

NEWSLETTER | SPRING/SUMMER '22



THE PASSION PROJECT BEYOU PROGRAM COHORT 01

YOUTH RISING ABOVE
INSPIRING • EMPOWERING • TRANSFORMING



COHORT 01

Session Highlights

SELF-ESTEEM & BODY CONFIDENCE

Participants explored what self-esteem and body positivity and body confidence looks like to them. Using real-life examples, youth collectively shared what the impacts of social media looks like for them, both negative and positive, and examined strategies to promote healthy self-esteem.

Youth watched the film "Body Politics" featuring MPP Jill Andrew, and engaged in a discussion on body confidence, representation, and self-esteem with the film's director, Aisha Fairclough.

RESILIENCE

Alongside a panel of self-identified women guest speakers, youth explored the meaning of resilience, effective strategies to work through challenges, and how to cope with difficulties and setbacks in their lives. Guest speakers shared insight with youth from their own life experiences and positionalities, navigating womanhood, on both personal and professional levels.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

With support from the T.E.A.R. (Teens Ending Abusive Relationship) Team from Victim Services Toronto, youth had the opportunity to learn about healthy relationships and what they can look like. Grounded within a gender-based analysis, the workshop taught youth how power works in relationships, and how to create and foster healthy relationships in their own lives.

GROWTH MINDSETS

Through an in-person learning trip, youth were able to engage with a community organization, the 519, and learn more about helpful and affirming resources that are available to them.

Participants were given the opportunity to learn more about services and support at The 519 through interactive activities, informational presentations, and an engaging walking tour of the 519 building and the land it is situated on.

THE PASSION PROJECT

passion

[pash-uhn]

a strong or extravagant fondness,
enthusiasm, or desire for anything

As a way to spark creativity and self-reflection, BeYou Program facilitators asked self-identified female participants to submit personal pieces to share with the collective and with the Youth Rising Above community.

Using mediums of their choice, youth were given the opportunity to contribute anything that they felt passionate about in regard to their experiences with the program, what they learned, and what matters to them and their intersecting identities. This is a collection of their work.





Since the program started in March, I have learned about various topics ranging from resilience, positive body image and personal growth. The participants have engaged well and I especially enjoyed the IWD outing. What stood out the most to me were the experiences that I could relate to, despite our differences. I realized over and over again that women experience similar things despite where we come from. For example, the idea of skin whitening is prominent in many cultures and this is very problematic. I enjoyed our discussions and feel grateful to be able to meet everyone. I am one of the older participants of the group and I had doubts going into this program, if I would be able to relate to others, but I never felt like an outsider. The facilitators and guest speakers were wonderful and very welcoming :) I also learned about following your own journey with regards to career and not comparing ourselves with others. This is something I already know but it is hard not to do. Hearing about other people's experiences with career struggles provided me with reassurance that everything will fall into place!

