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YOUTH  
RISING  
ABOVE



# PASSION PROJECT

BeYou Women's Program  
Cohort 3 | Spring 2024

**Cohort 3 / 2024**

*A collective creative project created by empowered youth*



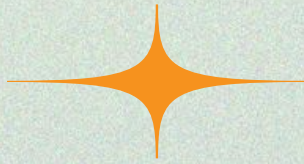


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# **What is the Passion Project?**

Youth participating in BeYou create a piece of work to contribute to our collective “Passion Project” which we share with the Youth Rising Above community to spotlight learnings and realizations from participating in the program.

Participants have been given the creative freedom to submit an original piece in any medium they choose to express themselves.

## **Why?**

We hope that the Passion Project Newsletter will provide our participants with an open-ended platform to express themselves, enhance their self-awareness, and create a supportive and courageous space as youth navigating their femininity and what being a woman means to them.

To share the amazing work our participants with our community, the newsletter will be shared on Youth Rising Above's social media platforms and will be archived with previous cohort passion projects.

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who made BeYou Cohort 3 a success—our wonderful guest speakers, the venues that hosted the BeYou team, and, of course, our amazing participants who continue to amaze us with their talents, and co-create this space with us.

With love,  
Lela Pacitti, BeYou Program Coordinator  
Bea Ramos, BeYou Program Facilitator



# Program Highlights

## Kick-Off Event: International Women's Day 2024

April 7 2024 | YRA youth and facilitators gathered for a IWD 2024 discussion and launched BeYou Cohort 3. Thank you to our special guest Natalie Osterling for facilitating a wonderful session on women's wellness.



## Session 1: Fostering Growth Mindsets

May 5 2024 | BeYou crew kicked off the cohort in-person at the Don Montgomery Community Recreation Centre with open and honest conversations as a collective, discussing our journey through self-development. The group had in-depth and meaningful small group discussions on how to embrace successes and mistakes to support future decision-making and problem solving.

## Learning Trip: Cirque du Soleil ECHO

May 7 2024 | Thank you to Cirque du Soleil for donating tickets to Youth Rising Above so our youth could attend a special performance of their show ECHO. The amazing acrobatics, music, drew the audience into a wondrous world of color, inspired by youth optimism, inventive power, and empathy.

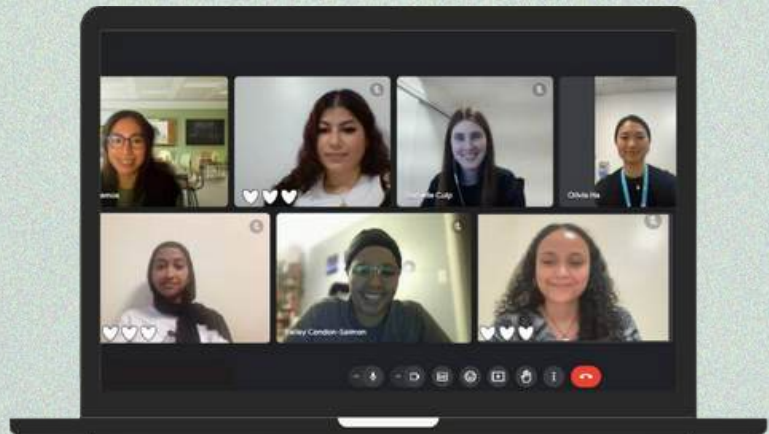




## Session 2: Positive & Healthy Relationships

May 16 2024 Participants and facilitators explored the key ingredients to healthy relationships using the online educational game “Likely Story” by Studio Jayne as a tool to express our thoughts, explore our opinions, and safely react to difficult, real life situations.

The second half of the session featured a panel of 3 guest speakers, Bailey Condon-Salmon (Comfort Cuisine Catering), Danielle Culp, and Olivia Ha, where the group continued the discussion on navigating the complexities of relationships using our unique personal and professional experiences as women.



