

THE VOICE

ISSUE 23, JUNE 2023



Taking our voice to the next level

ON THE COVER: BACK ROW (L-R): Kaitlin Wolfe, Olivia Macdonald, Patricia Lingley, Nate McCarthy, Sky-Lynn Brochu, Gracie Grieve, Ammy Purcell. FRONT ROW (L-R): Chloe Roberts, Wesley Roberts, Cat Elder, Brandy Warman, Shauna Crane

Cover + other inside photography: Ashley Blenkhorn



ABOUT THE VOICE

The Voice

Patricia Lingley

My experience of *The Voice*. It has been a pleasure to be a part of this program! I've learned lots, made friends, had connections, and have gotten suggestions and help. This is my first year of being part of the voice and I would definitely come back here again next year!

So, what is *The Voice*? *The Voice* is an organisation where we talk and help teens who are in or have been in the foster care system. I have had so much fun and learned a lot of things from this program, I cannot wait to come back next year!

The Voice

Nate McCarthy

I think this place is pretty good; actually, I'd say fantastic. I drink a lot of juice. I enjoy listening to the conversations and playing games like Pictionary. Sometimes I am excited to come on Wednesdays, sometimes I don't feel like it. Ammy says I haven't missed a session since I joined. We'll see about coming back next year.

"THE VOICE IS
MY HOME EVERY
WEDNESDAY."

The Voice

Sky-Lynn Brochu

I came back to *The Voice* because it showed me what a safe place feels like. And because I like that I get paid to say and write my opinions and not worry about being judged for it. I also like that I can get advice and share my feelings whether I'm happy, sad, angry, or sick. I like that they take you seriously and not as a joke. They will take "I feel like committing suicide" and make the necessary calls to make sure you are safe and protected but they can also take a joke if it is not about safety, yours or others. They care about you, so they set rules for that reason. I like that *The Voice* is a program for foster kids who need help finding their voice.

Six years at The Voice

Brandy Warman

Meeting kids in foster care and watching them come out of their shell and open up is why I do this. Someone needs advice, they ask, we talk. Someone wants to do art, they do it. Someone needs a safe place to vent, they do it, and we listen without judgment. It's the safe space *The Voice* provides for youth that matters. I've been a part of this program for six years and one day, maybe I'll take Ammy's place like she took Sandy's. I would love to run this program one day or even help run it. It's a special kind of place. It's an escape.

The Voice

Cat Elder

Why did you join *The Voice*? I joined the voice about three years ago and when I first heard that question for the first time it made me so confused. But now I know how to answer that question in a heartbeat. I joined *The Voice* because I wanted to find somewhere where I could be me and be safe. *The Voice* is my home every Wednesday. It is never boring. Everyone there is learning how to be accepting of our flaws and learning how to speak for yourself because we do matter. I joined *The Voice* because I was looking for a family to call my own.

Volunteering with The Voice

Gracie Grieve

As an adult volunteer, my intentions are to build connections with the youth and help in the process of learning new skills, but I often leave the weekly sessions feeling as though I have learned a lot myself. As a social work student, it has been a very eye-opening experience to gain first-hand knowledge on how the system can impact youth, which I hope to carry over into my own future practice as a social worker.

Hearing their stories and seeing their growth each week has become a highlight of mine, and I have thoroughly enjoyed my time spent with each and every member. It can be difficult to open up to new people in vulnerable environments, therefore I cannot thank them enough for accepting me and allowing me to be a part of their journey and experience at *The Voice*.

THE TEAM



BRANDY



CAT



NATE



SKY-LYNN



PATRICIA



CHLOE



WESLEY



SHAUNA



OLIVIA



GRACIE



Executive Director's Note

Kaitlin Wolfe

The saying that “time goes by faster the older we get” cannot be more true! I cannot believe we are producing the 23rd edition of *The Voice*, but here we are!

The articles in this edition are truly impactful — everything from the youth sharing some of their most vulnerable moments of living in care, to some of their proudest, and everything in between! It has been my privilege to be a part of this group for another year.

