

# Thriving

children • youth • families



Growing Edge Training online journal



## Voices of Youth

*Mark Freado, Andrea Crisp, Naia Sverdrup, & Halley Riefle*

**F**or the past 5 years I have worked with the Wentzville School District in Wentzville, MO, a growing community forty miles west of St. Louis. Despite the stress of building schools and accommodating hundreds of new students each school year, the district has worked consistently to develop in a trauma-informed, strengths-based manner throughout every grade level. My work there has been in training Life Space Crisis Intervention and The Art of Kid Whispering: Reaching the Inside Kid as well as providing consultation, coaching and direct intervention in schools throughout the district.

In one of those schools, Pearce Hall, an alternative school for high school and middle school students, I attended on a day some of the students were presenting poetry they wrote. The teacher who led the students in this inspired activity is Andrea Crisp.

## ***I Am More***

by Naia Sverdrup

What people don't understand  
Is that I am more than my diagnosis  
I am more than the labels that people throw at me  
I am more than my limitations  
I am not a cardboard cut out for doctors to play with  
Like a party game for them to try and win  
All they do is throw more diagnoses at me  
More labels  
Muscular dystrophy  
Postural tachycardia  
Depression  
Schizophrenia  
Anxiety  
Each diagnosis coming with implications and expectations  
Of how I'm supposed to exist  
Each diagnosis coming with limitations  
And struggles that pull me down  
I would like nothing more than to smile for once  
Without my weakened muscles getting in the way  
I would like to go back to horseback riding  
Without the struggle of muscles too weak to stay on  
I would like to make it through a day without the demons  
And without the voices  
Without the darkness that clouds my mind  
I would like to be able to stand up without struggle  
Carry my books without struggle  
But I can't.

She explained that “in the spring of 2017 I watched a documentary, “Louder Than a Bomb” about a grass roots group of high school students in Chicago who started a spoken word poetry program. The whole program and idea caught me on fire. I was determined to bring that kind of creative and free expression to our students at the Alternative Program. I had no idea that all I had to do was provide the forum. The students have jumped in, and share their heartbreaks and triumphs openly with each other. I feel honored and blessed to be a part of this healing process through spoken word poetry.

It was a very moving experience to watch the students stand in front of their peers and express themselves in deeply personal ways. The following are two of the numerous presentations I heard that day. The students are pleased and proud to share them with you.

Because my disorders and diagnoses try to hold me back  
They try to hold me down  
The labels that try to dictate my life  
Each label pushing me further and further down  
Until I can't breathe from all the weight put on me  
From the diagnoses and labels  
But what I am learning is  
I am more than the labels  
More the the diagnoses thrown at me  
I am a writer, a poet, a friend, a daughter  
I am a student, a graphic artist, an advocate  
I am more than my diagnoses  
More than the labels  
Because above all of that  
Above all my limitations and labels  
I am me  
And that is enough

## ***The Misconception of Anxiety***

by Halley Riefle

The misconception of anxiety,  
Is it's not just a feeling of uneasiness,  
Or a weird fear of not being able to go somewhere alone.  
But it's much more.  
Anxiety isn't just shaky hands and a racing heart.  
It's like every irrational thought is scraping the sides of my skull, every time it swirls around with the same repeating negativity.  
Every situation is turned into an uncertainty of whether they mean what they say.  
Or if they're lying just to use me... like the last person I chose to let in.  
Anxiety isn't just being needy.  
It's needing reassurance that you still love me.  
Because every thought in my brain is telling me otherwise.  
It's not that I think you never loved me, it's that I think something has changed.  
I can see the change of how you text, and I think I've messed up the whole relationship.  
If you sent a "k" I'll end up wondering what I did.  
Because every thought turns into a chain reaction that morphs any happy moment into an investigation of whether they want me in their life.  
Even if you told me you adore having me in your life last week,  
i'll still question your intentions today.  
Anxiety is needing to hear that you want to see me, because I'm so afraid to text first.  
Because I can't text first, if i text first, I'll seem needy. And no one wants an annoying needy person on their shoulder... right?  
Or is this the anxiety talking.  
Anxiety is not knowing whether you're thoughts are rational. Not knowing whether to act on them or not.  
Not knowing whether to tell them everything I fear, or shut them out completely.  
Anxiety isn't something a "deep breathe" can fix.  
The misconception of anxiety is that it can be cured by medicine.

