



Our

Minds

Our

Future

**Young people's experiences of mental
health through poetry**

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Introductions

Zoe Maggs and Our Minds Our Future

My name is Zoe and I first joined the Our Minds Our Future campaign in June 2018 in response to a call-out for a volunteer “campaign strategist”. What attracted me to the campaign was how different it is from all others I have come across before.

Awareness-raising is great and necessary, but I am hungry for real, substantial change that is led, shaped, and informed by the voices of real people. That is exactly what Our Minds Our Future represents to me:

we are young people who seek out and listen to other young peoples’ experiences of the UK mental health system. We give them the legal knowledge to know that they deserve and can be demanding more; we welcome anyone who wants young people to access the rights their government have agreed to providing. We do this in so many ways. Primarily, we aim for members of the public to sign our petition for a rights-based approach to mental health and for people in positions of power to pledge to respect young people’s mental health rights.

We also run poetry events to recruit more volunteers and get our voices heard, as well as taking our demands to the heart of government through mechanisms such as the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, or the Conservative and Labour party annual conferences. In Leeds, we started out with just two volunteers. Now we are a group of ten, spread across much of Yorkshire.

Could you be the next to join?

What follows is a series of poetry which has been selected and compiled as part of a national poetry project which we, the Leeds team, ran as our first project to gain momentum and launch the campaign. There were over 50 entries to the competition, and here are 25 poems which 8 academics based in northern universities shortlisted. These 8 judges have been asked to each write a short bio, which we have used to introduce the poems.

To give you a taste of the rights that we have based our approach on we have scattered human rights quotes throughout this anthology- look out for the quotes in purple!



Rhiannon Griffiths

My name is Rhiannon Griffiths. I am a student at the University of Leeds and also a passionate amateur photographer and writer. Having followed 'Make Our Rights Reality' for a while I saw a fantastic chance to get involved by entering my poem and offering my photography to their competition, as well as getting involved in the spoken word night itself. Something new and daunting to me, but by the end of the afternoon I was inspired by the many other fantastic poets and performers there. Through this event it reminded me how mental health is a topic close to my heart, especially how we all need to continually promote the de-stigmatisation of mental health and cultivating a safe environment for discussion. Therefore I hope in this collection we can all continue this much needed discussion.



Dr Scott Thurston

Scott Thurston has been publishing poetry in the network of little magazines and small presses associated with innovative poetry for thirty years. His latest book is *We Must Betray Our Potential* (The Red Ceilings, 2018). He teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Salford and lives in Manchester.

“The service is designed to improve, prevent, diagnose and treat both physical and mental health problems with equal regard. It has a duty to each and every individual that it serves and must respect their human rights.”

Department of Health and Social Care (updated 2015) The NHS Constitution for England, 1.



Adam Piette

Adam Piette teaches literature at the University of Sheffield. He is the author of studies of war culture, European modernism, contemporary poetry. He co-edits the international poetry journal, Blackbox Manifold, with Alex Houen. He has struggled with depression in the past and stands and feels in solidarity with those who are working as best they can with mental health difficulties.

**“All health facilities, goods and services
must be respectful of medical ethics and
culturally
appropriate”**

**UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR),
General comment No. 14 (2000), 12 (c)**



Sara Wasson

Sara Wasson is a Lecturer in Gothic Studies at Lancaster University, and writes about medicine, science fiction, Gothic and pain. Her books include the monograph *Urban Gothic of the Second World War* (Palgrave, 2010), *Gothic Science Fiction, 1980-2010* (Liverpool, 2011), co-edited with Emily Alder, and the monograph *Transplantation Gothic* (2020), forthcoming from Manchester University Press.

She leads the AHRC-funded research network *Translating Chronic Pain*. She really enjoyed reading all the submissions and would like to applaud all writers who try to represent their experience of mental health challenges.



