

EXCLUDED ~~BUT~~



A **CORAM VOICES IN ACTION** ZINE FROM
CREATIVES WHO HAVE BEEN **EXCLUDED** FROM
SCHOOL BUT HAVE NEVER LOST THEIR **VOICE**

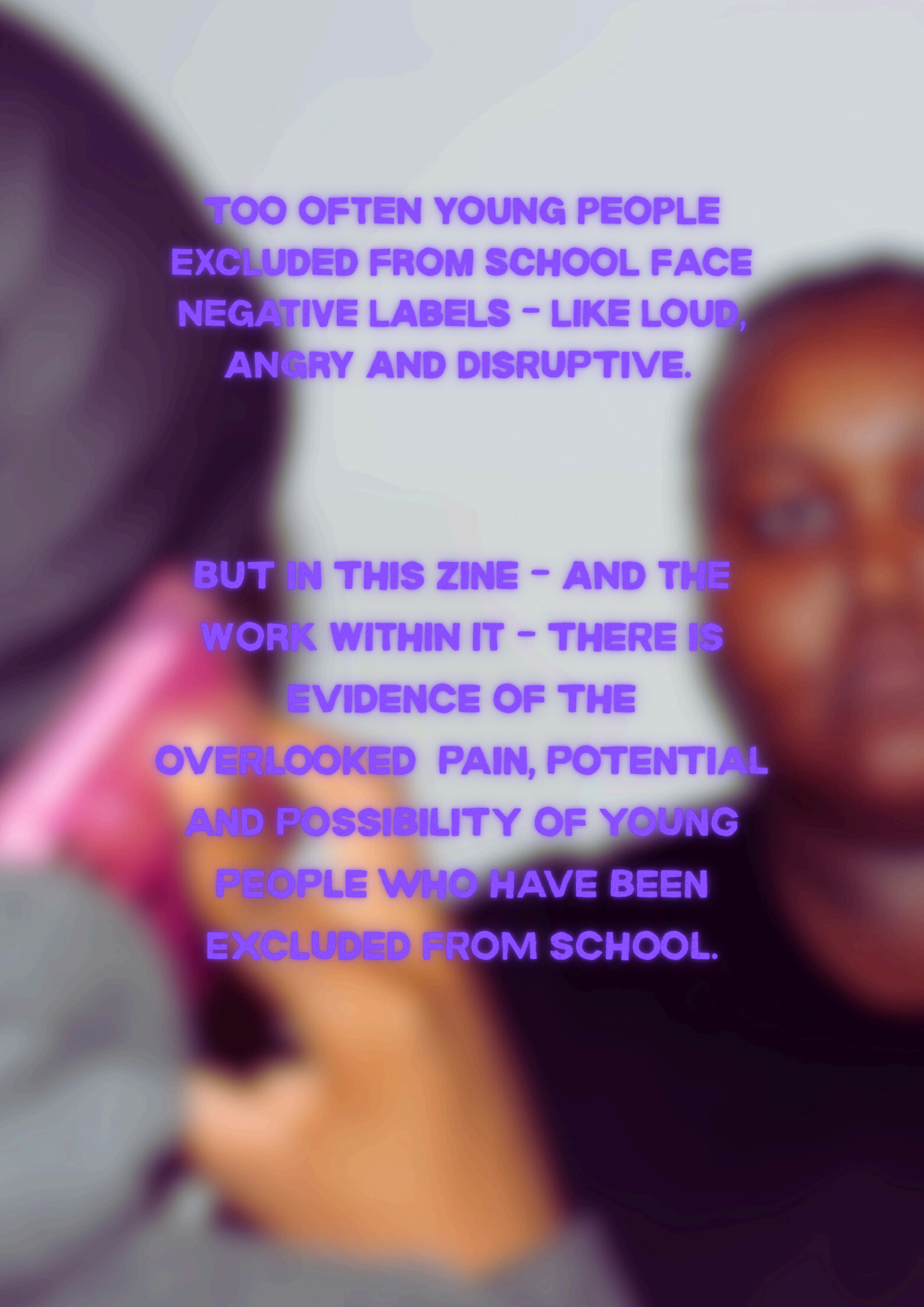
~~NOT~~ UN-HEARD

**CORAM VOICES IN ACTION IS A
PROJECT WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE
WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SCHOOL
EXCLUSION HELP OTHER YOUNG
PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THEIR
RIGHTS AND CAMPAIGN FOR
CHANGE.**

