



HERE

TO

STAY





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A zine on the impacts of

m **E** **n** **t** **A** **e** HEALTH
STIGMA

& cultural

D **i** **S** **o** **n** **A** **n** **C** **e**

on BLACK, Indigenous, and racialized youth

THE TD BLACK PROJECT

Centers the experiences of Black youth in Calgary Alberta. The project utilizes the principles of community development to strengthen community and build belonging amongst Black youth. The project aims to help Black youth develop various skills that will equip them with the tools they need to envision positive futures.



YOUTH WEAVE

Project Youth WEAVE strives to bring about transformational systems change in understanding and access to mental health systems for racialized youth in Calgary by advancing culturally responsive, racial trauma-informed, and equitable access to care through sustained community engagement, capacity building, and policy advocacy.



There is no movement without solidarity. This zine explores the impacts of cultural dissonance and mental health stigma on Black, Racialized and Indigenous communities.

Through the zine you will see and feel the difference in individual experiences under common themes.

Although we may not always feel safe or heard, what we do know is that even when we don't feel at home in the world, we have each other, and we have ourselves.

This zine speaks to the turmoil, the turbulence, the heartache, the discomfort, the ease, the hope, the sadness, the happiness and the bitter but wholesome experience of finding your place in a world that doesn't always feel like it was made for you.



contributors

Kathryne Boysis

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Mahwish Ahmed

Chanelle

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Fatimah Braimoh

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Sakshi Varghese

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**A few of our artists would
like to remain anonymous**

This zine is a collection of works by emerging
artists , curated by ActionDignity



Nisimis (my younger sibling)

It was a normal day in the residential school. Consisting of me begging my little brother to listen to the priest and nuns. I didn't know what they would do to him if he continued to not listen. He was only seven and my *Nikawi* told me not to let him get into too much trouble. There had been plenty of horror stories of the residential schools in my community. We had been there for only a few weeks, and my brother continued to not listen to me. I will forever remember that last breakfast like it was yesterday. The same exact breakfast of oatmeal and two bland pieces of bread. My brother was so upset that morning. My heart had picked up pace just trying to get him to eat, I can never explain how my heart felt when he threw his bowl of oatmeal onto the floor. I will never be able to fully explain the extent to how scared I was when I heard the priest get up from the table at the front. The table decorated with breakfast foods that us "Indian savages" would be taunted with. The next moments went by in a blur. The Priest yelled for my brother to start cleaning up his mess. My baby brother disobeyed the request, he was slapped. I remember screaming and a nun came running to hold me back. The slap was so hard he had fell to the floor, bile had coated my throat already as the Priest kicked him to the floor when he tried to stand. My brother was removed from the dining room, crying out for me just as loudly as I was doing for him. The next week was filled with me obeying all orders and demands of both the Priest and nuns. They had promised me I would be able to visit my brother in the attic if I listened. I knew the stories of the attic and how not one child came down living. I will always remember the breakfast only eight days after the incident. I had just picked up my utensil when I heard the cart. The cart that had multiple uses, this day the use being to wheel out my baby brother. I didn't scream or try to go see him, when that was all that my soul desired. The nun who had positioned herself next to me that breakfast morning did so to keep me from the screaming and running. I picked up my utensil and I ate the oatmeal. Remembering that if I was going to get out, I would have to obey.

This is a short story composed of one of the few residential school stories I have heard in my lifetime. I will not name who the storyteller was, but her story will always remain with me. Her age had not even been past double digits yet.

Nohkom (my grandmother)

I do not have a detailed story of residential school from my *Nohkom*, but I will never not think of the couple stories and sentences she did tell me though. I'm honestly grateful she never told me one of the more traumatizing stories because I don't think I could live with one of hers. One of my favourite stories she told me was of how the oldest children in the residential school she was mainly placed in would secretly speak in Cree and plot escapes. She told me "It made me feel bad ass". Growing up knowing that they would have soap placed in their mouths, get slapped on the hands to the point of bruises (in some photos of residential schools you can visibly see children with bruised hands), and many much worse things done to them just for saying one Cree word. The cultural genocide committed against my people will never not plaque my thoughts, it is engraved in every fibre of my being. I cannot speak my language and that is the one of the most heartbreaking things I have had to come to terms with.

