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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
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# YOUTH COMMISSION

## COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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July 14, 2022

TO: Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell, Chair  
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FROM: Alain Datcher, M.P.P.   
Former Executive Director

Erica Reynoso, Ph.D., L.C.S.W.   
Acting Executive Director

Lisa Wong, Psy.D.   
Acting Director, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

SUBJECT: **THE YOUTH COMMISSION: HELPING CENTER YOUTH VOICES IN MENTAL HEALTH (JANUARY 25, 2022, AGENDA ITEM 13)**

On January 25, 2022, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) passed the Motion "The Youth Commission: Helping Center Youth Voices in Mental Health," instructing the Youth Commission (YC), in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH), other relevant Los Angeles County (County) agencies, community-based organizations, interested stakeholders, and community leaders, to help elevate and center youth perspectives and voices in mental health, to do the following:

1. Convene a Mental Health panel discussion, led by youth and for youth, in order to develop a report back in 45-days that provides:
  - a. Youth perspectives, concerns, feedback, and recommendations pertaining to mental health services, and,
  - b. Support with outreach, materials, and engagement to youth and relevant stakeholders.

On March 7, 2022, the Board granted YC and DMH a 90-day extension with the caveat to provide a preliminary report, to include up-to-date progress; the [preliminary report](#) was submitted to the Board on May 17, 2022. The following provides a full report of the efforts of the YC, LACDMH, Centering Youth Voices Workgroup (members include representatives from Department of Arts and Culture, Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Public Health, Los Angeles County Office of Education, and the Office of Child Protection), County, and community partners to center youth perspectives and voices regarding youth mental health needs.

**1a. Convene a Mental Health panel discussion, led by youth and for youth that provides youth perspectives, concerns, feedback, and recommendations pertaining to mental health services.**

The YC, in partnership with LACDMH convened a youth mental health panel discussion, led by youth to gather youth perspectives, concerns, feedback and recommendations pertaining to mental health services. Nearly 200 people attended, including youth, parents/caregivers, County departments, and youth-serving agencies. To further uplift and maximize the reach of youth voice related to youth mental health, the YC and LACDMH partnered with County Departments and youth-serving community agencies and stakeholders to form the Centering Youth Voices Workgroup (CYVW). As identified in the [preliminary report](#), the workgroup convened seven (7) youth listening sessions and two (2) youth-serving advocates/providers listening sessions across the County and developed a youth mental health and wellbeing survey that reached 202 English and Spanish-speaking youth.

One of the lessons learned from the listening sessions and implementation of the survey is that youth engagement takes a significant amount of resources and time to be done well. For each youth listening session, it was imperative that the CYVW assign staff to outreach and coordinate with community partners to recruit youth for listening sessions, prepare youth participants ahead of listening sessions so they could best participate and provide their feedback, coordinate schedules to provide listening sessions during times that youth are available (e.g. after work and school hours), and secure resources to compensate youth for their time. There were some challenges in securing resources to compensate youth for their time and ultimately, due to limited time and resources, the CYVW was only able to compensate and incentivize youth who participated in the listening sessions, instead of also the survey participants. Authentically engaging youth in these efforts will require the County to intentionally think through how we can provide enough resources and time in future reports/initiatives.

The YC also partnered with the Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) to commission youth artists to create and share their perspectives on mental health and

wellbeing through the creative arts. A compilation of the artwork submitted by youth can be found in Appendix I.

### **Summary of Findings: Youth Perspectives, Concerns and Feedback**

The CYVW conducted a thematic analysis of the listening sessions and survey. The following highlights the top themes consistent with both listening sessions and survey results:

- Access to Youth Mental Health Care: Barriers and Supports:
  - Difficulty navigating mental health system,
  - Mental health stigma,
  - Schools remain vital access points,
  - Telehealth has increased access.
- Outreach and Engagement:
  - Continue to elevate youth voice,
  - Develop a cohesive strategy.
- Social Connectedness and Support:
  - Peer-to-peer services.
- Supporting Educators and Parents / Caregivers:
  - Train up the ecosystem,
  - Racial justice, educational equity, and culturally/gender responsive
- Traditional vs. Non-Traditional Mental Health:
  - “One size fits all” approach does not meet the diverse and complex mental health needs of young people. There is significant need for alternative mental health services in addition to talk therapy.

