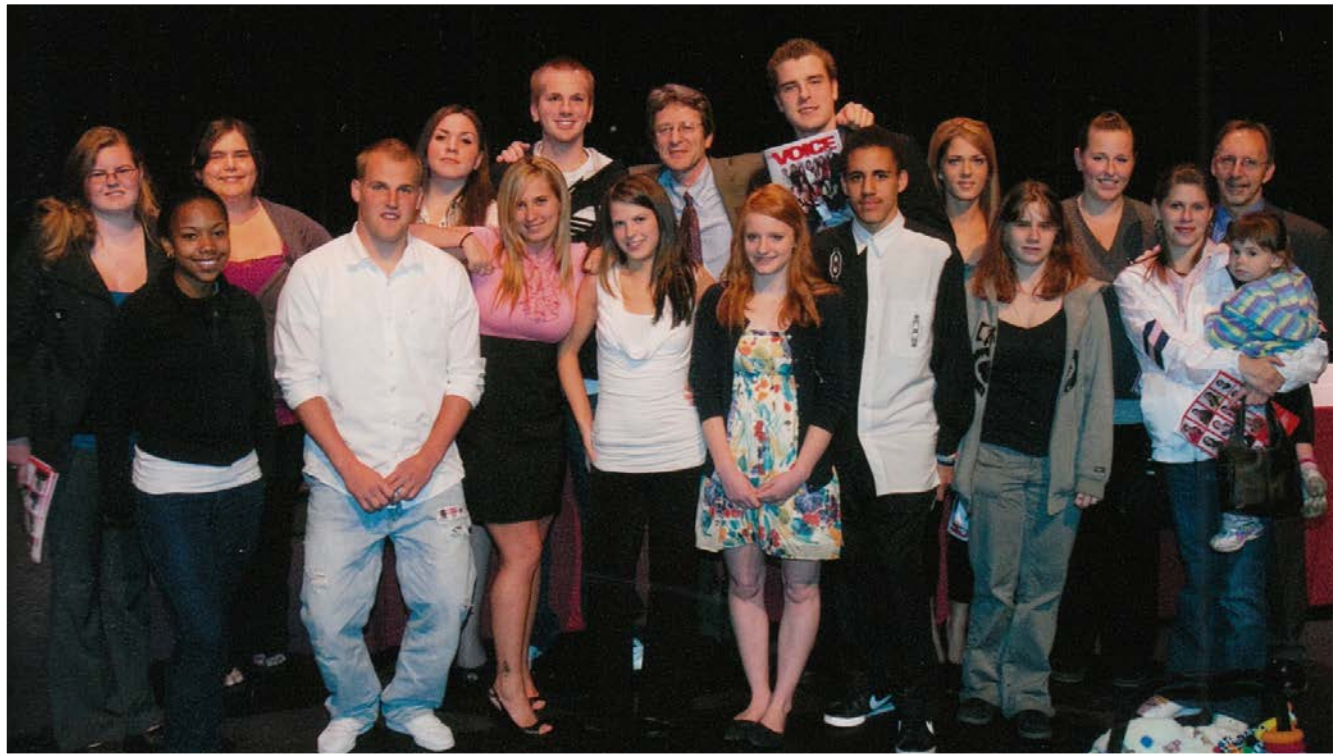
Battle Ground Unknown

By Morgan

We break ties
Choosing sides
A battle of whim
Where none can win
Trouble follows wherever you go
Our fates are unknown
Never truly our own
Seeking light
Fumbling and falling
Moving slowly forward
Till we reach the sunshine at the
end of the path

By Jaydee Riley, former Voice contributor

I look at you and I can see it in your face.
You think you hide it, but I see you.
I see the hurt, the dark circles beneath
your eyes and the quiet plea dancing on
your bottom lip, too afraid to be voiced,
too afraid to be heard because you're too
afraid to be hurt.
I just want to take you and wrap you up
in my arms and hold you, console you,
tell you things that you'll believe. But you
don't seem to believe anything anymore
because you have been deceived far too
many times.
So I'll just look at you and see the pain in
your fake smile, and I'll smile back and
I'll hear the attempted deception when
you tell me that you're just tired. And I'll
say, me too.
I know you're broken inside. I can see it
in your face; violets are blue, and so are
you.





WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By Jaydee Riley

Hello, I'm James aka JayDee, and I'm a past participant of the "Voice Youth Newsletter". In the past few years, my life has had many bumpy roads & obstacles to face, but with the right guidance & encouragement, I have succeeded with great success!

I have just finished up the last remaining four credits towards my high school graduation through NSCC's adult learning program and will graduate in June.

What has been a long road and journey to overcome through the years has been finally faced with great achievement! I can now look at myself and be proud about where I've gotten myself today. My next chapter in life will lead me to enrolling in a CCA (continuing care assistant) program through NSCC's Waterfront campus for fall 2015. I look forward to the knowledge and skills I will learn through this course and look forward to a beginning of a future and career for myself.

I'm currently an employee at Hollister, working in retail and looking forward to enhancing my abilities within the year.

By Tina Doucette

I was with the Newsletter Project years and years ago. I have been away from it for about seven years now.

To tell you a bit where I am today, I'm a mother of a six-year old beautiful smart little boy who is my whole world. My friends and family relationships are going good at the moment.

I have had difficulties in the school area since I left care. I have tried to get on track with school several times; I even changed career paths. I was 3/4 the way finished a CCA course and am hoping to return to it.

I'm on assistance and trying to figure out all my options to get back to college. My main goal is to get a career, not just a job. Overall, life is a journey and I'm not stopping yet.

By Chrystine-Lee Reid

My name is Chrystine and I grew up in care. When I was seven I was placed in a home and there started my journey. I lived with some pretty amazing people along the way, people with hearts big enough to take in children that are not their own.

While in care I was part of The Voice, a newsletter filled with the voices and opinions of us, and I love that I had that opportunity. Being with The Voice taught me that I had a voice even as a minor. I only hope that my children will feel like they have the same voice.

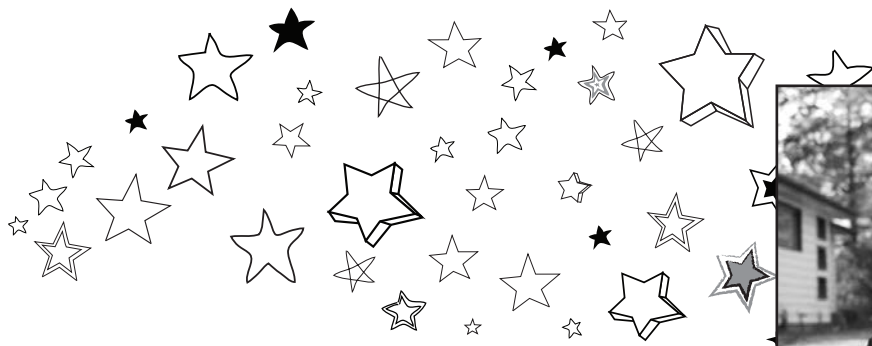
Now ten years later, I am a mother of four beautiful children; Cameron, age 10, Elizabeth, age 7, Riley, age 3 and Charlie nine months. I only hope I can give the same voice to my children as they grow. I hope to see The Voice running for a very long time; it's an amazing program with so many benefits, because we all need a voice, no matter how big or how loud. We all have a voice and we should keep teaching our young that.

I want to take this time to thank my foster mother, Frieda, for getting me involved with the program and for some of the best years of my life. Rest in peace Frieda, and thank you for opening your home and heart to a lost little girl.

By Elyse Saulnier

Since leaving the Newsletter I have gotten my grade 12 diploma and had numerous jobs before I got one that I have been with for the past 4 years. I love it and the guys I work with.

I have also started a family with my spouse that I have shared nine and a half wonderful years with. I couldn't be happier. I'm looking forward to see what the future brings for my family and me.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By George Dean

When I started as a Child and Youth Care worker in Nova Scotia I had five different positions with five different employers. They were all casual positions so I was called when someone called in sick, or for holidays and such. Casual positions are how you start off working in the field of Child and Youth Care in Nova Scotia for the most part.

