



**Our**

**Minds**

**Our**

**Future**

**Young people's experiences of mental  
health through poetry**



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# Introductions

## Zoe Maggs and Our Minds Our Future

My name is Zoe and I first joined the Our Minds Our Future campaign in June 2018 in response to a call-out for a volunteer “campaign strategist”. What attracted me to the campaign was how different it is from all others I have come across before.

Awareness-raising is great and necessary, but I am hungry for real, substantial change that is led, shaped, and informed by the voices of real people. That is exactly what Our Minds Our Future represents to me: we are young people who seek out and listen to other young peoples’ experiences of the UK mental health system. We give them the legal knowledge to know that they deserve and can be demanding more; we welcome anyone who wants young people to access the rights their government have agreed to providing. We do this in so many ways. Primarily, we aim for members of the public to sign our petition for a rights-based approach to mental health and for people in positions of power to pledge to respect young people’s mental health rights.

We also run poetry events to recruit more volunteers and get our voices heard, as well as taking our demands to the heart of government through mechanisms such as the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, or the Conservative and Labour party annual conferences. In Leeds, we started out with just two volunteers. Now we are a group of ten, spread across much of Yorkshire.

**Could you be the next to join?**

What follows is a series of poetry which has been selected and compiled as part of a national poetry project which we, the Leeds team, ran as our first project to gain momentum and launch the campaign. There were over 50 entries to the competition, and here are 25 poems which 8 academics based in northern universities shortlisted. These 8 judges have been asked to each write a short bio, which we have used to introduce the poems.

To give you a taste of the rights that we have based our approach on we have scattered human rights quotes throughout this anthology- look out for the quotes in purple!



# Rhiannon Griffiths

My name is Rhiannon Griffiths. I am a student at the University of Leeds and also a passionate amateur photographer and writer. Having followed 'Make Our Rights Reality' for a while I saw a fantastic chance to get involved by entering my poem and offering my photography to their competition, as well as getting involved in the spoken word night itself. Something new and daunting to me, but by the end of the afternoon I was inspired by the many other fantastic poets and performers there. Through this event it reminded me how mental health is a topic close to my heart, especially how we all need to continually promote the de-stigmatisation of mental health and cultivating a safe environment for discussion. Therefore I hope in this collection we can all continue this much needed discussion.



# Dr Scott Thurston

Scott Thurston has been publishing poetry in the network of little magazines and small presses associated with innovative poetry for thirty years. His latest book is *We Must Betray Our Potential (The Red Ceilings, 2018)*. He teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Salford and lives in Manchester.

**“The service is designed to improve, prevent, diagnose and treat both physical and mental health problems with equal regard. It has a duty to each and every individual that it serves and must respect their human rights.”**

**Department of Health and Social Care (updated 2015) The NHS Constitution for England, 1.**



# Adam Piette

Adam Piette teaches literature at the University of Sheffield. He is the author of studies of war culture, European modernism, contemporary poetry. He co-edits the international poetry journal, Blackbox Manifold, with Alex Houen. He has struggled with depression in the past and stands and feels in solidarity with those who are working as best they can with mental health difficulties.

**“All health facilities, goods and services must be respectful of medical ethics and culturally appropriate”**

**UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR),  
General comment No. 14 (2000), 12 (c)**





# Sara Wasson

Sara Wasson is a Lecturer in Gothic Studies at Lancaster University, and writes about medicine, science fiction, Gothic and pain. Her books include the monograph *Urban Gothic of the Second World War* (Palgrave, 2010), *Gothic Science Fiction, 1980-2010* (Liverpool, 2011), co-edited with Emily Alder, and the monograph *Transplantation Gothic* (2020), forthcoming from Manchester University Press.

She leads the AHRC-funded research network *Translating Chronic Pain*. She really enjoyed reading all the submissions and would like to applaud all writers who try to represent their experience of mental health challenges.