Some of the solutions that youth, advocates, and providers who participated in the listening sessions proposed include:

- Elevate youth voice by providing leadership opportunities for youth, including expanding peer supports and youth-led programs and outreach that compensate youth for their expertise and time,
- Increase access to traditional mental health services, such as individual counseling/therapy, support groups,
- Ensure that services are identity-based, trauma-informed, and care and supports are culturally/racial/gender responsive,
- Expand and sustain non-traditional services, including wellbeing events and activities, such as mentoring and arts programs in schools and communities,
- Implement strategies that address the identified needs;
  - Target services to youth who are experiencing homelessness, in foster care and/or the juvenile justice system, continuation schools, and youth who are part of the LGBTQIA+ population,
  - Include programs that address mental health stigma, the dangers of social media, housing and financial insecurity,

- Keep youth with the same provider, even when the youth changes placements.
- Address administrative factors;
  - Funding stream inflexibilities which limit individualized approaches to mental health care,
  - Support youth-serving workforce by providing self-care supports and strategies to help combat workforce turnover.

### **Recommendations:**

The YC believes that all public agencies and programs in LA County have a role in centering youth voices in the design and delivery of services; especially around mental health and wellbeing. The YC intentionally worked in partnership with the CYVW, youth and young adults, community-based organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that young people's ideas, concerns and recommendations were at the center of any solutions detailed in this report. As mentioned above, we learned from this work that authentic youth engagement takes time and resources to be implemented correctly. The YC believes it is crucial to increase the infrastructure for County Departments and agencies to continue centering youth voices; including cross-departmental collaborations, requiring departments to develop their own advisory councils, and funding community-based organizations and service providers across the region that engage youth effectively. This effort only further solidified the importance and impact of County leaders sharing power and decision making with the over 2 million young people that live, work and go to school in Los Angeles County.

### **1b. Support with outreach, materials, and engagement to youth and relevant stakeholders.**

The YC created a media toolkit complete with flyers, social media assets and guided language to expand information about mental health resources to young people within Los Angeles County. Similarly, LACDMH launched the School Based Community Access Platform webpage to maximize outreach and access to young people and school communities. In addition, LACDMH revised the Child Welfare Division webpage by incorporating useful crisis information contacts, program specific flyers, and training webinars available for youth, families, and relevant stakeholders.

CYVM's efforts to elevate youth voices, resulted in the following findings:

- Enhance Outreach and Engagement Efforts:
  - The County currently lacks a cohesive outreach and engagement strategy around youth mental health and wellbeing. Although specific programs exist, funding for these efforts is sparse and lacking authentic youth input and co-design. Existing outreach and engagement efforts (social media, websites, print, community events) must be reviewed and enhanced so that

youth and their families are informed and barriers to accessing important information are removed. The County must develop a strategy to enhance outreach and engagement efforts by collaborating with youth and young adults with lived expertise, community-based organizations, service providers and County departments and agencies that is multigenerational, culturally responsive, humble, and incorporates multimedia platforms.

- Strengthen Partnerships with Youth-Serving Organizations:
  - The County should identify new and existing partnerships with entities serving youth mental health; with a particular focus on the Antelope Valley and South and East Los Angeles where mental health resources are not in abundance.
- Reduce Barriers for Community-Based Organizations and Service Providers to Access County Funds and Resources:
  - The YC, LACDMH, and CYVW conducted an in-depth analysis of youth-serving programs across the LA County and compiled a list of programs that are accessible for youth,
  - The County should explore ways to reduce barriers of access to funding for community-based organizations that provide non-traditional, non-acute mental health and therapeutic services. This includes but is not limited to art, animal and music therapies, recreational activities, and mentoring programs. This work should include a review of existing County contracting procedures to determine how we can streamline the contracting process to be user-friendly for community-based organizations to respond to solicitations.

Based on the summary of efforts and themes, young people, the YC, LACDMH, youth-serving advocates and providers, and the CYVW shared the following priority recommendations:

### **Core Recommendations:**

- Develop a Countywide strategic plan that provides a sustainable, clear, and unified vision to support youth mental wellbeing that includes:
  - A “whole-person” approach to address youths’ overall wellbeing
  - Strategies and commitments by County Departments to provide sustainable funding and staffing resources to sustain and expand programs that provide non-traditional services to support youth wellbeing, such as peer support, mentoring programs and the [Creative Wellbeing healing-informed arts approach](#)
    - This will include partnering with and leveraging existing County initiatives – e.g., the Prevention Services Task Force, implementation of the Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program Task Force recommendations, Community Schools Initiative, and other efforts – to explore funding streams that can support innovative

new programs and existing ones that youth have identified as successful.

