

youth mind

Pieces

of

Me

Youth Mind is a quarterly magazine that is published by OLDF Inc., Toronto, ON Canada.

ISSN: 2563-4984

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for the youth by the youth

Youth Mind is an online magazine made for the youth, by the youth. Our editors and contributors aim to cover content that we belive young people care about.

Whether it’s school, the job market, the environment or social justice, we know that these areas affect and will continue to affect our demographic the most.

For this reason we wanted to cover such content with the utmost respect and attention that it deserves.

We hope that **Youth Mind** will inform, motivate and empower the young people of today.



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Letter from the Editor

Dear lovely YM readers,

Take a second to think about all the pieces that make up who you are. Not just your physical attributes, but the things that make you you. Maybe that’s your culture, the languages that you speak or the foods that taste like home. But it might also be events that shaped who you are today, your experiences at school or even how you learn.

All of these little things intersect together to create your identity. That’s why for this issue, we’re focusing on all the pieces that make you who you are. The team at YM dug deep to bring you stories that touch on who you are from neurodivergence, to family life and even personal struggles.

In this issue, you’ll find personal stories from our writers celebrating what makes us who we are. On page 27, you can check out Jospehine’s journey of finding out she was neurodivergent in her 20s. Then on page 21, you can read about Isabella’s relationship with energy drinks. Or have you ever worried about becoming an adult? Dive into Ruth’s story about Adulting 101 on page 10.

As you read this issue, we hope you celebrate all the pieces that make up your identity, but also what makes up the identities of other people. Even if there are stories in here that you might not relate to, we hope you think about how these aspects might make up other people. As you flip through these pages, remember that you are enough — just as you are.

Happy reading!

Julia Tramontin, Lan Nguyen & the Youth Mind team



Land Acknowledgement

Youth Mind Magazine acknowledges the Indigenous land on which we work that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples since the beginning.

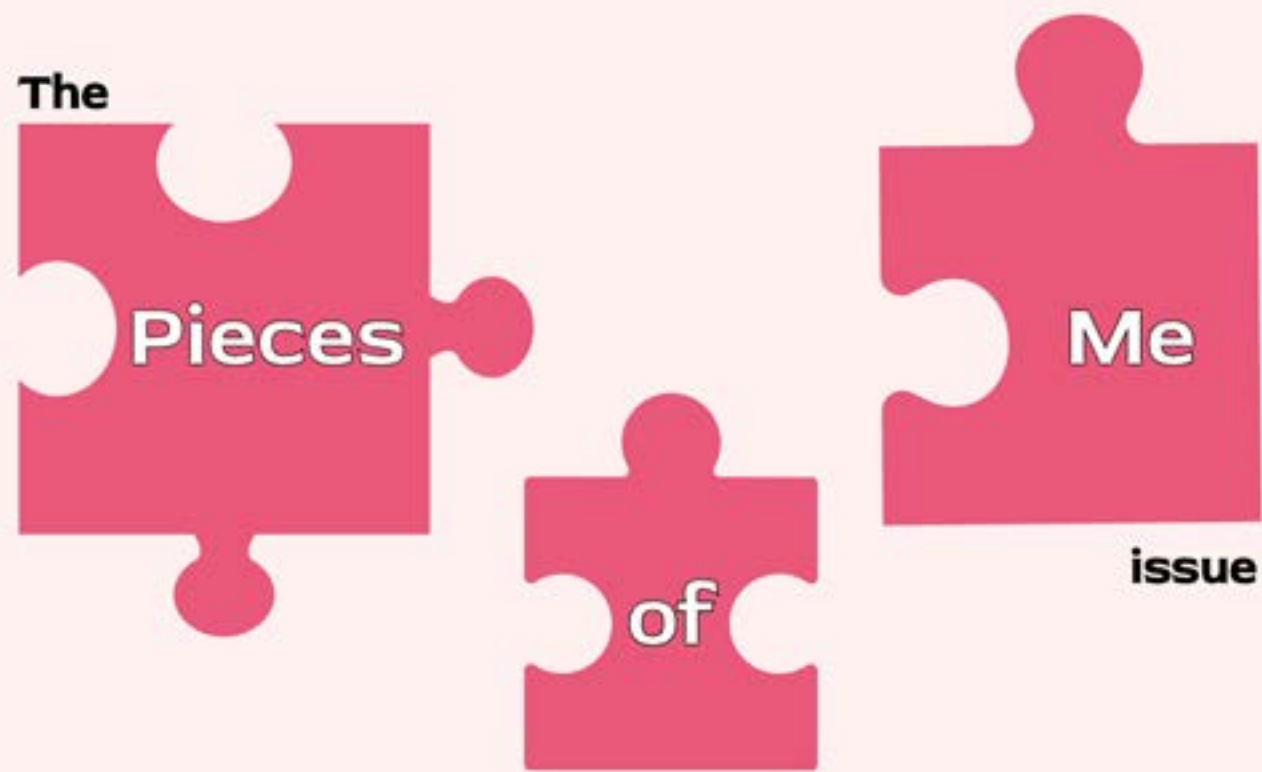
As settlers, we’re grateful for the opportunity to meet here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land — for thousands of years.

Long before today, there have been Indigenous peoples who have been the stewards of this place.

We wish to acknowledge the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place.

We also recognize the contributions of Métis, Inuit, and other Indigenous peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, and our province and country as a whole.

As settlers, this recognition of the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous peoples must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities, and in particular to bring justice for murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls across our country.