Sarah Corbett

Sarah Corbett is a poet and emerging novelist living in West Yorkshire. She has published five collections of poetry, most recently *A Perfect Mirror* (Pavilion Poetry/Liverpool University Press, 2018), and the verse-novel *And She Was* (Pavilion Poetry, 2015). She won a Northern Writer's Award this year for her debut novel, which is also long-listed for the Caledonia Novel Award. Sarah holds a PhD in Critical and Creative Writing from Manchester University, teaches Creative Writing for Lancaster University and lives in the Calder Valley.

"I did my first degree at Leeds University and only a few weeks in to my course I had a breakdown. I'd had mental health problems since childhood, but it wasn't until I was at Leeds that I got help. Four years of open-ended psychotherapy with the University's Mental Health team saved my life and allowed me to become a writer, a mother and a teacher."



Paul Whybrow

As a medical sociologist, I'm interested in patients and their experiences of illness and healthcare. I'm interested in how these experiences are presented, interpreted, ignored or made visible. As well as my academic interest in the area, I have also been a carer for a loved one suffering with severe depression so I have some experience of how debilitating, isolating and misunderstood mental health issues can be.

I was delighted to be invited to read and judge these 'our mind' poems. Poetry, and other art, can sometimes express thoughts and feelings that are otherwise invisible, unsaid or misconstrued. For me, many of these excellent poems were not only beautiful in their own right but also captured some of the important but unspoken challenges and bravery of living with mental health problems. For that I would like to say thank you and well done to all the authors!



James Williams

James works mostly on Victorian and modern poetry. He is the author of a monograph and co-editor of an essay collection on the nonsense poet Edward Lear. His wider fields of expertise are in poetry and poetics, the literature of the long nineteenth century (British, American, and French), the literature of nonsense, formal and stylistic dimensions of writing, and the Anglo-American libretto.

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services”.

**United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
Article 25 (1)**



Karen Tobias-Green

I am a writer of poetry and short stories and a regular reviewer of arts, writing and culture. I am course leader for the Creative Writing degree at Leeds Arts University. I believe writing is a powerful mode of communication. It can shout loudly or speak quietly. It is open to all. It provides space for discourse, protest, comfort and elation. I am happy to be part of a project that supports mental health and well-being through writing.

“Health facilities, goods and services have to be accessible to everyone without discrimination.”

**UN Committee on Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General comment No. 14
(2000), 12 (b)**



Naomi Booth

Naomi Booth is a fiction writer and academic, with particular interests in uncanny bodies, ecologies, and regional landscapes and literatures. She grew up in West Yorkshire and now lives in York. Her novella, *The Lost Art of Sinking* (Penned in the Margins), tells the story of a girl who compulsively passes out; it was selected for New Writing North's Read Regional campaign 2017 and won the Saboteur Award for Best Novella. Her debut novel, *Sealed* (Dead Ink Books), is a work of eco-horror shortlisted for the Not the Booker Award 2018. Naomi was recently named a Fresh Voice: Fifty Writers to Read Now by the Guardian.

“Health facilities, goods and services must...be scientifically and medically appropriate and of good quality.”

**UN Committee on Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights
(CESCR), General comment No. 14 (2000), 12 (d)**





**“Health is a fundamental human right
indispensable for the exercise of other
human rights. Every human being is entitled
to the enjoyment of the highest
attainable standard of health conducive to
living a life in
dignity.”**

**UN Committee on Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (2000) General Comment No.
14, 1.**



First Place

If That Makes You Feel Uncomfortable

When she was nine, someone showed her
pornography.

I'm sorry if that makes you uncomfortable.

Women washed other women as their eyelashes swooped in
slow motion

And warm water willed its way into all the secret spaces.
Fingers fondled folds of skin the same way her grandmother
Produced bread-dough, and she didn't know then that the
pulsing piece
Of flesh between her legs was called a clitoris.

She had a feeling
It was wrong,
That it would make you feel uncomfortable,
And for so long she tried to say something by saying nothing
at all.