- Strategies to reduce barriers to accessing mental health resources by:
  - Providing effective outreach and engagement (O&E) that communicates information in a way that highlights the value of accessing existing programs that address youth-identified needs and in a manner that is easily understood (culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate).
- Explore the feasibility of creating a Director of Youth Mental Health position within the LACDMH or the newly established Department of Youth Development.
- Convene a workgroup that includes CEO, County Counsel, and child welfare serving County agencies (including Department of Youth Development, YC, etc.) that analyzes existing policy, contracting, and/or fiscal barriers to compensating youth and families to provide their expertise in program development. The workgroup will also develop a guide that will include information on how agencies can fairly compensate lived-expertise experts without jeopardizing their eligibility for federal and/or state benefits and how agencies can facilitate community-driven design of programs and services.
- Provide the YC, Department of Youth Development, and other County agencies with the needed supports to authentically engage youth to support youth wellbeing:
  - Continue to fund the YC as it builds capacity, carries out its mission to elevate and center the voices of young people across LA County and provides opportunities for systems involved youth to engage policymakers in new and innovative ways.
- Strengthen partnerships between the YC and County departments and agencies to promote continued collaboration amongst youth-serving departments and creating a “central vision and strategy” for youth development and wellbeing in LA County:
  - Implement procedures Countywide to standardize compensation for youth with lived expertise as they continue to provide invaluable experience, recommendation and insights to county agencies and departments,
  - Explore the feasibility of each county agency or department creating their own youth advisory body and strategy for engaging individuals with lived expertise. These youth advisory groups should include a diverse group of youth and should be coordinated to ensure youth engagement work is not duplicated across agencies.

## **Future Steps**

Based on the panel, listening sessions, and survey results outlined in this report, the YC, LACDMH, and CYVW are committed to ongoing collaboration to center youth voices and address youth mental health needs across the County. The YC and LACDMH will continue the Centering Youth Voices Workgroup to explore possible implementation strategies based on the recommendations outlined in this report. The YC and LACDMH will provide bi-annual updates on the workgroup's efforts.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Acting Executive Director, Dr. Erica Reynoso, [EReynoso@bos.lacounty.gov](mailto:EReynoso@bos.lacounty.gov).

AD:ER:LW:cd:kr

## Appendix I

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
County Counsel  
Department of Arts and Culture  
Department of Children and Family Services  
Department of Mental Health  
Probation Department  
Department of Public Health  
Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Office of Child Protection



LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
**YOUTH COMMISSION**

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# YOUTH ARTWORK | Helping Center Youth Voices in Mental Health report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

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Developed by the LA County Youth Commission  
in partnership with the LA County Department of Arts and Culture

JULY 14, 2022

In spring 2022, LA County Youth Commissioners approached staff from the Department of Arts and Culture with an interest in incorporating [artwork produced by youth](#) into the Centering Youth Voices in Mental Health report to the Board of Supervisors to make the report more accessible to youth and other members of the general public. Arts and Culture provided honorariums to thirteen systems-impacted young artists, who either independently or with support from community-based arts organizations, created artwork that conveys some of the themes implicit in the report and that shares their own personal journeys with mental health. These pieces are powerful representations that offer a window, beyond the data, into the experiences of LA County youth.



**Artist's name: Rocket García**

**Title: I'm Struggling**



**Bio:** Rocket Garcia (they/he/she) is a multiracial indígena artista, who has had a lifelong struggle with mental health. Rocket is currently pursuing their BA in Communication Studies at CSU, Northridge. Prior to this, they received an Associates Degrees in Theatre Arts and Communication Studies from Los Angeles Mission College. Recently, Rocket received Congressional Recognition for their work in the community. At the moment, Rocket is working for Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural and Bookstore– a non-profit organization located in the San Fernando Valley. At Tía Chucha's, Rocket spends time fighting for a justice system that is equitable for all, bringing awareness to the intersections between mental health and over-policing, and hanging out in the bookstore!