Society

Adulting 101: Rethinking How We Prepare Youth for the World 10

The Quiet, Complicated Weight of Being a First-Generation Post-Secondary Student 11

How Dropping Out of University (and Going to College) Helped Me Re-find Myself 15

Back to Your Roots: Getting in Touch with Your Cultural Identity 18

Lifestyle

From Pop to Politics: How 'brat' Became a Meme, a Movement and a Marketing Tool 20

Health

Caffeine Chaos: How energy drinks made my anxiety worse 21

Letting Go of the Pressure to Be Okay All the Time 25

I Thought I Was Just Weird: Discovering I'm Neurodivergent in My 20s 27

Adulting 101: Rethinking How We Prepare Youth for the World

Written by RUTH MOON LOPEZ

[Dr. Kristina Llewellyn](#) and I laughed as we both admitted we had never changed a tire. “If that helps,” she said with a smile in her voice, “I consider myself very much a capable and responsible adult, but I’ve never changed a tire.”

The historian and professor at McMaster University’s Wilson College doesn’t downplay the importance of modern home economics. Rather, she explained to me how the notion of adulthood can’t really be defined by a definitive checklist of life skills.

In 2023, the University of Waterloo introduced an online course called Adulting 101, aimed at supporting students who may be unfamiliar with tasks like cooking, budgeting or doing laundry. It sparked renewed debate around a perceived decline in “adult literacy” among young people.

But to Llewellyn, the solution isn’t as clear-cut as reintroducing home economics or mandating tire-changing tutorials. “I would really push back against the idea that there are these finite applicable skills we can teach to be an adult,” she said. “It’s more about opportunities — opportunities for young people to work alongside adults in their communities and participate meaningfully in public life.”

As higher education became more accessible following World War II, more young people began attending and graduating school. This meant they were spending most of their time in settings largely composed of other young people, solidifying a youth culture increasingly separate from adults. This led to fewer opportunities to gain the kind of experiential, civic learning that fosters real-world competence.

“It’s a bit of a paradox,” Llewellyn explained. “We’ve created peer cultures that are very distinct from adult ones, and then we act surprised when young people don’t feel prepared.”

When it comes to the discussion about youth missing adulting skills, it’s not necessarily about what they lack — it’s about what they haven’t been offered.

That isn’t to say resources like Adulting 101 aren’t helpful or needed. While it’s important not to generalize the struggles of some youth as representative of all young people, “some people very much are [struggling] and need those supports,” Llewellyn expressed. “Education is one of the primary ways in which we can provide that.”

Amid the economic uncertainty, climate anxiety and social isolation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, wraparound supports — particularly mental health care, mentorship and community involvement — are key.

Education plays a central role in delivering these supports, but it must be reimagined to meet the diverse and evolving needs of young people. This includes increasing funding for post-secondary institutions, allowing them to provide robust and responsive support services from counselling to newcomer assistance for international students and other tailored accommodations that ease the transition into adulthood.

While practical life skills like financial literacy and auto mechanics remain important, they must be part of a broader, more holistic framework — one that recognizes that adulthood isn’t a checklist, but a collective effort.



Graphic by: Alisha Velji

The Quiet, Complicated Weight of Being a First-Generation Post-Secondary Student

Written by AUTUMN BRAMBELL

Photo courtesy: Pexel (photos by: Kaboompics.com, cottonbro studio, Andrea Piacquadio)



For many first-generation students, pursuing post-secondary education is more than a personal achievement; it is the fulfillment of a promise made silently across generations. It is a journey shaped by family sacrifice and hopes that are often unspoken but deeply felt. I speak from experience when I say that beneath the pride and celebration lies a complex, often taboo, emotional landscape.

There is a tension many first-gen students live with daily: the pressure to succeed without cracking under the weight of expectations, the guilt of wanting to pursue their own dreams while feeling tied to family obligations, and the difficult comparisons to peers whose parents have navigated post-secondary education before. These feelings are rarely discussed openly, creating a silent burden that can be isolating and overwhelming.

The Pressure to Succeed and the Weight of Expectations

When I first walked into my university classes, I didn’t just carry textbooks and notebooks, I carried

my family’s dreams. I felt the weight of every sacrifice made by those who came before me, and the silent hope that my success would honour them. Research supports this experience. A [study](#) published in the Journal of College Student Development found that first-gen students often feel intense pressure to succeed academically because they see their success as a reflection of their family’s sacrifices.

This pressure can be a powerful motivator, but it can also be overwhelming. I remember times when an exam felt less like a test of what I knew and more like a measure of how much my family had sacrificed for me to be there. That responsibility comes with no manual, no clear guidance on how to succeed without losing yourself in the process.

The Taboo of Guilt and Wanting More

Alongside this pressure, there’s a quieter, often taboo feeling: guilt. Guilt about wanting to pursue dreams that don’t always fit neatly with family expectations or traditional roles. Psychologists studying [family achievement guilt](#) describe how many first-generation students feel torn between honouring

their family and following their own path.

One participant in the study put it perfectly: “I wanted to succeed, but I didn’t want to leave my family behind. Sometimes it felt like if I did well, I was betraying them.” That tension, between gratitude and self-interest, is rarely spoken about. It creates a silent struggle where isolation and impostor syndrome thrive. I’ve wrestled with this feeling myself, the simultaneous pride in achieving something new and the heavy fear that, somehow, I was leaving my family behind.

Comparing Paths: The Invisible Divide

The challenge deepens when you start noticing the “invisible divide,” the quiet comparisons with peers whose parents have already navigated post-secondary life. Many first-gen students, including myself, don’t have the same “cultural capital” or the insider knowledge about how to access resources, navigate academic expectations or network effectively. [Research](#) highlights that this gap affects confidence and belonging.

I often felt like I was trying to decode a foreign language while others seemed fluent. That feeling of being “behind” can be isolating and makes it harder to feel fully part of the campus community.

Mentorship and Community: Pathways to Resilience

Despite these challenges, first-gen students show incredible resilience. From my own journey, I know that finding spaces to openly discuss guilt, pressure and identity can be transformative. [Studies](#) show that culturally responsive mentoring, peer networks, and programs that honour first-gen identities significantly improve persistence and well-being.

When I connected with peers and mentors who truly understood the unique tensions I carried, I felt less alone. It gave me the courage to reclaim my story and define success on my own terms.