Apart from following our curriculum for writing and peer support discussions, the group participated in some exciting experiences. We also hosted Gabriella from Nova Scotia Art Therapy to lead a 4-week mini-program to unlock our creative side!

This year, we had many new faces looking to volunteer and connect with the program, as well as returning and passionate members of our board! On behalf of the youth participants, we thank you for choosing *The Voice* to spend your free time!

As always, I need to give a special, enormous “thank you” and appreciation to our Program Director, Ammy Purcell. This is year 22 for her in the program, and her passion doesn't stop. She will continue to grow this program, support the young people who meet with her weekly and provide that sense of community and uniqueness that is *The Voice*!

On what the future holds, I wish I had my magic wand. However, this edition will be my last as Executive Director, as I embark on some new journeys life has in store for me. Just because this specific position is ending, does not mean my involvement will end. *The Voice* has been a part of my Wednesday evenings for the past 7 years. Like many of the youth as well as our program director, you can't get rid of me that easy! Enjoy reading this edition!



Program Director's Note

Ammy Purcell

We had a great year at *The Voice* in 2022-2023—lots of laughs, a few tears, and a lot of new beginnings. I've witnessed so much growth, from starting college to moving out into first apartments and leaving long-term foster families. It seems like every member of our group has had a major life change this year and they have all taken these challenges incredibly well. I see so much maturity, self-awareness and confidence in these young people. Each time one of them tells me they have news, I brace myself for what may come, but this year has all been very happy changes. I am so very proud of each and every one of them as they grow into incredible young people.

This year has not only brought change for our youth participants, but also our staff members. We've seen less of Olivia, our adult volunteer, as she has taken on bigger career roles, but she is still involved through our board of directors. Congratulations, Olivia, and thank you for sticking with us all these years. We welcomed a new volunteer, Gracie Grieve, social work student at Dalhousie University. She brought new energy to the group and fit in perfectly. Thank you, Gracie, for joining us! We also welcomed back Shauna Crane, former youth participant, as an adult volunteer. She's been a great addition to the group especially given her own experience as a youth in care. Thanks, Shauna, for returning and providing guidance, as well as contributing to all of the writing assignments. You set a great example with your commitment to the program.

The biggest change of all this year was Kaitlin's announcement of stepping down from her role as Executive Director. Kaitlin has been the most amazing work partner over the last five plus years. She jumped into her role head first and heart first, fresh out of school and without hesitation. She learned quickly and kept our program afloat through some of the most difficult situations thrown at us. I want to thank you, Kaitlin, from the depths of my soul for your commitment. I know you will continue to work with us in different ways, but more importantly, I know you will be a friend for life. I wish you the best on your new journey.

Change is such a huge part of life, and it needs to be embraced positively. Sometimes that can be difficult. But if I've learned anything through my years at *The Voice*, it's that all change, no matter how tough, has the potential for greatness. Sometimes you just have to find it yourself. I hope that by reading our magazine you can find the greatness that these young people have achieved through so much change and appreciate the challenges they faced and have overcome.





Hello friends,

Welcome to the 23rd issue of *The Voice!* Youth In Care Newsletter. Just by reading this magazine you are supporting our program in such a huge way. Thank you! Some of you may be new readers and some of you may be long time supporters of our 23-year-old program or maybe you fall somewhere in between. No matter which category you fall in the following message is for you...

***The Voice!* Youth in Care Newsletter Project cannot continue to be as great as it is without your support!**

Parents, guardians, family members, foster parents, group home staff, school support, and social workers. We count on your referrals to help young people get involved and fall in love with our program as so many have over the years. You can be the reason they find their true potential.

Young people in and from care, friends, roommates, foster siblings, classmates. If you are, or if you know a youth in care or formerly in care who could benefit from a group like ours,

please reach out to us. We are not only a writing program. You don't need to be interested in writing or art, or anything in particular, you just have to be you. Come as you are and meet others who can relate to some of the things you are experiencing and FIND YOUR VOICE, in whatever capacity that may be.