Another thing that is so deeply rooted within my heart is when my *Nohkom* told me that "I was one of the lucky ones". She explained to me that she lived in a village before she was taken to residential school. There were two little white girls who had visited her village a few times before she was taken to residential school. Through those little white girls visiting she had learned the most basic English words and sayings. It makes me so indescribably sad that she felt *lucky* just because she knew less than ten English words, and it makes me so sick to my stomach imagining what happened to the little Native kids who didn't know or understand any English. Through my *Nohkom* telling me this, it taught me that although my peoples have been tried, tested and shown the evils of the world very young; *We are some of the most resilient people you will ever meet. We can see the positives despite only being shown the negatives in life.*

My *Nohkom* had told me one escape story, telling me about it in a joking manner. She told me she had planned an escape with her younger sister. During the escape they would have to cross a field, not knowing it would be a field filled with mostos (cows). Her younger sister was so terrified of cows that she had to turn back and return to the residential school. My *Nohkom* told me this laughing about it making younger me understand that the way to persevere through some of my own hardships, was to work through them using laughter. Laughter is the best medicine and when you truly get to know any First Nations person you will understand that. Although my *Nohkom* had only told me one escape story, I grew up knowing she suffered lifelong foot pains from one of her other tried escapes. She had tried to run away from the residential school in a winter storm and almost froze half to death, she was only nine. I have a lot of respect and love for my *Nohkom*. I will forever be disheartened knowing despite all her tried escapes, she only stayed out of those schools for good after one of her escapes at fourteen. The disgust I feel not knowing what went on yet the relief I feel not knowing what went on, it will all forever haunt me.

Niya Nipawin (my story)

It was the start of summer of twenty-twenty one. My *Nohkum*'s health had declined and rapidly so. She had pneumonia, lung cancer and was dealing with dementia. She was brought home before her passing. I was only seventeen. I had to help with some of the caretaking which I didn't mind, it was only until I had to feed her. The doctors had her on so many medications and ordered us to only feed her oatmeal as that was one of the only foods her stomach could handle and that she didn't really need to chew. I will never not remember how badly I had to choke back my own tears when she started yelling at me that she didn't want to eat the oatmeal. That it was gross, bland. All I could think of was what memories from residential school had I brought back trying to make her eat the oatmeal.

My cat *Pepisi (baby)* was born in the summer of twenty-twenty and I had called her Baby for the first year. When I knew I was losing my *Nohkum* I had told her I wanted to know what baby was in Plains Cree, from then on, my cat was *Pepisi*. Amid her dementia I'm grateful my *Nohkum* managed to teach me yet another thing. I will forever be grateful to my *Nohkum* for teaching me so many life lessons. I'm also eternally grateful to my Baby, who has remained by my side throughout all the losses I've had no choice but to overcome to be where I am today.

Right before the summer of twenty-twenty one right around the time my *Nokum* had passed. The uncovering of two hundred and fifteen babies were found on the Kamloops residential school grounds. I remember both the loss and discovery had made me so incredibly depressed. My community was losing a lot of elders around that time. An elder had told my *Nikawiy (mom)* that the children who were found had needed people to walk their spirits home, it comforted me in a way.

I remember returning to school after that summer. I had previously dropped out the school year prior because I had found out one of my childhood friends had committed suicide. I sat in twenty dash one social class as the only First Nations taking that class. The main subject of this class was Nationalism. The first booklet I had been given right at the end asked me a question that I was so uncomfortable with. "-", explain whether or not you would die for your country." With or without context the question to me was the most inappropriate, disgusting thing you could ask a First Nations child ESPECIALLY with the recent mass graves being found. I took it to the Native Liaison at my school. The person whose literal job was to help me communicate to the white teacher my perspective. I was dismissed and told that I could do so myself, that it was good I felt

uncomfortable because at least that way I would learn my history. As if I hadn't been raised in my history; a *reservation*. I felt so scared to even bring up any of it with the white teacher in front of my all-white class. I had home stuff going on at that time and moved away although only shortly, even if I had remained, I think that would've been the second time I would have had dropped out.

