



BeYou Women's Program

Cohort 4 / 2025

PASSION PROJECT

*A collective creative project
made by empowered youth*



CONTENTS

- 03** BeYou Women's Program
- 04** Passion Project & Our Why
- 05** Program Highlights
- 06** Memories
- 08** Passion Project Submissions
- 24** Thank You & Acknowledgements

BeYou

Women's Program

BeYou is more than a program - it's a journey of growth, connection, and empowerment. Together, we build resilience, discover new strengths, and learn strategies that nurture well-being. Through meaningful conversations, shared experiences, and inspiring guest speakers, participants don't just develop skills - they leave with a stronger sense of self and community.

At its heart, BeYou is about creating a supportive space where everyone feels seen, valued, and encouraged to grow. It's not just about learning new strategies, but about building lasting connections and realizing the power of community. Each participant brings something unique, and together we create a space where confidence, curiosity, and courage can thrive.

I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to all participants for being part of this journey. It has truly been a privilege to meet you, learn alongside you, and witness the heart you brought to the experience. Your presence made this program so meaningful and I'm grateful to have shared this time together.

With Kindness,
Lela Pacitti-Sander, BeYou Program Coordinator





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 will provide 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 of participants with our community, the Passion Project will be shared on Youth Rising Above's social media platforms and will be archived with previous cohort passion projects.

Program Highlights

Growth Mindsets

We started off the fourth annual BeYou Program with an amazing new cohort of young ladies - and what a start! Our first session focused on Growth Mindsets, where we learned how to see challenges as opportunities, embrace “yet” instead of “can’t,” and show up for ourselves even when things get tough.

Resilience

Session 2 of BeYou focused on Resilience which explored how to bounce back from challenges and keep moving forward. We hoped on Padlet to reflect on what resilience means and to share strategies for building it! We also welcomed an inspiring guest panel (Asiya, Fiona and Allison) who shared their career journeys, giving participants a chance to ask questions, gain insight, and reflect on their own futures.

Body Confidence and Self-Esteem

The BeYou crew spent the third session of BeYou engaging in a tough but powerful session on Body Confidence and Self-Esteem. We explored how to appreciate our bodies for what they can do, not just how they look, and challenged unrealistic appearance ideals from media and society.

Healthy Relationships

For Session 3 of BeYou we welcomed Laura from Women's Support Network who delivered a memorable workshop on helpful relationships. Laura helped us explore personal boundaries, self-awareness, and recognizing unhealthy relationship patterns.

Memories



Memories



Passion Project Submissions





This drawing represents the fragile relationship many people have with their self-image. The cracks in the glass symbolize how beauty standards and social media can distort the way we see ourselves, breaking our confidence into pieces. It reflects the struggles many, especially women, face when navigating body confidence and self-esteem.

- Afrin Azme



LEARNING TO RISE ABOVE AND LOVE MYSELF

During the Be You sessions, I realised that growth is not just about being perfect, but it's about being willing to try again.

