

# *Do the Write Thing*

## *Zanesville*



# 2024

**Zanesville City School District**  
middle-schoolers share how  
violence has touched their lives  
and how they choose peace



**DAVE YOST**  
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL



# FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

As Ohio's Attorney General, I am so pleased to have partnered with the Zanesville City School District in the *Do the Write Thing* program for the third year in a row.

Once again, Zanesville students were asked to write about how violence impacts their daily lives and to share their ideas of how to reduce violence in their community. They tackled the difficult subject with candor, thoughtfulness and insight beyond their years.

These essays always amaze me and bolster my belief that the young students who soon will inherit and guide our nation are filled with goodness and compassion.

Their words are powerful and their stories sometimes difficult to read, but their perspective is invaluable to the community. These students are our future, and we must listen to their voices to gain a better understanding of the world they live in and how we can work together for a brighter tomorrow.

I commend these young people for their honesty, courage, and commitment to making the world a better place.

I encourage everyone to take time to read the essays in this book. You may be surprised by what you learn, but I know it will leave you proud and optimistic about the generations to come.

Yours,



**DAVE YOST**  
Ohio Attorney General



# FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

It is both a pleasure and an opportunity for Zanesville City Schools and Zanesville Middle School to have been selected to partner with Mr. Dave Yost and the Ohio Attorney General's Office to provide our students a voice in the *Do the Write Thing* national writing program.

This program provides a platform for our students to express how they have been personally affected by difficult challenges, that are mostly outside of their control, as well as describe potential solutions to those challenges.

It is both heartbreaking and inspiring to read the stories written through the eyes of a 14-year old. And, for the adults in the community and beyond, who have the power to make positive and lasting changes, to once again view the community through the eyes of a child.

It is our hope that these insights will initiate the momentum that is needed to encourage us all to become a leader in creating the type of communities that we all desire to live in.



Sincerely,

**DOUG BAKER, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent  
Zanesville City School District

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This book contains a compilation of writings by middle-school students who were selected as the top 10 finalists of the 2024 *Do the Write Thing* program. This book will be shared across the community in recognition of all the students who accepted the challenge to share their voices and help create a safer, more peaceful society.

## Overview of Do the Write Thing

*Do the Write Thing* is a unique national program designed to give middle-school students an outlet to communicate in classroom discussions and then in writing how violence impacts their daily lives. In addition to exposing the causes and effects of violence, students are asked to share their ideas on reducing violence in their community.

The program asks students to express in stories, poems and songs, or in any other written forms, the violence they've faced, with an emphasis on exploring these key questions:

- How does violence affect your daily life?
- What are some of the causes of youth violence in your community?
- What can you as an individual do to reduce youth violence in your community?

The benefits of the challenge are many. Students gain a greater empathy and understanding for victims of violence and realize that their positive actions can make a difference in their own home, schools and neighborhoods. Teachers gain a better awareness of what is happening in their students' lives and in the school culture. Community leaders benefit from greater understanding of the impact that violence has on youth and learn from the students' stories and ideas for reducing violence.

## Do the Write Thing in Zanesville

During the 2023-24 school year, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost partnered with the Zanesville City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program.

The program was well received, with nearly 435 seventh- and eighth-grade students submitting essays.

Zanesville community and business leaders volunteered their time to read each essay and choose the 10 submissions most responsive to the key questions. From the top 10, two students were selected to become Ohio ambassadors to the national *Do the Write Thing* conference in Washington, D.C.

A special thank you to all of the community volunteers, teachers, principals and school administrators who helped make *Do the Write Thing* such a great success in Zanesville.



*Do the Write Thing is the flagship program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence and has been in existence for 29 years. It operates programs in 28 cities in 14 states. Over the past 29 years, more than 1.5 million middle school students have submitted writings to the program.*

*The primary sponsor for the Do the Write Thing program is the Kuwait-America Foundation.*



## ESSAY 1 | AMBASSADOR

# HAILEY ANDERSON

Zanesville Middle School

“Mom!” I loudly but playfully exclaimed when my mom picked me up on my fifth birthday, but as I looked in her eyes it wasn’t like a usual midnight sky covered with clean glasses, it was a yellow and orange sunset, with little stars here and there. My mom’s eyes seemed as if they changed colours, really they were just a sweet hazel.