**THIS ZINE IS POETRY AND
OTHER CREATIVE WORK
DIRECTLY FROM THEIR LIVES
AND PERSPECTIVES.**

**THIS ZINE CONTAINS THEMES
AND TOPICS SOME READERS
MAY FIND UPSETTING.**





**TOO OFTEN YOUNG PEOPLE
EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL FACE
NEGATIVE LABELS - LIKE LOUD,
ANGRY AND DISRUPTIVE.**

**BUT IN THIS ZINE - AND THE
WORK WITHIN IT - THERE IS
EVIDENCE OF THE
OVERLOOKED PAIN, POTENTIAL
AND POSSIBILITY OF YOUNG
PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN
EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL.**

“THE BEHAVIOUR REPORT”

The behavior report was
black and plan
for the colour of
emotions , there was no
space:-
no space for the greens of
hope,
no space for the dark reds
of **rage,**
no space for the yellows
of **excitement,**
or the blue of being
frightened

They left no space for me
to be or to-see
no space to experience
pain and try **again**
no space to heal from the
arrows of **bullying**
no space for the pure fun
of **PE, cooking classes,**
and friendship **laughing**

They watched me on the
cold **page,**
day by **day,**
marking **again,**
until school exclusion was
written into my **fate.**

by **Jamelia R**

BEYOND SCHOOL EXCLUSION SHORT STORY - BY SANTINA R

The estate was the most alive at night. Music pulsed from the window three floors up, the bass rattling through brick walls. Scooters cut across the square, their engines whining like restless bees. I walked through it all, hood up, every glance was a calculation. **Nights like this had taught me lessons the classroom never could.**

Home wasn't really home anymore. Mum was ill, the kind of ill that kept her locked up in bed, while bills stacked up on the counter. It's like she knew that if she didn't move fast enough she might wake to another eviction notice. **Empty cupboards** spoke louder far louder than words ever could. In this bleak moment I had no choice but to step up. I became the safety net, holding together a life that was falling apart. Day after day was spent patching holes no one else could see.

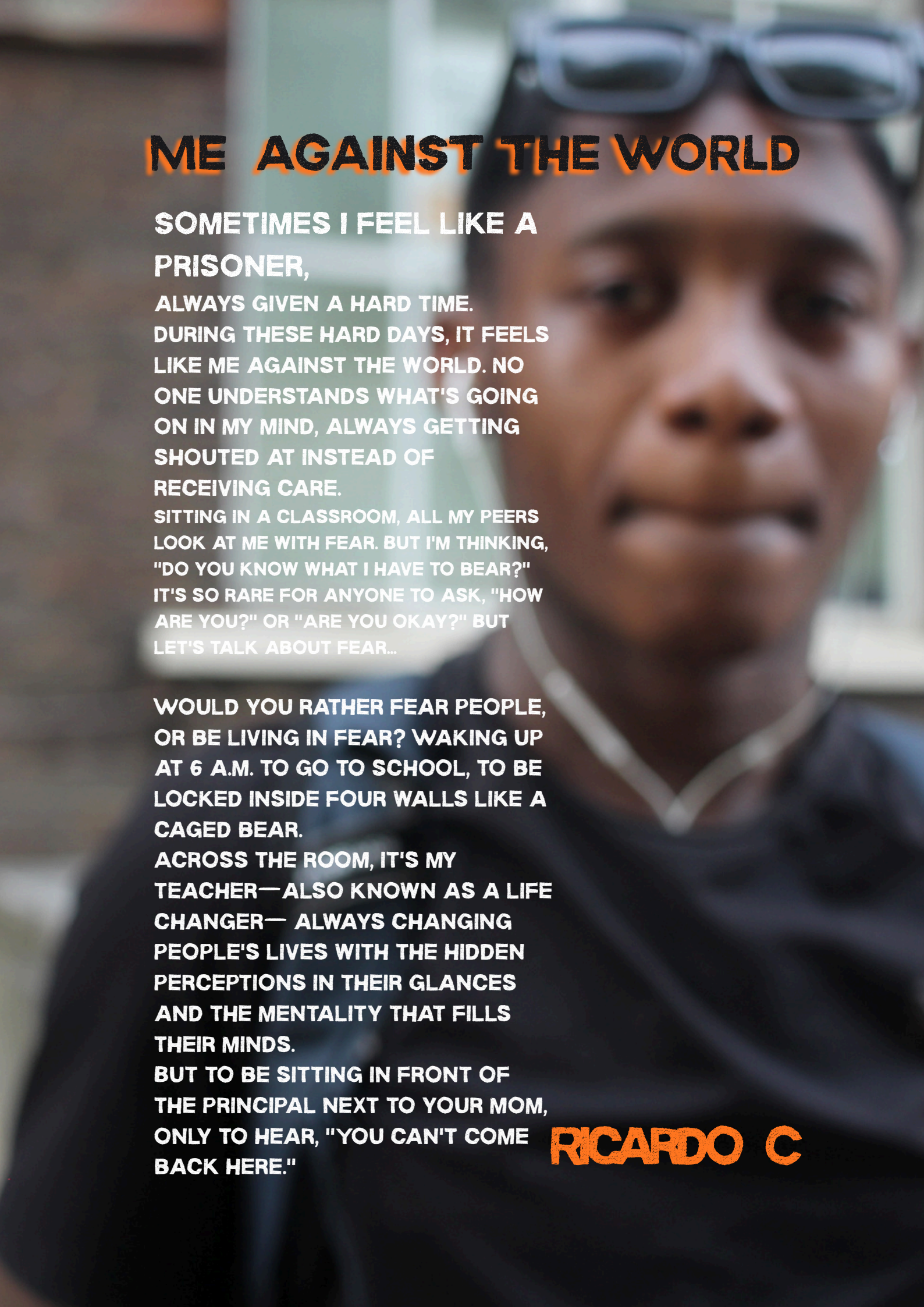
The desks were lined up in neat little rows, but mine was **always pulled to the side like they needed me contained.** Teachers saw me as trouble, a disruption, a name already marked with a red cross. The sigh when they called me up was cutting and the quick glance at the clock when I walked in late hurt deeply. I knew what it meant. Every mistake confirmed what they already believed, every detention just another tick on the list that felt longer than the essays I was asked to write. They said **I didn't care about education, but truth is, education stopped caring about me long before I stopped showing up.**

