



OUR VOICES

By teens, for teens

RESOURCES

COVID-19 Careline
1-800-720-9616

**National Suicide
hotline:**
1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line:
Text "START" to 741-
741

Crisis Care Center:
513-281-2273

**Psychiatric Intake
Response Center
(PIRC)**
513-636-4124

**Psychiatric
Emergency
Services/Mobile
Crisis Line**
513-584-8577

Who we are: Our Voices is a multifaceted quarterly newsletter that is broadcasted to teens all over the city. With an aggregation of student work such as art, poetry, photographs, and even individual interviews, we strive to provide a space for all teens to express themselves in any way they choose. Since our publication is "by teens, for teens," we hope to help raise mental health awareness in the teenage community, and take steps towards shattering the stigma.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The world has turned on its head. But of course, you already know that. News channels, magazine articles, and social media feeds serve as constant reminders that the lives that we took for granted almost two months ago will forever be changed. We at Our Voices would love nothing more than to tune all of that and just show you the beautiful submissions that lie on the proceeding pages. However, we cannot let it go just yet. Mental illnesses take vacations for no one, and world pandemics are no exception.

I want you to know that this is a difficult time for all of us, but especially those with mental health challenges. Some of the contributors to a positive mental health have been the very things ripped from our grasp, as we are forced to push pause on birthday parties, social gatherings, family reunions, or even just nightly library visits. It seems like we are helpless in a void of uncertainty, and for those who struggle with these feelings on the daily, it has only gotten worse.

But, as you absorb all of the creativity, bravery, and wisdom painted across this newsletter, I hope you understand that you are not alone in your struggles; it is okay to not feel okay, and these courageous young people are here to tell you that they understand. We get it. We're here for you. We will get through this.

So now, we want to provide you with a safe space to take a break from the chaos that is the modern world. Sit back, relax, and breathe. And as always, please contact any of the resources to the left if you need anything at all. They are here for you, too.

Lastly, we just wanted to thank all of our submitters. It is voices like yours that help the quiet feel heard.

With love,

The team at **Our Voices**

OUR VOICES

OUR VOICES

Elle Boettcher

Only a few moments of clarity
Unless we make a change
Rise of depression, anxiety, and mental illness
Very little is happening for us
Only together we can raise our voice
Is it okay to project an image?
Cause inside we are breaking down
Eclipsed feelings because of the drive for success
So we ask, will you help?

I was motivated to write a piece that would be a call of action. I hope after people read this they will be motivated to talk about mental health and be there for those who need help.



SPINNING IN CIRCLES

Liam O' Shaughnessy

I wrote this poem to show how I feel at certain times. I'm working on managing my perfectionism, and doing something like this helps me express that anxiety. I hope, in sharing this, that others can relate to this and feel understood, and I appreciate this opportunity in helping me reflect on my mental health.

Downward and downward into the depths,
Into the anxious spiral.
Sometimes, I feel that I am bereft
Of joy and a smile,

The danger signals going off.
It's almost at the door,
What will they think? Will they scoff?
Perfectionism demands more,

The ruthlessness
Of the inner critic
Makes helplessness
With the inner cynic,

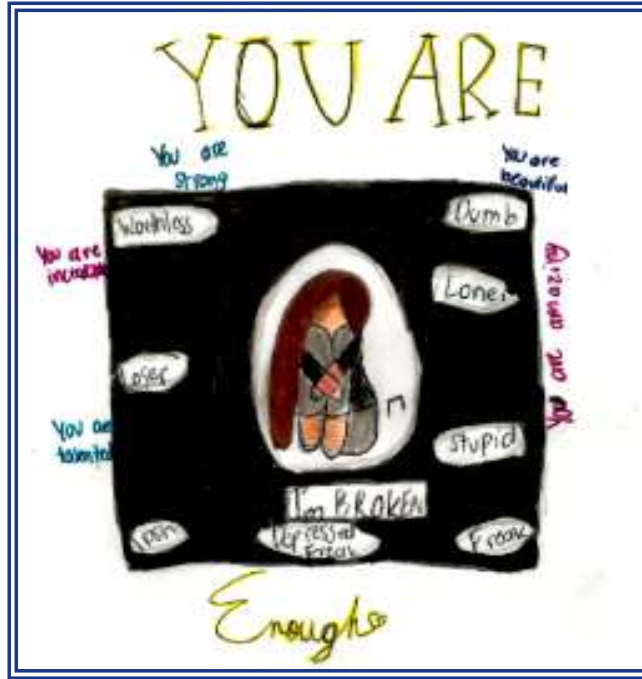
The locus of control's external.
With sleep deprivation,
One would think that we're nocturnal
In constant lacrimation,

Yet friends support us through good and bad.
It's real friends that help; they're no fad.
Mental health crises come in waves
And don't need to end with us in our graves.

