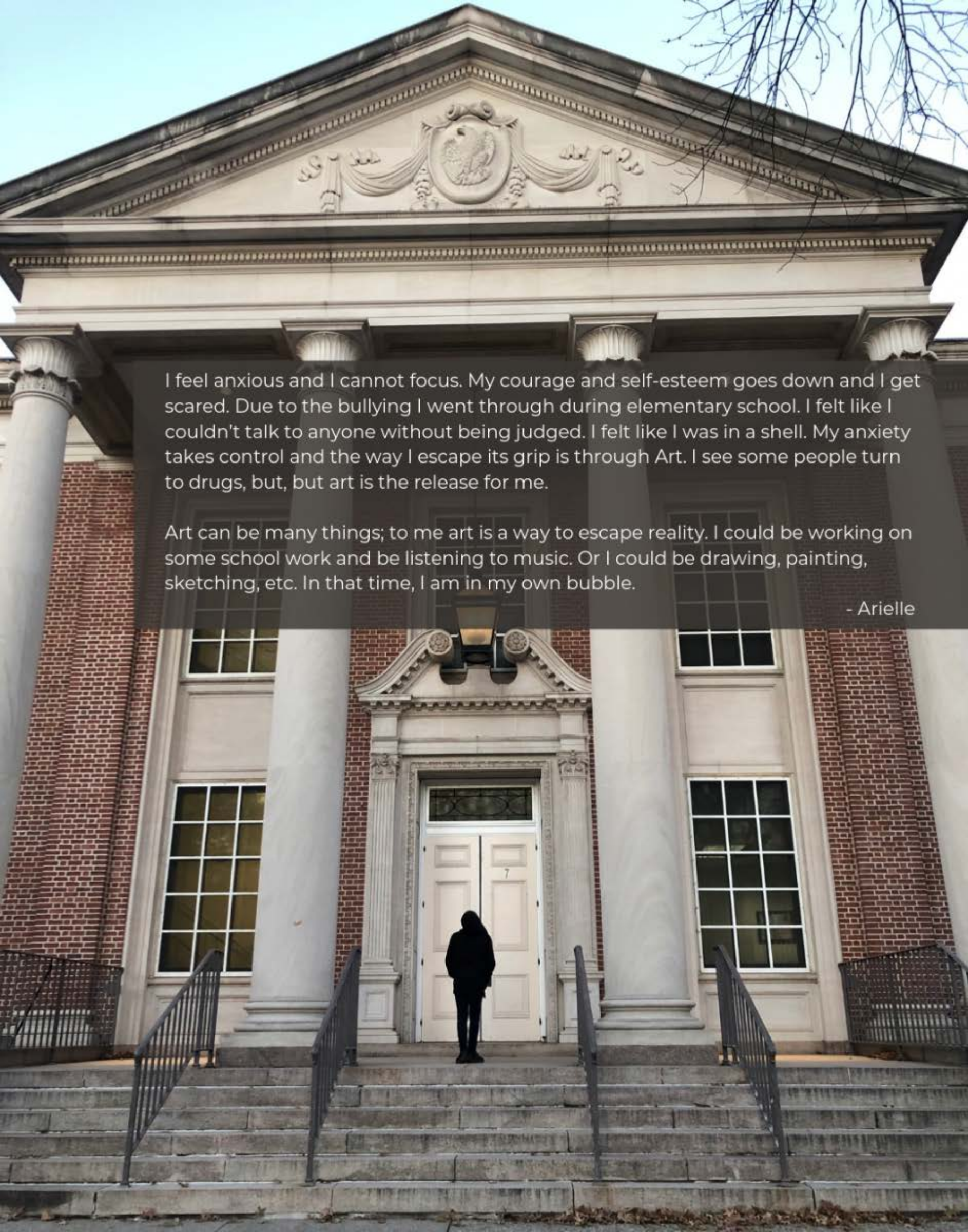


ARTISTS' STATEMENT

We are a group of youth and young adults from Springfield, MA who have come together to share our stories and show that youth have power. We want our stories to show that adults are not the only ones impacted by substance use, even when a young person hasn't used substances themselves.