Betrayal became a quiet shadow that followed me through the streets. As time went on friends who promised loyalty vanished when I needed them most. Family members became nothing more than strangers who I happened to share the same blood with. I learned early that survival often meant standing alone, keeping my hands clean but my eyes open. But things were slowly changing.

I wasn't sure if it was for the worst or the best. The foster placement had felt like another setup at first, a stranger pretending to care. But this woman did not mess about. She had immense patience carved from her own scars, strength that didn't bend when tested. Meals weren't optional, rules weren't empty words, and every lesson came without threats or lectures. It was then I realised I had someone willing to fight for me, not out of fear, not for recognition, but because it mattered.

I didn't know which way I'd fall, but I felt the weight of the choice pressing down every day. I sighed walking past the graffiti smeared walls, hearing the familiar sound of shouting and sirens wailing in the distance. The only place rid of all that was in that small flat, where I began to see that survival wasn't just about standing alone. It was about learning how to trust again, how to stand tall even when the world kicks you down, and how maybe, just maybe, I could find a place to call home, even if it wasn't perfect

BY SANTINA R



ME AGAINST THE WORLD

**SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A
PRISONER,**

**ALWAYS GIVEN A HARD TIME.
DURING THESE HARD DAYS, IT FEELS
LIKE ME AGAINST THE WORLD. NO
ONE UNDERSTANDS WHAT'S GOING
ON IN MY MIND, ALWAYS GETTING
SHOUTED AT INSTEAD OF
RECEIVING CARE.**

**SITTING IN A CLASSROOM, ALL MY PEERS
LOOK AT ME WITH FEAR. BUT I'M THINKING,
"DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE TO BEAR?"
IT'S SO RARE FOR ANYONE TO ASK, "HOW
ARE YOU?" OR "ARE YOU OKAY?" BUT
LET'S TALK ABOUT FEAR...**

**WOULD YOU RATHER FEAR PEOPLE,
OR BE LIVING IN FEAR? WAKING UP
AT 6 A.M. TO GO TO SCHOOL, TO BE
LOCKED INSIDE FOUR WALLS LIKE A
CAGED BEAR.**

**ACROSS THE ROOM, IT'S MY
TEACHER—ALSO KNOWN AS A LIFE
CHANGER— ALWAYS CHANGING
PEOPLE'S LIVES WITH THE HIDDEN
PERCEPTIONS IN THEIR GLANCES
AND THE MENTALITY THAT FILLS
THEIR MINDS.**

**BUT TO BE SITTING IN FRONT OF
THE PRINCIPAL NEXT TO YOUR MOM,
ONLY TO HEAR, "YOU CAN'T COME
BACK HERE."**

RICARDO C

They don't care about us - Olivuh X

They don't care about us.

They never did.

How could they when they never changed the system,
That generations tried to fight for and win.

When you look at them... At us,
Do you think we just misbehaved?
Are 'troubled' or a 'problem'?
That everything has been our fault?

We are children though.