Be kind with yourself and reach out when you need it.
Depression's not permanent; you can beat it.
So, remember, in everything you do,
That I am proud of you.

**“Be kind with yourself and reach out when you need it...
I am proud of you.”**

-LIAM O' SHAUGHNESSY



For someone who has social anxiety and depression, drawing this shows not only what I went through but other kids, teens, and adults are going through or went through: a stage of depression or anxiety. Why mental health is an important topic to talk about is because people everywhere are going through this and some don't have the help or recognition and tell themselves that they are fine when they are really not. Some people are given the help that they need but decide to fake it and they fake it until it is the end. Suicide is the second leading cause of death, with most people who have died being diagnosed with a mental condition. What I hope to get out of my drawing is a wake-up call, not only to those who suffer with a mental condition, but for those who don't know what it is, and we as a society should do something to fix this. We are people and life is real, we don't need to end it so quickly.

HIDE AND SEEK WITH A MONSTER

Tiffany Chen

I fought with a monster,
I thought it lived under my bed,
Staying up late, mind running,
dreading everything ahead.

There was a monster,
I thought it was in the closet,
I hid with the monster,
too late, I was already the gossip.

I was sure the monster,
was living in my car,
maybe I shouldn't live,
I hope to be a star.

There was a monster,
I figured it was in the fridge,
telling me how to starve,
to lose some weight, just a smidge.

I thought I spotted the monster,
it was definitely at school,
I understood my place in society,
the people were always cruel.

There was a monster,
I knew it was bathroom,
staring at the cuts and bruises,
hoping for my inevitable doom.

One day, I finally found the monster,
staring back at me in the mirror.

My inspiration for my piece was based on my most recent breakdown. I came to the realization that the battles that I fight are amplified by mental illnesses, which is essentially the monster within me. I also find things that trigger me to be represented by the external monsters portrayed throughout my poem; I often blame those and not realize that it's something mental. The entirety of the poem is reflective of different struggles that I've faced with mental health. I tried to show how broad of an effect depression has on a person's life. Since the lowest point of my depression, I've gotten better and I'm proud of how far I've come.

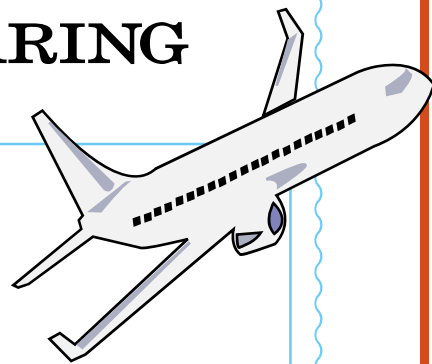
OUR VOICES

MY LIFE: SOARING

Gavin Raymer

I'm the dictator of my own life
Once I learned this, I stopped paying
attention to THEY
THEY told me I couldn't
THEY used to laugh at me for my goals
THEY are the first ones to tell me I'm doing
something wrong
When I realized their opinions didn't matter
That's when everything started to change

I Started to live MY own life for MYself
I blocked out the negative voices
Surrounded MYself with positive people
I only did things that would end up benefiting MYself
Only things that would help me get to MY goals
Once these happened, I was in control of MY own life



I wrote this poem because in my life, I have had friends and family who have tried to control my life. I have found if you live life like this you will generally live a miserable and a life that you don't want to live. How do you fix this? You get rid of the people who are trying to control you and surround yourself with positive people. For me personally, I had friends who were constantly tearing each other down and were nothing but negative. So, what did I do? I changed my friends; I left the negative ones and chose people who are driven to be successful and are encouraging for your goals. I have found this to be one of the best changes I've ever made in my life. You need to live your life for yourself and not for others.

ALMOST

Alissa Hayes

Perfectionism has been with
me since the beginning.
Everyday we would practice
drawing together,
When she wasn't flirting with
Procrastination,
She would paint the most
beautiful piece of art,
Photograph the most
breathtaking view,
And play the piano flawlessly,
She had the smoothest hair,
straight A's, straight teeth,
flawless makeup, and wore
nothing but
expensive clothes.
She couldn't leave the house
without looking "just right".
No matter how hard I tried, I
never seemed to catch up with
her.
Almost, but never enough.
Sometimes I would mistake her
for her twin, Beauty.