# Sarah Corbett

Sarah Corbett is a poet and emerging novelist living in West Yorkshire. She has published five collections of poetry, most recently *A Perfect Mirror* (Pavilion Poetry/Liverpool University Press, 2018), and the verse-novel *And She Was* (Pavilion Poetry, 2015). She won a Northern Writer's Award this year for her debut novel, which is also long-listed for the Caledonia Novel Award. Sarah holds a PhD in Critical and Creative Writing from Manchester University, teaches Creative Writing for Lancaster University and lives in the Calder Valley.

“I did my first degree at Leeds University and only a few weeks in to my course I had a breakdown. I'd had mental health problems since childhood, but it wasn't until I was at Leeds that I got help. Four years of open-ended psychotherapy with the University's Mental Health team saved my life and allowed me to become a writer, a mother and a teacher.”



# Paul Whybrow

As a medical sociologist, I'm interested in patients and their experiences of illness and healthcare. I'm interested in how these experiences are presented, interpreted, ignored or made visible. As well as my academic interest in the area, I have also been a carer for a loved one suffering with severe depression so I have some experience of how debilitating, isolating and misunderstood mental health issues can be.

I was delighted to be invited to read and judge these 'our mind' poems. Poetry, and other art, can sometimes express thoughts and feelings that are otherwise invisible, unsaid or misconstrued. For me, many of these excellent poems were not only beautiful in their own right but also captured some of the important but unspoken challenges and bravery of living with mental health problems. For that I would like to say thank you and well done to all the authors!



# James Williams

James works mostly on Victorian and modern poetry. He is the author of a monograph and co-editor of an essay collection on the nonsense poet Edward Lear. His wider fields of expertise are in poetry and poetics, the literature of the long nineteenth century (British, American, and French), the literature of nonsense, formal and stylistic dimensions of writing, and the Anglo-American libretto.

**“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services”.**

**United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights,  
Article 25 (1)**



# **Karen Tobias-Green**

I am a writer of poetry and short stories and a regular reviewer of arts, writing and culture. I am course leader for the Creative Writing degree at Leeds Arts University. I believe writing is a powerful mode of communication. It can shout loudly or speak quietly. It is open to all. It provides space for discourse, protest, comfort and elation. I am happy to be part of a project that supports mental health and well-being through writing.

**“Health facilities, goods and services have to be accessible to everyone without discrimination.”**

**UN Committee on Economic,  
Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General comment No. 14  
(2000),  
12 (b)**



# Naomi Booth

Naomi Booth is a fiction writer and academic, with particular interests in uncanny bodies, ecologies, and regional landscapes and literatures. She grew up in West Yorkshire and now lives in York. Her novella, *The Lost Art of Sinking* (Penned in the Margins), tells the story of a girl who compulsively passes out; it was selected for New Writing North's Read Regional campaign 2017 and won the Saboteur Award for Best Novella. Her debut novel, *Sealed* (Dead Ink Books), is a work of eco-horror shortlisted for the Not the Booker Award 2018. Naomi was recently named a Fresh Voice: Fifty Writers to Read Now by the Guardian.

**“Health facilities, goods and services must...be scientifically and medically appropriate and of good quality.”**

**UN Committee on Economic,  
Social and Cultural Rights  
(CESCR), General comment No. 14 (2000), 12 (d)**





**“Health is a fundamental human right  
indispensable for the exercise of other  
human rights. Every human being is entitled  
to the enjoyment of the highest  
attainable standard of health conducive to  
living a life in  
dignity.”**

**UN Committee on Economic,  
Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (2000) General Comment No.  
14, 1.**



# First Place

## If That Makes You Feel Uncomfortable

When she was nine, someone showed her  
pornography.  
I'm sorry if that makes you uncomfortable.

Women washed other women as their eyelashes  
swooped in slow motion  
And warm water willed its way into all the secret  
spaces.  
Fingers fondled folds of skin the same way her grand-  
mother  
Produced bread-dough, and she didn't know then that  
the pulsing piece  
Of flesh between her legs was called a clitoris.

She had a feeling  
It was wrong,  
That it would make you feel uncomfortable,  
And for so long she tried to say something by saying  
nothing at all.