We all felt nervous and had mixed emotions as we started putting our stories together. The process made us feel more open and confident, and we are proud of the finished product. We hope you will find our stories relatable, and that they inspire you to be more open, too.

Listen to youth voices!

A photograph of a classical building facade. The top part shows a pediment with a central relief sculpture of an eagle with spread wings, flanked by decorative scrolls. Below the pediment is a row of four columns with decorative capitals. The lower part of the image shows a person standing on a set of stone steps leading up to a white double door. The door has a small window with a decorative pattern and the number '7' on it. The building is made of red brick and white stone.

I feel anxious and I cannot focus. My courage and self-esteem goes down and I get scared. Due to the bullying I went through during elementary school. I felt like I couldn't talk to anyone without being judged. I felt like I was in a shell. My anxiety takes control and the way I escape its grip is through Art. I see some people turn to drugs, but, but art is the release for me.

Art can be many things; to me art is a way to escape reality. I could be working on some school work and be listening to music. Or I could be drawing, painting, sketching, etc. In that time, I am in my own bubble.

- Arielle



A picture is worth 1,000 words. But people can't seem to find the thousand in certain pictures. This picture has to do with the life cycles of life and how things will outcome at the end. The leaves on the far left tree are fresh and green, this shows the purest part of your life where no one's is telling you 'try this' or 'one time won't kill you'. The middle tree shows the experimental part of your life, where you give into what everyone else is telling you. This is you hitting the joint for the first time, this is you taking your first shot of alcohol for the first time, and this is your leaves changing. The final tree to the right and nothing more than the outcomes of what you thought to be a one and only time thing. This is your 'body' breaking down on you. Your leaves are falling off of the once perfect tree but now is not. Everybody else sees you as the 'green tree' because they are the same yellow tree as you. This is the no recovery zone tree, this is when help is needed the most.

- Ronald




My name is Jesus and my life been full of ups and downs. I had very difficult life, but I pushed myself forward through it. I lost my dad at 11 years old. At first it was difficult communicating, and showing to others because of the way I was feeling. I felt like I dug myself in a hole. Through my struggles I found Christ. My outlook on life is changing, through prayer, volunteering and constant work. So now I'm working on school, being positive, and moving forward in life. I finally feel like I'm digging myself out of the hole.

- Jesus

Six colors, that's all they used to be. Six colors, no significant meaning to anyone, until that first person let their whole self be known to the world. When you're done hiding, done being scared of what people will think of you, and what would happen to your psyche knowing you can't handle their hatred, what society would think of you. When you finally stand tall to realize that you're not alone. The pressure in your heart releases and it starts beating again. 2013 was the year my pressure released and my heart started beating. 2018 and it's still going strong, beating to the rhythm of the 6 colors of who I am.