So for someone like me who has numerous expenses and not having that monthly steady income was very hard. In addition there was a bus strike and I didn't have a car so I lost out on a lot of work and my bills piled up sky high.

My wife and I decided to take the long journey "out west" and we moved to Edmonton for work. I decided to get a job working in an office, running my own program for domestic violence. Then as time rode on, my boss added in other jobs including youth work, family work, and supervised visits.

I became overwhelmed and had numerous meetings trying to explain that I was not hired for all of this but nothing got solved. So I decided to look for another job and go back to being a youth care worker.

I read a job posting online for a youth worker in a 'ranch' type setting. I have only seen things like this in movies and did not realize they truly existed. I applied three times and called constantly wanting an interview and eventually I got one. Once I drove onto the property for the interview I knew in my heart I just *had* to work there. The interview went well, and I was offered a full-time position. I was one of the newest youth care workers at Oak Hill Boys Ranch. From the moment I started work, I knew my heart and soul were in the business.

I worked very hard every day learning what had to be learned. It's a different setting. Oak Hill is a full working ranch complete with horses, pigs, ducks, cows, donkeys and more. It's the children's and staff's responsibility to take care of the animals as part of a therapeutic approach to teach the children to *care* for something. A lot of the kids



George Dean was an adult volunteer with the Newsletter Project in 2012-13.

here on the ranch have challenges with aggression, self-regulation, drugs, and mental health, just to name a few. It is our goal as youth care workers to help them develop skills and supports to work through these issues.

Oakhill operates a program model called Children And Residential Experience (CARE) and a crisis management model called Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI). Both are totally different models than I was exposed to back home in Nova Scotia.

I got into a great routine early on as a youth care worker. I applied to be a team leader when one opened up in another facility on a ranch only seven months after I started, and instead they decided to make me a youth care supervisor. The transition from youth care worker to supervisor was a challenge for me, but in the long run it has worked out ok.

I like to think I still try to work very hard at my job, learning new strategies in working with youth and the staff teams in my program. It's never short of exciting and I learn something new every day. I directly supervise a program for 8 children and 5 other staff beside myself. We try to teach independence, caring, self-regulation strategies, and developing self-esteem.

I have been a supervisor now for two years and love my job more than the day I started. I am glad I came back to work directly with the kids and for this organization. It's helped change my outlook on life and how to cope in certain situations for the better. I can't see myself ever doing anything different.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By Mandi Jarvis

It's almost hard to believe that the newsletter is 15 years old. It's such an amazing project and I hope to see it continue for at least another 15 years! I still have my journals and I read through them from time to time. They are a nice reminder of how hard I've worked to get to where I am now.

For me, foster care feels like a lifetime ago. I'm now a [mostly] mature adult with two gorgeous kids of my own and a lovely partner. My life didn't turn out exactly as I had planned, but I wouldn't change it for the world.

Living with different families and seeing how they all worked has influenced my parenting, and I believe it's made me a better parent and person.

If things are tough now, just know you will get through this part of your life and it will make you a stronger person. Keep your chin up, and learn to budget your money!

I know most of us didn't have the best start to life, but you've got an opportunity to make your start to adult life the best you can. Take advantage of the help that's out there for you. You deserve your best shot in life regardless of your background.

By Gillian (Seth) Dakins

I was in the very first Newsletter Project published and the last one I got the chance to write for was way back in 2004. When I should have been finishing high school I was working full-time at Wendy's just to pay rent — 16 years old and terrified. No parents to see me through or point me in the right direction.

I am proud to say that I have made a huge turn-around from the statistic I should have been labeled. I've now been with my fiancé for almost 13 years, and we have 2 beautiful children that light up our life like fire works. We are months away from a mortgage-free life and finally content with what life has thrown at us.

My best friend to this day is my foster sister Tina Doucette — my sister and my angel. We've been through some pretty tough times together but in the end, we're not victims, we're survivors.

Life is what you make it. Just because we're foster children doesn't mean we are all bad or will never succeed. We were just children trying to find our own paths in this hectic world.

