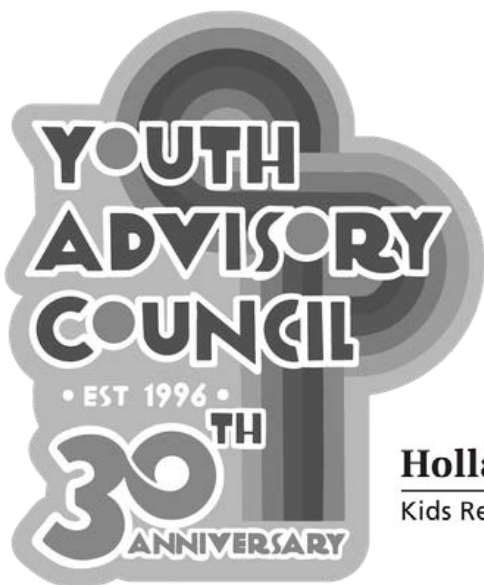


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HILL





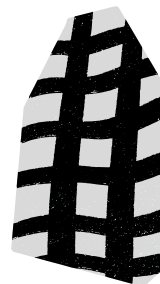
**Holland Bloorview**  
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

Holland Bloorview's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is a coming together of youth who have experienced health care at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto, Canada.

Our zine series highlights the history and present-day experiences of YAC members. We are creating our zines through community, collaboration, virtual work, interviews, and in-person art making. This is a way to celebrate 30 years of YAC's accomplishments and to inspire youth for years to come.

Our project is for Holland Bloorview and the broader disability community.

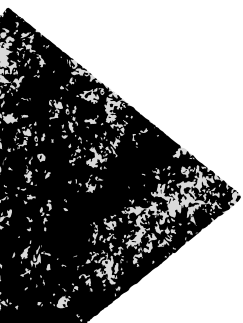




**CURRENT AND FORMER YOUTH LEADERS OF HOLLAND BLOORVIEW EMBARKED ON THIS PROJECT TO VISUALLY EXPRESS AND DOCUMENT LIVED EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY TO CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL.**

**AS A TEAM ASPIRING TO BE LEADERS, OUR ZINE COLLECTION SHOWCASES YAC'S MILESTONES AND PROGRESS THROUGH CREATIVE WORKS, STORIES, AND REFLECTIONS IN FOUR ISSUES: ART, ADVOCACY, COMMUNITY & TIME.**

**THIS IS THE ART ISSUE. WE HOPE YOU ENJOY IT!**



# CONTRIBUTORS

Aafiya

Alex

Ethan

Jessica

Jillian

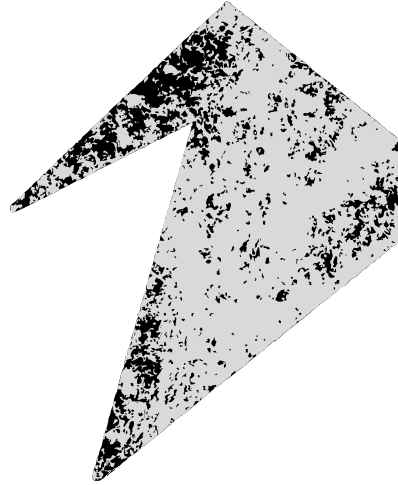
Julia

Lexin

Sam

Sinéad

Zoe G.

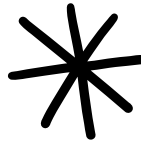
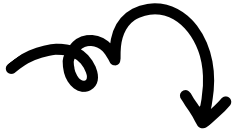
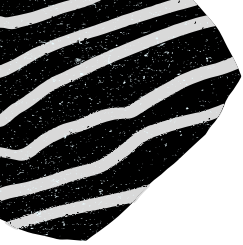


Project Lead: Dolly Menna-Dack

Project Coordinator: Julia Kowal

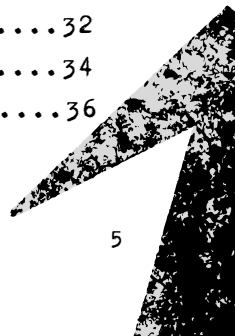
Artist Facilitator & Zinemaker: Mary Anderson

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital is proud to create space where Youth Leaders may express their views and acknowledges that these views do not necessarily represent those of the organization.



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# A Seat At The Table

There is something powerful about returning to a place that once cared for you and being invited to help shape what comes next.

For 30 years, the Holland Bloorview Youth Advisory Council has been a table where patients became partners. Where young people who received services here returned not just with gratitude, but with insight, perspective, and purpose.

This is a council built on lived experience. On knowing what it feels like to navigate hallways, appointments, therapies, and long days that don't always follow a plan.