## Session 3: Self Esteem & Body Confidence

May 26 2024 | BeYou held a workshop at the Oriole Community Centre facilitated by Natalie Osterling Arias. As a passionate advocate for body neutrality and holistic wellness, Natalie guided participants through several crucial topics, including: body neutrality, self-care as personal wellness, media representation and body inclusivity, and BMI and weight as health indicators.





#### **Session 4: Resilience**

June 1 2024 | BeYou crew attended an in-person special screening of Ice Queens (dir. Kwame Mason) which included an interactive women's sports panel event hosted by Ainka Jess of She's4Sports. The participants had an amazing time at U of T Innis College Town Hall, hearing from leaders and athletes in the hockey community (Angela James - Hockey Hall of Fame inductee, and Mikyla Grant-Mentis - PWHL Montreal hockey player) on women's representation, opportunities, growth, and challenges in women's hockey and the sports industry. A big thank you to Ainka Jess and the team at She's4Sports for the opportunity to attend this event.



#### **Session 5: Graduation**

June 9 2024 | BeYou 03 had a fun graduation lunch at the Longo's LOFT. This session was bittersweet, filled with memories from the previous sessions and talks of upcoming summer plans! Thank you to all the participants for the memories, and for sharing your time and talents with us. More cohort memory lane photos can be found on the last page!





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**Passion Project  
Submissions**

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## **"A Letter to My Younger Self"**

Dear Younger H,

As I sit here reflecting on my journey in the BeYou Women's Program, I am filled with gratitude and pride. There is so much I wish I could tell you, so much I wish you could see and understand about the incredible woman you will become.

You are embarking on a path filled with challenges, but also immense growth and self-discovery. Remember, resilience is your strength. Every obstacle you face will teach you something invaluable about yourself and the world around you. Embrace each lesson, no matter how difficult it may seem.

Being a woman means embracing your authenticity with confidence. It means finding power in your voice and using it to advocate for yourself and others. This program has shown me the value of solidarity and the strength we gain from supporting one another. The bonds we form with other women are a source of strength and inspiration.

You are not alone on this journey. You have a community of strong, supportive women who are walking alongside you. Lean on them, learn from them, and never forget the power of solidarity. The changes we want to see in the world begin with us, and together, we are unstoppable.

With love and hope, Older H



In my letter "A Letter to My Younger Self," I reflect on my journey in the BeYou Women's Program and the lessons I've learned about resilience, self-expression, and unity. I've come to understand the importance of authenticity and the power of community. This letter is a message of encouragement and hope, reminding myself and others that we have the strength to overcome challenges and create meaningful change.

Submitted by H



As tempting it may be,



you can't HATE  
YOURSELF into HEALTH.



For the 2023 school year a friend of mine gifted me a planner with positive messages. This is my favourite page from the planner. I find it resonates with the discussions we've had in the BeYou program about body positivity and acceptance.

Perhaps for a short period hatred can show results, however the journey to truly loving yourself should start from the mindset. This program has helped me remember that our bodies are amazing machines that do so much for us. A blemish or conventional "flaw" shouldn't demean that.

I've also found this program helped me step out of my comfort zone and challenge my negative thoughts and body dysmorphia.

It's unfortunate that our generation seems to have a skewed perception of what normal people look like because of social media. Filters, lighting, and editing is what I remembered I was comparing myself to after having discussions about it with our guest speaker.

Normal skin has texture. Genetics predetermine a lot of factors too. And grass is always greener on the other side. So instead of focusing on what you lack, focus on what can be changed; what should be changed.

And do it because you love your body, not because you hate it.

- Agypt Mao





# APPLE PIE

Can you hold me?  
Hold me and never let go?

I know you're bad for me.  
You know it too.

Bad like an apple that's  
been bruised.  
Maybe you can bake me  
into a pie.

You've always been good at  
fixing me.  
After.

After you've broke me.

Maybe it's the lies.  
When we lie and say  
everything is fine.