What I didn't notice until
recently
Was the pile of unfinished
drawings
Scribbled all over with black
pen,
A spiraling web of nightmares
on a white canvas,
Ripped,
Shredded,
Torn,
Burnt,
Chewed up and spit back out,
Then swept into the trash can.
All because of one, tiny,
mistake.
She would rewrite words over
and over because it didn't look
"just right".
She was always shifting in her
chair to get comfortable.
But, she never was.
The teacher was always
scolding her for being so
distracted all the time

And repeatedly checking
her phone,
She twirled her silky hair
around her finger,
And always had one leg
shaking,
To her, an erasure was the
equivalent of failure
She looks so different to me
now,
She doesn't look like
Perfection anymore,
She isn't that bubbly girl I
once knew,
Slowly, she's morphing into
someone I thought I forgot
about,
Anxiety

OUR VOICES

This poem is about what social or generalized anxiety disorder would look like as a person. I have dealt with anxiety since at least the fifth grade. In my case, what I thought was just being a major perfectionist was actually an anxiety disorder. I've always been a slow worker, which is because I wanted to make everything "just right". If it wasn't "just right", I wasn't proud of and felt like I wasted my time. I relied on having time at home to do homework, which was often classwork that I didn't finish either. I have tons of unfinished drawings because I'm scared of messing it up and then it won't be perfect. That leads to my habit of procrastinating activities, even if they're something I really want to do. These are just a few of the bad habits I've been trying to work on. Lately, I've been able to finish drawings even though they weren't "perfect!" I'm just proud of myself for being able to complete an art piece. If you are also struggling with wanting to be "perfect," what I found helpful was to count small successes. I hope others can relate to my poem!

"If you are also struggling with wanting to be 'perfect,' what I found helpful was to count small successes."

-ALISSA HAYES

I want to show how you view yourself and how others view you can be different, but how you view yourself is more important at the end of the day. And I think people, especially teenagers, are worried about what others think about them instead of how they think of themselves.



ME

Meredith Bornholdt

Me
One word, two letters
Different than her or him
Beautiful inside and out
Flawed, imperfect
Me
Special to my parents
Ordinary to my peers
Kind to my friends
Lazy to my teachers
All different views of ME
Me
Hardworking to myself
Gorgeous to myself
Funny to myself
Caring to myself
My views of ME

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Mark Keller

I often wonder what it's like
to feel alone in the dark.
When no one's there to comfort you
and you feel like life's always blue.

It seems like you're all alone
and the world's an empty dome.
You want to run and get out
but no one can hear you shout.

I hope you know that you're not alone
even when life seems like a heavy stone.
There are people you can count on
to comfort you and soothe your soul.

No matter how big or small it may be
You will always have a friend in me,
Please tell this to everyone
and make their life a happy one.

Depression is on the rise among teenagers and young adults. As social pressure grows with the introduction of social media and a faster pace of life, there are many young people who feel isolated. I wanted to highlight this through my poem because it is important for those suffering from depression to know that there are people they can count on. It is never too late to get help.



OUR VOICES

INSIDE

Alex Richards

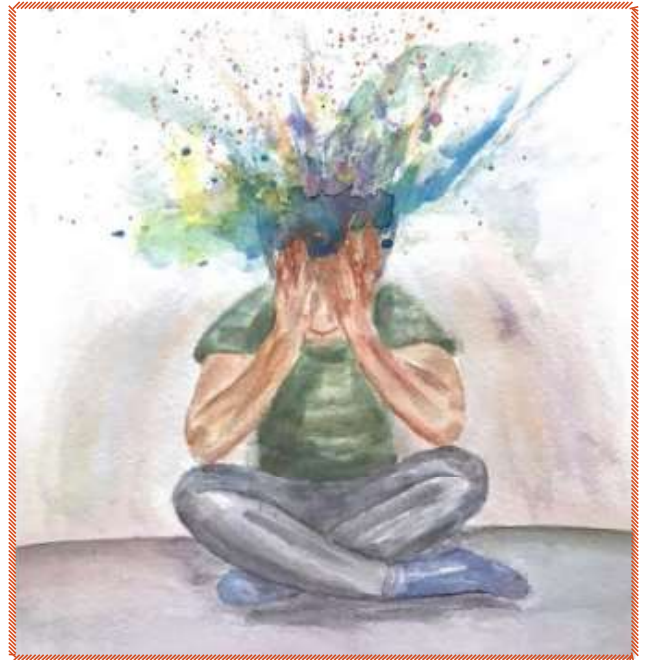
Inside

Drowning, but never fully under.
Alive, but never fully living.
I think of the past, but then I relapse.
In the same cycle, year after year.
Pinks and purples, glow so bright.
I look up and it reminds me of that night.
Where you held me and I held you,
And we lived, before we knew.
Night after night I sit alone.
Waiting for you, but you still don't know.
The secret pain I've held for so long,
I tried to sink, but you let me grow.
Now, after all that,
I look back,
And think,
I wish I could go back to where we once sat.