On understanding this place from the inside out.

At this table, youth are not imagined. They are known.

When young people who have received services here take their seats, care changes.

Because questions sound different when they come from experience.

Because solutions are stronger when shaped by those who have lived the reality.

Advocacy, in this space, is collaborative.

It is thoughtful. It is rooted in care for a place that has cared for us.

It looks like sharing what worked. Naming what didn't. And imagining what could be better for the next child, the next family, the next youth who will walk these halls.

And alongside that work, community grows.

A community of youth who understand each other without explanation. Who bring different bodies, communication styles, and experiences to the table and are valued because of them, not in spite of them.

The Youth Advisory Council is not just advisory. It is relational.

It is a place where confidence is built, where leadership is practiced, where youth learn that their voices carry weight.

For 30 years, young people connected to Holland Bloorview have helped shape programs, policies, and perspectives, making care more responsive, more inclusive, and more human.

To every youth who has ever taken a seat at this table, and to those who will in the years ahead: your experience matters. Your insight matters. Your voice matters.

You are not here simply because you were once a patient.

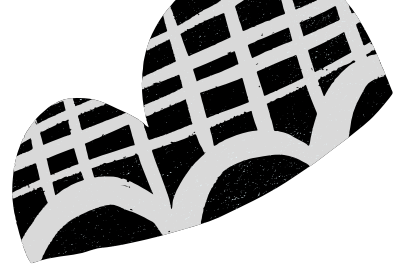
You are here because your perspective makes this place better.

So take your seat. Bring your story. Share what you know.

Because this table holds 30 years of voices, and every one of them has helped build a future where care is shaped with youth, by youth, for generations to come.

-Sinéad

# ART AS A TOOL



Art is inherently social and political and so is YAC. Plus, Art is an adaptable, accessible vehicle for all our managing.

Art gives us a new set of mediums to express our thoughts and experiences, both now and in the past. It also allows us to find new ways to represent and share what is meaningful about our work.

Art is a way to express things.

Art is a universal form of communication and will help our legacy reach a lot of people.

Art allows us to write about our long 30-year history!



Art is a very powerful tool that can share a million words through even just a single piece.

Art helps to accessibly communicate very deep ideas and each viewer then also generates their own ideas and opinions.

Art itself is an accessible way to share ideas in very personal forms and ways that are most accessible to us.

It's a different way to share experiences. It's a different way than discussion.

Art is a unique language that does not require any tutorials to learn. Art can be displayed in numerous forms and in ways that we have not imagined before.



Joining YAC felt incredible as I could finally be a part of the wonderful community that shaped my personality, social skills, and most importantly, transitioning into adulthood.

Being part of the YAC gave me a sense of belonging. I felt relieved because I finally felt heard.

Joining YAC meant that I finally found my people.

The YAC is beyond a council, it's a community filled with powerful people, powerful voices, and future leaders.

### **MORE THAN ACCOMMODATION (PART 1)**

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-Aafiya

I ~~was~~ joined because I was tired of decisions being made about us, without us.

I joined because I wanted more than accomadation, I wanted belonging.

I joined because having a disability is not something to hide, it's a power, it's an innovation.

I joined because my voice matters, and so does yours. ♡♡

**MORE THAN ACCOMMODATION (PART 2)**

I joined because I was tired of decisions being made about us, without us.

I joined because I wanted more than accommodation, I wanted belonging.

I joined because having a disability is not something to hide, it's a power, it's an innovation.

I joined because my voice matters, and so does yours.

-Aafiya



## CONFESSIONS OF A DISABLED CATHOLIC

February 28, 2026

Dear Diary,

Being disabled while Catholic is very hard. On one hand, I want to stick to all my beliefs and my morals. On the other hand, I want to please my parents. My mom, in particular, doesn't really like my Catholic beliefs, especially the belief of being open to life. I understand why she wants me to take contraception, but I want to be my own person. Parents of disabled people often don't respect when their children want to individualize.

My advice to a young person who wants to make their own decisions about their beliefs should be open with their parents. I hope my advice will be helpful to young people and their parents alike.

-Alex



Ethan

### ETHAN'S LIFE ADVICE

The collage I made for the zine's Art issue is abstract and made with the materials I had at Bloorview, but still represents me.

The quotes on the stickers I used fit my work in my opinion, such as "Believe and you will succeed." At the top left, I included a sticker with the quote "Every journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step," which the reader might see first, and which was the first element I added while making the collage.

I included a quote I found asking the viewer what their best life would be like and how it would be similar to and different from their life currently. This material may help motivate viewers if they need motivation.