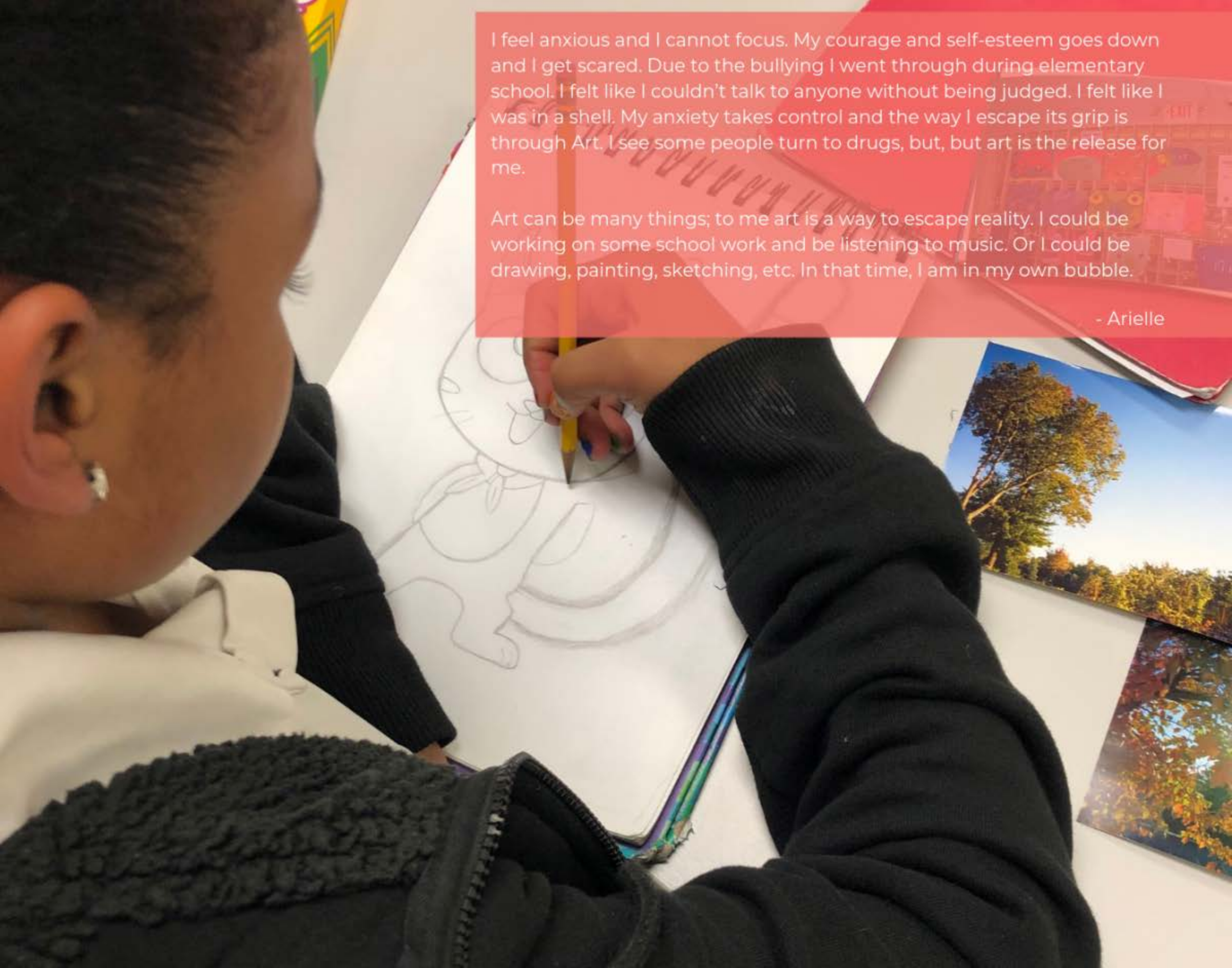
- Adriana





You're on the brink of unconsciousness and the last image before fading to black is your abusers face hitting the ground after they throw a punch. Your tears that haven't stopped falling, and their shirt soaked as they hold you and tell you everything's going to be okay. You finally find courage in yourself to admit that you're different when it comes to your love preference and they accept you automatically. That person no matter how many arguments you have with them, no matter how many problems you cause them, they still look at you and smile. They're the reason why you've stared at darkness and said "You don't scare me." Because a relationship that not even the word "friendship" is enough, but a friend they are and a lifetime we have.