I was very inspired by this topic. While I've never dealt with it personally, I've had many people close to me who have dealt with it. I wanted my poem to be about the pain someone feels inside, but when they find someone who can help, they can see the beauty of the world. I've always aimed to be this kind of person for the people in my life who struggle with mental health, and I hope that my poem can hopefully relate to some people who have been in a similar situation to myself.

MAYA BERRY

This painting is called anxiety. This is important to me because anxiety is something that I struggle with every day and I know many others deal with it as well. There is a stigma that inhibits people from talking about their mental health and a way around that stigma is art.



TJ Armstrong

20 SECONDS

At last a desire,
Ultimately fulfilled,
With thoughts left to retire,

Final with montage,
Of sixteen sets of 365's,
Warnings of no moulage.

Ignored by entity,
Spared of effort from dearest,
Result in 20 seconds activity.

SHOT

One shot,
Merely a few seconds,
A life closed which meant to
most not.

Disease not chosen,
Finally forever frozen,
At four more a dozen.

Thoughts of angels,
From multiple angles,
Now lie in shingles.

Editor's note: Mental illnesses can cause some people to go to dark places. Armstrong's poems above provide a glimpse into the internal hardship experienced by many. However, it is important to remember that things do not always have to be like this, and with the right care, light can be found at the end of the tunnel. If you or someone else is struggling, please contact one of the resources listed above.

OUR VOICES

THE PALACE OF ID

Nate Kreimer

Beneath a grey and shadowed sky
A silent land of granite and shale
Where dark and dreary thoughts do lie
Devoid of river, fen or dale
There lay a mighty pyramid
And 'twas known to all as the palace of Id.

And silent to the world beyond
Abandoned save for one sole guard
This bastion's quiet chambers yawned
And I silently watched through windows barred.
I kept my soundless vigil amid
The silent, hallowed halls of Id.

The quiet was one to never be broke
The danger could not be released
And thus, a word would not be spoke
For fear we free the mighty beast
Through weeks, through months, the days they slid
By hushed in the cavernous chambers of Id.

Until one day I felt a shake
Beneath my feet, resounding quake
A resonant drum, a frightening gong,
A terrible beat, both loud and long
And terrified, I ran and hid
Within the weary walls of Id.

A silence fell, the quaking ceased
And then a knell, a terrible bell,
From the dungeons far below released
And once more to the ground I fell
My hands, they shook against my bid
And I feared in the craven chambers of Id

As drums beat out, I knew their name
They scorched my mind like devilish flame
For none could not know of the feeling inspired
By the drums of Pan, his horns, his lyre.
My vision blacked, and I could not rid
My affliction in the halls of Id.

I was not prepared for a horrid new bay
A sounding of metal, of brass, of war
The horns of the hunt, and I was the prey
The feeling shook me to my core
These thoughts of death came to mind without bid
And fear reigned supreme in the kingdom of Id.

Those blasted horns, those beating drums,
They mimicked my heart in their arrhythmic dance
And as I recall it, my chest

becomes
A portal to then, its rhythm askance
And as chills wracked my body, against the wall I slid,
And my mind began to fail in the chambers of Id.

But just before my vision went dark

The sounds, they stopped, and I felt a spark
As a new instrument joined the song of the beast
In a terrible solo, though its volume was least
Of the sounds, its terror far outdid,
And it ravaged my mind in the prison of Id.

A torturous waltz of twinkling strings
A requiem of death and dirge of despair
What a tragic tale its gentle pluck sings!
As I hear footsteps coming up the stair
And my eyes were covered by dropping lid
As the creature moved closer, closer to me
within the darkened walls of Id
In the chambers of Id
In the halls of Id
In the prison of Id
In the catacombs of Id
In the palace of Id
My consciousness left me in the kingdom of Id



Maybe it is a bit too abstract, but this is a poem about having a panic attack. I decided to write this poem because of a problem I have seen in a large number of people, which is the lack of understanding in the difference between a panic attack and general anxiety. I am the one of the only ones in my friend group with diagnosed anxiety disorders, and when they flippantly talk about having a panic attack it always strikes me as somewhat ignorant. I also have been interested in poetry for quite a while and thought that a style similar to Edgar Allen Poe would be fun to do and encapsulate the more dour subject material effectively.