As I stared into her eyes, I realised I won’t have this forever. What I didn’t realise was that I wouldn’t have it for long either, because even if I could look my mom in her eyes right now, I imagine a dull pile of soil. However I can’t, because she is living with another “family” right now.

According to the July 2023 Newsletter, over 7,000 children get abandoned every year, and whether it’s your mother, father, or both, it’s equally unfortunate for children and comes with many side effects including mental damage beyond depression, along with unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Abandonment issues are more common than you think, because parents don’t have to go no contact and no talk with their children for it to be considered abandonment, or at least have the same effects as such. Abandonment can be as simple as neglect, emotionally or physically. For example, if someone’s father bought his daughter conditioner, and snacks, but didn’t talk to her or spend any time with her, that would be emotional neglect. Since the father is emotionally not there for his daughter. Similar to each other, physical neglect could be a father spending time with their daughter but never buying her food, clothes, etc. Any other way, it’s abandoning one’s daughter’s needs and necessities.

The side effects of this could include, unhealthy eating habits, due to lack of food, or harming oneself due to feeling of being unwanted, caused by lack of attention from a loved one. Now, this can be switched, such as unhealthy eating habits can be caused by feeling unloved and not treated fairly due to physical appearance, while harming yourself can be caused by emotional pain which can be influenced by an overwhelming unworthy feeling.

I’ll never fully understand why parents abandon their children, maybe it has something to do with being too

immature, or lazy, but overall, no matter what the reason is, it is still abuse and it is still illegal.

Growing up with both parents is easy, growing up with 1 is difficult, and none? It feels like when you’re drowning, and right before you pass out you wake up, every time. It feels exhausting. Don’t get me wrong, I grew up with both parents, although I only saw them about once a month. See, my father worked a lot, some days he worked over 24 hours, but he was bringing in beautiful paychecks, around \$2,000 every other week. So we must’ve been well off? No we weren’t. We were actually below average, and this is mostly because my mother would steal my dad’s paychecks, to either gamble it away, or buy drugs. My father’s life revolved around working, paying bills, sleeping, and making sure my sister’s and I made it to school on time. On the other hand my mother’s life revolved around money, drugs, gambling, etc.

My mother had some responsibilities, she had me up for school just about every morning. Yet, she had a unique way of doing it. About every morning my mother would yell to wake me up, and then I would take too long, until eventually I went to school with a bruised face or legs, so even though she thought she was being an adult she was really just being immature.

That’s the main issue, my mother is immature, she’s an addict. Since she had to deal with her kids and her addiction at the same time, she decided her kids were less useful towards her, and that she should find someone who can provide her with enough drugs, with a positive attitude towards her gambling addiction. As anticipated, she did.

I miss her sometimes, I miss the weekends she would let us have dessert before dinner, I miss the trips to the water park in the summer, I miss her helping with my homework. I miss my mom. No, not my mom, my mommy. I miss telling my friends I can’t hang out because my mom said we have plans, I even hate going to my friends house and seeing their mothers and fathers having the “perfect” relationship. It’s so frustrating trying to explain to teachers or officers why they can’t contact my mom anymore. Although I miss her, I’m still scared of her. It’s like when



you hear someone say “I have a love hate relationship with—” because that’s with my mom and I, I love who she used to be and what she can be, but I hate who she is and what she is doing. I wish drugs were less common and at least harder to find.

So many kids get left behind because of their parents’ addictions. Newborns, infants, toddlers, children, teenagers, are all people too and nobody should have to suffer because someone else decided to ruin their own life. I believe in order to reduce this issue we should be more focused on drug abuse, and less on other non-life threatening situations. For example, if cops stopped pulling people over for not turning on their turn single and started doing a welfare check on sketchy houses, it may be a little easier to find drug addicts. No offence to cops.