You must remember her silence breaking: 'some days I  
see myself from the outside,  
Like scenes in a cinema. I sit beside my stupid self,  
and we become  
Two different girls. One of them gets called Sarah; she  
likes  
To sing; she sews her own clothes. She has a soul and  
something to look  
Forward to. The other is a stupid bitch, a slut, a silly



cow,  
A cunt, a whore, a bastard-child, and one day  
She will go to prison'.

That's when Sarah started keeping score of scenes  
she'd seen by  
Slicing seams into her forearms at night, not too close  
to the vein,  
In case that made you feel uncomfortable.

Once, there were twenty eight grooves leaking blood  
into  
The bath as she shed herself away.  
That's when the internet taught you the word 'emo'  
When you punished her for punishing herself,  
You helped her hope for hatred ...

...when she started crushing codeine into camel  
humps, climbing  
Up to lands far away from the both of you, drinking  
£5-vodka  
Round the back of bargain booze, for older men to say  
'I would'  
And demand she fondle their folds the way her  
grandma  
Used to make bread-dough

**Anon**

## Second Place

### **Batsira batsira mwana wangu**

The labourer finds other ways to use his hands. He points out the bloom of the cherry blossom, he points to himself and says “not only does it bloom but it grieves the winter.” He shakes his head because once again he turned to the four seasons to forgive himself.

He has taught himself to silently hum along to ballads even though the choir never asked. Nobody ever questioned why he left the toe tapping and hips swivelling at the door. He smiles.

“Mwana wangu haunzwisi we grew up under two different households. When we grew cold, I wandered outside and found the tipping point. The darkness was humorous and somehow my chest grew bigger. I hoped to have never returned but they needed me. Mwana wangu.”

The working man points to me and warns me: “if you were delicate, they would pray your house would turn into glass just so they can throw stone.

The world spun whilst your chest kept on growing. You bled whilst other sacrifices were being made.”

So - this is why whenever you give me lessons there is a vibrato. You really mean it. You second guess and reassure yourself behind my back.

## **Takudzwa Mudiwa**

# Third Place

## ‘PTSDon’t Forget, The Body Remembers’

Your mouth is like a museum  
full of old memories as words  
spat at you  
spilling out into glass cages  
for everyone to see

Your hands are like club-footed pigeons  
mangled over time  
they are dirty flighty things  
picking up the scars left by others

Your eyes are like Atlantis  
submerged in the trauma you’ll never fully  
remember  
did they happen  
do they exist  
take the plunge

Your body is like waking from a dream  
in unfurls like an eyelid  
and you spew out unwanted gunk  
like sleep from the corner of your eye  
but it’s something else

**Hayden Downey**

# Leeds Poetry Events

After launching the poetry competition a series of events were ran. These events were intended to be a space where young people from Leeds could meet us in an informal way, where we could bring the petition to the public in hard copy for them to sign, and where we could celebrate the entrants to the poetry competition by hearing them perform their entries live on stage. The events were also used to recruit new volunteers.

Young people planned, organised and ran the events, and the photos are taken by a young person as well - Rhiannon Griffiths.









# Exact Change

Why is it my brain fades to unprepossessing shades of  
off white?

How is it I'm thinking about so much  
that I'm not even thinking about anything anymore?  
Or is it that my thoughts are moving so fast that I  
cannot pinpoint a single one?

I'm falling asleep on buses,  
a year ago I was too scared of what people would  
think to even be able to get on a bus,  
and now I can't even worry enough to stay awake on  
one.

I'm like a flickering lightbulb,  
on,  
off,  
on,  
off,  
on,  
off,

but I'm never fully off until I've completely blown my  
fuse.

I sleep for days at a time  
and then I'm a bundle of energy that irritates the  
people around me  
until they just want to extinguish me.

The fire in my chest rumbles,  
flames licking my dry throat as the simplest of things,  
like not having the exact change to pay for a bottle of  
water,

causes my mind to cry out.

For I've just made someone's life harder.  
If only I did not care so much then my life would  
become easier.