DROWNING

Claudia Lowrance

A taboo topic
A song without words
Mental health is a burden
That should not be unheard
When everything changes
And light fades to gray
You are not alone
Together we'll stay
When it feels like you're drowning, drowning deep

When it's too loud to be heard
But too silent to speak
When the gravity of darkness
Pulls you down
Your voice is gone
You can't make a sound
Place your hand
In the center of mine

Look for the light
It's a matter of time
For things to get better
For things to change
You are not voiceless
Though it might feel strange
Be brave be strong,
Remember your worth
You are not alone
Through this new rebirth.

CAROLINE MCKEOWN

Mckeown shared her story via iAMIN5 this past month. Not only has she dealt with toxic relationships, but she has had experience with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Now, she is doing much better, and is living proof that mental illnesses are not permanent, and with the proper help, you can recover. View her full story [here](#).



Why did you decide to share your story?

I don't want people who struggle with a mental illness to feel alone, especially other teenagers. Mental illnesses are real, and it's important to recognize that. I want to inspire others to realize their worth, and how much their presence means in this world. We all have a spot in this world that only we can fill, so it is important we realize the light at the end of the tunnel.

You said something beautiful in your video; that you shouldn't judge someone's story based on the chapter you walked in on. What does that mean to you?

I'm trying to emphasize that everyone is fighting a battle you don't know about. People change for the better, and change takes time. I have realized overtime as people grow and mature, they realize the mistakes they made in the past and work on correcting them for the future. It's okay to change, it's okay to start over.

You mentioned that therapy has been really beneficial for you. In what ways has that helped you heal?

Going to therapy has honestly helped me heal more than anything, Number one, my therapist is amazing. If I would've never started therapy, I probably would've never made this much growth in the past two years. I really started to heal the moment I felt like I was heard. I have learned that happiness is feeling, not a goal. Happiness can never be constant, and that's okay. My therapist provides me with a lot of good coping skills that I use throughout my everyday life. I would say the most beneficial coping skill I have got is positive self talk. When I get anxious, I use my positive self talk to tell myself everything will be okay. Practicing positive self talk definitely makes you stronger, and learning it now is going to be super helpful through the rest of your life.

You seem like you're doing amazing now, and we're so proud of you. Do you have any recommendations for others out there for mental healing?

What I do is everyday, I write three positive things about myself on a sticky-note and put it on a wall in my room. It can be a reason why you love yourself, something good you did that day, or why you should look forward to the future. That wall is the first thing and last thing I look at before I go to bed. It really has helped with many self esteem and my overall outlook on life, Journaling has got me far, too. If you are upset, mad at someone, or even just had a bad day but don't want to talk about it, write about it. Let it all out, everything that's in your head just force it out on that page. After I write, I crumple the paper into a ball, then throw it away because you don't need to keep on thinking about it.

I know this time is hard, especially for those with mental illnesses. Do you have any tips or recommendations that you could give to keep you happy?

I know this has been hard for everyone. As silly as it sounds, just be hopeful. We have to remember this isn't permanent. This isn't how life is going to be forever, it's just how it is right now. I know it's hard but I'll try to make the most of it. Do something you've always wanted to do, but you've never had the time to do it before. Watch a show you've always wanted to watch. Learn some Tik Tok dances. Work out some more. Spend some extra time with your family. Do whatever you have to do to make yourself feel okay. That's your top priority.

And finally, if you could say one thing to reassure the teenage community about our situation right now, what would you tell them?

I know it's stressful right now but everything will be okay. There is going to be a rainbow after this storm. One day, we will get to hug someone you love again. One day, places we love will open back up. One day, it will be safe to travel again. One day, we will get to see our friends and extended family again. One day, we will go back to playing our sports. One day, we will go back to school and see our classmates and teachers. That day might not be tomorrow, but it's coming. Be patient, I promise you it's worth it. You have made it so far, so keep on pushing because you are strong. You've survived 100% of your worst days, so I believe you can make it through the rest of them. You have endured so much but look at you, you're still here and I'm proud of you.

If you are interested in submitting your work, please contact: ourvoices.1n5@gmail.com

If you are interested in learning more about Our Voices, please visit our website [here](#).

Follow us on Instagram @ourvoices.1n5