Bridging Two Worlds: Insights from Patty Klug

[Patty Klug](#), inaugural director of the [Chaiken Center for Student Success](#) at Penn State, has spent four years walking alongside first-generation college students as they navigate the invisible terrain between pride and pressure, hope and self-doubt. She describes a recurring tension many students face, feeling pulled in two directions at once: between the world of home and the world of higher education.



“For a lot of first-gen students, college can feel like living a double life,” Klug explains. “Their families may not fully understand the environment they’re in or the demands they’re facing. The more these students grow professionally, the more it can feel like they’re drifting away from home, even when that’s not what they want.” As a result, many students feel they can’t talk about certain aspects of their lives with family, not out of secrecy, but because there’s simply no shared context.

Klug emphasizes that this dissonance isn’t just cultural, it’s emotional. “There’s pride, of course,” she says, “but there is also a bit of self-doubt, especially in the first year.” Students may feel like imposters without knowing the term for it, and only once they’re part of a community of peers or mentors does that language and validation begin to emerge. “It gets better,” she reassures. “By the time they’re in their third or fourth year, many of them are filled with more pride than doubt. And they want to give that pride back, they want to mentor the next wave of first-gen students coming in behind them.”

She speaks passionately about Penn State’s efforts to make first-gen identity a source of visibility and strength rather than a hidden status. “We’re working on building community and social capital, through mentorship, leadership positions, and peer networks,” Klug says. “We want students to see themselves in faculty, staff and alumni. To know that this identity doesn’t hold them back, it prepares them in unique ways.”

Patty Klug recalls how one first-gen student started as a peer mentor and eventually went on to lead a research expo, earn a service award and graduate with a resume full of leadership experience. “I’ve seen students take every piece of support offered and truly run with it,” Klug says. “And that’s something we often see with first-gen students, it’s not always about hustling harder, it’s about working smarter. Asking yourself: What’s the best use of my energy? Who can I connect with that might open the next door?” For Klug, one of the greatest institutional challenges is simply finding first-gen students early on. “Not everyone self-identifies, or even understands what being first-gen means,” she says. “That’s why visibility is so important. As we develop our first-gen offerings, we’re focused on creating more opportunities for staff, faculty, and alumni to connect with and learn about the needs of our first-gen students.”

“We’re also exploring ways to engage with students earlier in their journey, through access to peer coaches, customized orientation materials and videos that speak directly to the first-gen

experience,” Klug explains. “Our goal is to help students see their first-gen identity as a strength. Being first-gen means you’re resilient, capable and part of something powerful. and we want them to feel that from the very beginning.”

Her message to students? “You’ve changed the trajectory of your family’s life just by being here. That deserves to be seen and celebrated.”



Penn State first-generation student merchandise, including a sticker sheet, individual stickers and a button.



More Than Survival: Redefining Success

The journey of a first-gen student is complicated, filled with pride, sacrifice, tension and hope. But it is also powerful. By breaking the silence around taboo feelings like family achievement guilt and the burden of expectations, we can create more inclusive educational environments. Spaces where students don't have to choose between honouring their heritage and pursuing personal growth.

To first-gen students navigating this path: wanting success on your own terms does not diminish your love or respect for your family. You can carry your expectations without being crushed by them.

The question isn't, "Why carry this weight?" but "How will you carry it, and how will you define success for yourself?"

Your story, with all its complexities and contradictions, is a vital part of reshaping what it means to belong in higher education. And it's a story worth telling.

How Dropping Out of University (and Going to College) Helped Me Re-find Myself

Written by STEPHANIE TAYLOR



Graphic by: Alisha Velji

The minute I decided to drop out of university, I felt a great weight lift off my chest.

I had spent the previous four years trying my best to succeed in an environment I wasn't thriving in. I was struggling. I couldn't handle a full course load, and even when I dropped courses to make the semester more manageable, I was lucky if I passed the classes I stayed in.

I switched majors constantly — at least once a semester — in the hope that finding the right program would lead me to success. It never did. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. This constant failure in my classes and not knowing who I even wanted to be had a profound impact on my mental health. I was in a very dark place, and I knew if I stayed in university, it wasn't going to end well for me.

However, I didn't want to be labelled a dropout. In my mind, the label carried bad connotations. If I dropped out, that meant I was stupid, a disappointment to my parents. While I know this train of thought was incorrect, it was still hard for me to overcome the feeling of failure. I had hit a plateau in my life where I wasn't accomplishing anything. I had tried to succeed at university, but nothing was working, so I resorted to my last option — giving up.

Giving up isn't always a bad thing. According to [Tina Seelig](#), who has a doctorate in neuroscience, quitting can actually be beneficial.

Seelig wrote in an article for the [Stanford Technology Ventures Program](#), "Quitting allows you to start over with a clean slate. And if you take the time to evaluate what happened, quitting can be an invaluable learning experience."

Giving up on university allowed me to reflect on what went wrong. It also made me really think about where I wanted to end up.

So, what went wrong?

I chose a program I wasn't suited for, resulting in poor grades. These poor grades led me to spiral, resulting in more poor grades. It was a loop I was stuck in.

Where do I go from here?

This was the tricky part. I knew I wanted to keep studying, but clearly, I wasn't meant to be studying at a university level. My dad had mentioned college a couple of times over the past few years, but I kept brushing the idea away.

When I was in high school, the idea was pushed on us that the 'smart kids' went to university and the rest went to college — or nowhere at all. I needed to let go of this notion in order to take my next step in life. Going to college instead of university doesn't make you dumb, it just means you have different goals. College programs are a lot more narrow than a typical university degree program. If you take journalism, you will be trained to become a journalist. If you take cardiovascular technology, you will be trained to become a cardiovascular technologist.

The day I decided to leave university was the day I reclaimed my life. I called my parents and told them I was dropping out. My plan was college, but I wasn't sure which program just yet.