You must remember her silence breaking: 'some days I see
myself from the outside,
Like scenes in a cinema. I sit beside my stupid self, and we
become
Two different girls. One of them gets called Sarah; she likes
To sing; she sews her own clothes. She has a soul and some-
thing to look
Forward to. The other is a stupid bitch, a slut, a silly cow,
A cunt, a whore, a bastard-child, and one day
She will go to prison'.

That's when Sarah started keeping score of scenes she'd seen
by
Slicing seams into her forearms at night, not too close to the
vein,
In case that made you feel uncomfortable.

Once, there were twenty eight grooves leaking blood into
The bath as she shed herself away.
That's when the internet taught you the word 'emo'
When you punished her for punishing herself,
You helped her hope for hatred ...

...when she started crushing codeine into camel humps,
climbing
Up to lands far away from the both of you, drinking £5-vodka
Round the back of bargain booze, for older men to say 'I
would'
And demand she fondle their folds the way her
grandma
Used to make bread-dough

Anon

Second Place

Batsira batsira mwana wangu

The labourer finds other ways to use his hands. He points out
the bloom of the cherry blossom, he
points to himself and says “not only does it bloom but it
grieves the winter.” He shakes his head
because once again he turned to the four seasons to forgive
himself.

He has taught himself to silently hum along to
ballads even though the choir never asked. Nobody
ever questioned why he left the toe tapping and hips swivel-
ling at the door. He smiles.

“Mwana wangu haunzwi si we grew up under two different
households. When we grew cold, I
wandered outside and found the tipping point. The darkness
was humorous and somehow my chest
grew bigger. I hoped to have never returned but they needed
me. Mwana wangu.”

The working man points to me and warns me:
“if you were delicate, they would pray your house
would turn into glass just so they can throw stone. The world
spun whilst your chest kept on
growing. You bled whilst other sacrifices were being made.”
So - this is why whenever you give me lessons there is a vi-
brato. You really mean it. You second
guess and reassure yourself behind my back.

Takudzwa Mudiwa

Third Place

‘PTSDon’t Forget, The Body Remembers’

Your mouth is like a museum
full of old memories as words
 spat at you
 spilling out into glass cages
 for everyone to see

You hands are like club-footed pigeons
 mangled over time
 they are dirty flighty things
 picking up the scars left by others

Your eyes are like Atlantis
submerged in the trauma you’ll never fully
 remember
 did they happen
 do they exist
 take the plunge

Your body is like waking from a dream
 in unfurls like an eyelid
 and you spew out unwanted gunk
 like sleep from the corner of your eye
 but it’s something else

Hayden Downey

Leeds Poetry Events

After launching the poetry competition a series of events were ran. These events were intended to be a space where young people from Leeds could meet us in an informal way, where we could bring the petition to the public in hard copy for them to sign, and where we could celebrate the entrants to the poetry competition by hearing them perform their entries live on stage. The events were also used to recruit new volunteers.

Young people planned, organised and ran the events, and the photos are taken by a young person as well - Rhiannon Griffiths.









Exact Change

Why is it my brain fades to unprepossessing shades of off
white?

How is it I'm thinking about so much
that I'm not even thinking about anything anymore?
Or is it that my thoughts are moving so fast that I cannot pin-
point a single one?

I'm falling asleep on buses,
a year ago I was too scared of what people would think to
even be able to get on a bus,
and now I can't even worry enough to stay awake on one.

I'm like a flickering lightbulb,

on,

off,

on,

off,

on,

off,

but I'm never fully off until I've completely blown my fuse.

I sleep for days at a time

and then I'm a bundle of energy that irritates the
people around me

until they just want to extinguish me.

The fire in my chest rumbles,
flames licking my dry throat as the simplest of things,
like not having the exact change to pay for a bottle of water,
causes my mind to cry out.

For I've just made someone's life harder.

If only I did not care so much then my life would
become easier.

God I'm so damn selfish.

I've smiled at 38 people today
and only got 12 in return.

But 0 looked genuine.