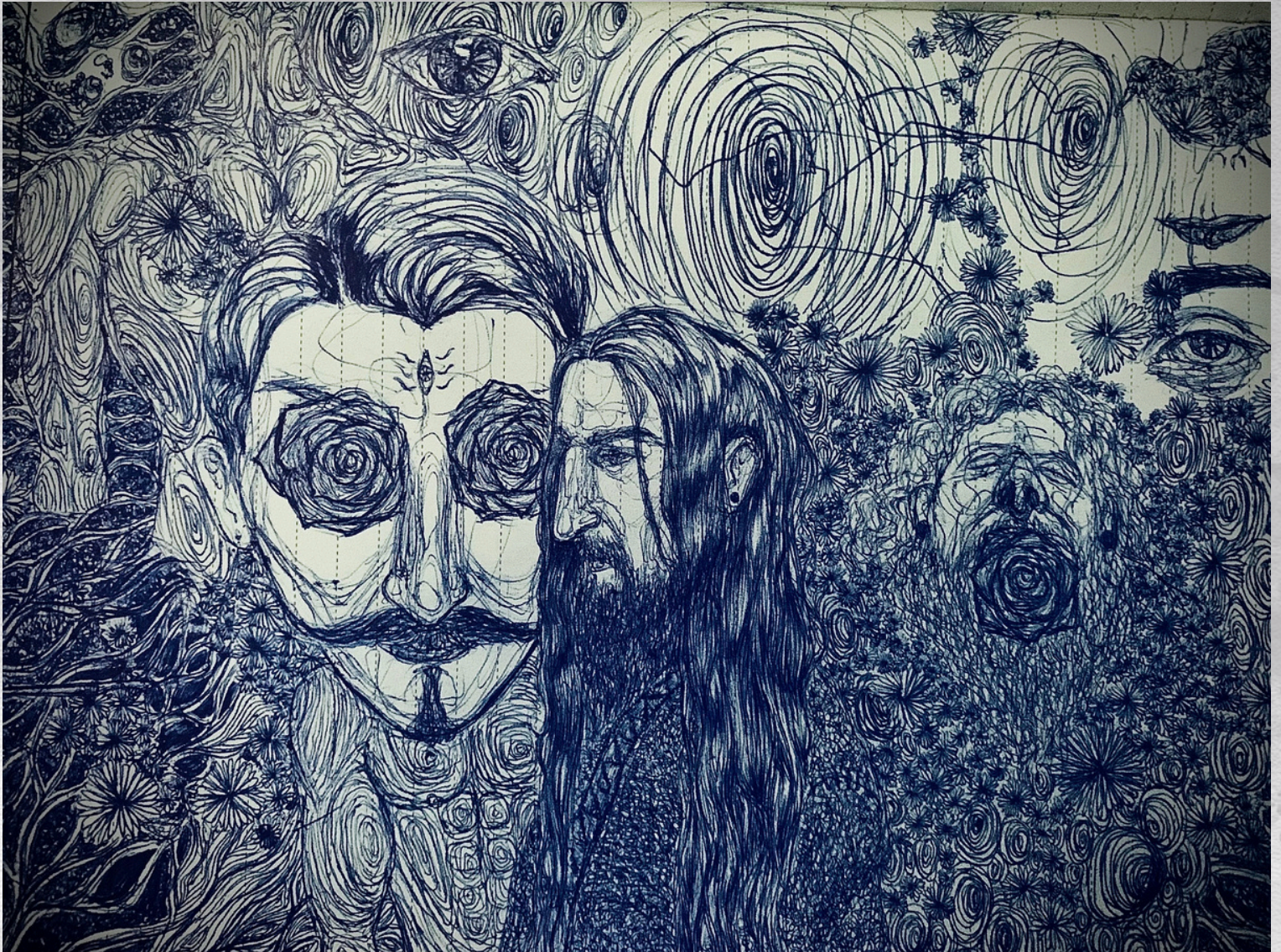
In our discussions on resilience, I saw that setbacks are not failures but lessons. Every challenge I face or faced taught me something about my strength.

When we spoke about self-esteem and body confidence, I began to understand that how I see myself matters more than how others see me. Learning to accept me as I am has been one of the most powerful steps in my journey.

The idea of a growth mindset reminds me that mistakes are not always the end of the story but they are stepping stones and each one teaches me how to walk further.

Be You gave me the space to not only reflect on I am but on also who I am becoming. My passion moving forward is carrying resilience and self love with me not just for myself but to inspire others to also do the same .

BY: ANONYMOUS



This drawing was created from visions in my dream; where recurring faces disappear and reappear in between stirring undergrowths and viny tendrils. I wanted to display feelings of disorder and confusion; an almost trance-like state. Eyes and lips and other body parts in focused view, opening mouths and peoples faces with flowers and spirals constantly moving, shifting, and dilating. I wanted to depict these men in my dream, because I have been dreaming these same faces for years. These strangers have always protected me, silently observing or providing care to versions of my childhood self in my dreams. Unlike the men in my life who have hurt, neglected, or abused me, these strange faces never once harmed me, and were always a source of comfort and safety. With this drawing, I am finally able to depict them on paper, reflecting my minds' inner ability to cope with domestic and sexual abuse.

- A.M.