We will be hosting meet and greet sessions this fall for potential new participants and their support people to come meet the group, chat with the staff, and see what we're all about. No commitment necessary. Just give it a try.

If you are interested in learning more, please scan the QR code to email me, Ammy Purcell, and ask any questions you may have.

This is my plea to you: please consider referring a youth to our program. It could possibly even change their life.

Thank you and enjoy!
Ammy Purcell
Program Director
 Ammy.thevoice@yahoo.com



DEAR FUTURE ME

Note to future self

Patricia Lingley

"Never underestimate the power of yourself, friendships and relationships because of what others say."

There are lots of challenges and changes happening to you and everything around you, and it can be hard to work with that, but always remember it doesn't matter what happens, just think about the people who were there for you till the very end and even after that challenge, those people are your true friends and will do anything to help and protect you. Always promise yourself when they do these things you return the favor and protect them, that's how friendships and relationships stay for a long time, and who cares what everybody else who doesn't support you thinks of you or your life. What are they gonna do? They'll only lead you to negativity while you're out there trying to be successful. So don't waste your time on those people because all they are to you is just a black empty void that does nothing, and they will never be successful if they don't change.

My future self

Sky-Lynn Brochu

I hope that I get into my dream university, The Mount. I hope to have a dream job of either a police officer, NICU nurse, preschool or daycare teacher or accountant. I want a car, preferably a Buick or a Toyota. I would like to adopt or foster little kid(s) or baby(s) and I want to have dogs and a cat. I want to live in a house in HRM. I would love to volunteer with the IWK art programs for kids.

Dear future me

Cat Elder

I wonder how the future is treating you. Do we rule the world yet? Is the world a better place now? I know good luck was never on your side and that the world hasn't always been the best to you but I wanted to let you know that I'm beyond proud of you and the person that you're becoming. You have handled things so well! I hope you were able to cut out the toxic people in your life and that you were able to heal yourself and the inner child that we thought was gone forever. I hope you have a stronger bond with your siblings. They have always looked up to you even if they never admitted to our face. I hope that we have a better relationship with our parents and family.

I know how hard it was on you having little to no family in your life but there have always been other people like teachers who supported us and that made every difference when our family didn't. I hope we get our own place where we don't have to feel like a burden on other people. I hope we have lots of animals to give our love to, I hope we went back to school to better our education and to get a good job that we enjoy. I hope our mind has become clearer, I hope we stopped the war against yourself and started loving yourself because remember that your soul is beautiful inside and out.

I'm proud of you, future me. Keep up the good work.

Love, Cat

Dear little me

Cat Elder

I know things are rough right now, but you have so much potential and the light inside you shines so bright when you aren't surrounded by negativity. Your family loves you deeply, but they don't know how to show it all the time, so try your best to remember, no matter how much you guys argue, that they love you. I wish you knew how beautiful you are. You didn't have to lower or change yourself to fit everyone's desired type. Your body is a temple, and those scars are gonna last forever now. Don't let those scars define who you want to be. You are beautiful inside and out. I wish you knew that those negative thoughts that you struggle with will always be

there, yet they aren't screaming anymore, and you can think clearly. I wish you understood that you deserve to be happy. You deserve to be around people who love you for you. I'm sorry that you had no one there for you growing up and I'm sorry you had to raise yourself plus your siblings. They don't understand what you sacrificed for them but that's OK because they love you. The bond with your siblings will never go away, I promise you that. I promise, little me, that you will be happy with who you are, and you will surround yourself with people who love you for you. I promise, little me, I love you.

FIRST YEAR IN CARE

My first year in care

Sky-Lynn Brochu

My first year in care was scary. I was only six when I was put in care with my brothers. Now I'm learning that it was for my own safety and well-being. I was placed in a group home with a bunch of other kids. Some were older, some were younger. I remember feeling like I was treated like a baby. I wasn't there very long and then I was placed in a foster home. Being separated from my brothers was probably better for me at this time and still is. It's been 10 years since then. My mental health then and now is no different, actually worse. I am working on it one step at a time. Now that I am a little older, I have more of a voice that I can use to get what I need/want. Don't be afraid to use your voice and stand up for yourself.