- BeYou Participant



Passion Project

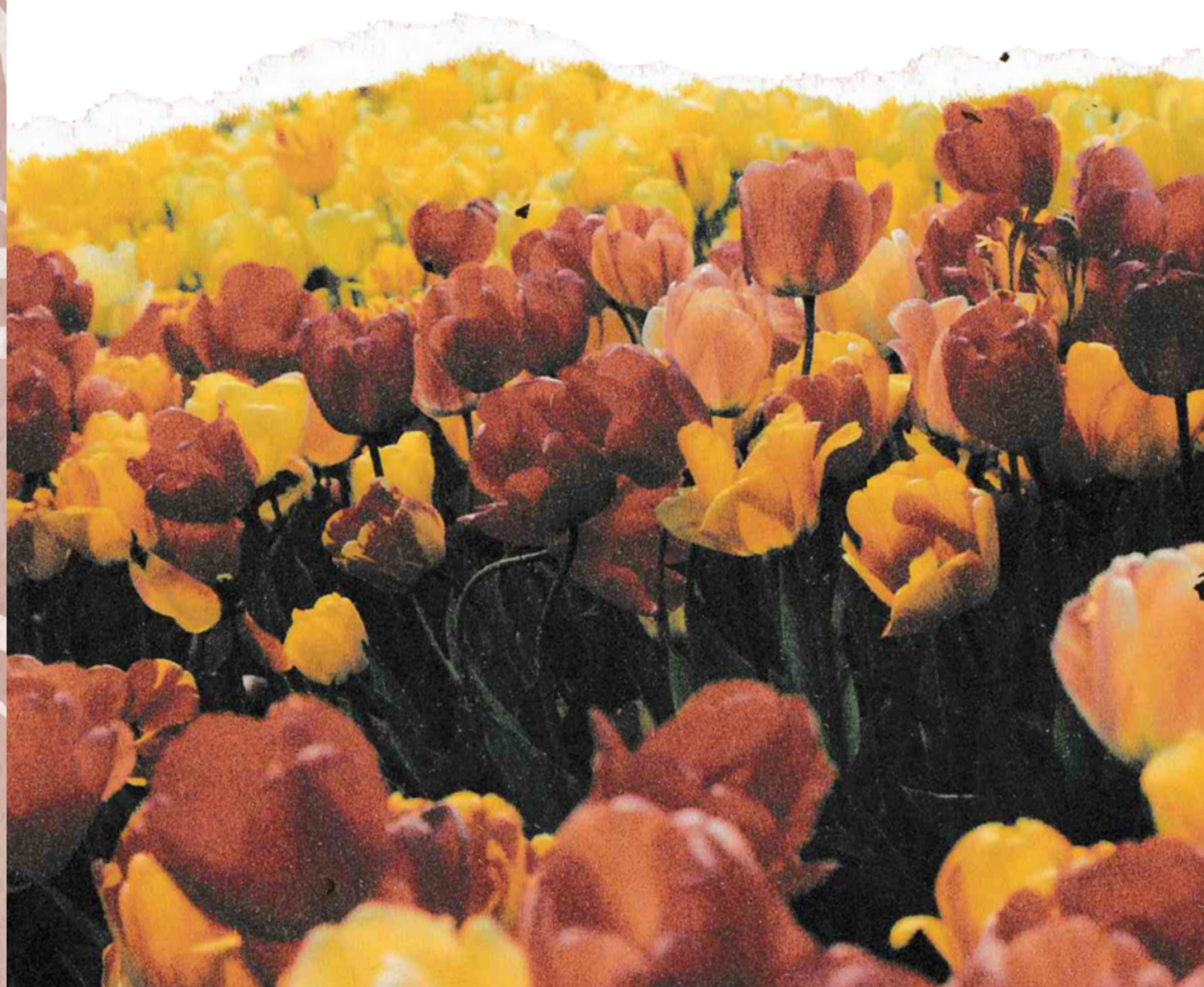
By: AJ



When I first saw these lovely flowers, I was reminded of women: myself , my family's, my community's, my country's, and the entire globe. I was educated as a child to always listen to my parents since they were the ones who brought me into this world and cared for me. And, of course, I did as a kid.

I realized I enjoyed working with my hands when I was in eighth grade, whether it was playing sports or building. I made the decision to pursue a career in the trades. I was delighted to tell my parents that I had finally decided on a professional path that had been on my mind for years. They answered no as soon as I uttered the word "apprenticeship." They were completely uninterested in what I trying to

accomplish. While I tried to persuade them every day. They still refused. Why? Because I'm a woman. Because I'm frail. Because society will pass judgment on me. The red tulips represent women, they will be unable to spread their lovely petals if they are subjected to hateful remarks such as these. Like flowers, require water and sunlight to develop into beautiful flowers, women also require support from their community and family. A stunning flower symbolizes their accomplishment in achieving what they desire and in persevering to attain their goals, demonstrating to society that their criticisms will not hold them back. When women help one another, they thrive together, as depicted in the photo.



During the Be YOU program, I felt truly empowered and heard in the space I was able to share with other young women who not only were able to empathize as they had also ensured these same experiences of barriers and navigating wellbeing, but were also able to recognize their strengths and the need for continuing to build supportive communities.