-Ethan



Jessica

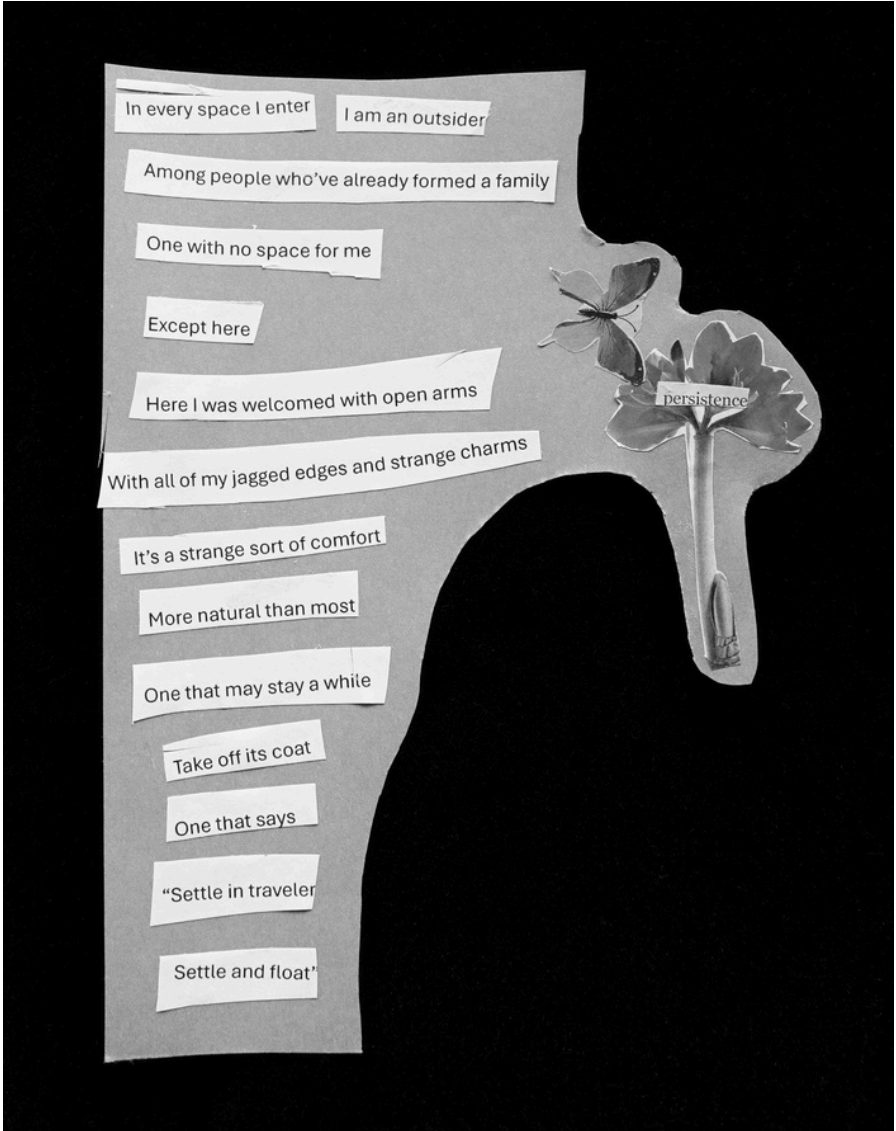
## GRIT

This mixed-media collage brings together reflections and reimagined meanings of the words and phrases put together following my experience of injury, recovery, and living with an acquired disability. Motivational words, thought-provoking questions, important supports, new "words to live by," and pictures of things that share joy, beauty, and sweetness in my life, fill the page messily just as they intertwine and fill moments in my life.

As McLuhan coined, "The medium is the message," and the choice of combining multiple mediums in this collage exemplify the complexity of my disability experience where things sometimes feel haphazardly put together - written, stickered, taped, and glued together in different ways to make something of beauty.

I hope my piece excites different feelings in different individuals who can reflect and hold onto the elements that they connect to when they look at my piece.

-Jessica



## I BELONG

Our history surrounds me  
Each time that I speak  
It's almost like I can see  
Generations of advocates  
Smiling back at me  
Even in my short time  
I'm proud to be a member of our future  
and reminded of our history

-----

I don't have to change the world today  
Don't have to know my way  
I'm welcome here anyway  
I may not know everyone very well  
But I can already tell  
Here I am home for here I am known

-----

Community is kind  
Community is joy  
Community is the sound of someone else's voice  
Supporting you  
In your point of view  
Even in my youth  
I know this much is true

-Jillian



Julia



Julia

## UNSEEN MASTERPIECES

I greatly enjoyed studying art history – the evolution of technique, the symbolism, and the context that shaped the truths, questions, and messages conveyed in the art. However, I noticed that much art was bereft of disability. Many things explain this, including long-held practices of hiding away people with disabilities and representing certain types of people (and not others) in art.

