Free From Stigma
Art Exhibit

#FreeFromStigma
Enjoy the show!
Welcome to Free from Stigma, an art exhibit and sale brought to you by the Youth Mental Health and Addictions Council (YMHAC) of London.

YMHAC is made up of youth (ages 16 to 25) with lived experience of mental health and/or addiction issues. They work to provide a platform for authentic youth engagement and involvement in the community.

We wanted to provide an opportunity for young people in the community to share their perspective and experiences with mental health and addictions in a creative way. From there, we came to the idea of hosting an art exhibit that would showcase the voices and talent of local youth between the ages of 14 and 25, while bringing attention to the stigma that often silences them.

Free From Stigma empowers youth to be part of the growing dialogue about the state of mental health and addictions in our local community. Our goal is to not only inspire young people but also inspire allies across London Middlesex to challenge their own bias and beliefs and live FREE FROM STIGMA!

We would like to thank the London Life Youth United, United Way Elgin Middlesex, London Health Sciences Centre, #Rising Youth Community Service Grant, with the support of mindyourmind and LHSC’s Transition Age Project (TAP), for believing in and funding our project.

This also could not have been possible without the courage and creativity of the young artists involved in today's show and for that we are thankful.

Sincerely,

YMHAC members: Alec, Alex, Elora, Jesse, Lily, Luke, Rachael and Scarlett

Alex K.
Sunset Over the Skyline
This piece represents the landscape I picture when I relax and this piece was done to help me relieve stress and fell more comfortable about my art and for me to be more self confident. I put together my favourite topics in this piece which included architecture 3D design and repeating patterns and abstract conceptualism. This piece represents my interest and my good place I go to when I am stressed.

Amilia R.
Untitled
I made this piece to visually represent what reading is to people, like me, who love to read. When you’re really into a book, the 2D letters can seem to become 3D, like dreaming with your eyes open. But still it doesn't matter how many people read the same book and no two people will think of it the same, including the author, and I think that's the beauty of reading. I hope the same can be said about this piece. I probably interpret it differently than you do, just like reading, but that's alright, even more than alright. I hoped that's what would happen. If this piece has been able to do that then I’ve done what I hoped to do, and accurately show what books can do to someone who loves to read, like me.

Cecilia G-B.
Chaotic Colours
I’m 19 and I’m a transgender woman who struggles with a lot of anxiety. My work relates to the theme of mental health by representing when someone is feeling not in control of their being and in an unstable state of mind.

Chanelle B-R.
I laugh when I’m with friends
My name is Chanelle and I am a biology student at Western University. The piece symbolizes how depression and anxiety overwhelm people's minds with clouds of negative thoughts and can often make us feel isolated. The person depicted in my painting is one of my favourite RnB singers, 070shake, who in many of her songs opened up with her struggles with mental illness.
**Chelsea H.**  
**Beautiful Shit Show**  
In my work I chose to represent my journey and experience with my mental illness through sculpture. I chose to use a mannequin head covered in cracked clay to show how fragile I feel I am at times and how someday my mental illness breaks through me and can be tough. The sterile white represents the misconception that people often face from others when they have a mental illness such as being called crazy. The feeling of crazy already presents itself because someday you feel like you’re the only person experiencing it and when we think of crazy and mental illness people associate sterile white padded rooms and straight jackets so that’s why I chose the white spray paint to convey the misconception and struggles. The flowers on this piece shade the army men below masking the war that’s going on within but also still growing and blooming from the war because tough things make us stronger. The box is to show how closed in I feel some days even though I’m not hence why it’s an open box you feel trapped when you’re not. The bottles with the army men pouring out represent the year I was diagnosed and prescribed medication to help my anxiety but for me it didn’t and I had to switch doses. My piece is to show the hidden struggles and upfront issues I deal with and it shows my journey.

**Claire W.**  
**Half Made of Water**  
When I made this piece I was at a point in my life where I was beginning to question everything. Even down to the sensations that make up my reality, I had felt I came to a conclusion that I have no choice but to be alive- despite being extremely suicidal for the majority of my life. Essentially, the boat is my “shadow” self that I had yet to explore and I was the girl at gasping for air needing to find a way out. Once I realized that I actually have a deep love for the ocean and animals (all life) I realized I’m actually right where I need to be, and that I was just confining myself by the labels I had been taught were reality.