Throughout the discussions, a prominent theme that was highlighted was the need for more transparent and validating spaces for BIPOC women, where young girls and women are able to build a sense of camaraderie, but also propose effective solutions for their communities and societies to ensure that these inequities, barriers, and bias continue to be addressed and remain at the forefront of how we operate.

After reflecting on these amazing experiences that were rich in knowledge, skills, and discussions, I hope that we can see a world of new leaders who are able to keep themselves and others accountable to creating the change they hope to be, but also continuing to pave an environment that allows future BIPOC girls and women to thrive.

- Tsion

A Letter to My Younger Self

To My Sister,

Life has its peaks and troughs but I promise you that you will ride out all of it and be just fine. As unbelievable as that may sound, you are so much more than enough – So much more than the other women you compare yourself to, so much more than the people acting on Instagram that you scroll past, so much more than the girl on YouTube that you're living vicariously through because you're convinced that she has a better life than you.

I remember feeling the pressure to pursue happiness and display it far and wide for all to see instead of seeking joy in discovering myself and being content with what I find. I remember feeding an all-consuming need to be perfect. But perfect to who? I was just chasing other people's expectations of me. I was probably seen as relatively successful for my age and doing good for my age and I promise you, sis, that I was never more miserable. I was never more miserable when I spent every day trying to be a version of myself that wasn't just me. It wasn't even the best version of myself that I was trying to be. It was far worse – It was someone else's version of me.

I want to tell you what I wish someone told me...

You are more than enough.
You are worthy and you are loved.
You are fragile and strong at the same time.
You are delicate with a sharpness.
You are brave and tenderhearted all in one.

You are a composite, layered and complicated human being with so many parts to you.

Enjoy discovering all the different parts of you instead of the you that others expect of you.

Take your time – It'll take a lifetime x

Yours in truth,

Mercy Ayesha xx



What does being a woman mean to me? This is such a complex question with so many parts to it, some of which I haven't even discovered for myself yet. To me, at the most standard level, what makes you a woman is identifying as a woman.

For the most part, women cannot be categorized because of the **diversity** and **intersectionality** that exists within us as a whole. To say having a vagina is what makes one a woman is to completely invalidate the identity and being of trans women. Stereotypes that exist to generalize women stem from social constructs that humans have made up. Liking **pink**, wearing dresses, watching princess/romantic movies, doing household chores, being *feminine*-which comes with its own set of stereotypes-, being **timid**, **gentle**, **afraid**, and **weak** are all traits society has associated with being a woman. I **strongly** disagree with every one of these. Of course, women like **pink**, wear dresses, and are **gentle** but women also like **blue**, wear suits, and are **rough**.

We are rough.

We are **afraid** and **fearless** and **passive** and **aggressive** and masculine and feminine and everything else *all at once*.

To be a woman is not to be a certain way or dress a certain style or have romantic feelings for a certain gender. Some people believe women are **strong and wise and **hardworking** but I don't think that's all that women are. We are not always strong, and that is okay. We are human and make mistakes and have bad days and cannot always be the best versions of ourselves.**

The most important thing to me is authenticity and the truth is, women are countless different things that can't be written on paper.

Every woman has their **own unique experience** with their identity, yet there is often a level of **relatability** that is shared. With that being said, within women as an institution, there exist **harmful systems** that create a divide between us. The world we live in combines different forms of oppression to create completely new experiences. It is important to acknowledge this because it *fundamentally* shifts the way one views **womanhood**.

Provided you identify as one, being a woman means being **whoever you are**.

You, *just being you*, **embody** what it means to be a woman. You are already enough and are already validated by this community *simply by being*. Isn't that special? This community we have is **special**. We are the foundation for society, businesses, families, nature, and most importantly, ourselves. Because without us, there would be no **woman** and there would be no **human**.