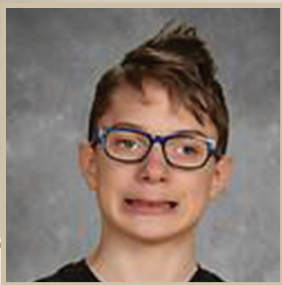
See, abandonment is an issue which is hard to point out, since you never really know the truth. In order to help the obvious problem of absent parents and abandoned children,

schools can offer better counsellors, with fun classes, allowing students to feel more comfortable and more likely to be able to reach out to trusted adults about their mother or father being absent. I believe school plays a big part in a students mental health, and a funner school just makes things easier.

Abandonment is no joke, it’s a real life issue that needs to stop being looked past. Abandonment is not funny, it’s something that can be very serious, and it can happen to any age.

According to NewYork Post, by Yaron Steinbuch, a 36 year old woman with locked-in syndrome was found deceased in her family’s home, with her faeces and more covering her melted body. All because her parents couldn’t stick around to take care of her.

In the future, I truly believe that as moral humans, we can prevent abandonment, and save whatever portion of the 7,000 children who get abandoned, an unfortunate death.



## ESSAY 2

# SHANE BURKHART

Zanesville Middle School

Were you or a loved one you knew affected by drug abuse and if so then how did you deal with it? Abuse is when someone hurts someone or themselves physically and mentally. Drug abuse is when you or someone uses or overuses drugs. I wonder how and why drug abuse happens and how I can make sure that other people stop overusing drugs and hurting themselves.

Drug abuse has affected me, my friends, and my family. I have experienced my mom abusing drugs and never taking care of her body or health. I had to leave all of my friends behind because of this. My sister was angry at my mom for doing drugs so she moved away with my other sister. This made me feel disappointed in myself for not helping my mom. I also felt very depressed when this happened which made me have some suicidal thoughts and I ended up being lonely and not happy like my usual self which also made me become way more aggressive.

The main thing that causes drug abuse in some people is because sometimes when they do drugs, they mainly do this because of their compulsive behavior. Compulsive behavior is when people behave in an angry, depressed, or suicidal way. This can include: Loss in the family, any depressing/non-happy emotion or feeling, drug/medication addiction, or their past life. All of these can lead to people doing and overusing drugs. Not only can this, it can make people attempt or commit suicide which may make most families depressed.

One thing I can do to help stop drug abuse from happening to people, especially teenagers, is by getting the person doing drugs a therapist so that they can talk to the therapist about their problems which in a lot of cases, therapists can help with drug abuse and other forms of youth violence. Two main reasons why drug abusers don't go to see a therapist is because they want to but usually since they're so addicted to drugs they don't want to get off them. The second reason why they don't want to see a therapist is because a drug abuser could be doing drugs to distract themselves from wrong things they did or a death of a family member. Because of this, many family members do drugs and sometimes they use them too much and can end up in the hospital and can even cause death in some cases. A way I can help with drug abuse is by getting the mom or any family member something better to do in my life. This could work because if you get them to listen to you they could try to work their way out of using drugs. Doing this can make them focus on more important stuff in life and this can help them with their family relationships. This is something everyone can do to help stop drug abuse in families and help lower death rates of drugs.

In conclusion I can deal with drug abuse by helping people with their problems head on and by getting them a therapist they can talk to who can help them get off drugs, live a better life, and help others with the same thing too. This is why we need to end drug abuse.



### ESSAY 3

# DAMIAN CAIN

Zanesville Middle School

Take a stand and don't let your life go down hill because of what others have done to you. When I say take a stand I mean to not let other people hurt you and if they do then you need to fight back or tell someone that they are doing it. Physical abuse has affected me and my family's life in a negative way because my dad always hit my mom and threatened to kill people which made me hate him and now I'll never talk to him again. My mom asks me every once and awhile if I want to talk to him because he asked but I always decline because I'm not ready to talk to him.