**Denise D.**  
**The Adventure of Self Discovery**  
the colourful space background I believe expresses myself in that my mind and thoughts get “lost in space” as there are so many things to think about and decisions to make in life. Blue as well, is my favourite colour. The city line on the bottom however is supposed to represent that I believe I am laid back and “down to earth” when in a calm state. The flowers coming out of the head represent growth and my creative side as my thoughts are always expanding and my knowledge is growing. Flowers are also a representation of beauty and the fact that growing and being your own person is beautiful, what’s on the outside. I also believe I’m an adventurous person and therefore love travelling and experiencing the world and what it has to offer. Opening your eyes to the world also adds to your character and changes the way you see things in a positive way which I believe is important. This is represented by the countries and the ski glasses which have mountains inside them as well as the scuba diver. The face itself, is split in half as well as the ski goggles as it is cracking open to view the inside of my face to symbolize both that I am still growing and haven’t fully discovered who I am yet, and also that I am not always as strong as I seem and need help when I fall apart in moments of weakness when it comes to feelings. In relating more to myself, the ski mask and the dripping paint underneath represent part of who I am, heritage wise as I was originally born in the states and most of my family as well as myself of course are German which is a big part of my life and also allows me to have a bigger view point culturally. And finally the emerald inside the ski goggles, is my birthstone and brings together who I am. The fact that you can’t see my eyes in this painting hopefully will allow people to make whatever they want to out of this piece and maybe even relate to and see part of themselves.

**Dulani D.**  
**Mixed Media Project**  
This painting gives a meaning of how someone like me views the universe, and the things happening around me. I view the world in a different perspective. I imagine a world where I walk my own path where I can find a cure for my feelings of isolation and anxiety. I walk my own path and realize that I can show my true colors. I show that I’m worthy of being the person I am when it comes to talent and individuality.

**Ethan D.**  
**The Transcendental Cerebral-Sphere**  
Dreams. Fantasies. Ideas. The ephemeral elegance that serves as the foundations of the youthful spark of creativity everyone recognizes. As best examined by Stephen Fry, these powerful impulses drift slowly away to the ‘Cosmic Imagisphere.’ And with the malleable perception and minds of humans, these impulses create something truly extraordinary. The ‘transcendental dreamverse’ may not be real, but it’s without a doubt a remarkable place and vast expanses of imagination everyone holds within. At times, it’s these imaginative theatrics that give us peace, bring us joy, and shuttle us away from the stress and concern of the world, and into the optimistic reaches of our own cloudy, beautiful souls. We all turn to the fantasy of our minds in times of spiritual need, it’s an inalienable fact - but it is the variable and unique nature of these detours that make us who we are, even if we may think that we aren’t special. I’m certainly not an artist by any means, but with this work it was easy enough to settle into a sterling trajectory, because when we shed the inhibitions of our minds and put forth an effort to contribute to something worthwhile to us, the result is a healthy conscience truly embodying imagination, and that, as far as I’m concerned, speaks for itself.
Hannah R.
Bad Trip
I have been in recovery for two years now. I have been clean from all substances for one year now. This piece is a representation of times when I would pray to be sober and for the "trip" to end. I still have mentally rough days where I pray for the day to be over, but never again will I have to pray for a "trip" to be over, because now I know that I never have to use again. Recovery is possible when you take it one day at a time.

Ilja B.
East of Adelaide
The Old East Village area is going through the wonderful/terrible process of gentrification. As a young person living there, I stand to benefit from the hip community centres and trendy coffee shops popping up in the area, and I feel responsible to draw a youthful eye to the population of people that are being displaced through this process. Mental health and addiction challenges create a cycle that keep a substantial group of people on our streets. While a simple solution to the wellness and placement of these people doesn’t exist, it is imperative that they remain visible and that we make an attempt to understand and accommodate their circumstances through the changes happening in our community. This work came about through live drawings of these ‘invisible’ people, observed through the window of a youthful coffee shop that recently entered the neighbourhood.