There's a chance you may be right,
But they learn how to react from somewhere.
Especially when the label they've been handed speaks
for itself.

Remember that people act based on where they came
from,
Their upbringing or knowledge.
Rage is an easier language to speak than sadness or
pain.

**Maybe their bodies are saying things they would never
say out loud...**
But how could you ever know?

1st September 2025 at 18:23 PM

[3] Song -

Open your mouth,
And you'll wonder why you didn't just keep it closed.

No one will believe you,
Their response just filled with 'No's,
Or 'We can't help you', 'Well we hope it gets resolved'.

You're misunderstood, villanised,
Everywhere you go.
You try to explain yourself,
But no, they've 'got it under control'.

You're tired of trying,
Allow them to believe what they wish.
If anything, I keep swimming,
Guess I'm no more than a fish.

Open your mouth,
And you'll wonder why you didn't just keep it closed.

No one will believe you,
Their response just filled with 'No's,
Or 'We can't help you', 'Well we hope it gets resolved'.

And for a time,
That's all you'll ever know.



BELL AND CELL

They told him “sit still” but his spirit ran
A boy too bold for the lesson plan
She answered back - not out of spite
But truth feels sharp when you live in a fight

They labeled her loud, disruptive and rude
But never asked why her hunger chewed
Her stomach knotted, eyes half closed
You ever tried learning maths when your traumas exposed
“Behavioral issue” they muttered in code
But couldn't see the house where the gas ran cold
No food, no light, just a crying mom,
So he stayed home to be the man - the only one