Physical abuse has affected me and my family negatively because my dad was always hitting my mom and that made me and my sister scared of him. My sister was still fine with him but I hate him. I will never talk to my dad ever again. My sister wants to and I always wonder why she still wants to talk to him but she does. It feels like something is missing in life but I don't want to see him ever again and my mom understood that I didn't like him. I've tried to forget about him but it was hard because he was my dad and I hated that I couldn't forget about him and what he did. But as I grew older I realized and found out that my dad was off his meds that keep him sane and not too aggressive but I still try to keep a distance and don't talk to him.

Physical abuse has changed me by making me realize the world isn't all fun and everyones happy. It showed me that sometimes you gotta take a stand and you have to deal with something yourself. If you want to do good

in this world you have to know how to deal with stuff like that. It taught me to not ignore stuff like that to tell adults what's happening especially if it's just one and the other doesn't know. But don't try to do stuff all by yourself because you can get hurt or end up hating yourself for it. Life isn't always easy so we will sometimes face difficulties that will make us hate life. If you are experiencing stuff you should try to reach out and get help because it will help a lot.

The way you and I can help is by helping other people that have experienced it and if they really need it help them get help from a professional. Like a therapist because the whole point of a therapist is for them to help you get through tough troubles and make sure you're ok. I've experienced horrible stuff and I can probably relate to a lot of people and I could help them out. But some people don't like to tell everyone all of their problems which makes it hard to help someone. So for the people that are too shy to tell others I say that you should try to open up to someone like a trusted friend or adult and they can try to find you help really fast.

To conclude my essay, Some people don't understand that life is harder than it used to be. Because when you were a 1-9, life was easy because you didn't have as many responsibilities as you do at 10+. Life gets harder as you get older; it could be anything that tries to slow you down but, you should always find a way to move forward and complete your goals.





## ESSAY 4

# SHAWNACEE CHURCHILL

Zanesville Middle School

Youth Violence. What is it in your eyes? What comes to mind when you think of it? Bullying kids? Or maybe even gangs or shootings. Less people are helping prevent youth violence these days but at the same time youth violence is growing more and more over time.

Bullying started to affect my life last year and this year people at our school began to make fun of me. They started making rumors about me saying some of the name brand clothes I wear were fake and also making fun of me for the type of phone I have because it wasn't an iPhone. This made me feel angry and sad because I knew the stuff I wore wasn't fake. But so many people were saying it and it made me mad. And made me feel out of place.

Some causes that start bullying are not having what everyone else has. Or even not being exactly like everyone else in this world. All most people care about these days are wealth, looks and having nice things. And the people that are lucky enough to have that stuff look down on the people that don't have that type of stuff. I'm not saying everyone does that but a lot of people at school bully kids for the way they dress or what they don't have because they feel like they should make fun of other kids for not having what they have because their friends do it. Other causes are being gay or lesbian or any of the other sexualities because they think it's weird because you're not the same as them. Because you're different then them in their eyes.

Some things people can do to help bullying stop are sticking up for the kids who are being bullied. It's not hard to take a stand and say "hey that's not right you shouldn't

do that." Some people dont wanna do that because they will start getting bullied for supposedly "sticking up for the weird kid." But that doesn't matter. People should stop trying to bring people down in life and start trying to help them. If a kid doesn't have many shoes and you have a lot of shoes you don't wear you could give them to him/her. They might not be brand new but he/she would most likely be grateful to have them. Although you may have a lot in life some people have nothing and your parents could have been through that struggle as a kid. No matter how much you have, you always have to start at the bottom to get to the top. Just go have a conversation with your mother or father or whoever you live with and ask them if they struggled in life as a kid or if their parents did and I guarantee they will say they have at some point in their life. Even if it was for a short period of time. But that's not the point. We can take a stand and help there be less bullying by stepping while a kid is being bullied and sticking up for him. So since I have been through this stuff and know how it feels if I see it happening I can step up and help them. Because people shouldn't have to change themself for everybody else.