**Age:** 23

**Instagram:** @rocketgarciaart

**Supporting organization website:** [www.tiachucha.org](http://www.tiachucha.org)

**Artist's Name:** Alexis Obinna

**Title:** Have you ever?



**Description:** have you ever felt like your thoughts and emotions would consume you? I outlined what looked like a melting person around the different colors and patterns. I did this to remind myself and others to take time for their self before life becomes overwhelming and sometimes feels like it's taking over your mind, body, and spirit. Can you see the face in this painting?

**Artist website:** <https://www.linkedin.com/mwlite/in/alexis-obinna-714329146>



**Artist Name:** @LuzKairam

**Title:** Mental Health is Visible



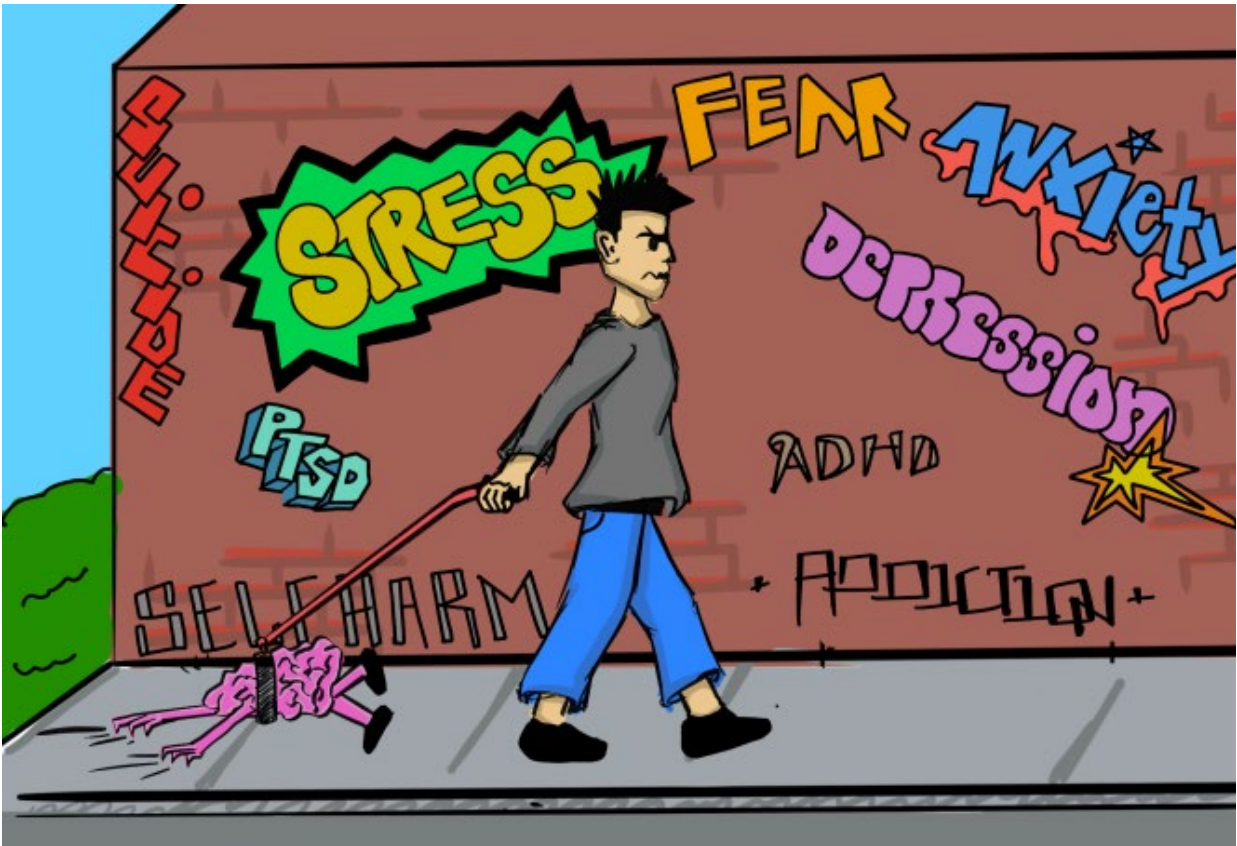
**Description:** I chose to draw my future, where I see myself in the next few months, in an orb to represent a sort of psychic reading into the future. I drew myself with longer hair and tattoos to represent myself presenting more feminine and punk which is what I've always wanted. I'm in New York in Central Park representing nature in my life and how important it is to me. I have a Molotov cocktail in one hand to represent my activism which fuels my soul. The sun above represents the light my ancestors give me and the importance of connecting with them for my mental health. The five emoticons represent various things I need to incorporate for my mental strength. The first represents quitting nicotine which is proven to increase mental health. The second is following a skin care routine which boosts my confidence. The third represents a healthy relationship with weed to manage my PTSD and anxiety symptoms. The fourth represents healthy eating, because a healthy gut fuels a healthy mind.