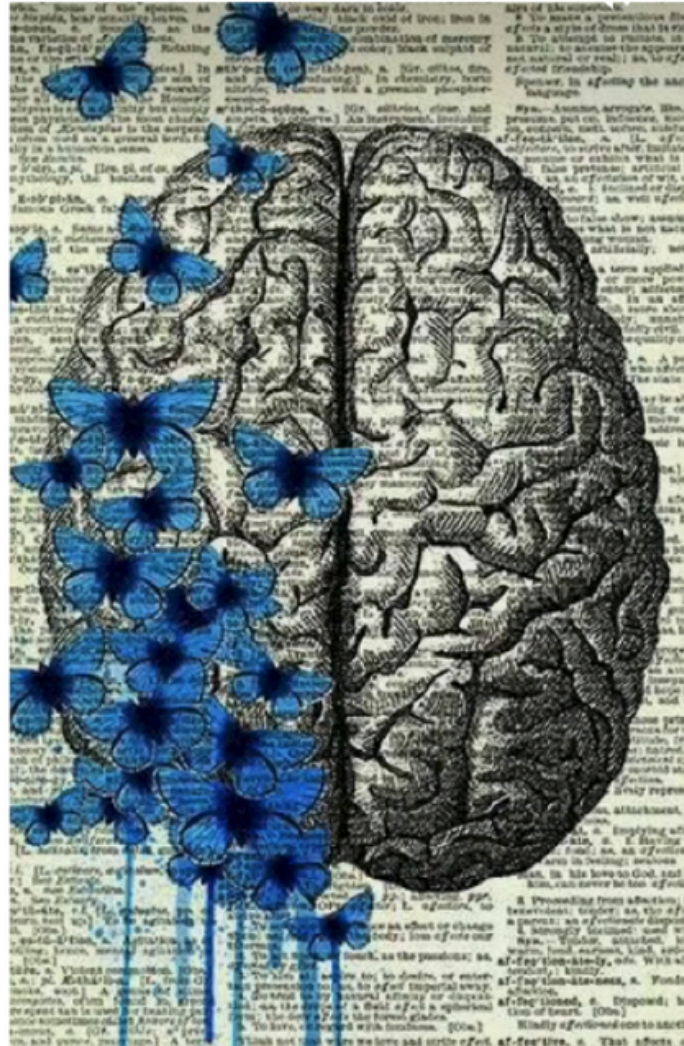
"My piece 'Emergence' speaks about fear. A fear of self and a fear of others. For this piece I wanted to imagine a world different then our own, invading earth and attacking us for earth's horrible ideas of what women are meant to be; while having the same ideals themselves. The scary reality of the vicious cycle that seemingly never ends. People speak down on misogyny all the time, but we still live in a society that values women below men. As women, we are taught to fear being different or out of the norm, but does it always have to be that way? Will we ever achieve true empowerment? I don't know... but look! Aliens!"

Jahnae & Aniya



Growth

Farida Ahmad



This is an image that I came across on Pinterest and I thought it would be great for my passion project as it represents growth to me. To me butterflies represent growth by their transformation, a butterfly has its own life cycle of becoming beautiful throughout its changes over time. I read a poem by Rupi Kaur that said, "you do not just wake up and become a butterfly, growth is a process", and that is something that stuck with me. Evolving into a better version of yourself constantly starts from your mindset, a positive mindset results in positive outcomes in life.



My experience in this program has been filled with euphoric moments of epiphanies and just utter bliss and happiness. I have learnt so much about myself and women in general that it inspires me and excites me for my future. I have never really felt at home with many things in my life and I am glad to say that this program is at the top of my list of that one place you feel like you belong in.

It is rightfully doing wonders for women especially women of colour and my wish is for it to never stop. The topic of bodily autonomy has always been very important for me and discussing that with everyone was a very vulnerable yet strengthening feeling.

My journey as a woman of colour and a child of immigrant parents has all been about enduring discrimination in this country but for the past few years, I have been on a self discovering journey about my very roots and significance as a woman, so with these things in mind, I decided to join very program, and was rightfully content with my decision as the unity women hold as a community, and individually, was proven many times.

- Aruba Durrani



THANK YOU,
COHORT 1!



Connect with us!

website: www.youthrisingabove.org

email: info@youthrisingabove.org

instagram: [@youthrisingabove](https://www.instagram.com/youthrisingabove)