God I'm so damn selfish.  
I've smiled at 38 people today



and only got 12 in return.  
But 0 looked genuine.  
Could it be they were mirroring my fake smile  
that's slapped across my face, from cheek to cheek?  
I must smile at every person I see,  
what if they don't get to see smiles enough?  
How I wish that my smile isn't the only one they will  
see,  
for it would be a tragedy.  
I wish I could give them a smile that is true,  
but how can I  
when there's flames licking at my dry throat  
because I didn't have the exact change for that  
stupid bottle of water yesterday.

**Izzy Owen**

# Tears

I've taken a photo of my tears,  
Because I'm the only one who sees them,  
They're the only proof I'll ever have,  
They're the only visible symptom.  
For my bones they are not broken,  
And you cannot see my bruises,  
They're invisible to those who choose not to see,  
To the one who simply refuses.  
What isn't in plain sight to be seen,  
Is usually ignored,  
We become blind to the mind's abilities,  
When the possibilities are not explored.  
With gloom-ridden thoughts and desolation,  
Plus, a whole lot more to juggle,  
I've taken a photo of my tears,  
Just a snapshot of my struggle.

**Naomi Johnson**

## Note to Self

Today I got dressed on a day I did not need to.

I didn't leave the house but I left my bed and

That, is a small victory.

On Tuesday I ran myself a bath.

I didn't wash my body with soap but did allow my  
body to soak in the water, rather than not and

That, is a small victory.

I work in research and had scheduled a call with a  
client.

On Friday I rearranged due to mental health but when

Monday came around and I wanted to

post-pone again I picked up the phone and

That, is a small victory.

I ate breakfast this morning.

I didn't manage to toast the bread but got myself two  
slices and ate them one by one when

ordinarily I would starve my body and

That, is a small victory.

Last night I opened a message that had been sitting in  
my inbox for over a week.

I often put off reading messages because it exhausts  
me to respond but I read yours and

That, is a small victory.

I allowed my lungs to taste fresh air today.

I couldn't step foot outside, every time I try, I feel my  
throat closing up, it gets hard to breath

but I did open a window and

That is a small victory.

Note to self, you are doing your best.

**Amber Graver**

# Homeless and Hopeless

The sun begins to rise  
And she - a mere fracture

To the eyes of pedestrians -  
is crumpled.

Swarming sounds  
Of people mix with  
Memories which sift,  
Then sink into mourning.

Spreading like an uneven  
Wave of water, her feet  
Reach before her: she peels  
herself from  
The pavement.

Adjacent is she to  
the place that spat her out  
last night

She is unseen, it seems,  
To passers-by who daren't  
Look her in the eye,  
Reluctant to part with time  
Or money.

All in such a hurry  
That as black fumes leak  
Into the bitter sky,  
Dancing for her one more time,

She stops to see their outlines mingle  
And the bus hits her  
She is crumpled,  
Cold and white.

**Anon**

# Quetiapine, 25mg, twice a day

Printed on bright pink card, in the round friendly font  
of a childrens book.

Funny, I think, the pills look rather like sweets, round  
and bright orange.

The kind I would have chosen from Woolworths pick  
and mix

way back in the time before I first got sick.

“It will make you feel calmer, sleep better. It’s a tiny  
dose” he says,

scribbling something else down in the file growing  
monstrous and fat.

I wonder if by ‘calmer’ he means ‘more submissive’,  
and by ‘tiny dose’ he means ‘be grateful,’

but I do not have the energy to put up a fight;

I leave only silence hanging in between us, impossibly  
helpless and heavy.

There’s a little leaflet tucked inside, and,  
nonchalantly, it lists the side effects he never

mentioned: diabetes... seizures... parkinsons disease...

I am nineteen years old and I am terrified. But the fi-  
nal side effect of this crippling illness  
seems to hurtle ever closer in the darkness, thicken-  
ing day, after day, after day.

I must try anything to save this life.

Quetiapine. Seroquel. Despair.

shouts the dull glow of a screen flickering somewhere  
in the middle of the night,

an atypical antipsychotic...class of major  
tranquillisers...  
Majorly tranquilised, I think, that's what they want to  
do to me.  
I feel that I am worth nothing more than the clinical  
words

embossed in Braille on the card,  
embossed in scars on my heart.

I swallow them, the acrid chalk catches in my throat  
and burns me.