**Age:** 18

**Artist website:** [www.instagram.com/LuzKairam](https://www.instagram.com/LuzKairam)

**Supporting organization website:** <https://www.lahsa.org/hyfla>

**Artist: Jacqueline Robles**  
**Title: Mental Health Matters**



**Artist Name: Montana Madison**

**Title: Satellitex**



**Description:** This piece is called Satellitex, and I painted it while on a plane returning to LA from a visit to see my grandfather. He passed away two days later. The whole experience was traumatizing and I use my art to process my trauma. I have suffered from Complex PTSD my whole life and music/painting is my favorite medication.

**Age:** 24

**Artist website:** <https://linktr.ee/m0ntanam4dison>

**Supporting organization website:** <https://www.lahsa.org/hyfla>,  
<https://www.ca-ilg.org/post/ca-youth-commissions-councils-and-advisory-boards>



**Artist Name:** *Precious Fuentes*



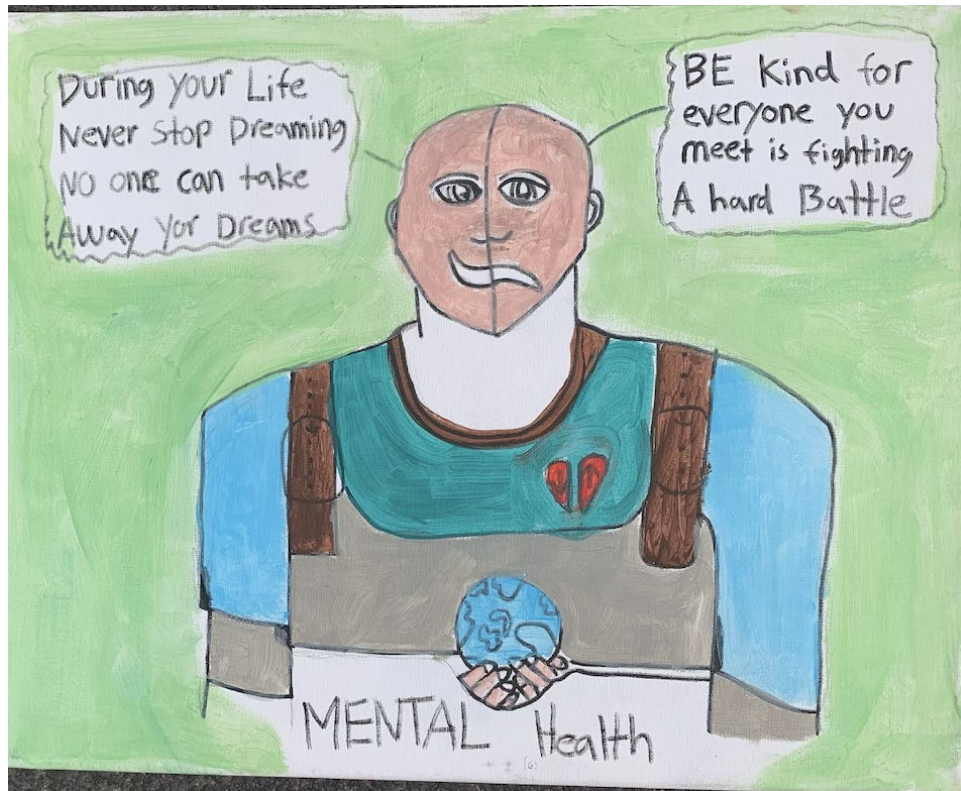
**Bio:** Precious Fuentes was born in Montebello, Ca. She is currently attending Learning Works-Homeboy Charter High School and will be graduating in the year of 2023. She has discovered her gift as a young girl, and she then began to practice her various talents in 2021. Precious loves to sing, play piano, draw and paint along with photography.