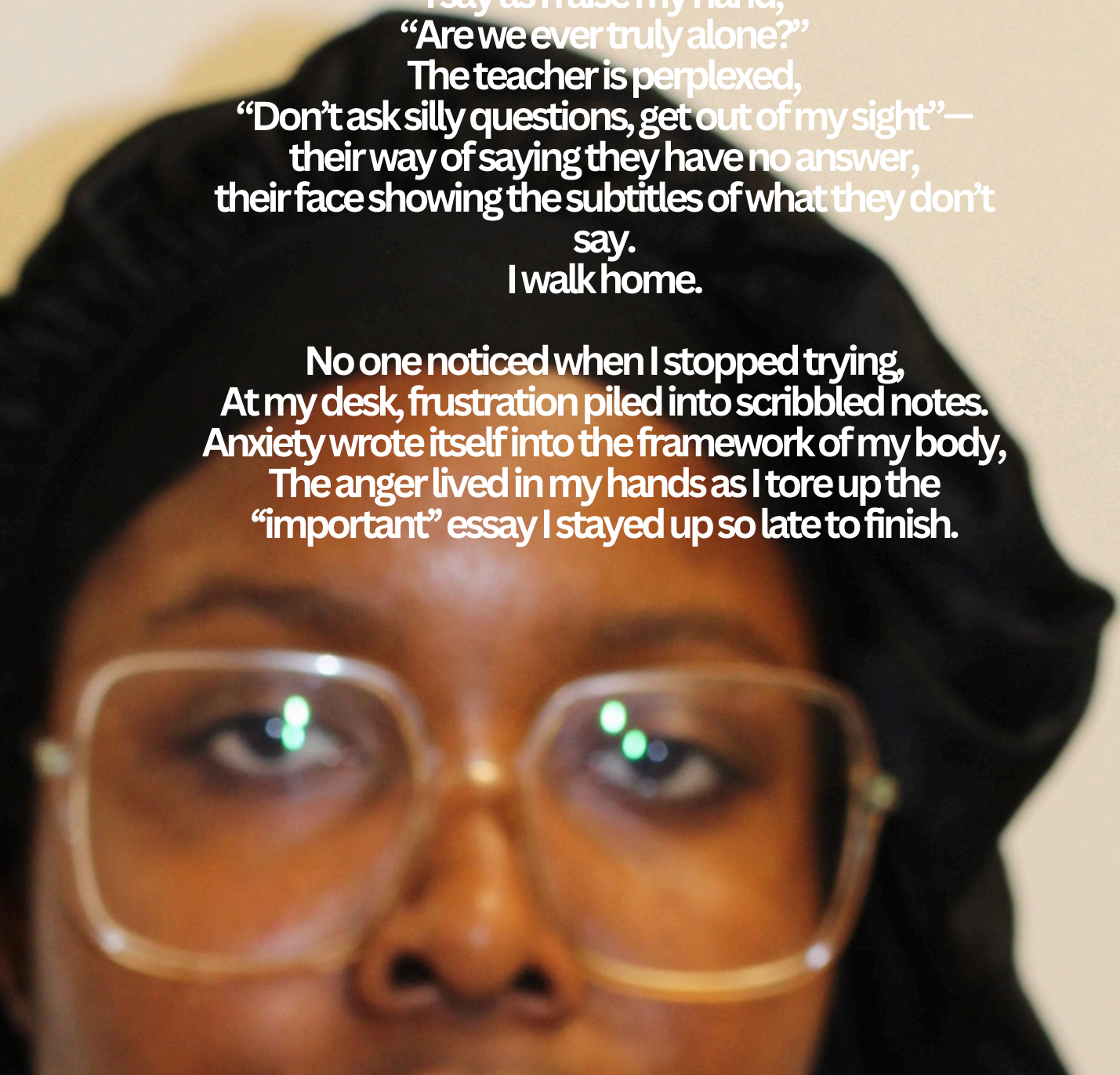
-JAYDEN R

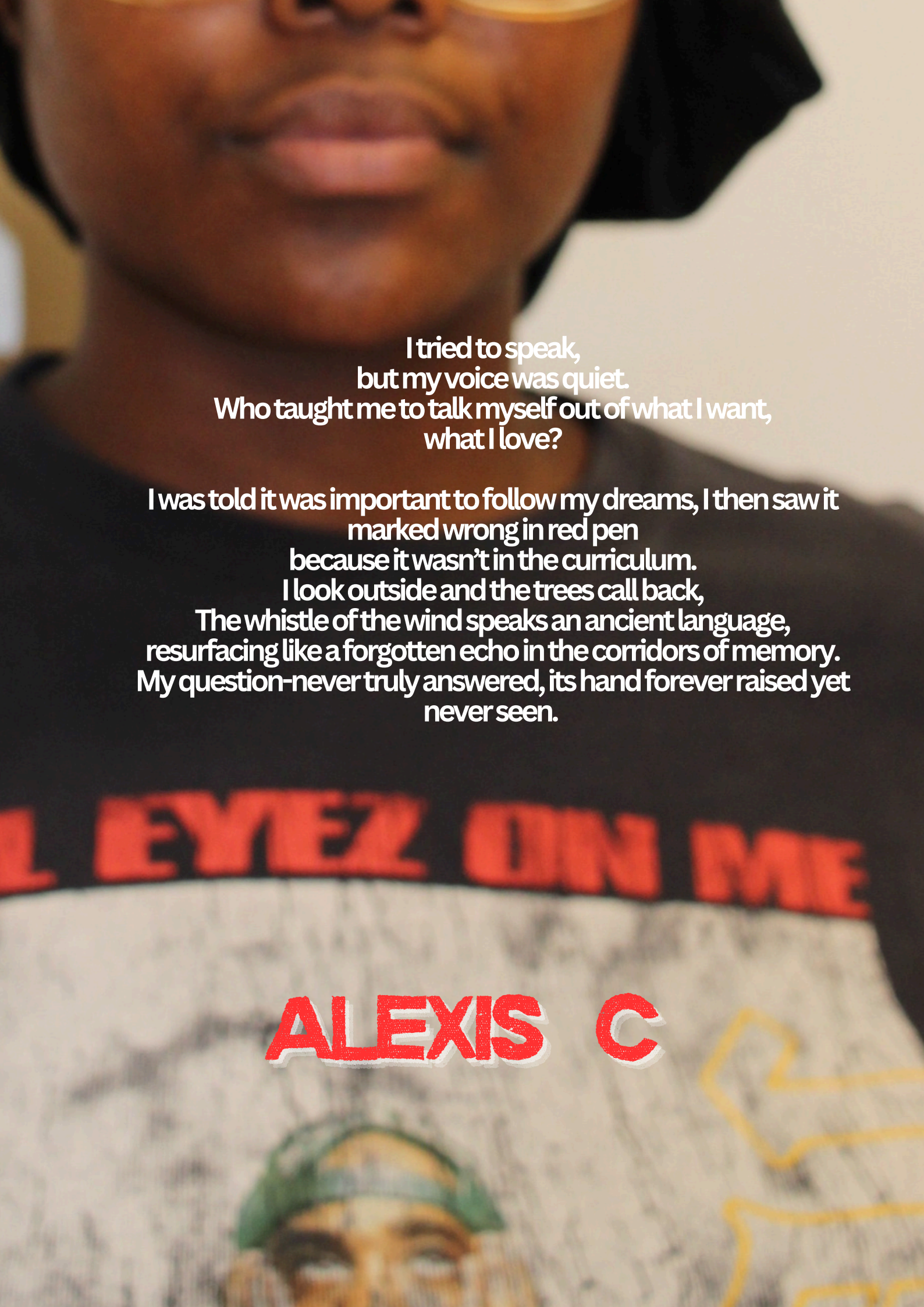
NOT ON THE REGISTER

ALEXIS C

I have a question, sir,”
I say as I raise my hand,
“Are we ever truly alone?”
The teacher is perplexed,
“Don’t ask silly questions, get out of my sight”—
their way of saying they have no answer,
their face showing the subtitles of what they don’t
say.
I walk home.