Could it be they were mirroring my fake smile

that's slapped across my face, from cheek to cheek?
I must smile at every person I see,
what if they don't get to see smiles enough?
How I wish that my smile isn't the only one they will see,
for it would be a tragedy.
I wish I could give them a smile that is true,
but how can I
when there's flames licking at my dry throat
because I didn't have the exact change for that
stupid bottle of water yesterday.

Izzy Owen

Tears

I've taken a photo of my tears,
Because I'm the only one who sees them,
They're the only proof I'll ever have,
They're the only visible symptom.
For my bones they are not broken,
And you cannot see my bruises,
They're invisible to those who choose not to see,
To the one who simply refuses.
What isn't in plain sight to be seen,
Is usually ignored,
We become blind to the mind's abilities,
When the possibilities are not explored.
With gloom-ridden thoughts and desolation,
Plus, a whole lot more to juggle,
I've taken a photo of my tears,
Just a snapshot of my struggle.

Naomi Johnson

Note to Self

Today I got dressed on a day I did not need to.

I didn't leave the house but I left my bed and

That, is a small victory.

On Tuesday I ran myself a bath.

I didn't wash my body with soap but did allow my body to

soak in the water, rather than not and

That, is a small victory.

I work in research and had scheduled a call with a client.

On Friday I rearranged due to mental health but when Monday

came around and I wanted to

post-pone again I picked up the phone and

That, is a small victory.

I ate breakfast this morning.

I didn't manage to toast the bread but got myself two slices

and ate them one by one when

ordinarily I would starve my body and

That, is a small victory.

Last night I opened a message that had been sitting in my

inbox for over a week.

I often put off reading messages because it exhausts me to

respond but I read yours and

That, is a small victory.

I allowed my lungs to taste fresh air today.

I couldn't step foot outside, every time I try, I feel my throat

closing up, it gets hard to breath

but I did open a window and

That is a small victory.

Note to self, you are doing your best.

Amber Graver

Homeless and Hopeless

The sun begins to rise
And she - a mere fracture

To the eyes of pedestrians -
is crumpled.

Swarming sounds
Of people mix with
Memories which sift,
Then sink into mourning.

Spreading like an uneven
Wave of water, her feet
Reach before her: she peels
herself from
The pavement.

Adjacent is she to
the place that spat her out
last night

She is unseen, it seems,
To passers-by who daren't
Look her in the eye,
Reluctant to part with time
Or money.

All in such a hurry
That as black fumes leak
Into the bitter sky,
Dancing for her one more time,

She stops to see their outlines mingle
And the bus hits her
She is crumpled,
Cold and white.

Anon

Quetiapine, 25mg, twice a day

Printed on bright pink card, in the round friendly font of a
childrens book.

Funny, I think, the pills look rather like sweets, round and
bright orange.

The kind I would have chosen from Woolworths pick and mix
way back in the time before I first got sick.

“It will make you feel calmer, sleep better. It’s a tiny dose”
he says,
scribbling something else down in the file growing monstrous
and fat.

I wonder if by ‘calmer’ he means ‘more submissive’,
and by ‘tiny dose’ he means ‘be grateful,’
but I do not have the energy to put up a fight;

I leave only silence hanging in between us, impossibly
helpless and heavy.

There’s a little leaflet tucked inside, and,
nonchalantly, it lists the side effects he never

mentioned: diabetes... seizures... parkinsons disease...

I am nineteen years old and I am terrified. But the final side
effect of this crippling illness
seems to hurtle ever closer in the darkness, thickening day,
after day, after day.

I must try anything to save this life.
Quetiapine. Seroquel. Despair.
shouts the dull glow of a screen flickering somewhere in the
middle of the night,

an atypical antipsychotic...class of major
tr tranquillisers...
Majorly tranquilised, I think, that's what they want to do to
me.

I feel that I am worth nothing more than the clinical words

embossed in Braille on the card,
embossed in scars on my heart.

I swallow them, the acrid chalk catches in my throat and
burns me.

I swallow them, my hope and strength alongside.
I sleep for hours. The world turns flat and numb.
But the burning pain is still there, still everywhere;

I swallow them and wonder how many I'd have to swallow to
bring the end.