Dear You,

you should've been laughing, eating cake without guilt, taking dumb selfies without checking angles ten times. you should've been free. but instead you carried around this heavy shame like it belonged to you. it didn't. it was never yours.

and it breaks my heart knowing how many moments you skipped out on because you thought you didn't look good enough. how many times you hid away, tugging at your shirt, standing behind people in photos. when the truth is... you were beautiful. you were soft and alive and worthy.

i'm sorry i believed society when they told you "too big." i'm sorry i let people's words carve scars into you. i'm sorry for every time you cried over a body that was already perfect, already enough. i'm sorry that i didn't protect you from their voices, that i didn't remind you every day how much more you were than what you looked like.

and i wish i could tell you how much time we lost hating ourselves. summers you didn't wear the fits you loved because you thought people would stare or your little rolls stuck out. . moments where you should've been laughing in photos, but instead you were calculating angles and shrinking yourself behind people in pictures. those years should have been filled with joy, with freedom, but you spent them making yourself small.

i wish i could hug you right now. i wish i could tell you that one day, you'll look back and realize you were never the problem. the world was. the standards, the comments. and we believed them.

but i promise you, i see you now. i see how tender you were, how much you just wanted to belong, how much you thought love depended on looking "right." and i wish i could take that weight off your chest, but since i can't, i'll do the next best thing: i'll spend the rest of my life unlearning it for you. i'll make sure we never starve ourselves of love again.

you were beautiful. you were enough. you were always, always worthy.



Yours Forever,

Me





This is an acrylic painting of three women. When looking at each I notice the differences of the body shapes and sizes. Throughout our discussion sessions we reflected upon our body images - representing our own individuality. Pictures can interpret different stories and ways, like who we are, how we think, our values, and ideas as who we want to be. With the warm colours the painting shows the warmth inside ourselves when we are collaborating in a team. The lady in the middle put her vase on top of the head. What do you think the picture is trying to interpret? Our creativity can be used to tell the story of three women.

- Heather Leung

The *Art*
OF BEING Me



THE *Art* ME OF BEING

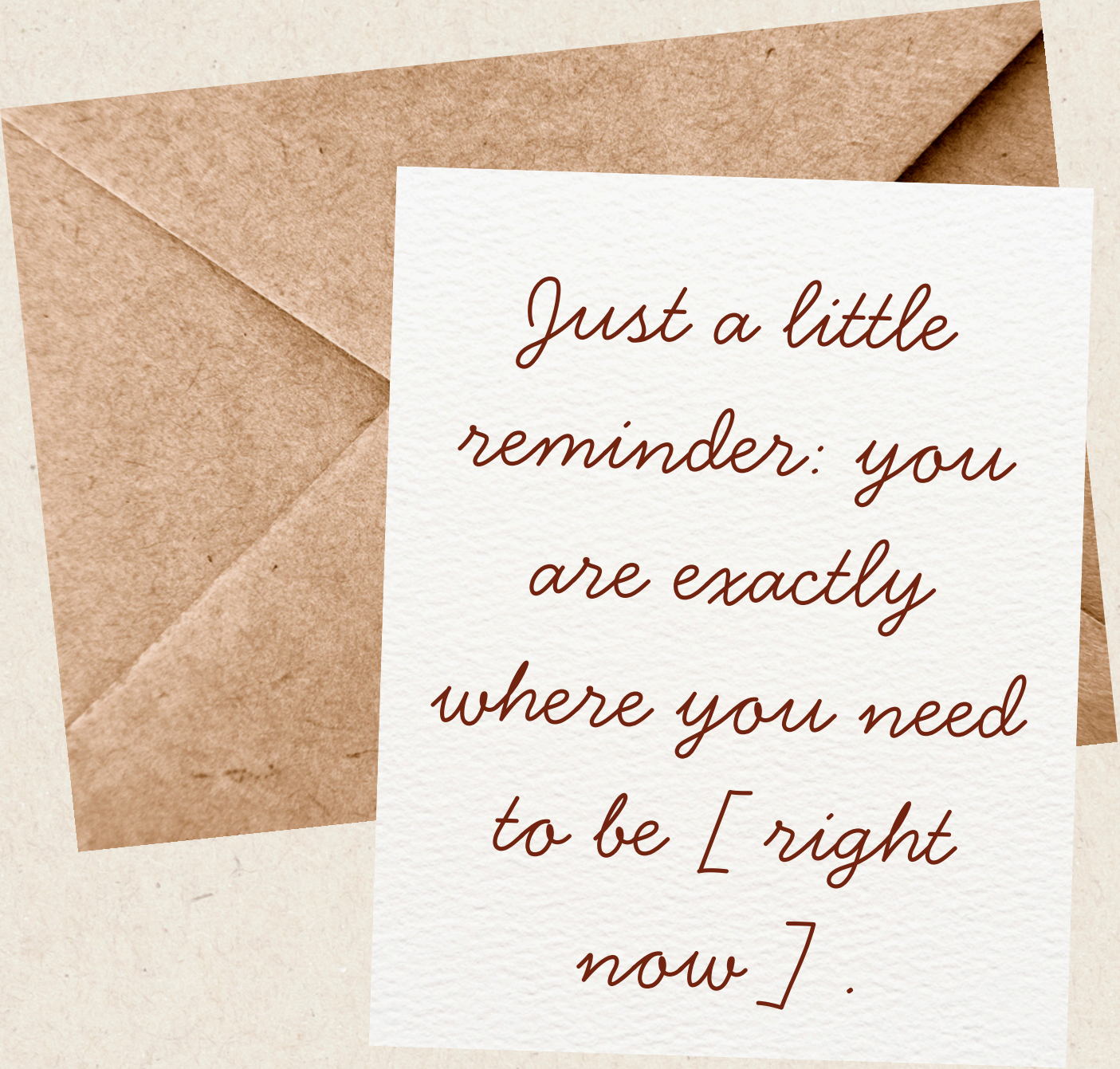
Upon joining the BeYou program, I have met people who are from different backgrounds and shared their own stories and experiences of the topics we have discussed. Such as body confidence, self esteem, resilience, healthy relationships and more. One of the topics that I enjoyed talking about and sharing my experiences with is Self Esteem and Body Confidence. We were asked *"What do you like about yourself?"* And I thought long and hard about it. Hence, I decided to challenge myself to create a digital collage of everything I love about myself.

