

## **Jessica McNealy**

Art has always been a means of coping for me. If I was depressed or anxious, I would draw in my sketchbook, and they were never anything thematically specific. It was the act of doing it that was important to me, if I kept doing it, a part of me would feel calm eventually.

When I was a kid, I was diagnosed with Central Auditory Processing Disorder, someone could say something sincere to me and I could misunderstand it as sarcasm. Gradually as I got older, my mental health started to become worse. I started to show symptoms of Anxiety when I got into middle school, especially when social situations started to become a more prominent part of my life. More recently, I've been having intrusive thoughts and Anxiety Induced Sleep Paralysis.

My mom tried to get disability aid for me, but she was always rejected, even though I showed symptoms. Education for me was always a struggle, to the point where I hyper fixated on schoolwork in High School, only to be told that I would never be employable or have a good career because of my mental health.

It's baffling how there are people who mock you for something you were born into. There are establishments whose purpose is to help people like me, yet it always seems to be about how much money you have rather than what they can do to help you. I even tried prescribed meds to help me with my mental health, but it only made me feel worse.

I basically handle my mental health by myself with encouragement from my mom. I struggled with what theme I wanted to do for the Exhibition, but they all felt too vague. However, based on my own experiences with mental health issues, I feel I can bring awareness to people who don't fully understand the trials and tribulations that people with mental health issues go through.