First year in care

Cat Elder

My first year in care was a little bit ago. I've been in care for five years or more now and when I got taken away it was too late. The police were there, and they took us to the DCS building in Dartmouth where we stayed for a few hours while the social workers and police tried to figure out where to place us. My brother got split up from us and my sister and I had at least three foster homes in one year while my brother stayed at one house for his whole time in care. I moved from family to family, dragging my sister along. The foster homes were loud with a lot of people always talking to you or in your personal space. It was scary. I didn't know where my brother was or where my family was for a little bit, then DCS moved us closer to my brother, allowing us to build back a relationship that they destroyed in the first place by splitting us up.

First year in care

Nate McCarthy

My first year in care was chilling out and having fun. I went swimming a lot and got some new clothes and other things. We went to P.E.I. for 1 week. That was fun. We are going again this summer. Changing schools was both good and bad. I made new friends. My guardian is good to me, she is nice and kind, whenever I'm not getting into trouble.

My first year in care

Chloe Roberts

Being taken away from your family isn't always ideal, but ten days before Christmas is much worse.

I remember it like it was yesterday. I was sitting in my house watching TV with my cat. My mom was working and my brother was sleeping. The police knocked on the door. I panicked and paced the house for a minute, assuming they were there for my older brother. I finally opened the door and saw my social worker with four police officers standing in front of me. She sat me on the couch and explained that we would be going somewhere else for a couple of days and to pack a bag. I went to pack my bag while she woke my brother up. The only thing I thought was "I can't say goodbye to my mom." They called my mom, and she rushed home. We cried, hugged, and cried more. I didn't know where we were going, but we ended up in Liverpool.

My life changed that night, having no family around but my brother, having to live with strangers. Nothing has ever been the same.

Stay hopeful

Brandy Warman

When I think about my first year in care, I remember the feeling "hope". I was hopeful for the next time I would get to see my mom, hopeful for when I would get the call that I was going back home, hopeful for the bad days getting a little brighter.

I knew it was hard for the adults in my life to see me full of hope sometimes, knowing what was going on when I was unaware. I was always told "don't get your hopes up. It might not turn out the way you think." I think they just wanted to protect me. No one wants to look a nine-year-old little girl in the eyes and say, "sorry kid, but you are never going back home again."

Hope was one of the things that kept me going on those long, lonely days. Some days felt so lonely and dark. But I would tell myself "I hope that my mom has a spot on the couch waiting for me after school to listen to how my day went and we're gonna fall asleep watching Disney channel". Even if things didn't work out the way I wanted, I remember the feeling of hope kept me going.

Sometimes all we need in life is hope, something to believe in, something that gives us a little bit of magic in our life. Whether it's hoping our school or work day ends well, or hope to win the lottery when we buy that ticket, we're all hoping for something.

One thing I wish for all of you reading this, is to hold on to hope. It fills our hearts and fuels our soul. Don't stop hoping and wishing on those stars.

First year in care

Wesley Roberts

My first year in care was very challenging and stressful for me. I had just turned 12 and was struggling in a school environment that I hated for multiple reasons. I have learning disabilities and I couldn't focus on certain things. I was sent to the office a lot, and I didn't mind because they would put me in a room with a desk and I would sit there with my head down and relax. The lights were motion detectors so if I didn't move it would be perfectly dark in there.

On December 15th, I was at school, and I had a social worker visit me. She asked about seeing my father outside of visits and I told the truth. Yes, I had. He lived down the hill from us. My twin sister lied, and I didn't know she was going to.

Later that day, I was sleeping in my room after school, and I heard a knock on my door. I didn't answer and continued to sleep. When I opened my eyes again, there was a social worker in my room. She told me that we had to leave, and I was immediately crying and devastated. She told me to pack a few things for the night and I did. I wasn't aware that I wasn't coming back.

My mom was at work, and when I came outside, I saw three cop cars. My mom had to rush home from work because my dad had called her. The only thing I wanted was to see her. "Please let me see my mom!" I hugged her, and we both cried, and it was a very emotional moment.