In conclusion, bullying can greatly affect people's lives. Bullying is a problem that does not only affect one area it affects everywhere around the world. Instead of people saying stuff about other people or judging other people they should treat them with kindness and respect like they would wanna be treated because if they got treated like that they probably wouldn't like it. If people could simply do this the world would be a better place.



## ESSAY 5

# CALEB HUFFMAN

Zanesville Middle School

*“At first, addiction is maintained by pleasure, but the intensity of the pleasure gradually diminishes and the addiction is then maintained by the avoidance of pain.” — Frank Tallis*

This quote means a lot to me. The reason I say this is because I have personally watched someone go through this cycle. Addiction is a powerful thing. It takes a lot of courage to overcome addiction but at any point in time you can put the substances down and choose a different path for yourself.

Drug abuse has affected my community, family, and school. In my community there were 43 deaths caused by overdose in one year. “Muskingum County confirmed 43 overdose deaths in 2020,” according to Erin Couch. This has affected my family because we have seen someone struggle with addiction and not wanting help until they realized that it had gone too far. It affected my school because in the school year of 2022-2023 Zanesville High School had two kids that had overdosed inside of the school building.

There are many different factors that can cause drug abuse. It could sometimes be the parent using the drugs and the kids soon following, but most of the time it's the people they hangout with. Friends set an example for each other if one person does it then it's not going to be long before the other person does it. I have had many friends that tried to get me to do things like these but if they want you to do that, they don't care about you or your health and they are not really your friends.

Some people might be thinking what can I do to help? It can be difficult watching a loved one go through this but there is always hope. There are a lot of different things

you can do to help by yourself or with other people. Just think for each person you help there could be one more person saved. We can all help people going through this. We can all refer someone going through this to a rehabilitation center. There are 48,698 rehabilitation centers around the U.S. There are about 20 rehabilitation centers in Muskingum county alone. Another thing that is available to people in need of help with this is a U.S. hotline the number is 1-800-662-4357. If you are on an illegal substance you can always call 911. Your life matters more than you being arrested. Another helpline you can call is 877-959-6362. This is a national helpline that is always available for people going through drug abuse. Some of you may be thinking if I have done these drugs or sold them and gone to jail there's no way I will be able to find a job, but that's not true, some jobs can be felon friendly. In Ohio there are 5,738 felon friendly jobs some of them start at 30,000 dollars a year and that's the lowest one some of the highest include 85,000 dollars a year which is perfect for some people trying to get back on their feet. All you need is a chance and these jobs are willing to give you one. If you're going through this you always need to remember that recovery is always possible, don't be scared to reach out for help if you need it.

At any point in time it is possible to put down these substances. There is always a way you can help someone going through this even if it is just a little bit of help. Anything works, even nice compliments could help that person to a better path in life. All they need is one chance to do the right thing. If you're willing to help give them a chance they need someone to believe in them so they can make the right path for their future going forward.



## ESSAY 6

# KYNDALL HUFFMAN

Zanesville Middle School

### Substance Abuse

*“People are not addicted to alcohol or drugs, they are addicted to escaping reality.”* — unknown.

I believe we could tackle substance abuse by talking to the person about distributing information dissemination, or giving referrals for someone to go to, to help them get better, and maybe even rehab. Substance abuse is a very important topic to talk about because a lot of people in the world go through it, and it is a really terrible thing to go through.

Substance abuse could be caused by many things. One thing could be genetic vulnerability. Which means, the inherited characteristics passed on from parents to children that make it more likely that a person will develop an addiction. So it really just means it runs in the family genetics. Another thing could be psychiatric problems. That means behavioral, emotional, or cognitive dysfunctions that are not readily controlled by the individual and are related to clinically significant distress or impairment in one or more areas including social, occupational, and interpersonal functioning. Also, Environmental stressors are another one. Environmental stressors mean, aspects of one’s surroundings that increase mental or emotional strain in their lives.