Justyn S.
Outwards and In
I am a custom spray paint artist, I grow up in a relatively hostile environment and as such am now diagnosed with PTSD. My piece is a direct correlation to that in the sense that the heart and mind are always pure and golden; it’s all the things outside that control that corrupt it. The piece also has an added feature where the dark void is actually a separate cover on the front, allowing for the image to be changed back whenever desired. This is a side note to signify that once you’ve removed the negativity from your life you can shine once again.

Kaitlyn S.
I’m Lost
As an artist I am always interested in what people find uncanny and why certain images make people feel uncomfortable. I like to try and implement that in my art to see the different reactions it invokes. In this specific piece I represented both my past depression and current social anxiety. I have lived with my social anxiety my entire life for multiple reasons, the biggest reason being that I have an intellectual learning disability. I’ve always felt as though people can see right through my intelligence and are judging me because of it. My disability cannot be cured so I’ve had to find a way to cope and live with it, art has always been my outlet for that. Unlike many other things I feel like nothing holds be back with my art.

Kat D.
Isolation
Kat D. is currently a secondary school art student and has experience of mental illness and misdiagnosis herself and within her family.
"I’m trying to convey the feeling of isolation and being misunderstood while living with a mental illness or disorder."

Laryssa S.
DOUBLE STANDARD
Mental illness is a scary thing and dark for most people, but if you can just open your eyes, you can see things from a different perspective.

Lili M.
Greyscale
I am a beginner artist, that is usually joyful. I love to be creative and imaginative. This piece, however, portrays feelings of loneliness and depression. I painted it with hidden colour and shadows. I wanted the feeling of fog. The girl's looking at all the mountains in front of her, as if her obstacles, with each one getting higher and higher. But eventually they fade away.
Manda H.
Don’t Suffer in Silence
I suffer from a few mental health issues and this piece I feel shows how I was handling my health alone and also explains my story a little.

Mara T-W.
Oh What Joy
Within the past 4 years, depression has been a very negative impact on me, and I know it affects many others too. I decided to create an art piece based on depression, as well as addiction because they go hand in hand. In my art piece, the wallpaper has highly addictive drugs and cigarettes painted onto it to represent the addiction aspect. In the middle, a dark creature is peeking out from behind the mask that hides it, which represents the depression part of it. I chose to use this creature because it shows what hides behind masks and what people feel when they’re struggling through depression.

Matthew S.
Great Falcon
You’re not confined to your mental health. Be free like a falcon.

Megan L.
Hope for Flight From the Inner Storm
Mental illnesses are becoming more common in society, and is especially common in teens. I designed my painting to create a powerful message to touch other people. There is a silhouette of a person, with an old dead tree, and a lightning storm inside of the person’s head, to represent a mental illness. Mental illnesses can be referred to as an “inner storm” and the head is to create that imagery. The storm with lightning bolts striking down from the clouds is to show how powerful mental illnesses can be. The sky can be blue all day with no clouds in sight, and in a matter of minutes a storm can surface from the horizon. Many people with mental illnesses can be affected by a change in thoughts very quickly and it can destroy their day. Butterflies are a very delicate insect, which represents hope, and change. The person is reaching out touching the butterfly to symbolize that there is hope for change and the mental illnesses can be cured. The person has a “storm” going on in their head, but they are reaching out to the butterfly instead of focusing on the storm. The butterflies are flying to symbolize someone being able to break free from a mental illness, and being free from all the harmful thoughts. Many people with mental illnesses feel a lot of weight on their shoulders, the butterflies also represent delicacy and that people one day will not feel the weight of their illness anymore. Overall I created this painting to create the image of hope, because no matter what, there is always hope for things to get better.

Megan M.
Untitled
I have struggled with high anxiety for as long as I can remember. I have been told I am “high functioning” which means when meeting me you would most likely have no idea. To me, it means it took getting to a place of wild desperation before I even believed me, let alone anyone else. I wrote and created this piece on the healing side of my journey as a reminder to myself that although my anxieties may not be vast mountains to climb, they are pebbles I carry in my pocket and they weigh just the same.

Miranda R.
Reaching Out
My name is Miranda R and I am a 19 year old art student from in St Thomas and I have been recently diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. To me, my piece really emphasizes my lack of identity, and my deep desire to reach out to people.