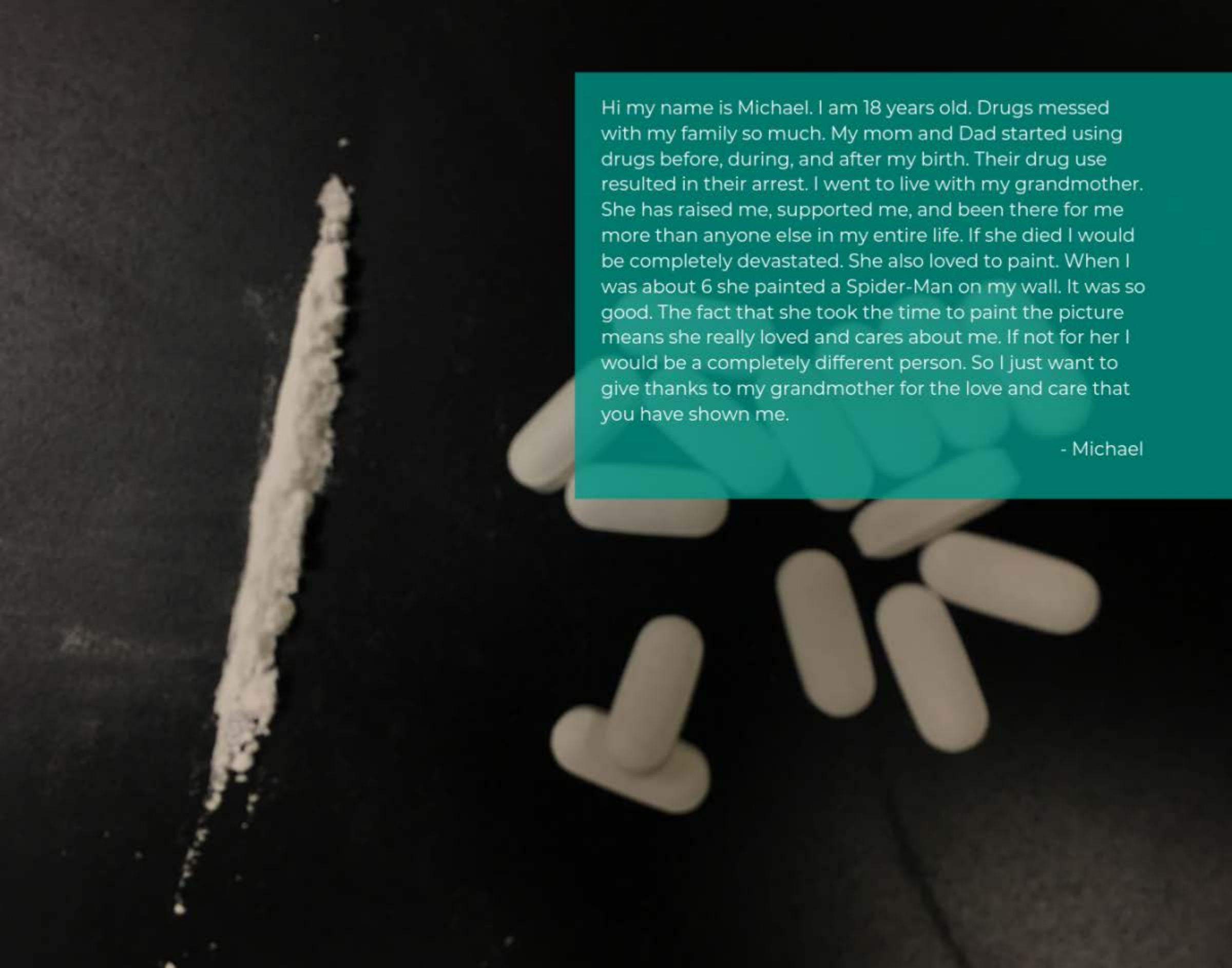
- Adriana



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- Arielle



Hi my name is Michael. I am 18 years old. Drugs messed with my family so much. My mom and Dad started using drugs before, during, and after my birth. Their drug use resulted in their arrest. I went to live with my grandmother. She has raised me, supported me, and been there for me more than anyone else in my entire life. If she died I would be completely devastated. She also loved to paint. When I was about 6 she painted a Spider-Man on my wall. It was so good. The fact that she took the time to paint the picture means she really loved and cares about me. If not for her I would be a completely different person. So I just want to give thanks to my grandmother for the love and care that you have shown me.

- Michael