Precious is a Youth Leader in an internship here at The Homeboy Art Academy, she has Participated in various projects in designing a tennis shoe to submit a work of art for Converse Co. Which was exhibited at CASA 101 in Boyle Heights. She also was instrumental in building wood panels for a mural which will be located in the California Endowment in a memorial for Leader Beatriz Solis. She continues to develop her skills with hopes to pursue a career in the Arts. She will also be looking into higher education with UCLA.

**Age:** 16

**Supporting Organization Website:** <http://www.homeboyindustries.org>

**Artist Name: Oswaldo Lira**

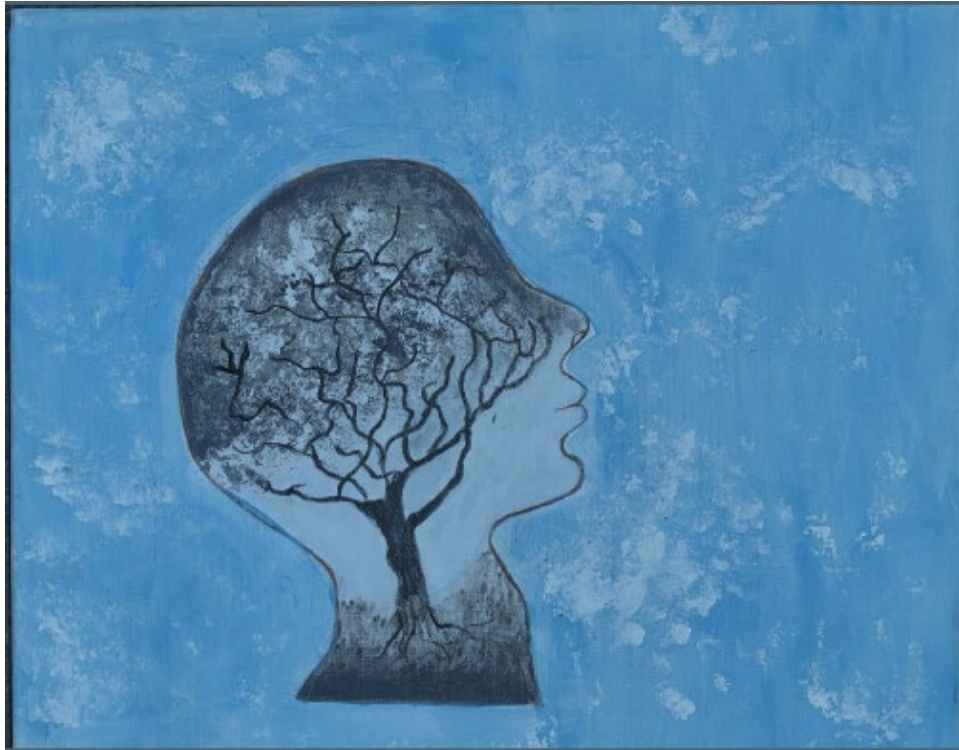


**Age: 20**

**Supporting Organization Website: [www.ahjnetwork.org](http://www.ahjnetwork.org)**

**Artist Name:** Jackie Juarez

**Title:** Lonesome



**Description:** My name is Jackie Juarez, from AHJN I'm 21 years old. I named my drawing lonesome because when I'm struggling with my mental health there are times when the day is nice outside and I can't enjoy it. For me it feels like I have a storm inside my head and I just isolate myself from the world...