Transitioning out

By Tina Doucette

My name is Tina Doucette and I'm a former youth in care. I was what they called a ward of the court, in permanent care. But really all that means is the government was legally responsible for me. I was in care since I was six years old, never allowed to be adopted. I moved around a lot — been in and out of foster homes as well as group homes but never really fit in anywhere. It took me five and half years to get out of high school. I was 20 when I graduated and two months pregnant.

I was accepted to college in September for the career of my dreams. I thought my life was starting. With help I could get through it, with the government paying for school and living expenses and my family helping with the baby on the way.

Well, the start of my life turned for the worst when my health got bad and I deferred college for a year. Soon after I found out there would be no more school

"I WAS AN ADULT BUT I HAD NO EXPERIENCE AT BEING ON MY OWN."

funding
at all after
my 21st
birthday

that was fast approaching. A baby on the way, and I had no source of income and support. I was very unprepared for what had happened. I lost my plans for life. So I did the only thing I was ever taught to do — get the help from the government. At that age the only thing is assistance.

Now I'm not saying I should have been in care all my life. But I was cut off when I needed it the most. March 3 came and it was all over. I had no life skills to get me through any of the situations that came — money, baby, paying rent, bills, no credit.

I was an adult but I had no experience at being on my own. I have never even lived on my own. I was in shock then and still am trying to get through it six years later. Youth, especially in care, should be better prepared for independence than just let go and expected to succeed. A summer or after-school job would have taught me a lot but I was never made to have a part-time job. I got my allowance right till I was 21.

By 21, I had never paid a bill in my life. I was allowed to buy my own clothes and I had everything handed to me. All I had to do was ask. I am 27 now, in debt, still trying go to school and still on assistance. I have to live with what happened to me and my lack of life skills that I am finally learning now.

A VISIT FROM BRENDAN MAGUIRE



Halifax Atlantic MLA Brendan Maguire (*third from left*) came to the Newsletter to share his powerful story of his challenging life as a youth in care in Halifax and his later success with his career and family.

Resilience

By Breanna

After hearing Brendan's story about what he has gone through in foster care, it made me feel really sad for him. But most of his story made me realize that even though you can go through hell and say you're done and you just want to give up, he still came out better than anyone thought — probably even himself.

I think he is doing very well and has a great job. He also taught me that even though life is hard, and you're so done with life and want to give up, that there is still hope — keep trying and never give up. And I really admire that about him.

By Beri

My impression of Brendan speaking to us was that it made me feel sad to hear about the unfortunate events he went through as a youth. I am thankful that such things didn't happen to me when I was in care.

Brendan encouraged me to strive for success. He accomplished so much after being from a similar situation that I was in.

Brendan Maguire shares his voice

By Shauna

A local politician by the name of Brendan came to visit our newsletter one Wednesday evening, and the outcome was more touching than I ever expected. He was also a youth in care, with a very troubled past. He spoke with such raw emotion that it truly humbled me, and gave me hope in my future as a youth in care.

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL AND ENLIGHTENED CAN GROW FROM A MUCH-DEPLETED, DAMAGED SOIL, BUT MUST COME TO TERMS WITH ITS ROOTS.

Brendan has made something of himself in spite of his hell of a childhood. Instead of the usual "it gets better speech" he really shared all of his struggles and how he overcame them, but never forgot where he came from.

It just goes to show that something beautiful and enlightened can grow from a much-depleted, damaged soil, but must come to terms with its roots. All in all it was my most helpful experience at the The Voice to see living proof in what one day I want to become.

His visit was a great attribute to our newsletter and I hope he comes again.

Trust Borders

By Morgan

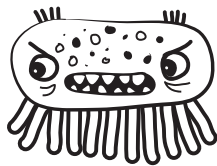
There are people in my life that I would do pretty much anything for. Some of them I know just enough to say this and I bet most of them would do the same.

This loyalty is very rare to give or to find. I have found that loyalty with people who connect with what I have gone through to get where I am because they have gone through it as well. It takes a lot to trust anyone that much. The fact they trust me and that I trust them speaks volumes.

The New Virus

By John

I wrote this story using dark themes and twisted them to make things sound a little bit different.