The **Strawberry** in my mouth isn't just my favorite fruit, it represents sweetness, simplicity, and a reminder to savor the little things. The **Fashion Books** and **Loafers** stand for my love of style and fashion. My favourite pair of shoes are my loafers as they add style to anything I wear and give me confidence because I can walk confidently in any setting. **CN Tower and the Streetcar** symbolize my deep connection to Toronto, a city that continues to inspire me with its energy, movement, and endless corners to explore.

The **Camera** speaks to my passion for capturing beauty in everyday life and turning ordinary moments into something aesthetic and meaningful. **Pencils, Scissors** and a **Measuring Tape** reflect my love for making things with my hands, crafting, designing, building, and always creating. And finally, my **Earbuds** represent the **Music** that fuels me, comforts me, and gets me dancing when no one's watching.

Jewelry: Especially gold and pearls, makes me feel beautiful and empowered, so I wear it with pride. **Flowers** represent growth, softness, and the natural beauty I'm drawn to. The **Art Museum** ceiling in the background is a symbol of my love for art spaces, places where I feel most inspired, reflective, and alive.

This portrait isn't just about how I look, it's about how I live. It's an honest, layered, and joyful reflection of the art of being me.



Just a little
reminder: you
are exactly
where you need
to be [right
now] .

Sometimes it's easy for me to get caught up in comparing, rushing, or feeling like I'm falling behind. Through BeYou I've realized that growth doesn't always look like a straight line, and every step [big or small] matters. - AKA Rose



Dear Jon,

Most times when I'm asked about growing up it makes me think of you. At first, I try to think about the good, but I eventually get consumed with the bad. I think my mind tries to numb my heart before the feelings of pain flood in with the memories.

I remember feeling shattered when you played with my trust, as though it were worthless. I was senseless with my faith in your care for me, and you were reckless.

I think about the times where I felt the lowest, and it was always at your hand. My self-esteem was stripped and my worth is something I questioned.

You tossed me away like I didn't matter, like I was something broken. You made me feel undeserving of love and that's something that's stuck with me.