During my teenage and early adult life, I have been with the same man. Although most of our relationship has been positive, we do have our ups and downs. As every relationship does. While studying towards my social service worker degree I took a class on poetry. The class taught me how to perfect my writing skills which allowed me to express myself in a healthier way. So, I wrote this poem. The poem expresses how the emotional hurt has caused me to feel bruised on the outside. However, being in the relationship is still where I want to be because we all make mistakes. Including myself that can result in hurting the ones you love. Especially while we are young.

Submitted by Anonymous

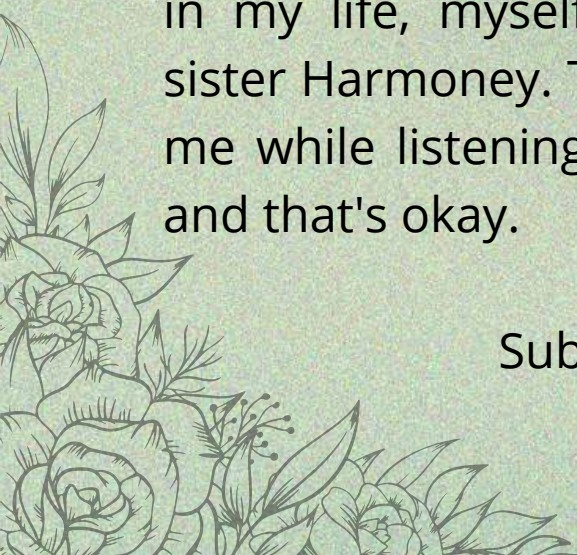




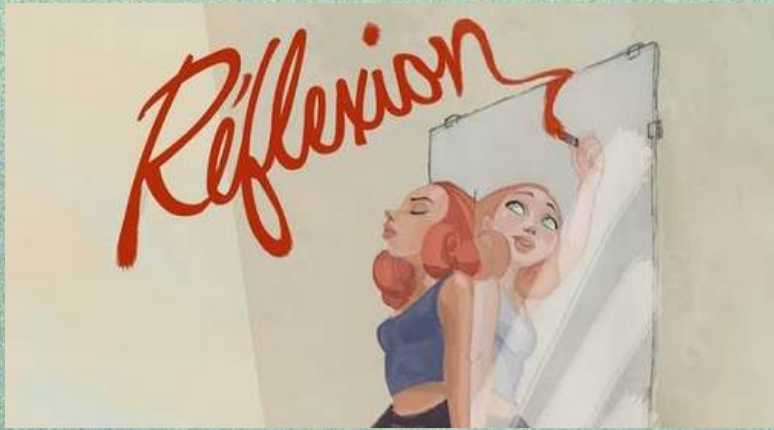


My art piece reflects the many empowering experiences I had in BeYou. The main 2 highlights are the hands and roses. The hands represent diverse backgrounds. And lastly, the rose, which represents growth. In my piece, the hands are closely together and in different shades. This part was motivated by the self-esteem/body confidence workshop when we had guest speaker, Natalie Arias. Seeing that a woman who was not initially in our group could come in and unite to foster renewal in the way we think is amazing to me. She introduced the topic of self-love which is so important to me because to fill another person's cup yours must be filled first. You don't have to share a walk of life, race, or even class to unite and be there for each other unity isn't discriminatory. Second, the rose, my motivation for this part came from a book I read. Overall I learned that growing a rose takes a lot of grooming. Connecting with like-minded people allows for mindfulness, transformation, and perspective. These factors allowed for mental spiritual and physical growth in my life, myself, and even my relationship with my sister Harmony. Throughout this journey I learned to be me while listening to others, I may not always be right, and that's okay.

Submitted by: Shamonique Forbes-Scarlett







**CGI Animated Short Film "Reflexion " | an animated short film directed by Planktoon and Yoshimichi Tamura**

I've always felt like a foreigner in Canada. Everyone had blonde hair, blue eyes, and pale complexion, except for myself and my family, who are brown with dark hair and dark eyes. I'm wondering why we look so different. I grew up believing that I needed to alter to appear like them, like a true Canadian. As I get older, I strive to become like them by acting and speaking like them. I often act out when I don't get what I want, particularly when it comes to modifying my appearance. As the BU PROGRAM progressed through its courses, I learnt a lot about how a woman should love herself. And she should never have to alter for anyone else, except herself. I discovered that I, like everyone else created by God, am unique. And it's okay to look different, and I'll always be a Canadian, no matter how I appear or where I was born. To summarize, this film is intended to remind young ladies that no matter how much they want to change themselves, they will only be satisfied with what they want, not what others want for them.