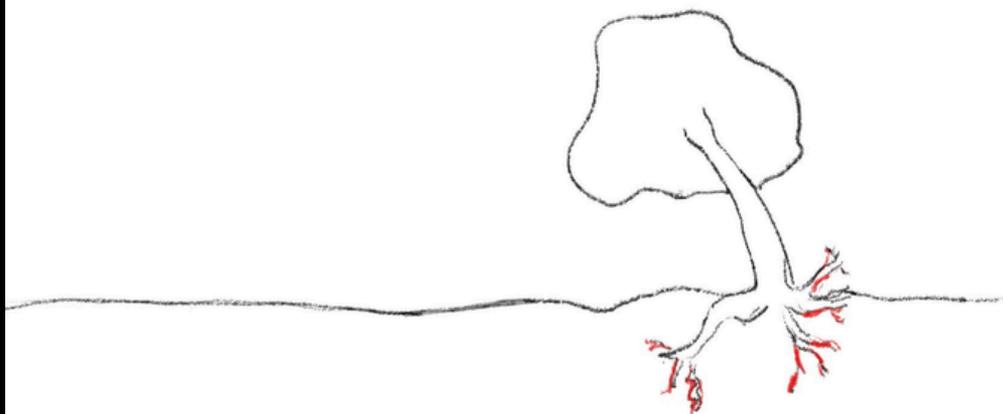
The systems everywhere whether it be the RCMP, schooling or healthcare fail my people every day. Without my people and Indigenous people all over the world the advances anywhere would've taken longer. Without us there would've been a definitive lack in so much. You wouldn't have had oral contraceptives, syringes, pain relievers, baby bottles, sunscreen, raised bed gardening, and so much more. The Iroquois confederacy even influenced the US constitution. Yet all our innovations and inventions will never be truly realised as ours. I will spend my entire life wondering why we were done so horribly when all we wanted was peace and the ability to be ourselves. The ability to practice and be immersed within our culture and language. I will spend my lifetime as a collection of stories dedicated to remembering all of those I've loved. I have had to come to terms with things other people my age will never even have to fathom, and I am okay with that.

Kathryne Boysis

This artist would like to remain
anonymous

How can we root
In a ground
That was stolen

-we weren't meant to be here



WOVEN SCARS

They stitched
silence into my
skin, but I wove
it into strength.

My heart,
once torn,
now glows
with golden
thread.

This is
not just
survival.
It's art.
It's truth.
It's me.

Anjali Pandey

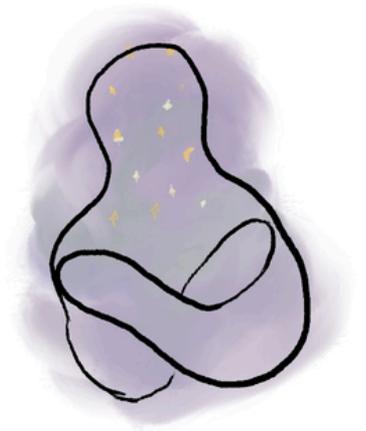
Mahwish Ahmed



Chanelle



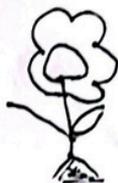
When I am not held by the world
I hold myself
I hold my soul
I remind myself
I am home



This artist would like to remain
anonymous

Made by Aziz
MUDANSIRU
Grade 7

BREAK THE
STIGMA
YOUR
MENTAL
HEALTH
MATTERS



😊 ☹️ 😊
😊 Be happy



IS OKAY TO
be OKAY.

~~IS OKAY~~
~~to not~~
~~be~~
OKAY.