Eventually, I settled on journalism. I always liked to write, so I figured it'd lead me towards a career I could be happy in. This year, I graduated from Algonquin College's journalism program with honours. Turns out I'm not dumb, I just needed a different learning environment.

The two years I spent at college were the happiest I had been in a long time. I was doing well in my classes, making friends and I had finally found my passions — the environment, animals and finding ways to make a change.

The very first story I wrote for the school paper was about pets for adoption on campus. The whole reporting experience — meeting the pets, learning how the vet tech students care for them, taking photos and piecing together the story — was such a high for me. In that moment, I knew I had found my place.

I'd be lying if I said the change wasn't scary. I was 22, restarting school, while people I graduated from high school with were starting their careers. However, I quickly found out I wasn't the only student who didn't come directly from high school (a silly thought for me to have when very few of my classmates were fresh out of high school).

One of my classmates, Sophie Daly, had a similar experience.

"I fully believed I was unteachable after I left university since I failed so hard," says Daly. "I was so nervous to go to college and possibly fail again."

Daly landed on the Dean's List every semester.



"College taught me that I am smart in specific fields," says Daly. "STEM isn't for me; I'm more of a visual learner. That isn't bad and it doesn't make me less of a learner."

While I sometimes think about how it took me six years to earn a diploma, I've learned it's okay to start over. It allows us to grow. I don't have any regrets about the path I've taken — I just wish it didn't come with a pile of student debt.

Photo courtesy: Pexel (photos by: Pixabay & Emily Ranquist)



Back to Your Roots: Getting in Touch with Your Cultural Identity

Written by LISA MANGANIELLO



Graphic by: Alisha Velji

Lan Nguyen, an editor at OLDF from Toronto, is learning “to accept and appreciate the roots that had always been laid down” for him. For Nguyen, accepting and appreciating his Vietnamese roots allows him to embrace where he came from.

“I became closer to my friends from Saturday school, after all these were people, I had shared experiences with since I was five, and we began to bond over hanging out every Saturday to learn Vietnamese against our will. I started looking forward to cultural events and holidays, whether it was at my church, or simply with my extended family,” says Nguyen of how acceptance and appreciation of his Vietnamese culture allowed for positive experiences with his culture.

“Most importantly, I stopped being ashamed of where I came from, and was not only just willing, but eager to talk to my ‘non-Vietnamese’ friends about my own experiences with my culture,” says Nguyen.

Ultimately, Nguyen says that reintegration of “culture back into your own identity” can help you to “learn to grapple with what you want to accept/celebrate what you want to leave behind.” This helps to shape personal and cultural identity.

Culture is a part of who we are. According to EBSCO, cultural identity is the concept of an individual that belongs to a certain cultural group. Culture is an important part of our ethnic identity. Youth are often on the journey of learning more about themselves. Exploring cultural identity can help young people feel more complete and at peace with their sense of self.

The Importance of Cultural Identity

Having a [sense of culture](#) is important because it helps to conserve experiences and events from the past. Cultural identity also helps individuals to feel like they belong to their culture.

Having a cultural identity allows individuals to feel secure. Those who identify with their ethnic culture are likely to have good health and excel academically.

Cultural identity is also important because it allows individuals to gain self-knowledge. Identifying with a culture also helps to gain self-respect and healthy pride.

Cultural Identity and Self-Identity

According to the [Sustainability Directory](#), “Culture acts as a foundational blueprint, subtly guiding our understanding of self from the earliest moments of life.”

For example, our language, social norms and values are all aspects of culture that help shape our self-identity at early stages in life.

Language

The words that we speak are established by culture which helps to shape our understanding of the real world.

Social Norms

There are certain notions and practices that guide good comportment during numerous communal instances which help to impact our exchanges with others and how we present ourselves.

Morals

Culture helps us to guide our moral conscience. Culture teaches us about moral principles. Moral principles are often developed through cultural identity.

Cultural Identity and Personal Growth

Cultural identity can help spark personal growth in young people because it helps with the exploration of morals, mindset and ambitions. Searching through these few topics can allow for personal growth because it allows for independence, freedom and distinctive personal identity that implements cultural elements and personal decisions.

Learning about cultural identity also helps individuals to gain more knowledge about the world which can help people to think critically and learn how to become more broad-minded

How To Explore and Connect to Your Cultural Roots

Mark Manganiello of Ottawa was able to get back in touch with his cultural roots by visiting Naples, Italy for the first time. This trip was very meaningful to Manganiello because he was able to walk the same streets as his parents, his grandparents and his ancestors.

His ability to eat the food in Italy and hear the Neapolitan dialect allowed him to gain a deep understanding of where he came from in both a historical and personal sense.

According to Manganiello, the trip to Italy “completely reshaped” how he saw himself. Manganiello says that previously, his “heritage felt like just a label.” “Standing in the place called home gave me a new sense of belonging and pride,” he says.

His visit to Naples, for the first time allowed him to “understand the values and traditions that have been passed down” to him. Ultimately, Manganiello is always learning more about his heritage through language, art, literature and music which he says has shaped his “identity of being Italian Canadian.”

Visiting the countries that you are from is just one way to explore your cultural identity. Here are [some other tips](#) for getting in touch with your roots.

- Listen to music or TV in the language of your ethnic origin
- Look at pictures of your ethnic origin
- Join community centers or organizations of your ethnic origin
- Cook food related to your culture
- Learn the language of your ethnicity
- Investigate cultural traditions
- Attend cultural festivals

Culture is a beautiful part of our existence. It is inevitably a part of who we are. Getting in touch with your cultural roots can help spark personal growth and allows for an overall better understanding of oneself.

From Pop to Politics: How ‘brat’ Became a Meme, a Movement and a Marketing Tool

Written by RUTH MOON LOPEZ

“[kamala IS brat](#),” tweeted British singer-songwriter Charli XCX in the wake of Kamala Harris’s emergence as the presumptive Democratic nominee in summer 2024. The singer would later clarify that the tweet was “just something positive and lighthearted,” a spontaneous, off-the-cuff post made while lounging by the pool.