I swallow them, my hope and strength alongside.  
I sleep for hours. The world turns flat and numb.  
But the burning pain is still there, still everywhere;

I swallow them and wonder how many I'd have to  
swallow to bring the end.  
My tears remain, the screaming rain, dry and silent  
instead.

Like running against the wind, in slow motion.  
I only want to ask, how many more years will I have to  
wait  
before you offer me any real help of a kind  
that does not come wrapped in plastic?

**Anon**

# breathing

i'm laid down  
legs crossed, hands locked  
hours up in the air  
vision blurred

life's passing me by  
can't run if i try  
the words i can speak  
are just out of my reach

head up in the ceiling  
i'm breathing

just breathing

**Jay Cooper**



# Stigma

Publish my book with half the story,  
And judge it solely by my cover.  
Refine me down to a singular word.

Paint my picture with half a palette,  
And criticise me for my abstract design.  
Condense all that I am into one depiction.

Confine us all into the same box,  
And take away our complex differences.  
Deprive us of our right to be different.

You cannot rationalise the irrational,  
And you should not fear the unknown,  
But you can end the stigma.

An adjective to most,  
A diagnosis to some,  
A life sentence to me.

**Jessie Blunden**

# Mother Tongue

Straining to turn to see the shapeless  
Silhouette that resides before me, the eyes  
And hands, and shapelessness  
A mirror image of uncanniness.

Words of scorn begin to spill from my  
Expression, a scathing smile placed below  
My twisted Cupid's bow. With slitted eyes,  
'You look fine.' slithers from my lips.

I watch as her form is swallowed up a  
Self loathing that I had sheathed in  
Gift wrap and given her for Christmas,  
My sneer the bow on top.

Her collapsed form lies before me,  
Flat packed, squashed to mimic the size of  
Her significance. I pick her up and use  
Her as a keychain. A keepsake.

It's something to remind me of something.  
Something important. But I Worry on the bus home  
Where between the boxes of childhood scars and  
Labeled insecurities I'll keep this relapse.

I am a tsunami of spite, my words  
A storm of suffocation to rest around the  
Skin upon on her throat. A mirror image.

It's my mother's tongue

**Erin Clarke**

# Salt n Pepper

i am enchanted by wind whispering through bracken  
and ivy clambering up my capillaries and cartilage  
    he blinks at flashing streetlights  
    sees an emittance of blue and red glows,  
    hears beeping monitors in the silent night  
    and wraps himself in bedsheets  
    he pictures me in my dressing gown,  
        black, satin and lace  
    with no toothpaste stains down the front  
floating around creeks and running my fingers  
along the crevices of woven willow statues  
he sees my soul, smiling in steel structures  
    subtly echoing through,  
        hollow  
        and without guilt.  
he misses me making him perfect bites when we were  
    at restaurants  
    carefully constructing them to contain  
    all the nicest parts  
    he misses cooking shows  
    and eyes that widen at architecture  
    in unexplored cities.  
    he hopes for my existence as a doe  
    and sees my legs scattering and dancing  
    up the steep hills of bradgate park  
    enamoured in my herd  
        happy  
ivy doesn't climb up my capillaries and cartilage  
    but i am glad.  
i don't need to wear the bandages any more  
    the scars have healed

**Jenny Joy**

# I need to cut my hair

I need to pull it out from the roots and re-plant it in  
caring and clumsy rows.

I need to plant it gently,  
kneading it into the soil  
with nimble fingers the way  
that my mother planted my  
great-grandmother's roses.

My mind needs to be as important  
as heirloom plants to me.

So when I re-plant my brain,  
the earth must be fertile and rich  
with satisfying nutrients to eat.

I must pour it water crisp and crystalline,  
letting the refreshment drip, drip onto the fresh  
mound

new and untainted by bitter moments.

And I this time I will raise my scalp-sprouts in a patch  
with a little hand-written sign  
decorated in cursive letters  
written with a fine-point, felt-tip pen.

After it is planted I will wait and  
watch closely to see if it  
yields the same ugly weeds  
that grew there originally.

I am making this pledge to myself: I will be a gardener  
this time.