No one noticed when I stopped trying,
At my desk, frustration piled into scribbled notes.
Anxiety wrote itself into the framework of my body,
The anger lived in my hands as I tore up the
“important” essay I stayed up so late to finish.





I tried to speak,
but my voice was quiet.
Who taught me to talk myself out of what I want,
what I love?

I was told it was important to follow my dreams, I then saw it
marked wrong in red pen
because it wasn't in the curriculum.
I look outside and the trees call back,
The whistle of the wind speaks an ancient language,
resurfacing like a forgotten echo in the corridors of memory.
My question-never truly answered, its hand forever raised yet
never seen.

ALEXIS C



I am so quick to be
rejected

I am so quick to be rejected

A social **outcast**

But unexpected

My humour got lost

Between best friends **broken**

through time

I'm feeling **hopeless** - being told you
are **useless**

The **disappointment** to a child's face

Forgotten dreams are **broken**

What **am I**

A failure or a fighter

Every day I am a **fighter**

Fighting to turn up

Even though school is a

Broken system

-Degmo I

NEWHAM NIGHTS ARE COLD

Kicked out again, slip home through the night
heart beating fast cah the vibes ain't right
Newham blocks laced with sirens and shouts,
future feels distant, the system throwing doubts.

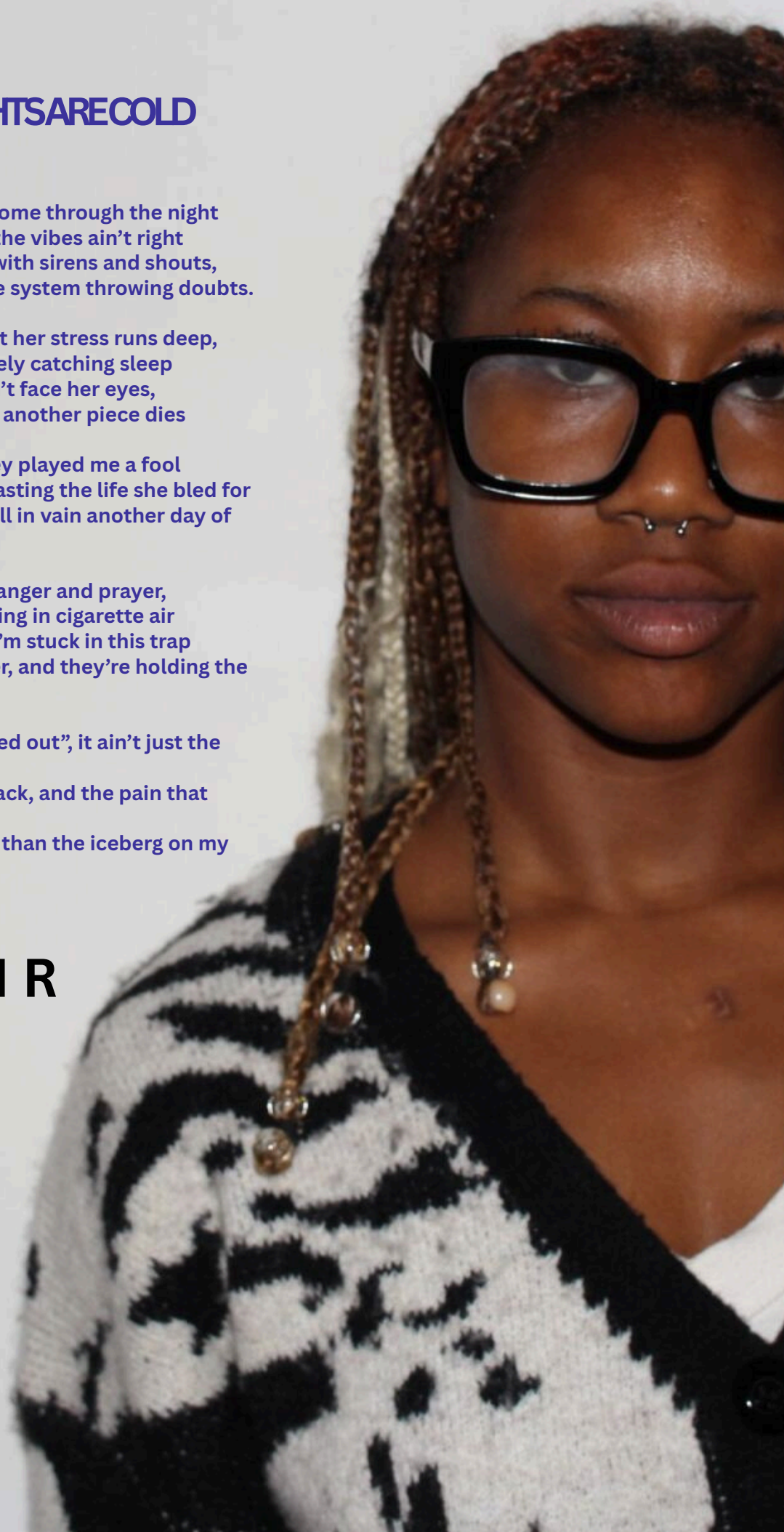
Mums african pride, but her stress runs deep,
working two shifts, barely catching sleep
i dread stepping in, can't face her eyes,
the moment she hears, another piece dies