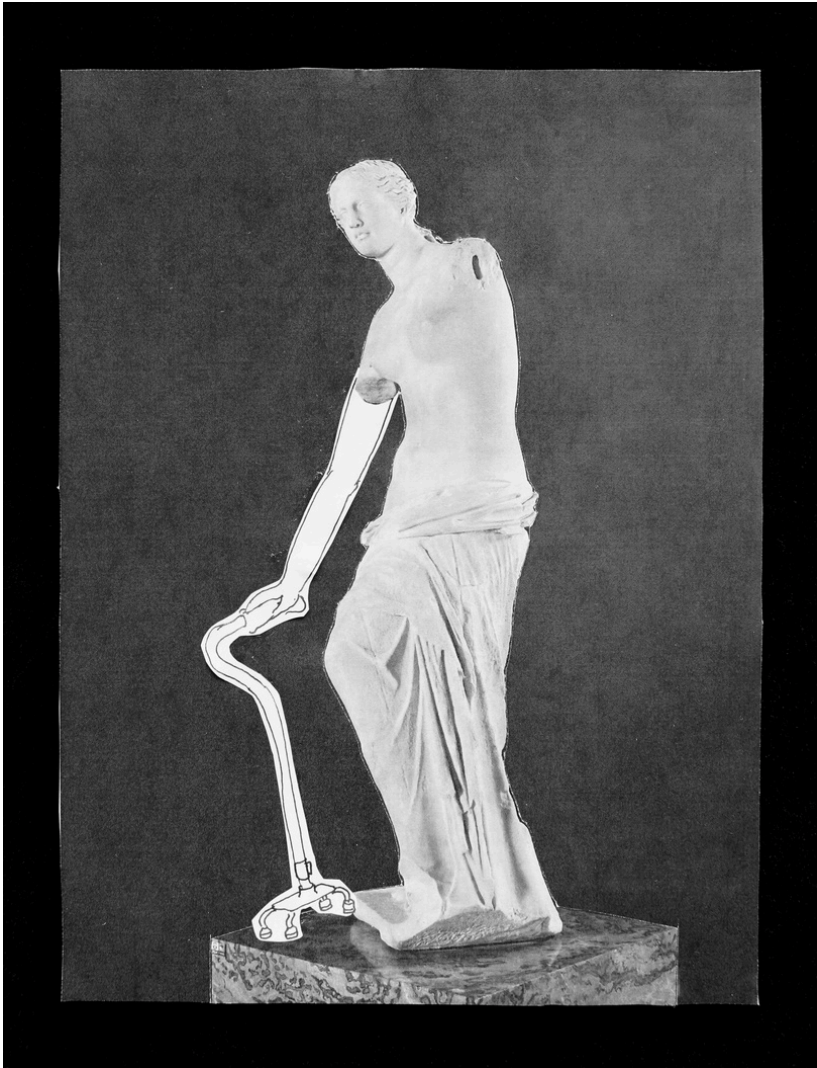
This erasure or absence was significant to me, as a person who grew up without close connections to the disability community until joining the Youth Advisory Council in my teen years. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder – but how does one learn to appreciate the beauty, resilience, and inherent humanity of disability if it is not there to be beheld?

This is where the power of art comes in. This collage takes many well-known (and well-loved) masterpieces and through the addition of mobility and communication devices makes the subjects disabled. In doing so, I invite viewers to consider: what would our world look like were it to have a history of disability representation and celebration in art? What if that narrative were to be made by disabled artists?