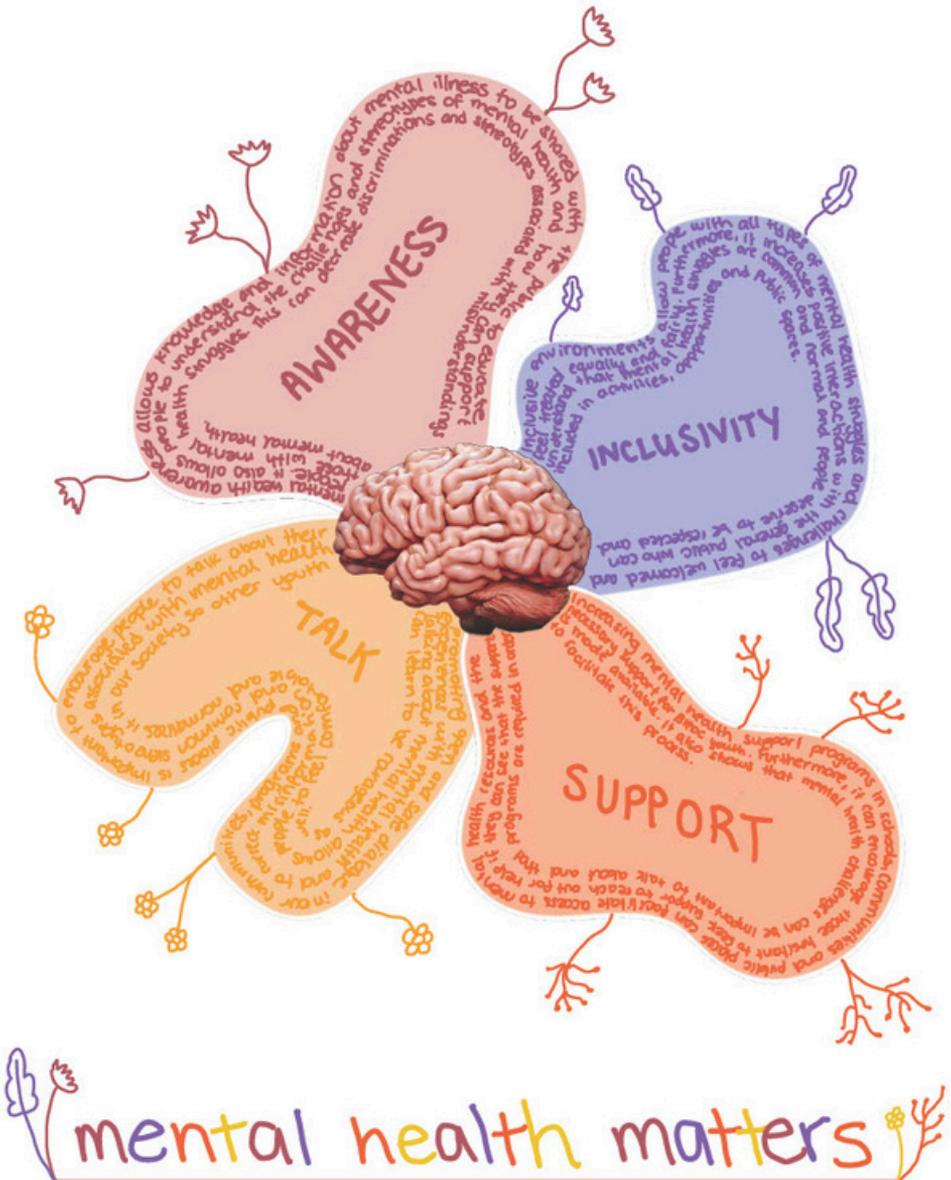
Fatimah Brainoh



Disoriental

BY MATTHEW TANG

Growing up as a second-generation immigrant, I often felt disoriented—too white-washed for my Vietnamese family, yet never quite Canadian enough. Trái thanh long (dragon fruit) symbolizes my Vietnamese heritage and reflects how I often felt: vibrant on the outside, yet undefined within. The maple leaves in the background represent my Canadian culture. In navigating these cultural identities, I've learned I don't have to be one or the other. I'm simply me. And home is where I find myself and belonging.



brains like butterflies

My brain is like the life cycle of a caterpillar—
it needs to be nourished, fed, and gently wrapped in rest,
tucked inside the safety of a cocoon.

This is how I care for myself:
through healing and slow quiet growth.
But when it's time to break free and emerge,
and spread my wings to fly like a butterfly,
my brain fails.

The cocoon feels too thick, too tight—
and I can't break through alone.
I feel overwhelmed, exhausted,
trapped in the shell that once protected me.

I wonder:
was I ever meant to become a butterfly?
I watch others fly away
so gracefully and beautifully
while I remain behind, unseen and trapped in my cocoon.
Those around me say I'm not strong enough
to force my way out,
but I know my struggle isn't with muscles or willpower—
it lives deep in my mind,
where thoughts and emotions can't be seen.