This time I will tend to my head,  
and speak to it softly,  
and pat the dirt lovingly,  
and treat it as a child.

Then maybe I can discover the way  
to fix this plot where I planted a prize-  
winning patch of poison ivy instead of  
flowers and let them grow until they  
they touched my shoulders and forehead.

Thick vines with sharpened leaves  
entwining me which is why I need  
to cut my hair and replant goodness there.

**Chloë Williams**

# Volunteer Florist Department

Today, I am trying to  
conjure corollas.  
Or rather, I want to be  
replanted.

I don't want to keep  
turning my heart  
away from the sun.

Instead let me grow  
the kind of stem that  
doesn't prick skin but  
but begins as a bud,  
then full of color.

I want to grow ray florets from my roots  
instead of rooting around in the dirt,  
rise from the dead, decomposing body of  
the flower I was last fall. Outstretch my  
neck in the heat of July and sprout from  
a bitter seed. But if the soil rejects me please  
set me on fire with your lighter  
on the leaf pile and watch the  
flames grow hotter, bluer, truer.

When I dry out and get tired  
of being my own fire-fighter,

I will retire and  
you will be hired.

If you see me rotting,  
let me burn out

and scatter all my seeds to  
let my body grow brand  
new flowers and let every-  
thing else be out of my power.

Next summer I'll wonder

why I cowered from the past,  
standing with my head up in the grass.  
Each harvest season will pass.

Skip through a field of shy sunflowers and wonder  
how anyone could kill a houseplant in two weeks.  
If you can't remember to water it,  
set it on fire.

**Chloë Williams**

# Dress-Up

Dress-up,  
I've been staying late

trying to catch my shadow-  
like a cat, it disappears for days.

i've been feeling my mother's  
expressions on my face,  
her mouth a tightly formed fist  
turning over and over in my lap.  
suddenly i'm five again, fish eyed  
watching her put on lipstick and  
hang silver from her wrists  
that glints like a promise  
of this holy thing.

mother, i finally understand the secret  
i want to be five again, in gloves too big  
clipping flowers from our garden.  
all the plants in my room are dead.

**Rhiannon Griffiths**



# Sometimes I forget

Sometimes I forget how to breathe  
It's like everything inside of me  
Everything I have  
Just lets go and stops

Sometimes I forget how to smile  
Not even my closest friends  
Or my favourite shows  
Can bring me the happiness they say I deserve

Sometimes I forget how to love  
And not just towards my family  
Not just towards my most valued things  
But I lose it towards myself

And sometimes I forget how to live  
Because I remember that moment  
That moment where I wanted to didn't want to  
And needed to slip away from everything

But now  
Sometimes I forget how that feels  
When the smallest light shines through  
And I remember  
To sometimes forget

**Faye Walker**

# Paradox

Our mind's work against us  
Subconsciously sabotaging, taking control  
Poppin pills or trust in the placebo  
No drug is more powerful than the mind  
Find new patterns and you sketch a new life  
Your mind has all the solutions as well as issues  
Misuse messes you  
Think what you believe  
Achieve in your reality  
'It's not an adjustment of biology, it's an adjustment  
of consciousness'

**Paige Phelan**

# Human Yo-Yo

Today I tied myself in string,  
Because to you I am nothing,  
More than a human yo-yo.  
Being always dropped so low,  
As low as one can truly go,  
I am your human yo-yo.  
But then you tend to call me near,  
And return to you I do with cheer,  
Despite knowing of past and future tears,  
Because I am your human yo-yo.  
Oh, how you make my head spin,  
Pulling or pushing me on a whim.  
What you do is such a sin,  
I can't believe I'm back in the bin,  
Your faithful human yo-yo x

**James Ure**

# Did You Know?

Did you know?

That in my darkest times, I imagined a world  
without my heart beating and I smiled.  
Every day, I closed my eyes and wished for a way out,  
searching for the door that would lead me towards  
the light.

Did you know?

That in the brief moments before I shared a positive  
picture  
on my social media, I was on the edge, drowning in  
desolation.

On the bathroom floor, pierced with panic in my  
chest,  
feeling the walls closing in, my breath trapped and  
shallow.