Segregated silence, they played me a fool
she screams that i'm wasting the life she bled for
exclaims how i took it all in vain another day of
relentless pain

Council flat walls hold anger and prayer,
her dreams for me sinking in cigarette air
i wanna do better, but i'm stuck in this trap
the roads pull me closer, and they're holding the
map

So when they say "kicked out", it ain't just the
class
it's the weight on my back, and the pain that
can't pass
Newham nights colder, than the iceberg on my
shoulder

-KAYLAH R



got kicked out again, sir said i'm too **LOUD**

too quick with the jokes, still **COULDN'T BLEND** with the crowd
but they don't see **THE NIGHTS** when the heating cuts
MARJ IS STRESSED out life hitting us in the guts
in stratty station i'm seeing doors that are closed
making ways **HOME** on the platform, i stood and i froze
For the first time **I DEEPED MY CHOICES**
but it was **TOO LATE** cos down the drain my future goes
im a **KID** who felt violated, trapped in that chair
in the staff room, while my names in the air
SEGREGATED SILENCE like i wasn't even there
On the blocks of **E15, YEAH, THEY CARRY MY NAME**
but in school i was numbers, **A MARK**, just a shame
Teachers talk futures, but mine got delayed
THE SYSTEM DREW LINES, and i stayed in the shade
Londons youth are more than **STATS**
More than **FLIES** in council flats

Still they **RISE**, still they **SHOUT**
FOR EVERY DREAM THAT'S BEEN KICKED OUT

-" FOR EVERY DREAM THAT'S BEEN KICKED OUT" KAYLAH R

EVERY EXCLUSION IS A CHOICE

By MARIANNE LAGRU

MARIANNE LEADS CORAM'S WORK IN TRYING TO CHANGE SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS POLICY - INCLUDING WORKING WITH MPs, GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED.

School exclusions are sometimes presented as inevitable. We are told 'our policies are clear...', 'the guidance states...', 'the law lays out...'. But every single exclusion of a child from a school is a choice, and as a society we can decide to make different choices. In England alone there were 10,885 permanent exclusions in 2023/24 school year, compared with 9,376 the year before – a rise of 16%. More than half of those exclusions were for children receiving SEN support, including 1,044 children with a formal EHC plan.

The figures also show big gaps between other groups of children, with other characteristics making a child significantly more likely to be excluded – boys, those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Afro-Caribbean ethnicities, children who get free school meals, and children in care or known to children's social care.



MARIANNE LAGRUE - POLICY MANAGER, CORAM CHILDREN'S LEGAL CENTRE

While most exclusions happen in secondary schools, some do not: 686 children aged between four and seven were permanently excluded from state-funded primary schools in the 2023-24 school year.

Each number, each child, represents a choice made by a headteacher, a board of governors, and the education system as a whole. But does it have to be this way? In Scotland twenty years ago, 271 children were permanently excluded from school; in Scotland last year there was only one.

So we need to enable headteachers, governing bodies, and the education system as a whole to make different choices. What choices do we ask them to make instead? And how do we help them change their minds, the guidance and the law?

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

When things break down for a child in school, it can feel inevitable that they must leave, but there are other ways that conflict can be resolved. More of a focus on a person's needs outside of their immediate education can help them to engage in learning. Being in care, caring for a sick parent or relative, having to be a financial provider, poverty, housing insecurity and a thousand other things in this zine and beyond it may impact a child's ability to be in school and to learn. Where else can children and young people turn for help if not their school?