This type of abuse traumatized me and hurt me mentally. My dad used to be an alcoholic and a drug addict. His addiction got so bad to where he would come home every night drunk and physically abuse my mom. One time he stole my brother’s birthday money just so he could buy

drugs. In 2018, he got locked up for touching my older cousin inappropriately, and because the cops found drugs on him. Because of his choices he ruined my family, my childhood, and my happiness. I have not seen my dad’s side of the family since 2021. He has asked and asked and asked for forgiveness, but every time I forgave him he messed up somehow. Seeing kids with their dads in public really hurts me, because it just reminds me mine is a deadbeat, and is not in my life. To this day I get flashbacks and memories start flooding back everytime someone talks about abuse, drugs, alcohol, and even my dad.

Substance abuse could be reduced in many different ways. One way could be learning healthy ways to cope with stress. That just means to take deep breaths, stretch, meditate. Try to eat healthy, well balanced meats. Exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. All that means is take care of yourself, and your body. A great way to reduce it would be keeping drug triggers and cravings in check. Which means to avoid anything from your past that made you start doing drugs or made you start drinking. Another one could be going to rehab. Rehab is a place you could go to if you want to get help quitting drugs or need help to stop being an alcoholic.

In conclusion, substance abuse can be very effective, and can hurt people around you. It is one of the most terrible types of abuse across the world, there were 30+ million people that were illegal drug users. It is one of the most traumatizing things I personally have been through. I feel bad for whoever has to go through this terrible abuse. What would you do if you were in this same situation?



## ESSAY 7 | AMBASSADOR

# LEVI KNOTT

Zanesville Middle School

### Bullying needs to stop

Have you ever been, or seen somebody get bullied? Most kids are scared to go to school because they are afraid that they will get bullied, perhaps about the way they dress or the way they look. Principals should start talking to their students individually about bullying because then they could figure out the causes of bullying, how bullying has changed many students' lives, and what we can do to help stop it.

Did you know that 22.5 to 25 percent of kids in schools are getting bullied every day? That is outrageous. According to HeathDirect some of the most popular things that cause bullying are "wanting to dominate others and improve their social status. Also having low self-esteem and wanting to feel better about themselves". If you did not know, a lot of the reasons that kids are getting bullied is because of the way they look and the way they act. For example, some of the big reasons that someone gets bullied is because of sexuality, religion, and disabilities according to Bullying free N2. Also in the article Fast Facts: "Preventing Bullying, it says that nearly 28% of middle schools have a bullying problem." That is way too high. We need to work together and find out how to prevent bullying and make that percentage go down.

Bullying has affected my life tremendously, My brother has a condition called Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder that happens in the brain. My brother was made fun of alot in school just to see how he would react or to see if he would get upset. Most of the time other students would realize that he had a disability and say really mean things and tease him alot. My brother would tell my parents when he was being made

fun of and then they would try to help the situation. My mom and dad would tell us that other kids were bullying my brother. When my mom and dad told me... it was heartbreaking. A Lot of those nights were questions about why those kids were being really mean to him. My brother had always been happy to see his teachers and I knew for a fact that he was not doing anything to deserve this kind of treatment. Bullying has affected my life in a huge way because, whenever I see somebody getting bullied in school or anywhere else, I try to help that person, because I know that that person is going through the same kind of stuff that my brother went through daily.

One way that I could reduce bullying in all different types of schools is by trying to get a school counselor in the building at all times. So that if people are getting bullied and don't have a parent of any type of relative to talk to or explain their situation to, they could go to that person and tell them what is going on in their school day. One other thing that we could do as a group is, we could try to get a speaker of some sort and have them speak on the subject of bullying, and how it affects the person getting bullied. Another thing is that schools could have their students take a poll on bullying and have them give some of their ideas on how we could stop it.

Talking to students individually could make a huge difference. If principals were able to do this, they would be able to figure out what causes bullying and how bullying affects many students' lives. This could possibly change the environment because they would be able to figure out how to stop it. What would happen if all bullying just stopped one day? A Lot of problems in all types of schools would be solved, and most of the kids in the school would feel safe and protected.