I try to help myself,
but I don't know where to begin.
Afraid of judgment, I stay silent.
And so, I stay inside my cocoon,
unsure if I'll ever see
the butterfly I was meant to be





This artist would like to remain
anonymous





leokayla G



This artist would like to remain
anonymous

IT'LL ALL WORK OUT

APRIL 2025



Theme: Mental Health Stigma & Cultural Dissonance (Navigating Mental Health Stigma and Cultural Dissonance)

The original photo I used as the reference for this self-portrait was taken on film by my good friend, Funmi. It was taken at the beginning of a particularly difficult time of my life - I've just been laid off from my previous job and I just dyed my hair a very cool, but unnatural, red. Admittedly, unemployment took a huge toll on my mental health. Filipinos are known for their incredibly strong work ethic. We're supposed to be hard workers... did you know that? I was taught from a young age that, to get anywhere in life, **you need to work hard, you need to study hard, you have to be doing something productive at all times, serve with a smile, exercise your brain, no - you can't play! keep your head down and just do the work.** Growing up, I internalized all of that. I believed that my self-worth is deeply tied to my work and how productive I was. I took that belief to heart. So what am I, then, if I'm out of a job and it feels like I'm not working hard enough?

Filipinos are also known for their resilience in the face of adversity. At the time this picture was taken, I didn't feel very resilient. I had a difficult time moving through life with grace, and I grappled with my mental health. Being raised in a fairly conservative and religious family, I wasn't really encouraged to talk about my mental health. If I was going through a depressive episode, or if I started feeling anxious, I was told that I should just pray and all of those feelings will simply go away. Because of this, I found it difficult to be transparent with my parents about my mental health. But Filipinos are also known for their strong sense of community. **Bayanihan**. The bayanihan spirit is one of communal unity and helping others without the expectation of getting anything back in return. So, instead, I leaned into my friends and my community for support. It's not as if I don't believe in prayers, but it was hard for me to hold onto prayers alone. Finding strength in my community allowed me to talk about my feelings and be truly vulnerable. I was given the space to feel the full range of human emotion. My community gave me the ability to really lean into the worst of life's heartaches, and yet they showed me that I still deserved to feel love at full capacity. They helped me begin to unlearn the deep-rooted belief that maybe when I find a job, then I'm worth something again.

The themes of **mental health stigma** and **cultural dissonance** can be particularly heavy topics for people to stomach. So I wanted my piece to serve as a positive reminder that our difficult experiences with cultural dissonance and the stigma surrounding mental health aren't the only things that define us. When we have our community, our **bayan**, to lean on, it'll all work out.



Sakshi Varghese

confessions of a 20 something year
old

I'm lucky cus my moms English vocab really good so I can beef her so hard

I don't have the words for what I wanna say to my mom hahahaha

I told my mom she has ego problems

i thought my loneliness is mine & only mine bc it didn't come from longing for a friend or a partner. then i realized my mother gave it to me. when i feel like it's my last day & that only she could carry me from my lost place into tomorrow, i think about how she couldn't find me if she tried. that's when i feel the most alone. but for some reason i find a way to bring myself further because i feel unprepared to rest as long as i don't know what it feels like to not be deserted. i think that would be an unfulfilled life. my loneliness feels like staring at a blank wall & feeling nothing, begging to be bored at least. for it's not that you don't mother but that you cannot - the same being the reason why i raised you & why i stopped.

2 notes

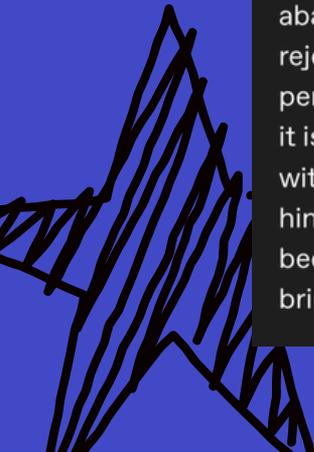


the people from my childhood who i tenured to be my favourite adults were people who looked at me with adoration. i don't like how this proves my perceptual abilities, meaning i know who especially didn't feel this way towards me.