But what followed was anything but casual. The tweet rapidly spiraled into a cultural flashpoint, emblematic of the ways in which politics and popular culture are increasingly entangled in the digital age. brat, Charli’s most recent album, became more than a collection of tracks. With its unapologetically hedonistic messaging, it became a symbolic language for certain youth subcultures deeply attuned to online performance, curated chaos, and the recycling of early-2000s “indie sleaze” rebellion.

And Harris’s campaign was quick to capitalize on this moment. Shortly after Charli’s apparent endorsement, the Harris campaign’s official Twitter account (@kamalahq) [updated its banner](#) to the signature brat green, subtly making the party girl aesthetic a part of their political campaign’s visual language. By recontextualizing the brat imagery, the Harris campaign attempted to signal cultural fluency and win the favour of younger demographics.

Online, youth also began co-opting brat to reframe political discourse in their own terms. From out-of-context press clips being used as reaction videos to [fan edits](#) of Harris accompanied by songs off the album, the politician began to amass a following more akin to that of a celebrity than a public servant.

One might interpret this meme-ification as a coping mechanism, a way to process political frustration through humour and detachment. But when brat’s symbols begin appearing at [political protests](#) — its shades of neon green flying next to Palestinian flags — a more complicated picture emerged.

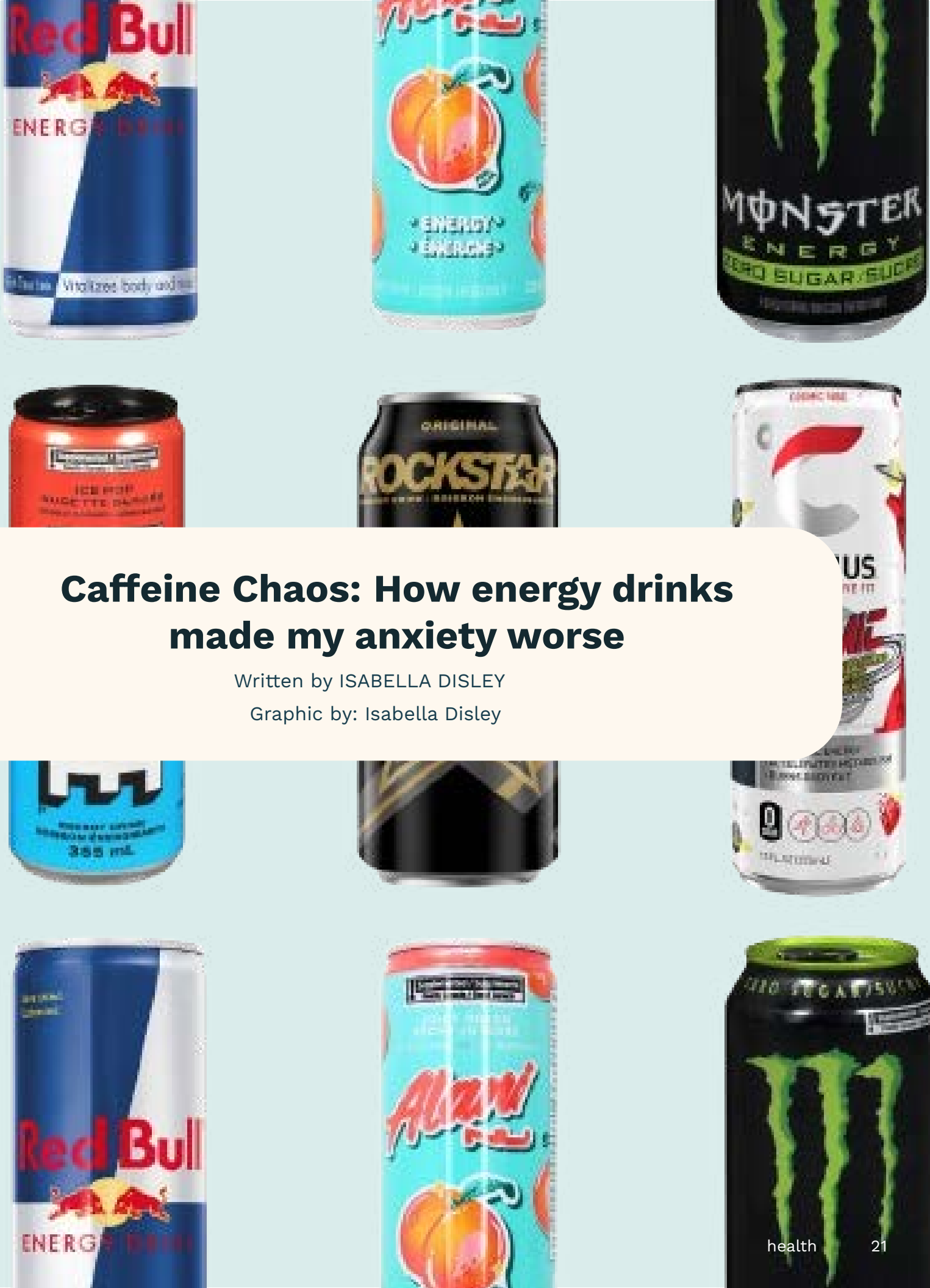
What begins as a gesture of solidarity can quickly turn into an insensitive act. The act of inserting popular culture into protest may feel empowering or tongue-in-cheek, but it can also undercut the urgency of the causes being fought for. In the face of genocide, settler colonialism and state violence, does employing a meme not risk trivializing the severity of these issues?

When Harris, a representative of a government actively complicit in many of the systems young people are protesting, co-opts the brat meme for relatability points, it’s not just tone-deaf — it’s strategic.

Meme politics trades in ambiguity. That’s what makes it fun, fast and viral — but also what makes it dangerous. Its playful, ironic tone allows complex or contentious issues to be distilled into catchy, easily shareable content that resonates across diverse audiences simply because it’s funny. Real political struggles require clarity, accountability and sustained engagement.