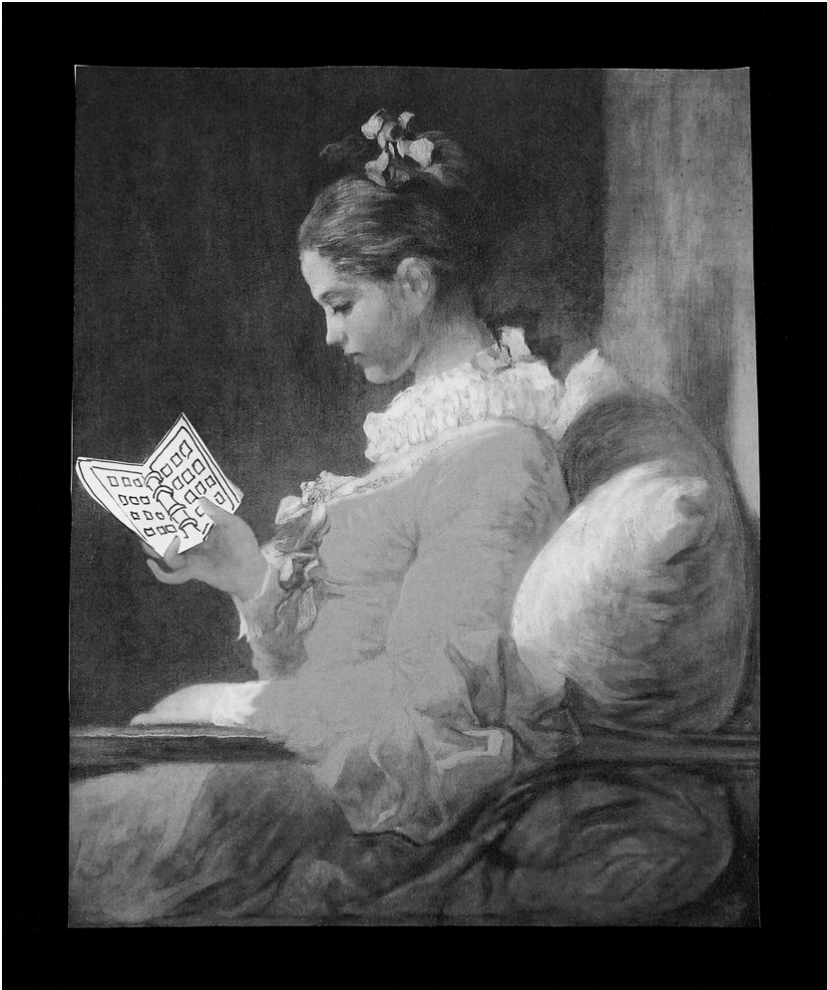
This is a matter that Youth Advisory Council members have been taking into our own hands over the past decade. We have undertaken many projects to share our lived experience of growing up with a disability through art installations, photography collections, and podcasts.

Art is adaptable, accessible, expressive, and political – and so is Youth Advisory Council.

-Julia



**Julia**



**Julia**





Lexin

### FLOAT OR SINK (RESIST)

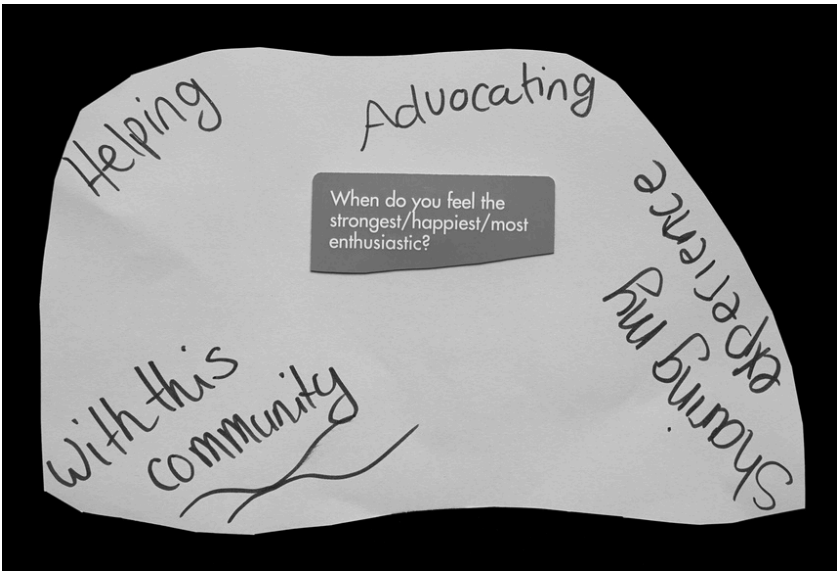
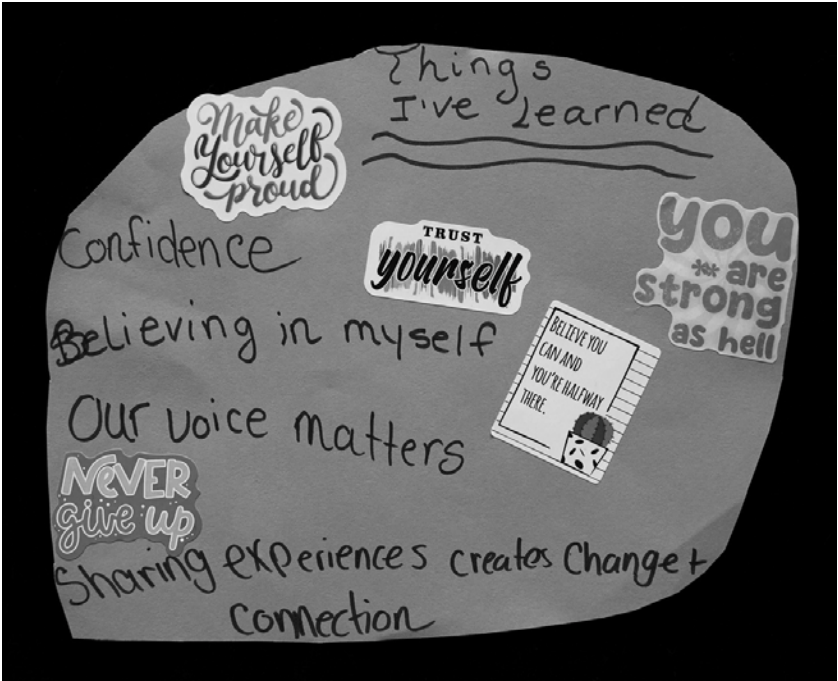
As my first self-portrait, I expected the act to feel more confrontational. On the contrary, I found the process to be surprisingly comforting.