We went to a home with two other foster kids and two parents I got along with the other youth very well, we became very close. The foster parents were nice at first, the house was big and beautiful. I had Christmas with them, and it was very strange to be at a stranger's house for Christmas. We were afraid to open any gifts.

As we got to know them, we had a lot of downs. They tried to take away my personal property and controlled who I talked to. They were very passive aggressive and degrading. Whenever I would get upset, they would say I was "pulling a Britney" and make fun of me.

We went to a new school soon after Christmas. I was happy to leave the school I was at, other than leaving the two girls I was friends with. Shortly after I started the new school, I got a girlfriend; she was beautiful and lovely, and we got along great. My grades had never been better. My attendance was through the roof. I was the "popular new kid" and even got an award for health class as the student with the highest marks. The teacher and I were best buddies.

Through all this positivity, I still dealt with a lot of self harm and depression to which my foster parents would say "he's looking for attention." I was put on ADHD meds for the second time which I would spit out when I walked to the corner of my house where I couldn't be seen. I couldn't swallow pills at the time, so they had to break it open and put it in yogurt. It didn't taste good, and I didn't stay on them for long. I stayed at this home for a year. Overall, I would rate the experience 0/10.

Special permission

Wesley Roberts

One thing that frustrated me about being in care was always having to ask for permission. For simple things that any other normal kid could do. Sleeping overnight, leaving NS, just anything that was easy for others.

I was always embarrassed when social workers asked to do background checks on someone before I could stay the night at their house. I didn't want them to feel like they were untrustworthy or were accused of being criminals.

So, I never stayed at anyone's house besides my family's until I was around 16 without permission because I knew that if I asked, I would be told "no".

When I turned 18, I was able to stay the night without really asking.

Special permission

Nate McCarthy

Having to get special permission from my social worker to go to sleepovers with my friends sucks.

OUT & ABOUT

My experience at The Voice

Patricia Lingley

We've done some really fun activities and had great moments at *The Voice*! This year we have been to:

1. **Trapped** – You're in a room where there's puzzles and riddles to solve and help you open the door and escape.
2. **The Grafton Street Dinner Theatre** – it's a fancy restaurant where they have live comedy performance that includes singing and acting.
3. **Bowlarama** – It's a big open space where they have foods and drinks, a bowling alley, and a variety choices of arcade games. We went here to take our photos for the 2023 magazine.

I have had so much fun and learned a lot of things from this program, I cannot wait to come back next year!

Grafton Street Dinner Theatre

Nate McCarthy

The food was good. The play was good. I didn't know the songs, but the performance was great. It was a fun night out with the group. I would go again.

Co-Hosting the OYAs

Cat Elder

This year I was able to be one of the hosts of the Outstanding Youth Awards (OYAs). This was an honour because I got this award myself three years ago to show my growth throughout my time in care. This time I was able to congratulate other incredible youth on their growth.

The experience was fun and great to be part of a team who wanted to show how proud we are for everyone making those changes in their lives. Congratulations to all OYA recipients!

Songs of the City – United Way Halifax

Cat Elder

This year I was a part of songs of the city, organized by United Way. It was an amazing experience. I got to have my own dressing room and my own mic. We were backstage with an amazing support team who helped me overcome my nerves and I met amazing people with at this once in a lifetime opportunity.

I had a song written for me about my experience with *The Voice*. It was beautiful and touched my heart after hearing it for the first time. Thank you, United Way, and thank you, Breagh Isabel, the amazing singer/songwriter who took my story and made a beautiful song "Finding my voice". Watch at <https://youtu.be/Djwzc8eN9II>

Songs of the city

Sauna Crane

It was an honour to be a guest at the United Way, Songs of The City concert at the Alderney Landing theatre in Dartmouth. Our very own, Cat Elder, was on stage representing the Youth Voices of Nova Scotia newsletter, our program that wouldn't be possible without the support of the United Way. Cat wrote truly moving words about her experience in care and how *The Voice* has helped her along the way. Her story was beautifully told in song by Canadian artist, Breagh Isabel. This evening of stories, and songs of hardship and triumph, was truly a unique experience that I was very grateful to be a part of. Cat spoke so wonderfully on stage and lit up the room as usual. She truly has a way of making your heart feel a little lighter with hope through her words.