Desperately watching my endless tears fall to the  
ground.

Did you know?

The immeasurable time I spent living inside my head.  
A cold and lonely place, somewhere you would never  
want to be.

Wasteful moments revisiting old conversations,  
analysing - every - spoken - word, every - emotion -  
felt.

Exhausted by the cycle of never - feeling - good -  
enough.

Did you know?

The infinite seconds, minutes, hours that I struggled  
in silence.  
Dragging my legs through the mud until the sun set in  
the sky.

Sleeping was my only sanctuary, my only safe space

away from the bleak.  
In my dreams, I was free from anxiety, free from depression and free to be the real me.  
Did you know?  
That despite the glimmer you saw in my eyes, inside, my soul was breaking.  
The daily mask I wore was due to the fear of being misunderstood by a disapproving world. Whenever it slipped, the eyes would stare, the voices would whisper, they did not understand my journey, they did not understand my pain.  
Did you know?  
Although I am now walking on solid ground, I am waiting for it to fall once more.  
I see the light now. I can breathe again. But I know that one day, the walls will close in and darkness will return.  
Did you know?  
Now you know.

**Emma-Jane Barlow**

# Black Cloud

Hi there,  
Black Cloud

It's funny because I think  
When I'm out I'm loud,  
You can hear my laugh  
Over the crowd,  
So what exactly makes me  
This "Black Cloud"

It's funny because I know  
I don't tear you down,  
By vocalising that comment  
That made me frown,  
As I ask myself "God...  
Is she really wearing that to town?"

It's funny because I feel  
Like I have to be sorry,  
For the fact that my life's  
Not been this ongoing party,  
That things I can't control  
Tint my life grey, well partly.

It's funny because for you  
It's just a passing comment,  
But I've got to try prize it  
Out of my brain cement,  
As it sets in and takes  
Hold of every single moment!

It's funny because I'll say



# Primary Colors

after “Babylon” by Nick Drake

Late in the summer we stand in fields  
and our eyes follow the fireflies.  
Little glimmering orbs gleam out past  
out past the mountains and into town.  
In this space we see primary colors  
as you hold a beaming yellow bug on your wrist,  
and I see a faint flash of red and blue travel across  
the road,  
screaming its call far away from the silent insect.  
We live several minutes away,  
but we get the papers,  
we watch the news,  
we know the houses where the sparkling lights will  
stop.  
We know.  
We know the victim  
and what they have shot up only to fall down,  
and who will rush in their home so frantically,  
and what they will stick the sleeper to revive them.  
And if not,  
we will attend the funeral,  
or else be caught in the traffic  
as the procession drives by.  
In school teachers told us pills and needles prick  
skin deeper than the veins, but the impoverished  
people of our state can only see relief from the  
pain plaguing their brains. It's not an opioid  
crisis, it's self-medication for your  
old neighbors and friends' brothers,  
the parents of foster kids you sat next to in  
school who never knew their mother. People



you never expected to be pictured in newsprint.  
All part of USA Today's Most Miserable State.  
Little blue pills fill gold bottles in one hand and  
a steering wheel in the other as they drive down

country roads where red and blue lights  
speckle the horizon more brightly than  
than yellow lightning bugs dot the sky.

**Chloë Williams**

# The Sky is Not Blue

The sky is not blue  
But I know its blue, I can see it  
And to believe something you need to see it, right?

The sky is not blue  
But I can see the sky and the sky is blue  
And seeing is believing, right?

Then tell me why does this little voice in the back of  
my head keep telling me that the sky is not blue  
I know it is, I can see it  
I just don't believe it

I don't understand where it's coming from  
What it sings is not a song  
But eventually it got closer  
And it's face grew almost kinder

Before my eyes it took its own form  
as if it's for what I always longed  
I shook its hand and became its friend  
This was the beginning of the end

It had me tight, so very tight  
And all in all it took my sight  
No longer I could see the truest me  
And I forgot how to simply be

I was fading out at the mercy of its hands  
I followed it's orders, as if sheet music in hand  
But this tune I was so convinced was good  
Gave away all my shoulds, woulds and coulds