There's a new virus going around. It's a computer virus and a disease. Some symptoms include drainage of your self-esteem, a loss of reputation, a dose of anger and depression, and much more. We've talked to some victims of this new spreading virus, and we understand that they've developed some dark feelings.

Now, not everyone reports these symptoms I'm about to list off, but it isn't rare to suffer from a sudden disturbing mind set, a consumption of bleach, a loss for air (due to a rope), a need for a firearm, and a loss of blood (commonly from their wrists). This disease can and has been fatal. A lot of people suffering have tried hard to run away but it's everywhere.

There is no running. This is a real life nightmare. You just want to forget what you are, and forget what you feel. In this short period of time you've been altered, this is deep in your veins. You feel the same day in and day out, you feel so shallow.

Trust me you're not insane, you just want to be free. All you want is to give it all away. You're not to blame, don't feel any shame in this, your sorrow keeps chasing you.

We've just received word that this new virus now has a name, and its symptoms match those of bullying. But since this virus was born on the Internet, we've named it cyber bullying.

This unforgiving virus has claimed many lives, and it has not quit as we have witnessed in this past decade. This will continue until we as humans can come together and take action but until then, these strict laws being put into place just won't work. We must end this seemingly endless catastrophe.

If I could change something in Halifax what would it be?

By Alex

I would build a place for entertainment where teens could go and have fun.

I feel this place is boring enough that it pushes teens to make their own fun by having parties with alcohol or just doing illegal activities. We don't have any kind of place around for those ages except for the movie theatre which sometimes gets old if you live in Halifax where that's the only thing you can really do.

So I was thinking of a teen nightclub where teens to young adults can go and socialize, dance and just have fun because lots of schools in the city are cancelling year round dances.

A pain-free world? No thanks

By Kimber

"Imagine a world pain free". Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? But is it really? Would life really be better if there were no such thing as pain and trauma? If I had the power to erase all the pain and trauma from my life, I would not do it.

I ACCEPT ALL THE PAIN I HAVE BEEN THROUGH BECAUSE IT HAS MADE ME THE STRONG AND MATURE PERSON I AM TODAY.

I truly believe that God will never put me in a situation I won't be able to handle and that everything happens for a reason. I accept all the pain I have been through because it has made me the strong and mature person I am today. I accept the pain I am going to face in the future because it will make me an even stronger person that I will need to be to become a wise adult.

Words Matter

By Morgan

What you say can hurt you. It's not a matter of how, it's just that they can and we all know your words can hurt others.

I've already been broken by someone else's words, the ones you know are hard to swallow but they get forced down anyways, 'til you believe them, 'til you live them.

There are words that hurt not just you but everyone around you. When it's you saying all the negative things, it's easier to believe something you say yourself.



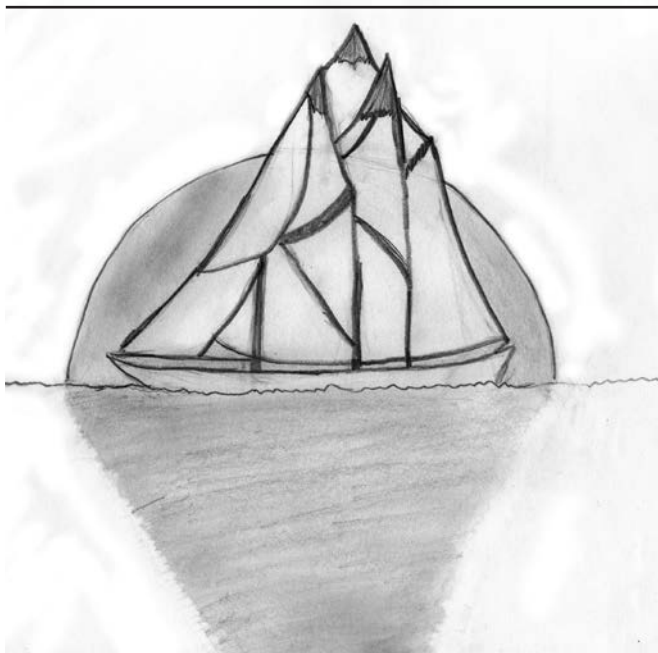
Above: Breanna's drawing of Stephen Harper

Free association: Bridge

By John

Not only do bridges connect one piece of land to another, it connects people, allowing us to live our daily life the way we do. The bridge gives us access to different areas; it allows us to get to work, to get to dinner, and more.