Submitted by Anonymous





In the BeYou program, my favorite session was the trip downtown to watch the Ice Queens Film Screening, because it was about women's empowerment mainly black women's empowerment in the hockey league, made with/by real-time women who play for the WNHL and a coach who's not only been a player but is also a mom and wants to pave a pathway for future generations.

This is important to me because at the moment society is falling as a whole and the black community is working on building that unity with one another, so to see the fruits of our labor and to know the many victories of black women on ice gives me hope.

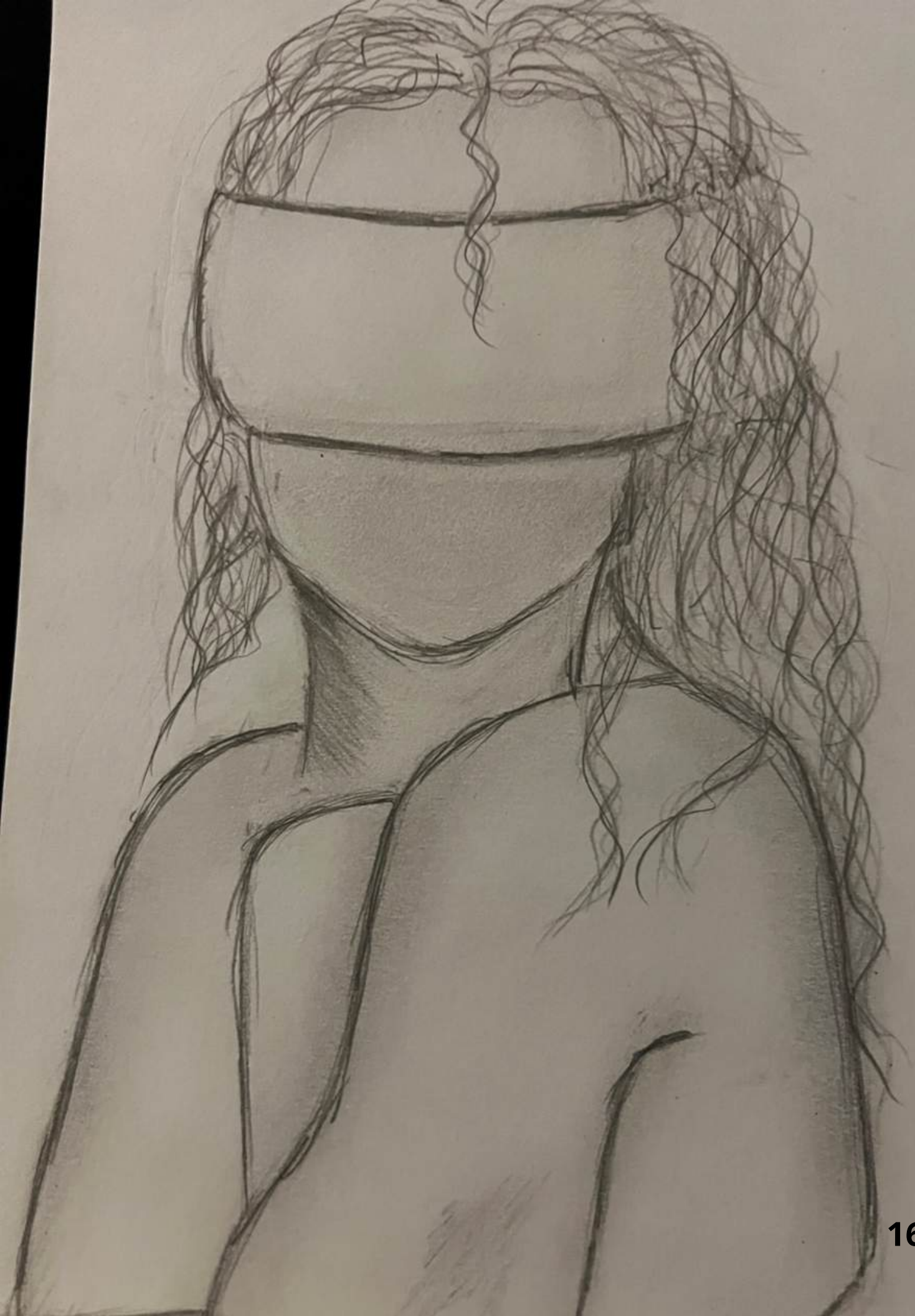
Being in the BeYou program let me embrace the parts of me not commonly seen. Being in the BeYou program gave me space to breathe. Away from all the eyes of judgment and greed. Being in the BeYou program allowed me to heal and be me. In a place far from the eyes and hands of envy and greed.