Trends like brat allow politicians to appear connected to youth without committing to any of their demands. It lets protesters slide from outrage into performance, where an image of holding a flag becomes more important than what it actually stands for.

brat



Caffeine Chaos: How energy drinks made my anxiety worse

Written by ISABELLA DISLEY
Graphic by: Isabella Disley

Energy drinks are one of the coveted items included in any ‘university/college student starter pack.’ From Red Bull to Monster, energy drinks are the go-to for tired students. In my case, my energy drink of choice was Alani Nu.



Graphic by: Isabella Disley

I never tried energy drinks until last year, when I was constantly exhausted because of school and needed a solution. I tried a sip of a peach-flavoured Celsius and Red Bull, but I did not like the taste of either of them. I ended up sticking with variations of tea-based drinks up until the first semester of my final year, which was around the same time Alani Nu became available in Canada.

I decided to give energy drinks another try. I went to Shoppers Drug Mart and picked out their peach drink, the only flavour available on the refrigerated shelf. I got home, took a sip to try it thinking I would save it for class the next day, and it tasted great.

It was a refreshing feeling. It was easier to work and complete assignments, and I had energy the entire day. I even stopped on the way home to get more, and the store had the cherry flavour. It became a routine. I had an energy drink every time I had class, which was at least three days a week.

For the next few months, everything went smoothly — until December hit. I had an energy drink before my night class, and instead of feeling energized, I started to feel weird. It was as if I were nervous about something. I had to skip eating before



Photo courtesy: (photo by: Isabella Disley)

class due to a sudden wave of nausea. During the commute to campus, I could not pinpoint what was happening to my body, but everything started to feel off as my nerves continued to heighten.

I figured it was a stomach bug, so I took an anti-nausea pill from my small emergency kit, prepared for all possible contingencies. I thought it would help. However, at that point, I was having a full-fledged, internal panic attack. I did not know what was happening. It was a mix of nerves and confusion.

I felt out of control of my body, and my fight-or-flight instincts said I needed to go home. I took a cab home and fell asleep due to the side effects of the medicine.

I woke up feeling a bit better, but still confused as to why whatever had happened had happened. I tried to find an answer, but I couldn't. My dad brought up energy drinks as a possible culprit, but I thought it couldn't be the reason since they hadn't caused any issues before.

But then I began to wonder if energy drinks were the cause. I had class the next day and decided not to drink one. Everything was fine, so I decided to stop drinking them for the next week. On one of my days off, I decided to conduct a test by drinking an energy drink to see what would happen. The same thing happened: heightened nerves, feeling off and out of control.

That's when it hit me: I couldn't have energy drinks anymore. It induced anxiety and panic attacks.

Amber Sommer, a registered dietitian nutritionist and licensed dietitian, mentioned the dangers of energy drinks in a [Cleveland Clinic](#) article.

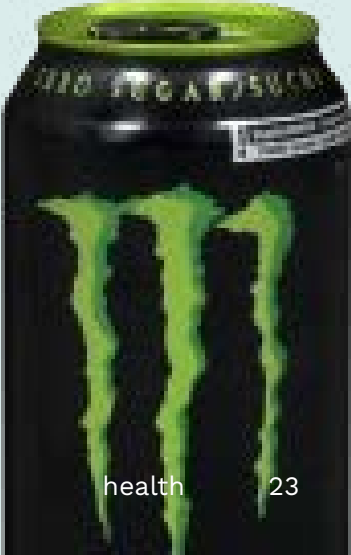
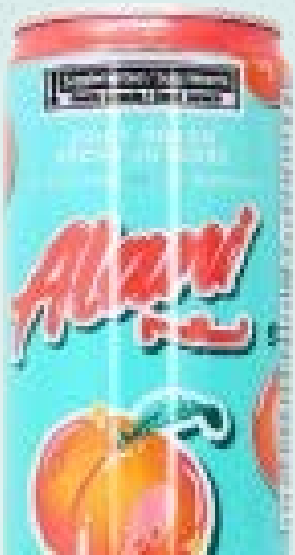
"On their own, these ingredients may have some health benefits — like supporting brain and heart health, improved energy and focus and antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits — but when you combine them with the additional caffeine and added sugars in an energy drink, it can be a recipe for disaster," Sommer told the organization.

"Occasional consumption of energy drinks by healthy people is not likely to be harmful. But drinking them regularly can increase your risk of adverse health effects, especially if you have an existing medical condition," said Sommer.

Additionally, the Cleveland Clinic provided a list of potential risks of consuming energy drinks:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Diarrhea
- Hallucinations
- Headaches
- Mood swings
- Nausea
- Rapid heart rate (tachycardia)
- Stroke
- Tooth decay
- Weight gain

After coming to that conclusion last year, I stopped drinking energy drinks for good. As I continued to research energy drinks and their effects, it became clear that what happened to me was a direct result of them. Since then, I have opted for other forms of caffeine, such as green and chai teas.





FINANCIAL PROGRAMS

COUNCIL OF CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATIONS BURSARY PROGRAM

To encourage and assist youth from **Caribbean countries** who are currently resident in **Ontario** to pursue their educational goals at the **university or college level**.

To recognize academic effort, community involvement and contributions to the Caribbean community in Ontario.

In 2023, **Twelve (12)** \$1,000.00 each Bursaries will be awarded. The value of each bursary is **CDN \$1,000.00** and is used towards full courses leading to a **first diploma or first degree**.

NEW PROGRAM - SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORED BY SENECA POLYTECHNIC

To encourage and assist youth from **Caribbean countries** who are currently resident in **Ontario** to pursue their educational goals at **Seneca Polytechnic**.

To recognize academic effort, community involvement and contributions to the Caribbean community in Ontario.

One (1) Full Tuition Scholarship valued up to **\$6,000.00** per year for up to 4 years to a qualifying student for the duration of the program the student applied for and admitted into.