One thing I find funny is the Confederation Bridge. It's the first thing I think of when someone talks about a bridge. Confederation makes me think of Canada splitting away from Britain, which to me is ironic, how we break away, but yet our bridge connects us.



Above: Drawing of boat by John

Someplace warm

By Chantel

"If you could go some place warm, where would you go and what would you hope to see?"

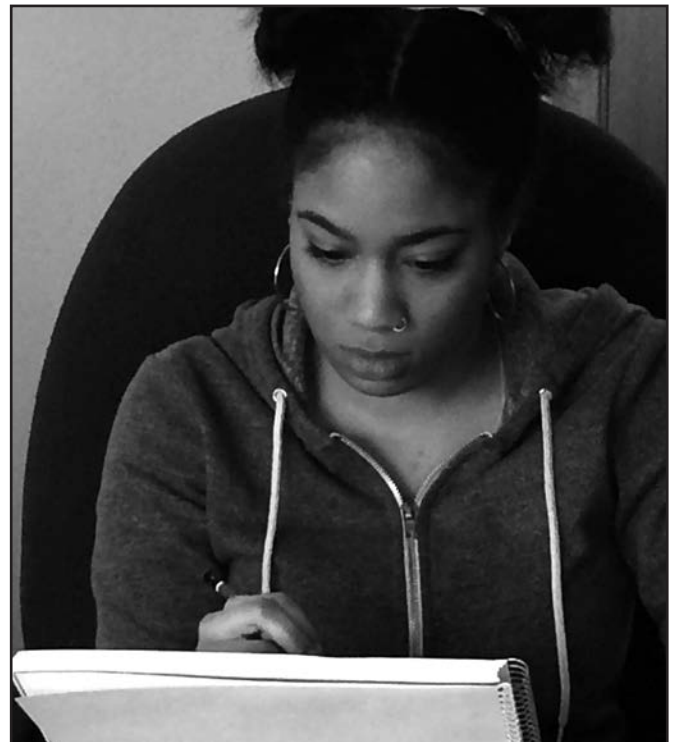
Can this place be fictional? Because my first choice would be the wizardry world in Summer, where I would first go to Ollivander's Wand Shop in Diagon Alley and buy my silver lime wood wand with unicorn core, 12 1/4 inches with high flexibility.

I would then go see Eeylops Owl Emporium & Magical Menagerie and buy a tawny owl and name it Rosemary. I would have to go to Potage's Cauldron Shop after that, to get my cauldrons for Potions class, followed by a visit to the Apothecary for ingredients for my potions.

After that, I would have to see Wiseacre's Wizarding Equipment for all of my wizardry supplies. And then I would go off to Hogwarts, where the sorting hat would sort me in to either Gryffindor or Ravenclaw.

Also, how do you feel about time-travel, because I would like to go back to 18th century Caribbean and sail on a ship. Maybe illegally if I had to, so I would also require an invisibility cloak (Can I bring something with me from a fictional place as well? Let me know).

However, if I had to choose from just today's world, I would probably need a map and a dart.



Above: Kimber working on a drawing at the newsletter

Imagination

By John

We all know how some people have imaginary friends, but to some of us, they aren't imaginary. They're our friends, no matter what.

As a kid I grew up with barely any technology, except the old radio on my bedside table and the TV (it had knobs!) that had no cable. It would play anything I put into the VCR next to it. I had a lot of time to myself once I got home from school. My door would close behind me and I would travel to another world.

Some people have imaginary towns, I had my own world. It was just like Earth, but sort of like an alternate dimension. And guess what? I was the president. I couldn't have a world without some history, so I would think up all these things and store it in the filing cabinet in the back of my head, right beside my brain.

I needed a map, so I had that drawn up. I needed construction and the ability to make changes with my hands, not just keep everything in my head. I looked under my bed, pulled out the box of hot wheels and set of construction toys and went to work. One day I'd build one city, mark it on the map, draw it up, and the next day I'd flip to the next page and think up a whole new area for life to take hold of.