Submitted by Anonymous











The blindfold represent trust we put in others. As women we are very nurturing and giving weather it be towards men or families we are generally trusting and caring people. Therefore, the blindfold represents how resilient and strong we can be and how we are trying to better the future generations.

To be able to have more acceptance towards things about our body we can't change. If a woman has stretch marks or redness, we need to learn to accept it and be proud. Don't let men fool you and blind you for not accepting the love and worth you deserve. When a woman is reliant, we are confident, we don't let people break or step inside our boundaries and that is a core belief I think is important. Set your boundaries and be in control don't let anyone fool you to doubt yourself.

Submitted by Anonymous



2019 Junko Furuta  
was tortured, raped, and  
murdered for rejecting  
a man. Jo Ogura,  
Shinji, Akato, Yasushi,  
Watanabe, and Mitsuo  
Hirash were the perpetrators.

- 1

  - She was set on fire
  - She was raped by multiple men
  - She was raped with objects
  - She was forced to eat her own feces
  - She was electrocuted
  - Her body was found in a barrel of cement
  - All her perpetrators walk free

## LEGEND

- what it means to be a woman
- Difficulties of being a woman
- Changes I'd like to see
- Fact/Statistics

# A WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE

More strong and feminine female characters in media. Strong women are often portrayed as masculine.

- 37,000 pregnancies stem from rape each year. This is in regards to women 13-45 (J Obstet Gynecol, 1996)

35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. 38% of murders of women are committed by their partner (UWI, 2011)

- Unrealistic beauty standards
- The hour glass figure
- Flat stomachs
- Big chest
- Slim

## Child marriage

Less invalidation  
"You must be on your period"  
"Women are so emotional"

Abortion is illegal in over 16 countries.

There is a kind of conformity and understanding shared between women. We face the same struggle but in different ways.

- Over 300,000 women died from pregnancy related deaths in 2017  
- 68,000 women die from unsafe abortions each year (WHO, 2014) (Hindes & Hays, 2009)

## Double standards

I wish I wasn't openly disrespected then told to laugh it off because it's a joke

Being expected to do housework or domestic chores opposed to my brother who 'helps'

To struggle but prevail

Being expected to mature more quickly than men.

"Boys will be boys"

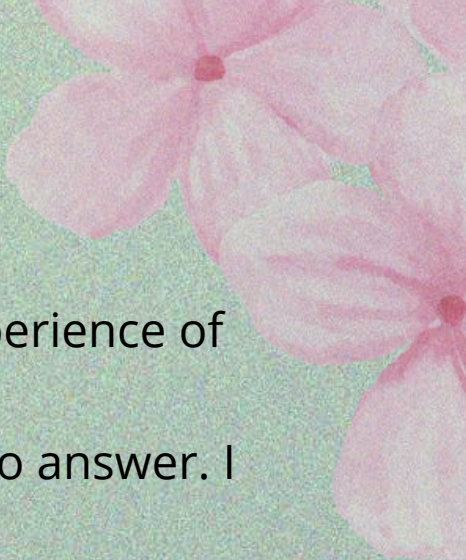
To be human. It's hard to explain what it is to be a woman because we know nothing else. I do know that people expect different things but there is no exact definition in my eyes. I just know I'm a woman.