3 notes



i think people wear autonomy like a little house on their shoulders while they roam the world... some people who significantly lose their autonomy growing up also lose their little house... and they interact with others in the world in a way that begs for structure. they plead for closeness and transparency. everything feels like a deep connection when you are vulnerable and exposed. so they freely knock on doors without the knowledge of what it's like to feel trespassed. ultimately, they struggle to understand that some bids are an intrusion because they don't have a little home. they don't enforce boundaries to seem more likeable, in theory, but being over-accommodating has made them hellishly unrelatable. i find they oftentimes are obsessed with a skewed idea of community (they want to be needed to ease the chance/fear of being abandoned). it's cruelty - to constantly despair over rejection and simultaneously facilitate and perpetuate it. i don't think it's as much a skill issue as it is an unawareness of context. i hope for those without little homes the ability to learn from hindsight. it's not particularly virtuous to resist becoming jaded if you are enforcing the naivety that brings you harm.





sunday night realization that i am not weak but overwhelmed by the amount of things i'm suddenly responsible for without guidance as a second gen immigrant. my parents know how to survive & i am trying to figure out how to do more & maximize what i have as i become the caregiver.

4 notes



as much as i have pride, when i envision myself standing she is holding shame in her hands

0 notes



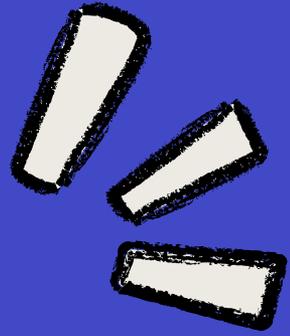
I think I might be the most lighthearted one of all my lineage

Add tags to help people find your posts



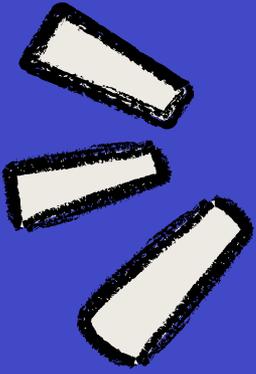
i don't know why my body doesn't let me show my anger. ppl tell me i'm a good person for this but they don't understand how sometimes i really, really do want to be disrespectful in return. it's like i walk up the door hundreds of times but i can't go through because i have a feeling that i won't be able to live with it. i think i'll deeply regret it. i think it's embarrassing for others when they show theirs. so i warm it in my hands and shape it. since i can't give it back i have to hold onto it. and the bigger it gets the more humiliating it would be to show.

1 notes



i'm delighted that i've grown out of my greatest childhood desire - the one where i yearned for a home & would do anything to make one, anywhere. i did visit a couple nice homes but the owners have moved. i still live in an unfinished house but it doesn't provoke me anymore. i like my room and it suits me fine for now.

2 notes



eldest second generation immigrant - i thought i would turn to my dad & ask, "are you proud of me?" instead i want to say, "i'm sorry" for the extent of how underpaid his labour is and i do not pride myself in how much easier my work is for the same wage

2 notes



in war there is despair and in resistance there is hope
and westerners do not know the difference because
they have been the occupying force for so long