I've walked through life believing I couldn't be worth affection, questioning anyone who claimed they cared. I thought it was impossible for someone to love me.

You've left me scars that I'll never be able to remove from my fragile heart. Though I've healed as best I could, I often feel like I'm being held together merely.

I continue on my healing journey in the hopes of once again being whole.

Yours,
Elle

My Passion Project

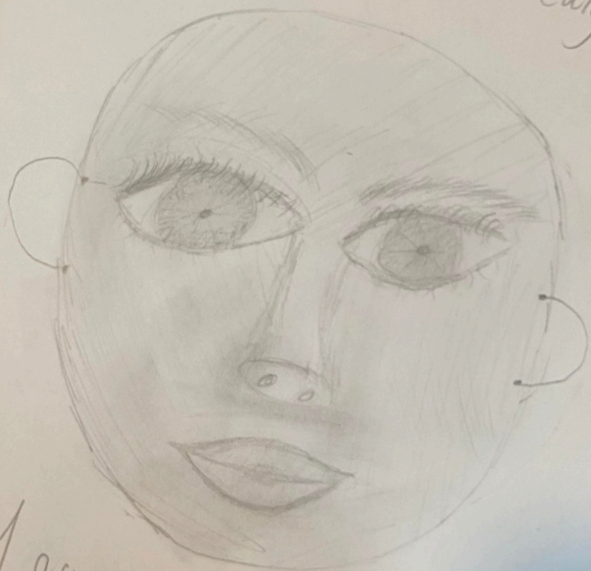
I didn't have a lot of resources
But this is what I came up
with my mind is messy
like my project I find
I make myself a lot to try
and please the people
around me I found in the

Be you program I showed
me what's healthy to keep
around myself and what I
need to discard I found

The Be you program helped me
understand what a healthy relationship is
I will forever carry what I learned.

By: Mikaela

Are you truly



Your mask

Dear Younger Self,

You were young and innocent. You were told these are the best years of your life but also you are wasting your youth. It was too much pressure. I did my best in school but I never felt it was good enough. I worked hard but did not have anything to show for it. A report card with A's but at what cost? The stress, losing sleep over one test, telling my family and friends that I can't go anywhere and stayed home all the time because I need to study. Looking back was it worth it? I wish I hanged out with friends more, joined more clubs, and stopped putting all of the pressure on academics. My grades were great but none of my friends were there to celebrate. I wished I explored more interests: could I have been an athlete or maybe a good debater? Instead I was a good test taker and that is not a skill I can list on my resume. It is okay to get a bad grade, it is okay to say no to study sometimes because I have studied enough.

School is important but so is having fun. Try new things, ride your bike more, go on field trips without worrying about cost or time. Time is limited and I wish I could hug myself longer and give myself more grace and love. It felt like society was always telling me to do better and be better. It is impossible to fulfill all of society's wishes and demands so just focus on your dreams. Focus on what makes you happy. Do not worry about a job for the rest of your life and instead try to find something you enjoy and practice it. I loved to write but all of my English teachers said I was not good enough because I did not understand Shakespeare. I remember crying thinking that I was not good enough. If I do not have first place, it's like last place. But the only competition was with myself. I did my best and it was good enough. Stop worrying so much about what will happen and enjoy every moment now because it will be gone in an instant. Life is about living not worrying so stop worrying, go outside, smell the flowers, and know everything turned out ok.

Love,
Me

Artist Statement: For my passion project, I wrote a letter to my younger self. I explored the feelings I felt being in school and being a teenager. I missed out a lot on experiences because I was too focused on grades and being the smartest person in my class. But I write this letter as a hug to my younger self to remind myself that it is okay to not be perfect and to not always study and work. It is okay to enjoy life's moments and experiences and to explore interests outside of academics. All in all, this letter is a reminder to myself to not let life pass me by and to live life to the fullest.