As a person with a physical disability, there are days I appreciate my body, and there are days where I try to forget it exists. I try to allow both experiences without judgement. Painting myself felt like practicing that a step further.

Recently, I have been entertaining the distant idea of painting disabled bodies like classical paintings, and have the disabled body be seen and admired as a work of art. It may never happen, but this piece proved to me that the process of trying to get there can be an act of self-love. And if it's only that, it's still worth doing.

I can only speak to the intention of what I wanted from the piece, which was to take the feeling of persisting, and the ache and loneliness that comes with it, and put it outside of myself.

-Lexin



### THINGS I'VE LEARNED

The first piece illustrates all of the skills I've built and learned while on the Youth Advisory Council. After seeing this piece, I want people to understand that this group of people are more than just a council coming together to discuss programs and services.

### WHAT EXCITES ME

The second piece shows all of the things I've liked about being on the council. Through this work, I want people to understand what future clients can gain from joining the council.

-Sam



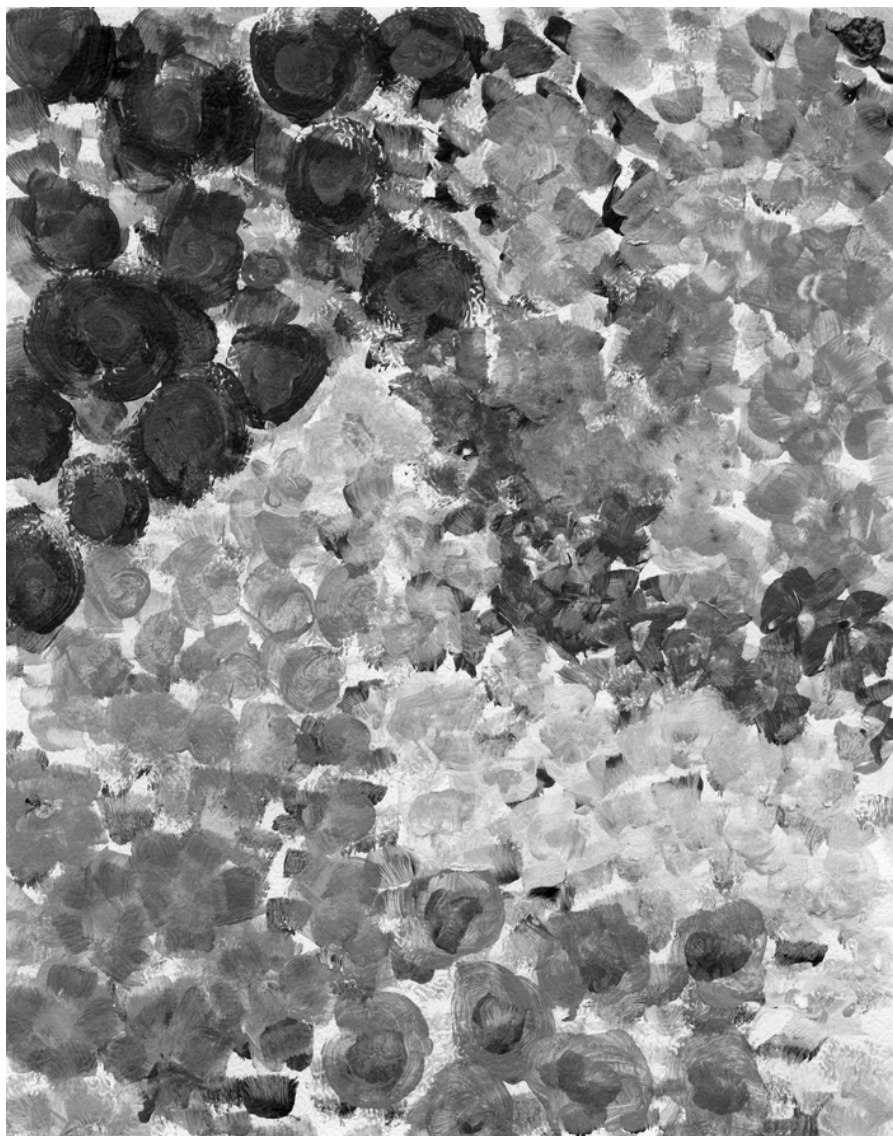
## PAST, PRESENT, UNMUTED

This painting/collage explores past, present, and future, and the journey of learning to use my voice. Each layer reflects experiences that shaped me, the work I'm doing now, and the hope for a more accessible future. A piece of string runs through the work, connecting everything like an invisible thread. It represents how all of these moments and experiences are tied together.

Even during the pandemic, when the world slowed down and changed how we connected, the need to advocate for people with disabilities didn't stop. If anything, it became even more important.

This piece reflects the idea that using your voice can be hard at first, but the more you do it, the stronger and clearer it becomes. It's about growth, persistence, and continuing to break down barriers.

-Sinéad



Zoe G.

## HARMONY, BELONGING, COMMUNITY

This piece is a field of flowers coming together, petals overlapping, colours meeting, individual blooms meeting together and growing together. No single flower is the focus, it's the way that they coexist. Each one takes up space without taking space away.

I used many shades to symbolize the way that our community is layered and diverse. Each flower, and each grouping, represents disabled youth: different shapes, different compositions, different beginnings. Some blossoms are wide open, and others are still unfolding, but they're all together, joined in this space.