0 notes

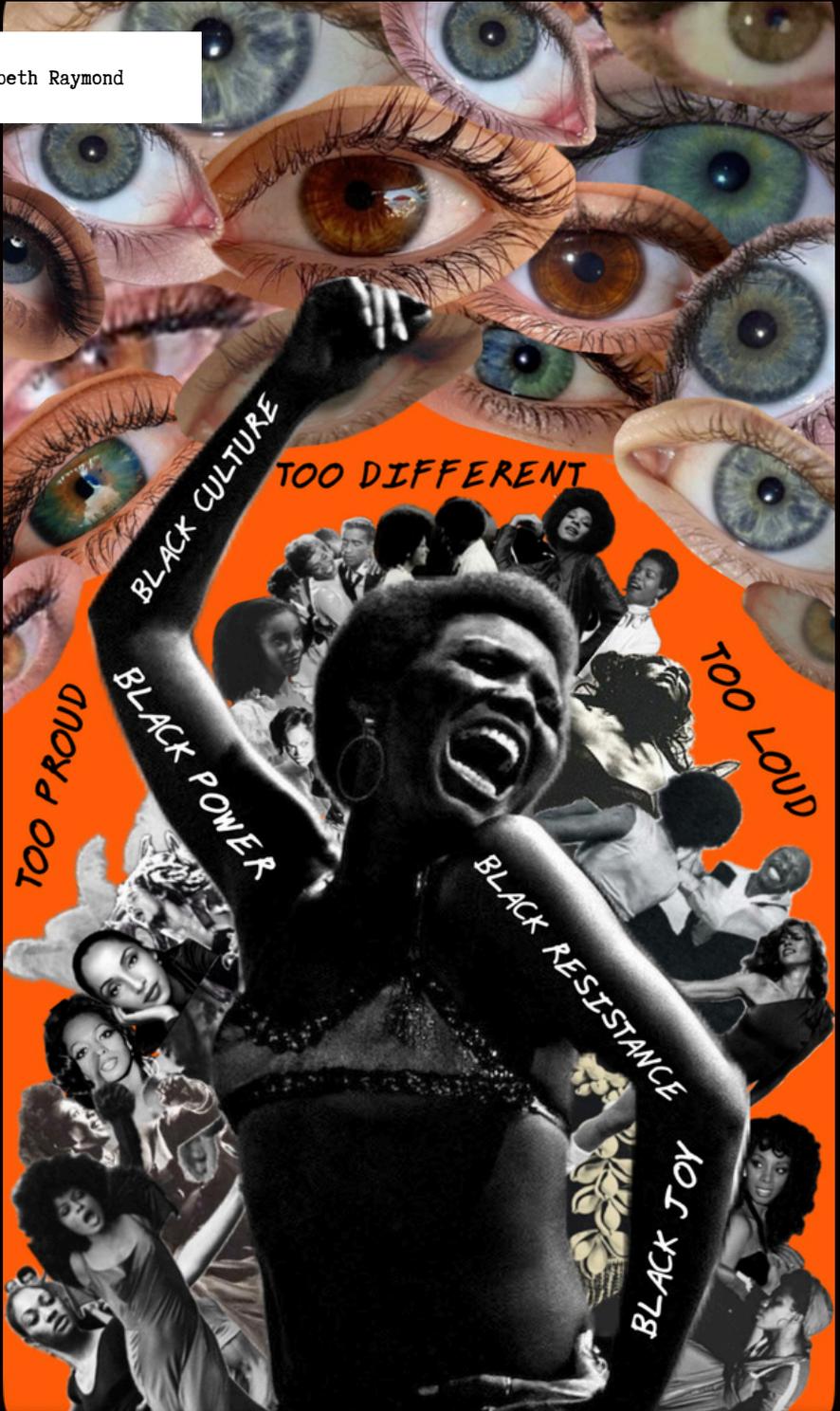


what do you do with your friends? i fall asleep in her
bed and wake up missing her. we go to the grocery
store together. i drive to their houses to carpool
because i'm scared to drive downtown. i learn about
her religion. we discuss politics in a small group. we
share our knowledge in public health, policy making,
social services, and the wars from which our parents
fled. we drink the same drinks every weekend. but we
can never decide what to eat. we introduce one
another to other friends & speak highly of those who
aren't present or who have not been acquainted yet. i
tell her about everything that happens when she's
not there. we make secret pacts in the corner of a
crowd. we use the last of our youth to extend the
night until dawn. and we miss each other all week. n.

1 notes



Elizabeth Raymond



“Illi”, better known as
“palengke”



Minante I, Cauayan Isabela,
Philippines.

Our version of a “farmer’s market”,
where locals gather to sell their
form of livelihoods- whether that’s
fishing, farming, or livestock.

I used to hate going to the market.
It smelt horrible as a kid- there was
nothing worse than the stench of
butchered meat and dried fish.

It took my family 12 years to have
the means to return to the
motherland, and I couldn’t have
welcomed the stench more.

Kain na

Minante I, Cauayan
Isabela, Philippines.

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“farmer’s market”, where
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When the world
slows down
That's when we become
Ourselves