Ideas and opinions are under valued. Emotions are neglected because women are 'emotional'

Abortion rights and easy access to birth control in all countries as well as a thorough explanation of consent in the education system.

Being expected to marry/have a child after explicitly saying you don't want one.





For my contribution I wanted to show the experience of being a woman. What it means to be a woman is such a vague question it's difficult to answer. I wanted to portray the issues women face but I didn't want this piece to focus entirely on those issues. I tried to have a fair balance of facts, problems, solutions, and opinions. Some of the problems and strengths mentioned are from the program's meetings. An example would be the double standards brought up. I was aware they were there, of course; however, I never realized just how prominent they were without the help of the other 'be you' members. A woman's experience is varied just as the human experience. One message I want to get across is being a woman is part of who I am but not all of it. I want my femininity to be acknowledged and understood yet not used as a focal point to degrade me or encompass my whole being. I want people to understand that women as are people and people are layered.

Submitted by: Ally. B



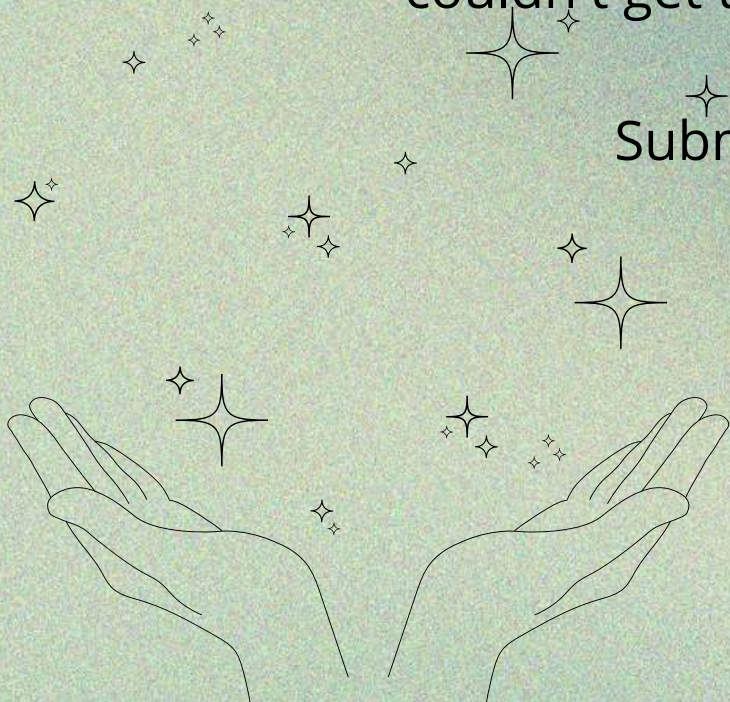






This is a Native American dreamcatcher that I made in my shelter as a way to honour the people who live here. They were meant to keep people, especially kids, safe from bad dreams, nightmares, and evil forces while they slept. I picked this as my passion project because the dream catcher is made like a circle, which for me represents the circle of life. I also felt good energy and spirits during all 4 sessions, which is what a dreamcatcher means to me. For the times we relaxed, the green ring stands for peace of mind. This ring is generally held together by feathers, which stand for breath or air. The beads are for the good dreams that couldn't get through the web.

Submitted by: Azhar Al-zahrooni











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# Thank You

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Thank you to everyone who helped make the BeYou Program learning experience possible, accessible, and fun for our youth participants:

Ainka Jess, She's4Sports  
Cirque du Soleil - ECHO  
City of Toronto Parks & Recreation  
Comfort Cuisine Catering  
Longo's Yonge and Sheppard  
Studio Jayne

**Guest Speakers:**

Bailey Condon-Salmon  
Danielle Culp  
Olivia Ha  
Natalie Osterling





THANK YOU,  
COHORT 3!



**Connect with us!**

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