The dynamics symbolize our underlying strength and ability: the steady work of showing up, advocating for access, and using our lived experience to shape new beginnings. It tells the story of how disability advocacy sometimes feels joyful, bold, happy and unmistakable, but also the quieter challenges; it's not always easy to demand space and attention. But together we make each other strong and help each other grow.

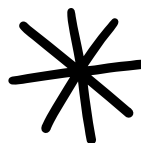
Finding this group felt like belonging for the first time in a long time. It felt like stepping into a place where I could learn and still be encouraged to be unapologetically myself, encouraged to show my own colours and be nurtured as I grew. In my new reality, it was the first space where I was welcomed as I was. Access wasn't a favour and understanding wasn't something I had to earn. Here, we refuse to sort each other into categories. We stay curious. We make space. We nurture. We listen.

If you look closely, the flowers aren't separated by strict edges, they blend and transform, because the best parts of community happen in the overlap: when someone's story makes room for others to grow. For me, community is welcoming, and creating space for a day to be made lighter because of us.

This painting is my thank you and my promise to keep growing in community.

-Zoe G.

## **INTERVIEW WITH LEXIN, BY ALEX**



### **WHAT KIND OF ART DO YOU DO? HOW DID YOU LEARN?**

In recent years, I've been into digital art. I've found it to be freeing, as there's less limitations. Especially because I am able to use accommodations in the digital medium, such as smoothing a shaky line, or zooming in and out for details. Like most, I started drawing as a kid. I enjoyed focusing on something visual and creating something at the end of it. To cultivate my interests and help exercise my fine motor skills, my parents put me in still life art classes for around 6 years. There, I learned the fundamentals of visual art. I mostly drew vases, kettles, sculptures, fruit, and landscapes, in graphite, charcoal, and watercolour. I really appreciated that time, and it helped me in various ways.

### **WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO TO ADAPT THESE ART FORMATS TO BE ACCESSIBLE FOR YOU?**

When I was doing more traditional art, I used those squishy, chunky, pencil grips. I remember it being purple and sparkly. The pencil grips offered more control to my lines. And, as I mentioned, digital art afforded me a lot of leeway, in terms of finding ways for me to build a process that best fit my physical abilities.

Most recently, I discovered an automatic lasso fill option that can help cut down the physical motions of colouring. This can mitigate some of the physical pain my body takes on from drawing or painting.

### **WHAT DO YOU ENJOY CONVEYING IN YOUR ART - EITHER IN TERMS OF SUBJECTS OR DEEPER MEANINGS?**

I think that's an interesting question, because when I reflect on it, I am deeply conscious of themes and wanting to convey a message when it comes to creative writing; and for a long while I didn't really treat visual art in the same way.