IVORY MEMORY

ELEPHANTS NEVER FORGET

SUCH GREAT CREATURES
SERENE AND MAJESTIC
THEIR BODY SHAKES THE GROUND
AND WITH THEIR TRUNKS, ARE LOUD

YET TENDER-HEARTED
AND EASILY SUBJUGATED
JUST A FEW MICE
LEAVES THEM COLD AS ICE

ELEPHANTS NEVER FORGET

WHAT A BLESSING
YET A GREATER CURSE

FILLED WITH MOURNING
AND ENSLAVEMENT
UNDER HUMAN CONTROL
EVERYTHING TAKES A TOLL



HUNTED FOR TUSKS
LEFT WITHOUT A HOME
EXPLOITED AND BRED
LIVING WITH DREAD

NOTHING AT FAULT OF THEIR OWN

NONETHELESS ELEPHANTS,
CAN NEVER FORGET

STILL, THEY OWN
SOMETHING GREATER
MUCH GREATER
THAN THEIR SIZE

THEY WALK THROUGH
LOSS AND DANGER
WITH QUIET STRENGTH,
HOPE IN THEIR EYES

AND THOUGH ELEPHANTS NEVER FORGET,
THERE ARE NO REGRETS.
THEY LIVE AND PROTECT,
RESTORE AND CONNECT.

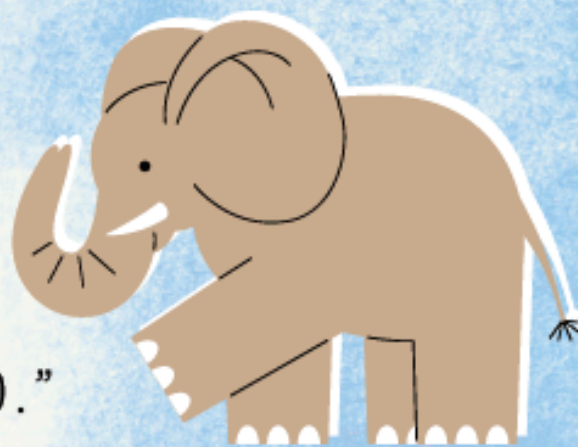


THEY ENDURE TRAUMA
AND HEAVY LOSS,
YET STILL CARRY HOPE
NO MATTER THE COST.

YES, IT'S TRUE:
THE ELEPHANT DOES NOT BITE.
THEY NEVER FORGET.

BUT THEY REMEMBER,
THEIR PAST, A STEADFAST WITNESS,
THAT LIFE WILL GROW BRIGHTER,
BIGGER AND BETTER.

RESILIENCE IS NOT LOUD;
IT DOESN'T ROAR OR DEMAND.
IT WHISPERS:
"YOU SURVIVED YESTERDAY,
YOU WILL SURVIVE TODAY TOO."



AND SOMEHOW, THAT IS ENOUGH,
FOR ELEPHANTS NEVER FORGET.

Ivory Memories

One of the most impactful sessions during the Be You program was definitely when we spoke about resilience. We cannot change our past, our adverse experiences or injustices of life, yet there is power in moving forward. However, that power isn't always loud and even through the pain and hurtful memories, we can have hope for a brighter future. That's where Ivory Memory was born. It was inspired by the beautiful yet tragic lives of some elephants. They live through very unjust and sad experiences, which are sometimes exploited for tourism, and many experience issues on their backs and other poor living conditions. They also mourn members of their herd that they have lost. Whether it is in captivity or freedom, elephants must endure hard situations. They are such an amazing example of resilience, which is what makes them strong. Humans also have a hard time forgetting past traumas and experiences we sometimes wish we could make disappear, but it is impossible. The goal of this poem is to highlight that although we cannot forget our hardships from the past, those memories serve as reminders that we can always overcome.

~Nita

Thank You

We would like to send a huge thanks to everyone who helped make BeYou Cohort 4 such a success - our awesome guest speakers, agency partners and the spaces that hosted us.

- Laura Colangelo, Women's Support Network of York Region
- Fiona Kovacaj, Guest Speaker
- Asiyah Elmi, Guest Speaker
- Allison Nicholls, Guest Speaker
- Maria, Loft Coordinator
- Longo's Yonge and Sheppard

And we can't forget Youth Rising Above's very own:

- Henrietta Botei, for stepping in as a guest facilitator with such warmth and kindness
- Bea Ramos, for creating content that delivers insight, growth, and impact - cohort after cohort

Above all, we're grateful for the participants who always blow us away with their talents and the passion they bring! Thank you for being you!



Connect with us!

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