Nicola J.
Clear Your Mind
One of the most common phrases people will tell you when you’re overthinking is to “clear your mind”. What does that even mean? How is it possible to clear your mind of all thoughts when your mind never sleeps? After years of asking myself these questions, I have come to discover that imagining a peaceful place is much more helpful than trying to shut down your mind. The solar system is the most peaceful and quiet place I can think of, and reminds me that we are nothing but a speck on a planet travelling through space. This thought is somewhat calming to me, and the closest I will get to “clearing my mind”.
Sarah H.
Tired of This Body

I am a 16 year old girl and my work relates to Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). My work illustrates the kind of emotions and feelings that can run through a person with BDD in an abstract symbolic way, yet of course, anyone with this condition could have different symptoms and feel differently. I chose to do this drawing with graphite pencils to illustrate the dark and dull feelings, that are not at all bright or what some people may call beautiful, just as BDD would make a person feel. A lot of the symbolism with the floating eyes, ‘x’ shape made from bones behind the character, and broken off and visible limbs can show self-loathing, self-consciousness, and the fear of judgement. I have not been diagnosed with BDD, but I feel a lot of these traits within myself, especially with the traits that make me unique. The curtains are representative that even though there is a desire to hide yourself, at times you can’t and the curtains are pushed back and the is a spotlight in the drawing shows that. The butterflies and wings can represent the desire to be free from these emotions, but also at the same time represent beauty that is in every person and satisfaction with oneself. Lastly, as for the title of this it reflects the how somber and tiring life is with constant fretting over imperfections, even though in reality there is no such thing as true perfection.

Sarah S.
The Only Thing I Sea

This piece was made to showcase what I personally feel comforting in times of trouble or worry. The painting relates to mental health and wellness in the way that it shows the importance of having a grounding factor, something or someone or somewhere that puts you at ease, even when you just think about it, something that pulls you away from all the hustle and bustle of everything going on around you, if even just for a split second. Hopefully this painting will bring a little bit of peace to the viewer, the same as I felt while creating it.

Sydney B.
Unconscious Beauty

When looking at this what do you feel? Love? Trust? Loneliness?

In looking at this, I also want you to see a broken girl trying to find herself and her heart in a right state of mind. In the background, the sunset is fading off into the roses and into her soul and mind.

I hope when others are painting or creating that they feel as much appreciation for the beauty of life as I did when putting my time and effort into this work. We are all imperfect beings and our beauty unique.

Vince H.
Capability

This piece Capability, stemmed from a battle with depression. After having dropped out of college twice. I felt terrible about what I considered as intelligence, and that I had nothing to give or offer the world and the idea of not being smart and having problems learning really got to me, and put me in a really depressive state. The anxiety of never having a good job and constantly being a failure always ran rampant throughout my head. That’s when I really honed in on painting and painting capability brought me closer to myself instead of my ego and showed me that I am intelligent, just in a different way that isn’t a societal norm, and that it’s okay to focus on those strengths I have as an individual. Capability made me believe in myself again and brought me out and into a much better place.

Xavier W.
“The Closet”

This is about what it is like to live undiagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. I used to be terrified of my childhood closet. Every night I had to hide my belts, close each drawer three times, slide the closet doors shut twice, and turn off the lights five times before I could go to sleep. If I didn’t do these and many other rituals, I was convinced that I would act upon all the violent fantasies plaguing my mind. In making this piece, I forced myself to come to terms with the trauma of my past to accurately convey the unearthly dread and isolation that people with OCD constantly experience. Each item in my composition carries deep symbolic value to me, all representing personal obsessions, fears, and desires. Although it was once horrifying, I am now learning to live with OCD. There is organization within the chaos. Obsessions are powerless unless we decide to give them significance.

Xzaria S.
Daunting

As an artist I aim to make even the most simple work of art tell a thousand stories and convey a thousand emotions. However, art to me is more than making people see or feel, it’s about opening their eyes to see what you want to bring awareness to; mental illness, politics, even the beauty of our world. This piece in particular although one of my less complex pieces; in its simplicity is meant to depict someone with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Her current state is somber and drained, she has three personalities: Anger, Sadness and Worry.
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