Anxiety is part of your thought process.  
No matter the amount pills they prescribe you,  
And no matter how many appointments you go to,  
You'll always think those same thoughts, but morphed.  
Instead of focusing on the things going on in your life.  
You're focused on your arm that has a weird pain, wondering if this is how you die.  
Wondering if this is a side effect of the medicine.  
Maybe i'm having a stroke...or a heart attack... i can't remember.  
Or maybe I've found something I'm actually allergic to.  
What if the allergy is deadly?  
No. you're fine. You aren't gonna die from a side effect.  
This is just the anxiety.  
If you search up anxiety into google, and look at the images,  
You'll find random people stressed out, most in the fetal position,  
Grabbing their head like they're going insane.  
This is a misconception.  
Although anxiety can get this bad.  
A lot of us can have a panic attack sitting in the middle of the classroom.  
Staring blank at the wall, findling with our hoodie strings.  
Your mind could be a natural disaster... and you could look as calm as the morning fog.  
Another misconception is the nail biting, yes some bite their nails.  
But it's not what you think,  
Not just a "nervous tick kicking in."  
It's a "anytime something is out of your control" type of thing.  
And trust me, my life is not under control.  
And it's not pretty little delicate short nails.  
Its beaten up, rough, unhealthy nails.  
And you know you're making things worse, but you can't stop because it's still not perfect. But it'll  
never be perfect.  
And when there is no more nail for us to 'fix'.  
We start picking our skin.  
This is the reality.  
Anxiety is spinning out of control, and all you can try and control is yourself.  
Its this constant need to be in control.  
And i'm not saying every anxiety filled person, thinks this.  
I'm not a doctor.  
And I'm not a professional.  
But no one can talk about anxiety in the most accurate way,  
Accept for the ones who go through it.  
Don't tell me the pills will help and don't tell me it will take the edge off,  
Because although it may slow my breathing,  
It will not slow the tornado going on in my brain.  
I'm not saying I don't want help,  
I'm just saying don't tell me this will fix me.  
When anxiety is apart of me.  
Anxiety is not being able to make a choice on my own because I don't trust myself to make my own  
decisions.  
Its trying to decide if I love myself or not.

But I keep coming back to my flaws.

Anxiety is trying to shuffle through my playlist of insults I throw at myself:

“Stupid.”

“Annoying.”

“Dumb.”

“Fat.”

“No one wants you.”

Anxiety is crying in your car, and you feel like you can't breathe.

Its wanting to never see anyone ever again because if you do,

You have to try and figure out every single thought, by trying to read their facial expressions.

Trying to figure out if your joke was funny or not buy staring at their cheekbones.

Trying to see if they like me, from the stress on their eyebrows.

Anxiety makes your mind race, ridiculing yourself for the stupid joke.

Anxiety is a little brother that follows you around, pointing out every flaw.

It's hard to love yourself with the bees swarming your head.

But I have to remind myself,

People love me,

And the care about me.

But there's always the truth hiding in the back of my head.

Well, if they want me in their life, they'll text, they'll tell me.

And anxiety is left on the edge of his seat, waiting for a text.

Anxiety is trying not to text the people that ignore you.

Because it's torture to know they dont want to talk to you.

I'm not saying I'm attached.

What I'm saying is I have a bucket of hope sitting in the closet, praying it doesn't go to waste.

Because everytime someone looks at me with a smidge of affection.

I'm holding onto them hoping they'll calm my feelings.

When I was thirteen, I stopped talking out loud... it all just stayed inside my head.

Because at that time, I was alone. I developed issues.

I was thirteen when I was diagnosed.

I was still so young.

I didn't know myself.

I don't know who I am without anxiety.

They say anxiety isn't a part of you,

But that's a misconception.

**Mark Freado, MA** (counseling and forensic psychology), is the director of Growing Edge Training, LLC. He previously served as Director, International Training Network with CF Learning, a program of Cal Farley's, and President of Reclaiming Youth International. His career involves direct service, supervision, and executive management in programs and services for troubled and troubling youth and their families. For more than 20 years, he has provided training and consultation to an international array of public and private organizations in mental health, social service, education, and juvenile justice disciplines. He can be reached at: [freado@growingedgetraining.com](mailto:freado@growingedgetraining.com)