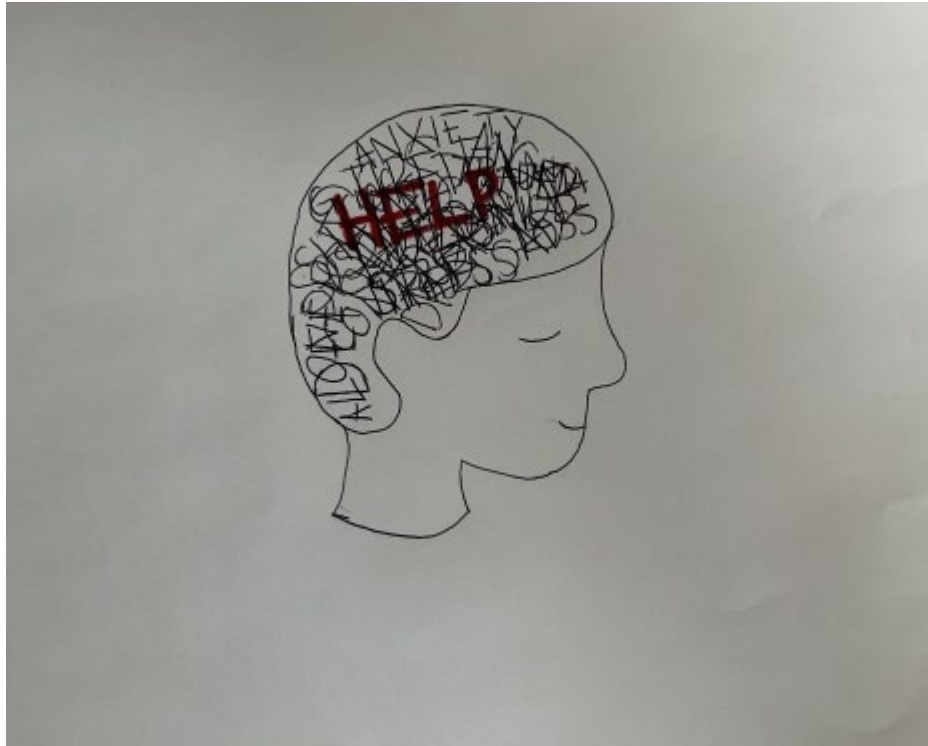
**Age:** 21

**Supporting Organization website:** [www.ahjnetwork.org](http://www.ahjnetwork.org)



**Artist Name:** Dania Calva

**Title:** Unaided



**Description:** My name is Dania Calva, from AHJN I'm 16 years old. My perspective of mental health is someone who is always smiling doesn't mean they're happy they could always need help with something, they just won't come out and say it.

**Age:** 16

**Supporting Organization website:** [www.ahjnetwork.org](http://www.ahjnetwork.org)

**Artist Name:** Jordahn Clarke



**Bio:** My name is Jordahn Clarke I am 16 years old and I am doing great with my academics. I love my school and communicating with others. I am always willing to discuss any topics because I am optimistic. I think about my self care and priorities often.

My perspective on my mental health is sometimes toxic. To cope with my feelings, I turn my daily mental struggles into amusement. To change this, I developed a positive way of thinking to reflect on a better vision of myself through my portrait. Before, I used drugs to cope. With crisis in my life I used negativity with my decisions and life choices and anger I have discovered healthier ways to cope in these situations including prayers, my teachers and mentors' support and meditation.

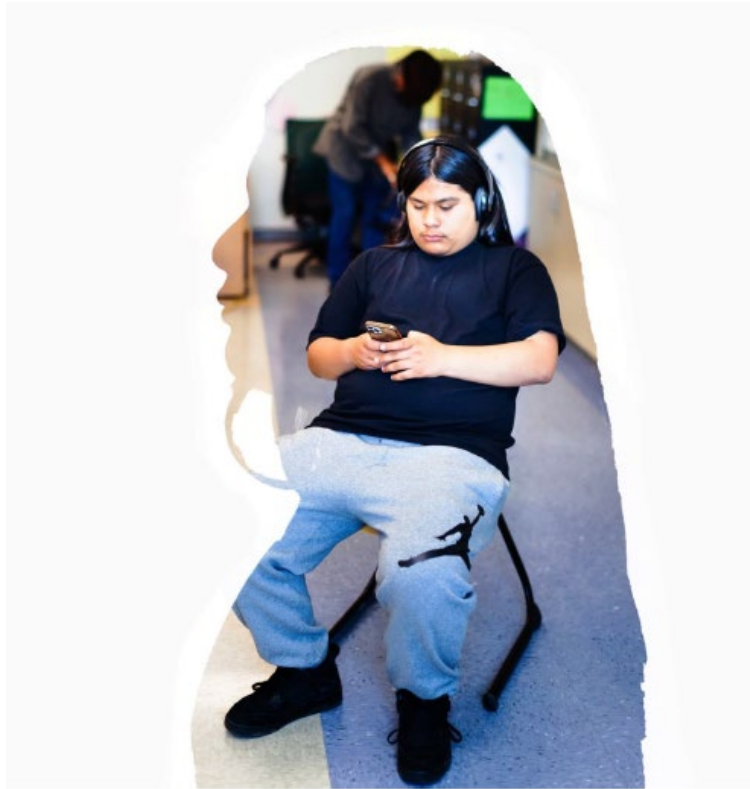
My experiences with struggles with my mental health have included negative thoughts, wishy washiness, toxicity, and lack of accepting a positive self image I discovered activities including listening to music, meditating, writing, and cleaning. I also enjoy getting a good workout in and I push myself to cook.