"DON'T FORGET TO USE YOUR IMAGINATION."

I'd put on concerts, organize sports, business, elections, currency, news reports, special events, villains to keep things interesting, and a few heroes to keep things in check. I'd even imagine disasters, because even in a make belief world there is tragedy.

Eventually I moved to another place and this ability to imagine left me. I told myself that but the reality is I forgot how to imagine. It came back to me; I just needed to let my mind wander.

Eventually I stopped again. The fear of disapproval, the thought of embarrassment, the reality of being seen as childish troubled me and I decided to live a boring life.

Don't forget to use your imagination. Every now and then, I find myself laying on my floor, my mind racing as I play with my little siblings, showing them how to make cities and countries. And I'm happy.

Don't have the fear of disapproval. Do what makes you happy.

Do you ever wonder?

By Chantel

Do you ever wonder what would happen if someone just woke up one day and knew everything there was to know, about everything? Nothing left to learn, nothing left to discover.

"AS A HUMAN, WE ARE GENETICALLY BRED WITH AN INTENSE CURIOSITY."

Would they slowly begin to notice their sudden expansion of knowledge, or do you think they'd go into some state of shock from such an abrupt change? And what would happen if they got through that shock?

As a human, we are genetically bred with an intense curiosity. We see it in children, as we watch them grow and learn to channel it in different ways; they become artists, musicians, scientists, mathematicians, engineers...

We are born with the need to learn at any cost, but if one day we knew everything, what would happen to that urgency to learn? It would still be there, wired into our brains, but we wouldn't need it anymore. We'd still need that challenge, but there would be nothing to challenge ourselves with.

Would the boredom eventually drive us insane?



Beri and John at the 2014 newsletter Christmas party



THANK YOU!



**HALIFAX YOUTH
FOUNDATION**

OUR THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF OUR PROJECT THIS YEAR...

INDIVIDUALS

Troy Allen — driver
Sue Barr — United Way of Halifax Region
Jane Boyd-Landry — Nova Scotia Council for The Family
John Campbelljohn — Guest
Curtis Davidson — Driver
Sonya Ferrara — Chair of board
Mary Anne Fraser — Department of Community Services
Shauntay Grant — Guest
Dr. Bill Hart — Halifax Region Children's Aid Foundation
Geoff Hood — Department of Community Services contact
Angie Kocic — Book keeper
Chris Lutley — Driver
Carole MacDougall — United Way of Halifax Region
Jeannie MacGregor — Board member
Brendan Mcguire — MLA, guest
Kyle MacIsaac — McInnes Cooper
Kilby MacRae — Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre
Sandra McKenzie — Halifax Youth Foundation
Bruce Mackinnon — Halifax Chronicle Herald, Guest
Rebecca Moore — Facilitator, Board member
Claire Munroe — Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre
Lisa Neily — Graphic designer
John Odenthal — Board member

Ammy Purcell — Facilitator, board member
Nancy Pynch-Worthylake — Department of Education
Jennifer Robichaud — Facilitator
Kay Rogers-Lidstone — Board member
Kevin Ryan — Scotia Private Client Group, guest

ORGANIZATIONS

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

THE ELECTRONIC VERSION OF THIS NEWSLETTER, AND MORE, ARE AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE:
WWW.YOUTHNEWSLETTER.NET

BE OUR GUEST



Part of the joy of the Newsletter Project is welcoming people from the community to share their knowledge and passion about their own lives with the group. Blues musician John Campbell (left) and national award-winning editorial cartoonist Bruce Mackinnon (right) came to the sessions to talk about their lives and their work. The group even wrote a song with John and drew some cartoons with Bruce.



One of our favourite guests each year is poet and writer Shauntay Grant (left), who led a wonderful session about fairytales and the role they play in our lives. Kevin Ryan (right) from Scotiabank helped the youth better understand the daunting world of personal finance and how to create a budget to manage money. Thanks to everyone who came to the Newsletter Project this year.

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SANDY MACDONALD

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