Learn more:
<http://bit.ly/44RFWt8>

CANADA LEARNING BOND

Receive \$2000 to an RESP, \$500 in Year 1.
Apprenticeship Programs, CEGEPs, Trade Schools, Colleges and Universities.

The Canada Learning Bond, popularly known as 'CLB' is money that the Government adds to a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) for children from low-income families to assist them in paying for high education.

Learn more:
<https://bit.ly/44RBaqL>



Photo courtesy: Freepik

Letting Go of the Pressure to Be Okay All the Time

Written by AUTUMN BRAMBELL

I used to think being strong meant pretending I was okay, even when I wasn't.

Over time, that kind of strength started to cost me. It's easy to believe that resilience means hiding our emotions.

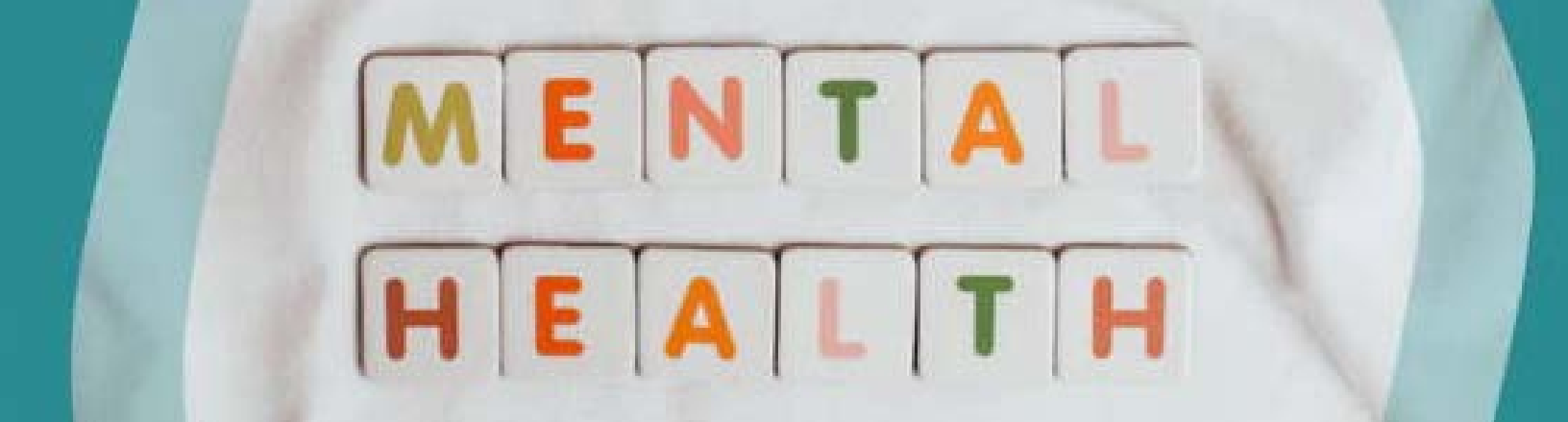
Cultural narratives, especially in the media, reinforce this. In movies and shows, we see “strong” characters soldiering on through trauma without flinching. Female leads are praised for being tough, stoic and unbreakable. Even when they fall apart, they rarely cry. They rarely ask for help. They never let their pain slow them down.

I didn't realize how deeply I had absorbed this message until my mental health started to unravel in university. Despite years of anxiety, insomnia and burnout, I didn't think I had the right to struggle. I

clung to the identity of the dependable one, the one who didn't fall apart. I feared that if I admitted how much I was hurting, everything would collapse. Or worse, people would see me differently. I wouldn't be “strong” anymore.

Slowly, I began to see that the kind of strength I was chasing wasn't strength at all — it was silence. It was shame. It was a quiet belief that needing support made me weak.

I'm not alone in this. Many young Canadians, especially those with multiple identities such as racialized, Indigenous, neurodivergent, LGBTQIA2S+, first-generation youth, carry a double burden. According to the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#),



I Thought I Was Just Weird: Discovering I’m Neurodivergent in My 20s

Written by JOSEPHINE NAGAVY

approximately **1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental health problem or illness each year**, yet stigma and systemic barriers often prevent them from seeking help. For [Indigenous youth](#), the rates of mental health challenges and suicide are disproportionately high, influenced by historic and ongoing trauma.

When we constantly need to prove ourselves, vulnerability feels risky. Yet denying it takes a toll on our bodies, our relationships and our sense of self.

The truth is, emotions don’t disappear when we ignore them. They show up as exhaustion, irritability, panic attacks and disconnection. I didn’t learn to name or sit with my emotions until I was forced to. Therapy helped. So did quiet talks with friends who admitted they struggled too. One of the most healing moments was when someone said, “You don’t have to be okay for me to care about you.”

That sentence broke something open. And something softer started to grow.

I’m still learning to let go of the pressure to be okay all the time. It’s hard. Some days, I feel guilty for resting. I catch myself apologizing for needing reassurance or taking up space. But I’m trying. I’m practicing. I’ve come to believe real strength isn’t carrying everything alone, it’s knowing when to put things down. It’s letting yourself be held.

Sometimes strength looks like crying in a bathroom stall. Sometimes it’s sending a “hey, I’m not okay” text. Sometimes it’s saying ‘no.’ Other times, it’s getting out of bed when you really don’t want to. It doesn’t always look like power poses and bold declarations. Sometimes it’s quiet. Sometimes it’s barely visible. But it’s real.

I wish more people talked about this kind of strength, the soft kind. The messy kind. The kind that doesn’t get awards but keeps us alive.

If you’re reading this and you’re tired of holding everything in, this is your reminder: you’re allowed to let go. You’re allowed to feel. You’re allowed to be more than the “strong one.” There is strength in softness. And there is freedom in allowing yourself to be fully human.

You are worthy of love, care and belonging, even on the days you’re not okay.