I enjoyed meeting and talking with artist, Christina Martin. It was great to share with her what our group is about and what we do in the community. The most memorable part of this evening though was how giddy we were for food by the end. It was nearly 9pm when we were all sitting around the table at the wooden monkey, all of us on such a high from the energy of the concert. But also, being deliriously tired and hungry as it was a wild, crazy busy day for everyone. We were definitely at peak silliness.

I returned home with such a sore face from smiling and feeling so whole in life. Very grateful for this memorable evening.



The Voice crew with the cast of “Back To The East Coast” at Grafton Street Dinner Theatre. Thank you so much for inviting us. We had a great time!



Cat Elder on stage with the other performers at “Songs of the city 2023 – United Way Halifax”.

To watch, scan this QR code.



The Voice crew with art therapist, Gabrielle Rizkallah. Thank you, Gabrielle, for opening us up to creativity and expression through beautiful artwork.

EMOTIONS

What makes me happy

Sky-Lynn Brochu

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

Emotions

Cat Elder

My main emotion would be fear, all day, every day for the rest of my life. I think the worst of every situation which used to stop me from enjoying life and going out, which caused me to fall deep down a dark hole with no way out and that depression hole kept getting bigger. I self-sabotaged just when things started to get better. Sadness had swallowed me whole, taking over my life. I stopped talking / hanging out with my friends. My own family didn't even recognize me. What was the scariest thing of all was that I couldn't even recognize myself! I lost sight of what was really important to me. It was like I was trapped in my body with a stranger controlling it. I was numb. I didn't care what happened to me because I felt like I was going to be trapped inside forever. The numbness faded into anger because I was trapped for so long. I started being rude to the people I cared about, pushing them away until I was alone, and sad because everyone left me. So I decided that it was time for a change.

Now, I take every day one step at a time. I don't take anything for granted and I'm taking back my emotions.

Happy

Nate McCarthy

If happy was a colour, it would as blue as a sky on a sunny day.

If happy were a taste it would be as sweet as honey.

If happy were a smell it would be rich as a chocolate mousse.

If happy were a sound it would be as melodic as a harp.

Trigger

Cat Elder

She's always posting about how she misses me like she didn't have the chance to change and get clean for me, she sets me back each time she messages me, causing my whole world to be shaken, like I'm on a roller coaster, and she's stealing all the oxygen so I can't breathe. My heart races like it's going to explode, almost beating so loud I think everyone around can hear it, she's my mother so my head and heart is at a tie but it's like she never actually cared about me and my mental health. I'm constantly fighting with myself being in a world surrounded by addiction, knowing that I'm always gonna struggle with it.

Anxiety

Shauna Crane

Anxiety is never convenient, always popping up when it's least wanted. It's usually a secondary response to another emotion. Fear of looking like a silly goose in public causes me to have anxiety when speaking to people, especially when explaining anything or having someone actively or even inactively listening to me speak. Anxiety usually causes such a physical response for me; I get so sweaty and clammy like a swamp toad. My heartbeat races like a toad with too much caffeine, just hopping around my chest without permission. I usually try to ground myself in the situation as much as possible, but sometimes I have to remove myself before I can control my breathing and feel more present. Anxiety is a gross toad, but meeting yourself where you are at with it, truly is the only way for there to be peace in the swamp.

Empty

Cat Elder

Without you I'm alone crying, I'm crying my heart out, but no one is there to hear. I feel free when the rain hits my face hiding my tears like a cool wave washing over the beach, my air is feeling like there is less and less. I can't breathe, my chest feels tight as I'm completely frozen in place like a statue having people stare at me as they walk by. I feel like I'm going completely insane. Feeling like my worlds on fire dropping out of the atmosphere, blank and empty falling into space getting lost without you.