## ESSAY 8

# SKLYAR PATTON

Zanesville Middle School

### Mental Health

One in five teens between the ages of twelve and eighteen suffer from diagnosable mental health disorders. There are a lot more teens who struggle with mental health than you probably think. Mental health issues can be caused by childhood trauma, overthinking, discrimination and many other things. Having poor mental health has affected many people that I care about. I sometimes struggle with mental health, and I would say that it affects the way your life proceeds from day to day.

To begin with, mental health issues are caused by many things. They can be caused by childhood trauma, discrimination, and overthinking. Childhood trauma can lead to a mental health illness, because people who have experienced trauma are more prone to having a harder time expressing their feelings. Experiencing something traumatic in your childhood can also lead to anxiety, where your anxiety can focus on negative flashbacks. Discrimination can lead to mental health issues, because the feelings of feeling neglected can lead to stress. Stress is one of the most common things that lead to a mental health issue. If you didn't know, discrimination can launch individuals into despair and hopelessness, often resulting in depression. Overthinking is something that many people I know struggle with. An independent can overthink over something extremely small, or overthink a topic that is huge. Overthinking can occur from stress and anxiety. Overall, mental health issues can be created from many things.

If you think this doesn't apply to you, you're wrong. Mental health can affect everyone. It could affect your friend. Your family member. Your peers. In fact, 19.86% of adults experience a mental illness. I have struggled with mental health many times. Starting at six or seven years old, I wanted to die. I told my mom that I wanted to commit suicide. I would pull my hair out, bang my head off of things, bite myself until it left a mark, and hit myself. By

the time all of this stopped, I was about eight or nine years old. As the years went on, the self harm got better. I am thirteen years old now. I do not hurt myself anymore, but I still have memories and scars that leave me to remember what my life was like in the past. I, myself, now struggle with overthinking. I am always thinking "Am I good enough?". "Do people even like me?". I question myself all the time, hoping that I am enough for other people, but I need to start asking myself. Am I enough for me? Many of us need to remind ourselves that we are enough. We were created to be different, in a unique way. If all of us people in the world were alike, would it be the same?

Furthermore, to help reduce the amount of people who struggle with mental health I could make sure that I am saying positive words to people. Making sure our word vocabulary is kind is a step we could take. Saying positive things to other citizens can help improve their mood, day, and maybe even their life. Imagine you are someone who is struggling with mental health. Someone gives you a small compliment about how they think your outfit is cute. That small compliment could brighten their day. Negative words can really leave an impact on individuals, and can lead to a mental illness. Another thing we could do to help reduce the amount of people who struggle with mental health, is to let people who are struggling know they're not alone. Be there for that person. Talk to them. Have empathy and try to understand what they are going through. Talking with someone who is struggling could help them. Letting someone know that they're not alone is important. Everyone can help.

Briefly, to conclude, mental health issues can be caused by childhood trauma, overthinking, discrimination and many other things. Having poor mental health has affected many people that I care about. I sometimes struggle with mental health, and I would say that it does affect the way your life proceeds from day to day. I hope that people who struggle with mental health can find a way to have joy and peace in their life.



## ESSAY 9

# BELLA SEEVERS

Zanesville Middle School

### Body image is a delicate disgrace

Did you know that 61% of adults feel negative about their bodies? 66% of children also feel negative about their bodies due to their figures. I, as a student, feel very displeased with my body figure. Body images can bring down self confidence, change the way you eat, and it can ruin you and try to make you someone you're not.

Youth violence is mainly caused by people. You wished you looked like them, or they make you grow insecure. As a young girl, I've always wanted to fit in. I want to be like others, have a boyfriend, have a nice body, and even be popular. I wanna be pretty, like some of the girls in my grade. Seeing them, and seeing myself, makes me sick. I look in the mirror everyday, and wonder why. Why do I have to look like this? Why do I feel this type of way? Why did this happen to me? It makes me want to cry and just never stop. I'd dream to look like them. Boys also hurt me, as if I don't matter at all. As I've grown older, I've realized, all boys do is hurt you. They make you feel worthless, like an object with no life, no meaning, no nothing. They take advantage of you, maybe even use you to get popularity. Little do people understand that there are people out in this miserable world that hate themselves. They want to just end it all, they want to just give up.