My tears remain, the screaming rain, dry and silent instead.
Like running against the wind, in slow motion.

I only want to ask, how many more years will I have to wait
before you offer me any real help of a kind
that does not come wrapped in plastic?

Anon

breathing

i'm laid down
legs crossed, hands locked
hours up in the air
vision blurred

life's passing me by
can't run if i try
the words i can speak
are just out of my reach

head up in the ceiling
i'm breathing

just breathing

Jay Cooper

Stigma

Publish my book with half the story,
And judge it solely by my cover.
Refine me down to a singular word.

Paint my picture with half a palette,
And criticise me for my abstract design.
Condense all that I am into one depiction.

Confine us all into the same box,
And take away our complex differences.
Deprive us of our right to be different.

You cannot rationalise the irrational,
And you should not fear the unknown,
But you can end the stigma.

An adjective to most,
A diagnosis to some,
A life sentence to me.

Jessie Blunden

Mother Tongue

Straining to turn to see the shapeless
Silhouette that resides before me, the eyes
And hands, and shapelessness
A mirror image of uncanniness.

Words of scorn begin to spill from my
Expression, a scathing smile placed below
My twisted Cupid's bow. With slitted eyes,
'You look fine.' slithers from my lips.

I watch as her form is swallowed up a
Self loathing that I had sheathed in
Gift wrap and given her for Christmas,
My sneer the bow on top.

Her collapsed form lies before me,
Flat packed, squashed to mimic the size of
Her significance. I pick her up and use
Her as a keychain. A keepsake.

It's something to remind me of something.
Something important. But I Worry on the bus home
Where between the boxes of childhood scars and
Labeled insecurities I'll keep this relapse.

I am a tsunami of spite, my words
A storm of suffocation to rest around the
Skin upon on her throat. A mirror image.

It's my mother's tongue

Erin Clarke

Salt n Pepper

i am enchanted by wind whispering through bracken
and ivy clambering up my capillaries and cartilage

he blinks at flashing streetlights
sees an emittance of blue and red glows,
hears beeping monitors in the silent night
and wraps himself in bedsheets
he pictures me in my dressing gown,
black, satin and lace
with no toothpaste stains down the front
floating around creeks and running my fingers
along the crevices of woven willow statues
he sees my soul, smiling in steel structures
subtly echoing through,
hollow
and without guilt.

he misses me making him perfect bites when we were at res-
taurants

carefully constructing them to contain
all the nicest parts

he misses cooking shows
and eyes that widen at architecture
in unexplored cities.

he hopes for my existence as a doe
and sees my legs scattering and dancing
up the steep hills of bradgate park
enamoured in my herd
happy

ivy doesn't climb up my capillaries and cartilage
but i am glad.

i don't need to wear the bandages any more
the scars have healed

Jenny Joy

I need to cut my hair

I need to pull it out from the roots and re-plant it in caring
and clumsy rows.

I need to plant it gently,
kneading it into the soil
with nimble fingers the way
that my mother planted my
great-grandmother's roses.

My mind needs to be as important
as heirloom plants to me.

So when I re-plant my brain,
the earth must be fertile and rich
with satisfying nutrients to eat.

I must pour it water crisp and crystalline,
letting the refreshment drip, drip onto the fresh mound
new and untainted by bitter moments.

And I this time I will raise my scalp-sprouts in a patch
with a little hand-written sign
decorated in cursive letters
written with a fine-point, felt-tip pen.

After it is planted I will wait and
watch closely to see if it
yields the same ugly weeds
that grew there originally.

I am making this pledge to myself: I will be a gardener this
time.

This time I will tend to my head,
and speak to it softly,
and pat the dirt lovingly,
and treat it as a child.

Then maybe I can discover the way

to fix this plot where I planted a prize-
winning patch of poison ivy instead of
flowers and let them grow until they
they touched my shoulders and forehead.

Thick vines with sharpened leaves
entwining me which is why I need
to cut my hair and replant goodness there.