Emotions

Shauna Crane

I could often be described as an emotional character. I have a tendency to wear my emotions on my sleeve usually as a detriment to myself. It's very important to honour your emotions, even when avoidance seems like the easiest route to take.

Life gives you many examples of times when emotions cannot be processed in the moment, and you have to play catch-up later when it's safe to do so. It's hard to recognize in the moment that a particular emotion might be driving you, but when you are able, it's so important to give yourself time to recognize and do what best honours your well being in the moment.

During times of stress and tension it's usually best to ground yourself first before your actions become driven by your emotions. Sometimes to me this can feel a little like selling out or being fake. This to me is usually an indicator I am on the right track. This is because my emotional side will always want to talk louder than my rational side.

Being an emotionally charged person isn't always a detriment. It leads to a more compassionate and understanding perspective that can be beneficial in building relationships. Letting my emotions guide and teach me about myself has led to a lot of personal growth and success in my communication internally as well as with the people around me.

Going in circles

Wesley Roberts

The mind spins in a dizzying loop,
Counting, checking, until it's soup.
Compulsions and rituals, ever so sly,
Asking for reassurance, we can't deny.
In a restless mind of tangled fears,
A demon lurks, unyielding, severe.
Compulsions rule with iron might,
And thoughts spiral, until it's night.
Each touch, each step, each breath they take,
Repeated, counted, no mistake.
Intrusive whispers in their ear,
"Did you check it? Are you sure?"
A prisoner chained to their own mind,
Pleading for release, yet hard to find.
The urge to do it all again,
Until the doubt and fear expunged.
OCD, a silent thief of peace,
A soul in agony, seeking release.
May we see the struggle, not the quirk,
And offer kindness, not a smirk.
For in the battle waged within,
The warrior fights a fight unseen.
May we hold their hand with empathy,
And love them, flaws and beauty.

Random facts about me

Cat Elder

I'm a stranger when it comes to myself, but these are some of the things that I have learned about myself so far:

- My memories come and go.
- I love to be outside connected with the earth.
- I love swimming.
- My siblings mean everything to me, they are my best friends. I would go to the end of the world for them.
- Smiling and laughing is one of my favourite things to do.
- I've had a teddy bear since I was 4 from getting a CAT scan.
- I knew I liked women since an early age, always playing the boy while playing house or playing dolls.
- I've always known I wanted to have a job that helps people since I was young.
- I've always wanted a big family.
- I want a pet duck.
- I love sailing.
- Poetry is my favourite writing style
- Reading helps keep me safe by allowing me to escape from reality.

AFTER CARE

Being independent

Chloe Roberts

Every newly graduated high school student wants to get out of their parents' house. They want independence, and to feel like they're going somewhere in life. Well, that's what I thought. Moving out was the hardest thing I have done so far. I had just graduated and was barely making any money, but I thought, oh well so many people move out this young. I'm just gonna have to work harder, maybe skip school this semester until I can get on my feet to take classes.

Independence brings with it the freedom to create your own schedule, choose what to do and when to do it, and all the fun that entails. It also demands responsibility and requires purposefulness in your actions. Choosing what to eat and when to eat it is one of the best parts of moving out. However, food can be pricey and proper nutrition can also be difficult without parental guidance. Research and grocery planning are critical here, so be mindful of what you buy and try not to shop hungry. You may make some weird purchases, trust me. One thing I strongly recommend is automating chores like bill payments. Automating bill payments or savings deposits means you'll have one last task to think about and manage.

Bills aren't the only thing you should schedule. Living on your own means that you'll need to factor in things such as grocery trips, supply runs, cleaning, and other housework all on top of your studies. On top of that, you'll likely have a job that needs to fit in there too. That's why making use of your calendar can be a huge help. If there are regular tasks that you know you'll need to do, plan ahead and plug them into your calendar or agenda. Also, consider setting alarms for your calendar reminders. You'll be busy enough with school, why not make things easier for yourself?

Anytime you're dropped into a new situation you get to shed the old parts of yourself that are no longer truly you and discover new parts. This is a just little of what I've discovered about growing up.