I've always wanted attention, but from certain people, but most of the time, boys. I've tried so many things, but nothing ever worked out. I'd watch videos daily, trying

to understand how to be pretty. I'd starve myself, trying to lose the weight I hardly had. I'd sit with the popular girls, hoping they'd like me, even if I got ignored. I'd cry, wishing I was as pretty as them. I basically look up to them like they're my idols. I wish I could be a different person. Sometimes people ask, "Why do you look so sad?" when all I try to do is keep a smile on my face, even if I'm going through the worst time of my life.

Even though I've never had self love, or confidence, others should. If I ever notice something wrong, I'll always be available. Just to talk, make them appreciate themselves, or simply just give them a hug. Nobody knows what people go through until they take a step in their shoes. People struggle, and the others that make people feel bad about themselves, do not deserve nothing. Even if you think about trying to make yourself someone you're not, try to get some help. Even if you don't want it, it might save your life.

Continuing to be silent about something serious isn't okay. We are here to listen, no matter what you're going through. Seeing people struggle is a very painful thing to witness. Maybe people don't understand the battles you're going through, or what you've gone through, but people will listen. Even if you're embarrassed, or shy, or angry, or any other emotion in this world, just remember that people are here to listen. "We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't." — Audre Lorde.



## ESSAY 10

# ARIYAH SULLENS

Zanesville Middle School

*“Children of addicted parents often grow up too fast and carry burdens they shouldn’t bear.” — Unknown*

Drug abuse doesn’t only affect you but your child too. 85% of the prison’s population is filled with people who have or had a drug abuse problem. Children of drug abusers are most likely to grow up having a hard time trusting people. The separation of a child and their parent could lead to mental health issues and/or aggressive behavior.

Most of my life so far, if I add up all the times that I’ve seen my mom it’ll add up to about 5 to 6 years, and I’m 14. I’ve had to tell my little brother lies about where my mom was. I had to learn how to comfort myself during events of mental illness that were passed down from her. I’ve had to get toys and handcraft things to keep my hands busy so that I can sit still, which comes from my ADHD or my Tremors (a neurological issue where your brain doesn’t know what to tell your body to do, so you shake instead, often caused by drug use during pregnancy or during breastfeeding). I recently had a conversation with my mom and she said that once she gets out of jail she wants to turn her life around, not only for her, but also because my siblings and we don’t have our dads in our lives. The household that we’ve grown up in is mentally and physically abusive and she doesn’t want us to feel like we are not loved. My great grandma is bedridden and barely eats. Any day my great grandma could get extremely sick and, since she signed the do-not resuscitate papers, if it were to be so bad that she started dying we couldn’t help her and my mom would be in jail the whole time without

being able to hug her one last time or being able to talk to her at all.

I feel like the absence of our mother and the way that our supposed “father figure” handles things, my older brother grew up without someone to tell him how to act (not in a “he runs around the store like he has no sense” kind of way, more of a temper kind of way). Whenever my brother tells me stories from when he was in school, it always ends with him talking back, fighting someone, or being expelled or suspended from school. Something me and my siblings were taught was never throw the first punch and my brother always followed that rule physically and verbally, but when you hit him he’s going to hit harder. That’s why he’s been expelled and suspended multiple times.

The best thing I can do at the moment is encourage my mom to stay off drugs so she can witness everything like birthdays, concerts, games etc., but the number one thing I can do later on in life is to share my story and my mom’s story to encourage people to stay off drugs so they can spend time with family and actually live life. I could also make sure that my kids in the future can actually be kids.

Drug abuse not only affects you but your children. Why spend time in prison instead of spending time with your kids? Kids need someone to look up to, so try your best to be that person. The only thing that should affect your children is the good morals seen on a day-to-day basis, like someone picking up trash off of the side of the road or helping the elderly cross the road.







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