It's okay to find peace



This artist would like to remain
anonymous

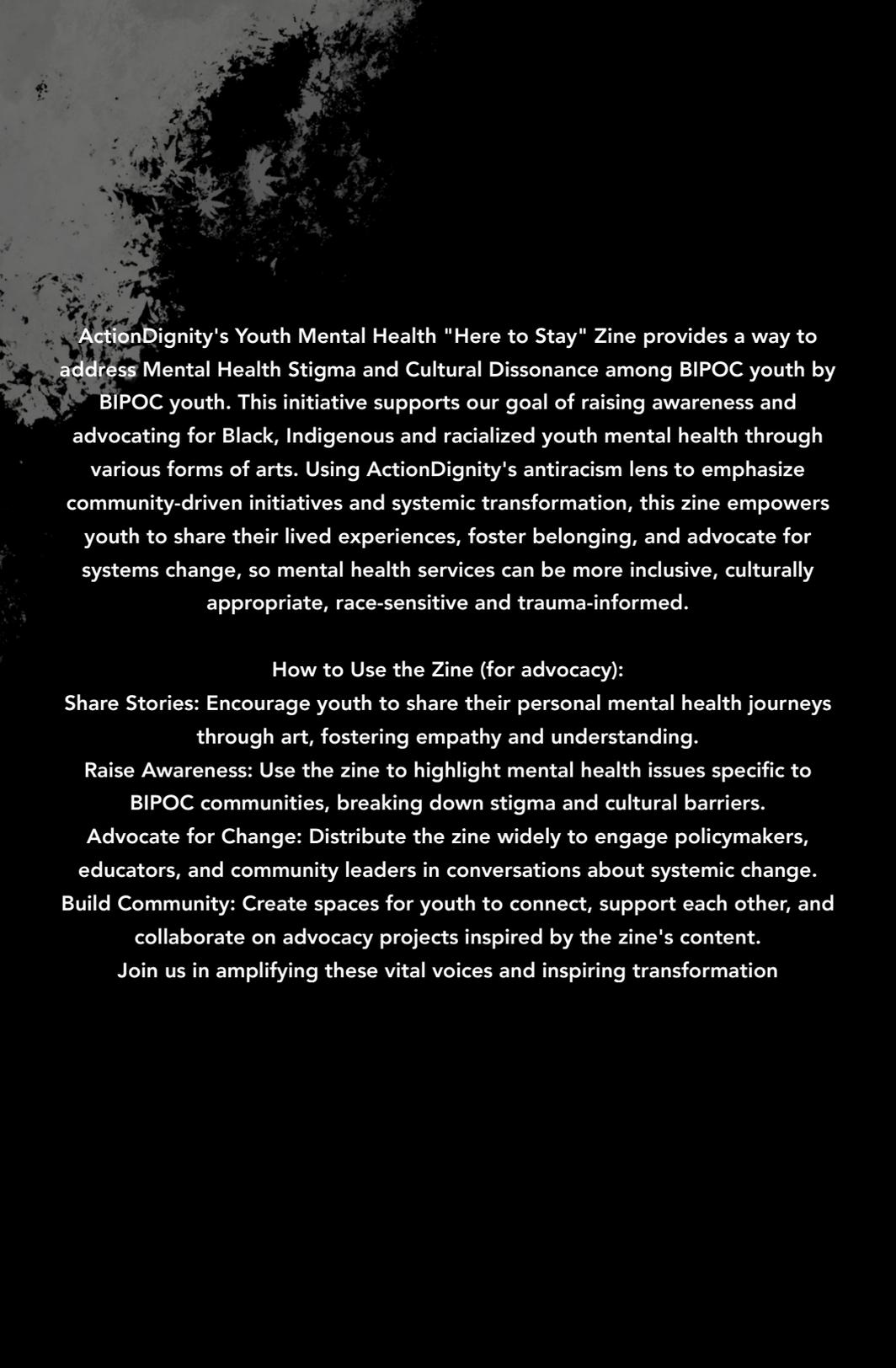
THANK
YOU

We would like to extend a special thank you to all of those who contributed to this zine

We would also like to sincerely thank our funders TD and City of Calgary,

This zine would not be possible without your support.





ActionDignity's Youth Mental Health "Here to Stay" Zine provides a way to address Mental Health Stigma and Cultural Dissonance among BIPOC youth by BIPOC youth. This initiative supports our goal of raising awareness and advocating for Black, Indigenous and racialized youth mental health through various forms of arts. Using ActionDignity's antiracism lens to emphasize community-driven initiatives and systemic transformation, this zine empowers youth to share their lived experiences, foster belonging, and advocate for systems change, so mental health services can be more inclusive, culturally appropriate, race-sensitive and trauma-informed.

How to Use the Zine (for advocacy):

Share Stories: Encourage youth to share their personal mental health journeys through art, fostering empathy and understanding.

Raise Awareness: Use the zine to highlight mental health issues specific to BIPOC communities, breaking down stigma and cultural barriers.

Advocate for Change: Distribute the zine widely to engage policymakers, educators, and community leaders in conversations about systemic change.

Build Community: Create spaces for youth to connect, support each other, and collaborate on advocacy projects inspired by the zine's content.

Join us in amplifying these vital voices and inspiring transformation

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