Chloë Williams

Volunteer Florist Department

Today, I am trying to
conjure corollas.
Or rather, I want to be
replanted.

I don't want to keep
turning my heart
away from the sun.

Instead let me grow
the kind of stem that
doesn't prick skin but
begins as a bud,
then full of color.

I want to grow ray florets from my roots
instead of rooting around in the dirt,
rise from the dead, decomposing body of
the flower I was last fall. Outstretch my
neck in the heat of July and sprout from
a bitter seed. But if the soil rejects me please
set me on fire with your lighter
on the leaf pile and watch the
flames grow hotter, bluer, truer.

When I dry out and get tired
of being my own fire-fighter,
I will retire and
you will be hired.

If you see me rotting,
let me burn out
and scatter all my seeds to
let my body grow brand
new flowers and let every-
thing else be out of my power.
Next summer I'll wonder

why I cowered from the past,
standing with my head up in the grass.
Each harvest season will pass.

Skip through a field of shy sunflowers and wonder
how anyone could kill a houseplant in two weeks.
If you can't remember to water it,
set it on fire.

Chloë Williams

Primary Colors

after 'Babylon', Nick Drake

Late in the summer we stand in fields
and our eyes follow the fireflies.
Little glimmering orbs gleam out past
out past the mountains and into town.
In this space we see primary colors
as you hold a beaming yellow bug on your wrist,
and I see a faint flash of red and blue travel across the road,
screaming its call far away from the silent insect.
We live several minutes away,
but we get the papers,
we watch the news,
we know the houses where the sparkling lights will stop.
We know.
We know the victim
and what they have shot up only to fall down,
and who will rush in their home so frantically,
and what they will stick the sleeper to revive them.
And if not,
we will attend the funeral,
or else be caught in the traffic
as the procession drives by.
In school teachers told us pills and needles prick
skin deeper than the veins, but the impoverished
people of our state can only see relief from the
pain plaguing their brains. It's not an opioid
crisis, it's self-medication for your
old neighbors and friends' brothers,
the parents of foster kids you sat next to in
school who never knew their mother. People
you never expected to be pictured in newsprint.
All part of USA Today's Most Miserable State.

Little blue pills fill gold bottles in one hand and
a steering wheel in the other as they drive down

country roads where red and blue lights
speckle the horizon more brightly than
than yellow lightning bugs dot the sky.

Chloë Williams

Paradox

Our mind's work against us
Subconsciously sabotaging, taking control
Poppin pills or trust in the placebo
No drug is more powerful than the mind
Find new patterns and you sketch a new life
Your mind has all the solutions as well as issues
Misuse messes you
Think what you believe
Achieve in your reality
'It's not an adjustment of biology, it's an adjustment of consciousness'

Paige Phelan

Human Yo-Yo

Today I tied myself in string,
Because to you I am nothing,
More than a human yo-yo.
Being always dropped so low,
As low as one can truly go,
I am your human yo-yo.
But then you tend to call me near,
And return to you I do with cheer,
Despite knowing of past and future tears,
Because I am your human yo-yo.
Oh, how you make my head spin,
Pulling or pushing me on a whim.
What you do is such a sin,
I can't believe I'm back in the bin,
Your faithful human yo-yo x

James Ure

Did You Know?

Did you know that in my darkest moments,
I imagined a world without my heart beating and I smiled?
Every day, I wished for a way out, searching for salvation,
a path that would lead me towards the light.

Did you know that before I shared the positive picture that
you liked,
I was drowning in desolation on the bathroom floor?
On the edge, pierced with panic in my chest, the walls crumbling around me.
Trapped, desperately watching my dense tears descend to the
ground.
Alone, clock ticking, waiting for the storm to pass.

Did you know the immeasurable time I spent fighting with my
own mind?
A damaged wasteland, a toxic atmosphere, somewhere you
would never want to be.
The countless moments I spent revisiting old conversations.
Analysing every-spoken-word, every-emotion-felt.
Exhausted by the endless cycle of never-feeling-good-enough.