I couldn't see anything until that day  
But people around me would always say  
How it looked good on me, it really did  
But blind I still was, down the slope I still slid

Further I went and still further I now go  
But I did say goodbye, I'm now higher than the low  
But it knows that goodbye is never goodbye  
But if it did learn, I know I wouldn't cry

For its always here, where ever I go  
I can hear it now, I know, I know  
You think I'm mad but really all this is  
Confusing, I know, let me make a list

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, bed  
Run, shower, food, head  
Clothes, long, tired, heart  
Food, water, locked, can't

Fifty, forty, five, three  
Why can't I just exist and be  
Lights, mirror, mat, shoes  
I know it is, but the sky is not blue

All I'm asking from you now  
Is that you don't mention or ask how  
Keep the conversation general  
I promise, I'm trying not to fall

See this thing I'm taking about  
It's not an easy thing to say out loud

And although it means lots of lying  
I promise I really am trying

Because I can see the sky  
And I can see it's blue  
And although it's more of a slog than a fight  
I think I've found my sight  
I will be alright

**Laura Brown**



**“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.”**

**World Health Organization (WHO) (2006) Constitution of the World Health Organization, Forty-fifth edition**



# Anxiety is a Bully

He stood towering over my petite figure, his prominent eyes staring lazily into mine as if he could see what was going on in my mind. He was so close that their shadow in the bright unnatural light shrouded me from everyone else's view. His breath tickled my neck sending shivers down my spine and turning the blood in my veins to ice due to my terror. His snide smile turned my once happy face into one of stone without a single emotion. I could not show him my shaking hands or the bones in my body that clanked silently together, signifying the fear I had towards him, he would relish that too much.

His plump lips started moving, reeling off threats and warnings but I didn't hear any of them. They were just background noise to the ringing that had overcome my ears. Despite the look on my face he stated to laugh. No matter how hard I tried to block him out he found a way to crawl under my skin and embed himself there like a disease making me feel moronic and humiliated. It makes my heart cave in and the life to slip out of my body. I despise him so much but he also seems to be my best friend, just lingering.

Anxiety is my Bully yours could be anyone but despite who it is it hurts. Both emotionally and physically he holds so much power over me and I don't understand how or why. Anxiety isn't a real person yet I

describe it as a 'he' by choice because I see how much control he has that it doesn't stay the size to be just an emotion or to be objectified but to be the silent killer that circles my life.

**Alex Parkin**

# Drowning

Like how darkness is the lack of light,  
Numbness is a lack of feeling.  
Directionless and unbound,  
Unsure of where to go from now.  
My pride gets in the way,  
Of full blown dismay.  
But this constant acting takes its toll,  
And exhaustion has started to become me.  
Nobody can know the stress,  
The sadness,  
The weakness below  
This pretence of strength.  
A rock to everyone,  
Where they can go to lean and rest.  
But I can't swim at the best of times,  
And this weight is starting to drown me.  
If only 'help'  
Was part of my vocabulary.  
Not just a call,  
That I am required to answer.  
I need something to change.  
To feel the warm bulbs of inspiration.  
Yet all I do is sit here,  
Dull and void,  
Full of desperation.

**Laura Bagnall**





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MAKE  
OUR  
RIGHTS  
REALITY

# Our Minds Our Future

To find out more about the campaign visit:



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[facebook.com/MakeOurRightsReality/](https://facebook.com/MakeOurRightsReality/)

Anthology design by Kat Outten



[@katoutthere](#)



The UK mental health system is failing young people. Nearly two in three young adults with diagnosable conditions go without necessary support, more than any other age group. Young people from across the country are fighting back through the Our Minds Our Future (OMOF) campaign. This anthology offers you a window into the experiences of young people living with mental health challenges; the poems were collected as part of a national poetry competition hosted by the OMOF campaign. We hope that one day, decision makers will take notice of the lived experiences of young people as being crucial to the development of a sustainable and meaningful mental health system that respects young people's human rights.

**Make Our Rights Reality is co-ordinated by Youth Access (registered charity in England & Wales No. 1042121)**



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