Photo courtesy: Pexel (photos by: SHVETS production & Vie Studio)



Graphic by: Alisha Velji

I used to think I was just ‘bad’ at life.

I lost my keys twice a week. I interrupted people without meaning to. I cried in the bathrooms after social events and replayed every conversation in my head. Group projects drained me. I either forgot assignments completely or stayed up all night trying to make them perfect. In school, I wasn’t failing —but I wasn’t thriving. I floated in this space of high-functioning confusion, always wondering: Why does everything feel harder for me than it looks for everyone else?

For years, I didn’t have an answer. Just shame, anxiety and a growing list of coping strategies that made me feel fake.

The Masking Starts Early

I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was [masking](#) — a term used to describe when neurodivergent people mimic neurotypical behaviour to blend in. I learned to script conversations. I forced eye contact. I copied how my friends laughed or used emojis so I wouldn’t seem ‘weird’ in texts. I over-apologized, over-explained and over-analyzed everything I said.

Masking worked, kind of. On the outside, I looked like I had it together. Inside, I was exhausted. I didn’t even know I was doing it — it felt like surviving.

The Turning Point

It wasn’t until I hit my early 20s — post-pandemic, post-university, post-burnout — that I started to question everything. I was struggling with basic tasks

while working full-time, constantly overwhelmed and pushing myself past my limits just to keep up with normal life. I stumbled across a [TikTok](#) by someone describing ADHD in women. Then [autism](#). Then something called [RSD](#)—rejection sensitive dysphoria.

Each video hit like a gut punch.

It wasn't just me.

I fell down a rabbit hole of [neurodivergent creators](#) and [late-diagnosis stories](#). For the first time, I saw my patterns — my spirals, my shutdowns, my sensitivity — reflected back at me with compassion instead of criticism. I wasn't broken. I was different. And there were words for it.

Getting Diagnosed (Sort Of)

I don't have a formal diagnosis yet. Like many young people in Canada, I'm on a long waitlist. The cost of private assessments is high, and most family doctors aren't trained to recognize ADHD or autism, especially in people who've spent their whole lives masking.

But I've still found peace in knowing. Self-identifying while I wait for access has helped me reframe years of guilt. I've started to adjust how I work, rest and communicate. I give myself permission to stim (fidget). I take breaks without apologizing. I've even told close friends about my neurodivergence — and they didn't run. They listened.

What Diagnosis (or Self-Discovery) Changes

Here's what I've learned since realizing I'm neurodivergent:

- **Productivity ≠ worth.** I'm not lazy; my brain just works differently. I need structure and flexibility.
- **Burnout is real — and faster.** Social events, bright lights, even long emails can drain me. Recovery isn't optional. It's survival.
- **Friendships shift.** I've gravitated toward people who value clear communication and emotional honesty. Some people didn't get it. Some leaned in. That's okay.
- **Self-compassion hits harder.** I no longer shame myself for needing reminders, taking rest or feeling deeply.

Neurodivergence Is More Than a Trend



It's important to say this: neurodivergence isn't an aesthetic or a "quirk." It's not just about fidget toys, pastel brain memes or TikToks about being "that ADHD friend." It's a real neurological difference — one that comes with barriers in education, work and healthcare. Especially for people who are Black, brown, queer, disabled or low-income, diagnosis and support are even harder to access.

But what is real — and powerful — is the wave of self-recognition happening in our generation. Social media didn't invent neurodivergence. It gave many of us a mirror. And for once, we could see ourselves clearly.

If You're Reading This and Relating

Maybe you've spent years thinking you were too sensitive, too awkward, too forgetful, too intense. Maybe you've been told to "try harder" or "just relax." Maybe you've wondered, deep down: Is it just me?

It's not just you.

Whether you're exploring ADHD, autism, sensory processing issues, dyslexia, OCD — or just starting to ask questions — your curiosity is valid. Your experience is real. You don't need a diagnosis to start unlearning shame and finding tools that work for you.

What I Wish I Knew Sooner

- You are not broken.
- You don't have to earn rest.
- Being different is not being less.
- You deserve accommodations even if you've learned to survive without them.
- Masking is hard — but you don't have to hide forever.

Realizing I'm neurodivergent in my 20s didn't fix everything overnight. I still have hard days. I still forget things. I still get overstimulated by the grocery store. But I no longer hate myself for it. I understand myself now. That alone changed my life.

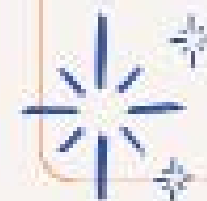


OLDF PRESENTS

FREE TUTORING

Subjects:

- English
- French
- Math
- Science



Our High School Tutoring program provides **comprehensive social and educational activities** throughout the school year for students in **grades 8-12**. We are providing virtual high school tutoring for **free** for academic support.

An after-school High School Tutoring program would provide the necessary, safe space, tutoring, and support to inspire students to excel, including but not limited to completing assignments and reading/literacy activities.

At the end of the school year, the management team of OLDF, along with the tutors, will evaluate to assess the milestones, accomplishments, and areas of improvement for the High School Tutoring program to renew it successfully for the following school year and beyond.



Coming Soon: Sept. 2024 & March 2025

Registration opens each fall and goes through until the end of the school year.



OLDF PUBLICATIONS



Black Voice

At Black Voice we aim to create an inclusive community that strives to achieve equal representation among Black people in Canada.



Youth Mind

Youth Mind is an online magazine made for the youth, by the youth. Our editors and contributors aim to cover content that we believe young people care about.



Women Quest

Women Quest is an online magazine designed to inform, inspire, and encourage women to reach their full potential while mentoring and empowering others.



Business Hub

Business Hub is a publication designed to promote business excellence and achievement by creating a platform that promotes, motivates and mentors other business owners.



The Newcomer

The Newcomer is an educational repository for newcomers providing how-to guides, informative articles, stories, resources, and services.

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Learn more about OLDF publications:
<https://oldf.org/publications>