Did you know the infinite seconds, minutes, hours that I
struggled to find silence?
Wanting just a fleeting moment of peace amidst the chaos of
my unruly thoughts.
Every day, I dragged my legs through the mud until the sun
set in the sky.
Sleeping, my only sanctuary, my only safe space away from
the bleak.
In my dreams, I was free from the demons that held me
hostage.

Did you know that despite the glimmer you saw in my eyes,
inside my soul was breaking?
The mask I wore was due to the fear of being misunderstood
by a disapproving world.
When it slipped, the eyes would stare, the voices would whisper,
the fear returned.
No one recognised the hopelessness in my heart, the desire I
felt to eliminate the darkness
that was growing inside me, once and for all.

Did you know that although I am walking on solid ground today,
I am waiting for it to dissolve, without warning, beneath my
feet once more?
I see the light, I feel the light, I am the light. I can finally
breathe without pain.
Yet I know that one day, when I'm not watching, my demons
will return.

Emma-Jane Barlow

Black Cloud

Hi there,
Black Cloud

It's funny because I think
When I'm out I'm loud,
You can hear my laugh
Over the crowd,
So what exactly makes me
This "Black Cloud"

It's funny because I know
I don't tear you down,
By vocalising that comment
That made me frown,
As I ask myself "God...
Is she really wearing that to town?"

It's funny because I feel
Like I have to be sorry,
For the fact that my life's
Not been this ongoing party,
That things I can't control
Tint my life grey, well partly.

It's funny because for you
It's just a passing comment,
But I've got to try prize it
Out of my brain cement,
As it sets in and takes
Hold of every single moment!

It's funny because I'll say

Those words in my head,
Over and over and think
About why that was said,
I'll ask Him over and over
But my thoughts will still spread.

It's funny because I get sick
Of how your life has this rosy tint,
How you're always happy?
How it clings to you like lint.
But look at this brain fire
You were the fucking flint!

So fuck you I'm not the Black Cloud
I'm the thunderstorm bitch,
And I will tear you down,
Bad thoughts is what I'll stitch,
Into your skin so you can learn
To think before you speak witch.

You should have the sleepless night,
Fighting with your own brain,
Because if I'm the Black Cloud,
Then you're that shitty sunny rain,
That you weren't expecting
And that drives you insane.

Katy Weech

Dress-Up

Dress-up,
I've been staying late

trying to catch my shadow-
like a cat, it disappears for days.

i've been feeling my mother's
expressions on my face,
her mouth a tightly formed fist
turning over and over in my lap.
suddenly i'm five again, fish eyed
watching her put on lipstick and
hang silver from her wrists
that glints like a promise
of this holy thing.

mother, i finally understand the secret
i want to be five again, in gloves too big
clipping flowers from our garden.
all the plants in my room are dead.

Rhiannon Griffiths

Sometimes I forget

Sometimes I forget how to breathe
It's like everything inside of me
Everything I have
Just lets go and stops

Sometimes I forget how to smile
Not even my closest friends
Or my favourite shows
Can bring me the happiness they say I deserve

Sometimes I forget how to love
And not just towards my family
Not just towards my most valued things
But I lose it towards myself

And sometimes I forget how to live
Because I remember that moment
That moment where I wanted to didn't want to
And needed to slip away from everything

But now
Sometimes I forget how that feels
When the smallest light shines through
And I remember
To sometimes forget

Faye Walker

The Sky is Not Blue

The sky is not blue
But I know its blue, I can see it
And to believe something you need to see it, right?

The sky is not blue
But I can see the sky and the sky is blue
And seeing is believing, right?