Visual art, to me, became more of a simple act; just enjoying getting better at the skill. I didn't think about conveying a theme or deeper meaning with my drawings. Honestly, maybe it's an amateur way of thinking, but I think wanting to convey meaning in art requires one to imagine an inevitable audience that will have that conversation with you.

I have started to come back around to inviting conversations through visual art. This is not to say I have an exact idea of what I wish to convey, but I have found myself wanting to be more vulnerable by trying self portraits. I am also wanting to work towards painting disabled bodies in the familiar classical manner. Perhaps, the theme or message I look forward to conveying is simply wanting to center disabled bodies and the disabled experience in the way we imagine a Rembrandt or Botticelli. I think that would be cool. That's what I want to see.

**YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL HAS DONE A LOT OF ART PROJECTS. WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE PIECES TO MAKE AND WHY?**

First off, I have loved all of the art projects YAC has done over the years. I am really grateful to the Youth Advisory Council for giving youth with disabilities so many opportunities to express themselves through art over the years. I truly believe that art is advocacy. Art allows us to center overlooked groups in society and give them a voice; declare the inherent value in their experience.

For the collection of short stories project, "As I Live and Breathe," I had the opportunity to work on the accompanying illustrations, and I was able to read everyone's short stories and interpret them into illustrations.

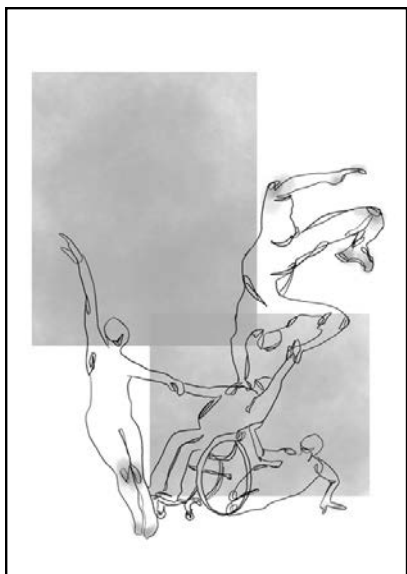
In particular, I loved working on the piece for "Solo Parenting on Wheels" by Gabriella Carafa because I was able to just follow intuition. I tried to show the celebration between the mother and child through the colours, and how the mother is enveloping the child.

The wheelchair has the colours of Earth, as the mother is able to sit and move on the world while lifting up her child.

For the short story, "What's Wrong With Me?" by Ayesha Zubair, I enjoyed trying out contour drawing. I referenced pairs of able-bodies and disabled dancers to show how they moved by supporting one another in equal parts. I felt that it went well with what resonated with me in Ayesha's story: the ideas of burden, interdependence, and resilience.

There were so many pieces I enjoyed working on, but the piece I did for "Seeking Safe Spaces" by Mikayla Hjørngaard is one I loved the process of. I remember listening to a series of podcast episodes covering the life of Frida Kahlo as I painted this piece. I was inspired by how Frida Kahlo depicted herself, her disability, and her identity. A queer disabled artist: I felt like it was fitting for a story about navigating, and finding, safe spaces for a queer disabled young person in university.





### **TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND HOW YOU CAME TO KNOW ABOUT YAC?**

I am a disabled artist and Youth Leader. I am currently working full time and navigating the ups and downs that come with being in your 20s. Aside from drawing, I enjoy reading translated fiction, walking my 3-year old dog, Theo, and listening to podcasts.

I was introduced to YAC through Dolly Menna-Dack when I was 16. Though I didn't really know then, I was looking for a feeling of belonging in a time in my life where that was hard to find. YAC gave me a space to feel comfortable among peers, and confident enough to contribute my voice. It was definitely a safe space I held onto in those turbulent teen years. I was looking for a space to belong, feel safe, and have a voice.

YAC gave me opportunities to connect with peers that held similar experiences to me. As someone who spent a majority of my life in spaces where I was the only disabled person, YAC was endlessly valuable to me.

Beyond that, I wanted to contribute to providing feedback to the hospital and to the research presented to us, to hopefully make an incremental positive impact.

### **HOW DID YAC INFLUENCE YOU AND SHAPE YOU AS A PERSON?**

YAC has become the inner voice that checks my internalized ableism. It reminds of the ways I can build inclusive accessible places for others and myself when I confidently advocate for myself. This is as simple as asking for help with carrying my food at workplace events, to asking HR for automatic doors, to challenging myself to go to a stadium concert.

### **IF YOU HAD ADVICE FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO JOIN YAC, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE?**

My advice for people who want to join YAC is to try it out and participate in the conversations and opportunities. It's a good way to be connected to your community, give feedback, and practice advocating for yourself and others.

It can help ease your transition into adulthood when you are doing it alongside others who can share in your experiences.