Jordahn's piece was created through his affirmation: "I am not defined by my past instead I am driven by my future and One positive thought can change my day."

**Age:** 16

**Supporting Organization website:** <https://www.empoweredfamily.org/>

**Artist Name:** *Jonatan Cruz*  
**Title:** *Inside My Own Head*



**Description:** My name is Jonatan Cruz. I am 17 years old and I attend school in Panorama City, at the Panorama High School TRI-C/JDRC location. For my age I should be in 12th grade, but I am up to 10th grade in credits so far. Regarding my mental health, I have always tried to keep my calm no matter how big the bad situation is. I know that if I always let my anger get the best of me, things will not be so great. To manage my anger, I always try to slap on my headphones and listen to music to calm me down. A place I call safe is my bedroom, because I can be alone and do what I want. I always try to keep myself motivated no matter what, so I won't feel down or sad. One specific struggle I've had with my mental health journey, was feeling bad that I couldn't afford clothes, shoes, or stuff I just wanted or needed in life. I take care of my brother a lot, and I live with my dad who is a single father. When I was younger, I remember I would always want to have new stuff, and have at least a couple of pairs of shoes to wear. I always only had one pair, and always wore the same clothes and it was stressful. I remember I would try to ask my dad if he could get me new clothes when I was small, but he didn't. He would want me to get the clothes that I didn't like. My dad didn't really like spending money on me when I was a kid because he said I wasn't responsible yet. When I got older, he would see I got more responsible, so he would give me allowance. From there I saved up and til this day I am working on getting a job and making more money to take care of myself and my family. I also ride my bike to keep me calm and less stressful.

Jonatan's piece was created through his affirmation: "I am brave enough to overcome any obstacle" and "I can be who I want to be in life."

**Age:** 17

**Supporting Organization website:** <https://www.empoweredfamily.org/>

**Artist Name: Enrique Corral**

**Title: Starblood**



**Bio:** Enrique Corral was born and raised in the Chicagoland Area and moved to Los Angeles in 2021. Corral is a multifaceted artist, the core of his art being expressions of interpersonal experiences, emotional intimacy and personal truth. Corral attends the Homeboy Art Academy in Boyle Heights training in visual arts, music and photography and will soon be featured at an event for the Homeboy Art Academy and at the Hive Gallery & Studio in Downtown Los Angeles.

**Age:** 25

**Supporting Organization website:** <https://www.bharts.org/>



**Artist Name:** Chole Tsang

**Title:** *Withdrawing*



**Bio:** Chloe Hiu See Tsang is a Chinese-American illustrator based in Los Angeles. They received their Bachelor of Arts (with an Emphasis in Book Arts) from University of California, Santa Barbara; College of Creative Studies. Chloe has worked with the community to develop creative skills with courses on drawing, comics, flipbooks and photography to systems-impacted and incarcerated youth through the Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory. They have also established a presence with the local underground music and radio scene, often creating show flyers and album art for events and prominent artists. Chloe specializes in manga-style artwork in both traditional and digital mediums, focusing heavily on bold linework and whimsical expressions. Their multi-cultural upbringing in Los Angeles, international travels, as well as influences such as Little Thunder, Shinichi Sakamoto, Junji Ito and James Jean inspire Chloe to create thought-provoking and visually impactful artwork.

**Supporting Organization website:** <https://www.bharts.org/>

***Artist Name: Daniel Bisuano***

***Title: Winding Roads***

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBnNEif8h1I>

**Supporting Organization website:** <http://justiceformysister.com/>