Then tell me why does this little voice in the back of my head
keep telling me that the sky is not blue
I know it is, I can see it
I just don't believe it

I don't understand where it's coming from
What it sings is not a song
But eventually it got closer
And it's face grew almost kinder

Before my eyes it took its own form
as if it's for what I always longed
I shook its hand and became its friend
This was the beginning of the end

It had me tight, so very tight
And all in all it took my sight
No longer I could see the truest me
And I forgot how to simply be

I was fading out at the mercy of its hands
I followed it's orders, as if sheet music in band
But this tune I was so convinced was good
Gave away all my shoulds, woulds and coulds

I couldn't see anything until that day
But people around me would always say
How it looked good on me, it really did
But blind I still was, down the slope I still slid

Further I went and still further I now go
But I did say goodbye, I'm now higher than the low
But it knows that goodbye is never goodbye
But if it did learn, I know I wouldn't cry

For its always here, where ever I go
I can hear it now, I know, I know
You think I'm mad but really all this is
Confusing, I know, let me make a list

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, bed
Run, shower, food, head
Clothes, long, tired, heart
Food, water, locked, can't

Fifty, forty, five, three
Why can't I just exist and be
Lights, mirror, mat, shoes
I know it is, but the sky is not blue

All I'm asking from you now
Is that you don't mention or ask how
Keep the conversation general
I promise, I'm trying not to fall

See this thing I'm taking about
It's not an easy thing to say out loud

And although it means lots of lying
I promise I really am trying

Because I can see the sky
And I can see it's blue
And although it's more of a slog than a fight
I think I've found my sight
I will be alright

Laura Brown



“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.”

World Health Organization (WHO) (2006) Constitution of the World Health Organization, Forty-fifth edition



Anxiety is a Bully

He stood towering over my petite figure, his prominent eyes staring lazily into mine as if he could see what was going on in my mind. He was so close that their shadow in the bright unnatural light shrouded me from everyone else's view. His breath tickled my neck sending shivers down my spine and turning the blood in my veins to ice due to my terror. His snide smile turned my once happy face into one of stone without a single emotion. I could not show him my shaking hands or the bones in my body that clanked silently together, signifying the fear I had towards him, he would relish that too much.

His plump lips started moving, realing off threats and warnings but I didn't hear any of them. They were just background noise to the ringing that had overcome my ears. Despite the look on my face he stated to laugh. No matter how hard I tried to block him out he found a way to crawl under my skin and embed himself there like a disease making me feel moronic and humiliated. It makes my heart cave in and the life to slip out of my body. I despise him so much but he also seems to be my best friend, just lingering.

Anxiety is my Bully yours could be anyone but despite who it is it hurts. Both emotionally and physically he holds so much power over me and I don't understand how or why. Anxiety isn't a real person yet I describe it as a 'he' by choice because I see how much control he has that it doesn't stay the size to be just an emotion or to be objectified but to be the silent killer that circles my life.

Alex Parkin

Drowning

Like how darkness is the lack of light,
Numbness is a lack of feeling.
Directionless and unbound,
Unsure of where to go from now.
My pride gets in the way,
Of full blown dismay.
But this constant acting takes its toll,
And exhaustion has started to become me.
Nobody can know the stress,
The sadness,
The weakness below
This pretence of strength.
A rock to everyone,
Where they can go to lean and rest.
But I can't swim at the best of times,
And this weight is starting to drown me.
If only 'help'
Was part of my vocabulary.
Not just a call,
That I am required to answer.
I need something to change.
To feel the warm bulbs of inspiration.
Yet all I do is sit here,
Dull and void,
Full of desperation.

Laura Bagnall

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MAKE
OUR
RIGHTS
REALITY

Our Minds Our Future

To find out more about the campaign visit:



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facebook.com/MakeOurRightsReality/

Anthology design by Kat Outten



@katouttahere



The UK mental health system is failing young people. Nearly two in three young adults with diagnosable conditions go without necessary support, more than any other age group. Young people from across the country are fighting back through the Our Minds Our Future (OMOF) campaign. This anthology offers you a window into the experiences of young people living with mental health challenges; the poems were collected as part of a national poetry competition hosted by the OMOF campaign. We hope that one day, decision makers will take notice of the lived experiences of young people as being crucial to the development of a sustainable and meaningful mental health system that respects young people's human rights.

Make Our Rights Reality is co-ordinated by Youth Access (registered charity in England & Wales No. 1042121)



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