My journey so far

Brandy Warman

I started coming to *The Voice* when I was 12. I just got placed in to care with my Nan a few years before that. I was struggling a lot during this time; this was the first time I could remember not living with my mom. The isolation and depression were unbearable. My social worker at the time noticed my challenges. She suggested a program. It was a place where kids like me could make friends. I remember being so shy and having no self esteem. Going to programs or anything that involved leaving my room was terrifying, the only room in my house that I felt protected me, the place that shielded me from the cold world.

I knew I had to go. I knew how important was to get out there and try something new. (The pay wasn't bad ether). From my first day there, I fell in love with the people I've never met. I still struggle with my self esteem and mental health. But I found myself a support system in *The Voice*. I found people that cared about me and understood the things I was feeling a place where I was seen, heard, and listened to and respected. Those were things I lacked through out my childhood.

I changed a lot from when I started coming at 12 years old. I've changed from the styles I wore to the colours of my hair, to what career paths I wanted to chose. I remember I started of wanting to become a makeup artist. I've always knew I had the crave for creative expression. I felt myself most when I expressed my thoughts and emotions through the art of makeup and creative fashion. I never left my creativity through out these years. I always stayed true to my uniqueness; I learned new ways to create.

I changed that and left my creative passion in my pocket and remembered how much my connection to animals, something I wanted to share with others. I now wanted to work with animals. I explored that for a while through different opportunities like doggy daycares and retail pet store. I learned a lot during those times, and I worked hard during those years of high school. I felt I knew where I was going to be career wise.

Things changed fast for my life when my mother passed away. That put a big question mark over my head. I questioned everything. I questioned things about my life and who I was, what was my purpose? Was I making the choice for me or to please others? I really worried about what my mother would think if I worked for the system that took her daughters away? I knew I had to make a decision. I knew it was going to be hard, but I knew that if I stayed to make others comfortable, I wouldn't be happy.

I just knew I wanted fulfilling work, something I knew I would be able to help others. I chose to work with youth. I knew it was calling because of everyone who is reading this. Everyone needs someone in their life they know will support them, someone in those rough days in the system or the days you were your happiest and need someone to cheer you on. I wanted to be what others were for me. I want to be the light for others to see there is hope for us kids out there.

Living on my own

Wesley Roberts

As someone who never thought that they would make it this far in life. The past few years have been some of the most important and stressful years of my life.

I had graduated high school, I turned 19 and moved into my first apartment three months later. Living by myself has been different. It's been quiet, lonely and amazing.

Living by yourself is extremely freeing. Make your own meals, go to bed whenever you want, have privacy, and feel like an adult.

Life after care

Shauna Crane

It's been six years since I aged out of care at the age of 18. Technically, I had a post care agreement for my time in university until I was 24, but things were less than linear in my path and likely will never be. I was very fortunate to have my loving foster parents, Susan and Randy, help guide me during this tough period of transition from high school to post secondary life. I was in a hurry to grow up for so long, and I was difficult to guide in any direction other than my own.

I graduated from high school a semester early with honours. I started NSCAD at age 17, immediately after high school. I moved out into a small apartment on my own, and quickly got very overwhelmed with the reality of growing up. I always regretted my stubbornness with moving out so early in such a rush after I finally found so much stability and support in my foster home. I was just stubborn and thought I was independent to no fault.



WESLEY, BRANDY AND CHLOE

I completed two years at NSCAD with financial assistance from the Department of Community Services towards my tuition and living expenses. I unfortunately dropped out due to mental health issues and became very isolated for many years afterwards, just struggling to meet the harsh reality that comes with actually growing up and attempting to provide for yourself. I found a lot of confidence in the past few years working in the events and hospitality industry, and through that I was reconnected with *The Voice* and started volunteering at the newsletter this fall of 2022.

I have struggled to connect with a lot of people in my life after care, and I am beyond grateful for the mental ease in conversation that comes from our weekly sessions at the newsletter. I have found so much inspiration to further apply myself in my life and future from being around like-minded youth who have gone through and continue to go through tremendous struggles and move forward for a better future for themselves.

THANK YOU



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