Many children also need more focus on their educational needs, especially the more than 5000 children with a special educational need who were excluded in England last year. The most common reason for an exclusion is 'persistent disruptive behaviour', but you only need to read this zine to know that anxiety, ADHD, autism and many other diagnostic categories come with behaviours that make school harder. The government is going to reform the whole SEN system soon – any reform should focus on giving kids the support they actually need to help them stay in school.



The systems themselves also work against children and young people. A child who has been permanently excluded can't appeal their own exclusion – their parent or carer has to do it for them while they are under 18. That is not fair, and excludes them even from the discussions and decisions that will define their future.



SO HOW DO WE PERSUADE HEADTEACHERS, GOVERNING BODIES, AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AS A WHOLE TO MAKE DIFFERENT CHOICES?



MAKING CHANGE

Stories are powerful, and learning to tell your story in a way that keeps you safe can be a way to change peoples' minds. Imagine standing in front of a politician who has the power to change the law on exclusions, and telling them what happened to you. How would you want them to reply? What conclusion do you want them to reach, not just about you but about the process and the system?

Art is powerful, and making art that reflects the reality you see can make people see the world through your eyes.

Finally, though it might feel like it all happens too far away from your day to day life to apply, the people who make the laws, the guidance and the decisions are all just people – and you can talk to them. Everyone has a right to meet with their MP to discuss a problem – google it. You can also write to them to ask them to fix the many things about the system that are broken. Your experiences matter just as much as your qualifications: no one knows better how the system works and how it doesn't, because you've lived it.

Nothing is inevitable. Systems change all the time. You have the power to change minds.

THE CORAM VOICES IN ACTION ZINE EMERGED FROM A THREE-MONTH CO-PRODUCTION BETWEEN CORAM VOICES IN ACTION AND THE SCHOOL EXCLUSION AMBASSADORS—A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL EXCLUSION.

THE PROJECT KICKED OFF WITH CREATIVE EDUCATION SESSIONS, WHERE THE YOUNG PEOPLE LEARNED THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. WE BUILT AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW CREATIVE WORK—including ART, PHOTOGRAPHY, JOURNALISM, AND POETRY—CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL FOR MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES TO ASSERT THEIR PERSPECTIVES. WE TALKED ABOUT HOW SOCIALLY CRITICAL ARTISTS AND JOURNALISTS HAVE CHANGED THE WORLD BY CHALLENGING DOMINANT NARRATIVES AND HOW ARTS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS HAVE SHIFTED SOCIETY BY QUESTIONING THE STATUS QUO.

THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS STARTED CREATING THE ZINE BY EXPLORING HOW THEY ARE OFTEN TALKED TO AND ABOUT, BUT RARELY GIVEN A CHANCE TO SHARE THEIR OWN POINT OF VIEW.

THROUGH A SERIES OF IDEATION, WRITING, AND EDITING SESSIONS, THEIR POEMS AND SHORT STORIES TOOK SHAPE. THESE PIECES DELVE INTO VARIOUS TOPICS, INCLUDING THE JUDGMENT YOUNG PEOPLE FACE IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, THE EFFECT OF BULLYING ON SELF-ESTEEM, HOW REPORT CARDS CAN FEEL SIMILAR TO BEING WATCHED, AND THE FAILURE OF SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY OR ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES. THE ZINE ALSO CONTAINS FICTIONALISED STORIES THAT REFLECT REAL LIFE EXPERINCES.

**A FINAL MESSAGE FROM THE CORAM
VOICES IN ACTION SCHOOL EXCLUSION
AMBASSADORS:**

**EXCLUSION ISN'T THE END. FOR US, IT WAS
THE START OF A NEW JOURNEY. WE TOOK
OUR PAIN AND TURNED IT INTO FUEL TO
CREATE CHANGE.**

**WE ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WERE
EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL, NOW WRITING
POETRY, DELIVERING SPEECHES TO
GOVERNMENT MINISTERS, AND SHAPING
POLICY REPORTS.**

**TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE READING THIS: WE
ARE PROOF THAT YOU CAN GET THROUGH
IT, YOU CAN FIND YOUR PEOPLE, AND YOU
ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN A LABEL.**

**THIS ZINE IS FOR YOU. THE NEXT CHAPTER
IS YOURS TO WRITE, FILLED WITH ALL THE
POETRY, BRAVERY, AND SO-CALLED
IMPOSSIBLE THINGS YOU WILL DO.**

**FOR ALL THOSE WHO ARE READING:
SUPPORT CORAM VOICES IN ACTION AND
HELP US CAMPAIGN FOR CHANGE AND
BRING TO LIFE THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG
PEOPLE EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL.**