Editor’s Note

The World in Me is a compilation of original poetry written by young people ages 8 - 17 who stayed with their families in housing at Solid Ground’s Broadview Emergency Shelter & Transitional Housing for women and children. The young authors in this book are not identified by their real names, and some details have been changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of our authors and their families.

With the help of Broadview Children’s Advocates and the Pongo Poetry Project, they found their voices. Over the past few months, they have laughed, cried and bonded over shared experiences while bravely speaking their truth. In this chapbook, they courageously shared how they make sense of their world amidst the confusion, trauma and instability they’ve experienced, and in turn created language for their pain and perseverance. In the words of one young poet, “This writing experience has really shown me who I truly am!” Oftentimes in our society, we don’t listen to kids or value what they have to say, but we have so much to learn from them. Thank you to all the writing mentors, the support from Pongo Poetry Project, and to all of the young people that shared their stories.

A note from Pongo Poetry Project

The Pongo Poetry Project is proud to have worked with the staff at Broadview to support this poetry project. Pongo believes that personal writing can help people understand their feelings, find their voices, and articulate their life challenges and best hopes. We are inspired by people who write from the heart. Pongo teaches our methods through a book, training and consultations. Please visit our website for poetry and free writing activities: www.pongoteenwriting.org.
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Bridge from Fear to Hope
A poem by Alaska, age 11

I hope the end of every year
Will be followed by happiness

I hope the weakest dog will find a family
Of five people
And one more dog, so the dog isn’t lonely
The second dog is big, very fluffy
Playful
They become really good friends

I hope the fiercest storms bring rainbows
To part the storm:
A never-ending rainbow

I hope every empty room will eventually have
A lamp that can brighten
A lamp with flowers on it

I hope gunfire in the distance is just thunder
Striking the tree
An evergreen tree
An evergreen tree that is 24 years old

I hope when life passes there is a new life for me to call home
The first thing I would do in a new life is get a dog
A Pomeranian
Named Pom-Pom
I hope the angriest person in me will learn to find calmness
Calm like a white butterfly
In a sea of bees

I hope the loneliest person in me will discover a friend
Imaginary or real
It doesn’t matter

I hope the most lighthearted person in me will find some structure
Structure like a sturdy bridge
From fear to hope

I hope I will someday be able to walk that bridge
I would not look down
I would look straight forward
I might even bring my dog
Lemon Flavored Noodles
A poem by Tiffany, age 8

You see that I have a big family
You think my siblings are disgusting
And that we’re weird cuz my mom and dad are separated.

You see that I am quiet when you point and stare,
My silence is begging you to stop staring
But you don’t know me.

You would know me if...
You knew how hard it was to be pointed out like homeless people
Or if you knew how I feel hurt sometimes, like a caged elephant or giraffe
Or if you knew how my sister and I help each other do our hair
It takes 4 hours and hurts so bad
Or how my sister and I gather our 4 siblings when they misbehave at the store.

You see that I am not what you think
You see that I don’t point at you the way you point at me
But you don’t know me.

You would know me if...
You knew how I color butterflies like I’m a famous artist
You knew how I cook noodles with lemon flavor for my whole family and
I’m only 8 years old.
I Am Old & New
A poem by Gohan, age 10

I feel old when I can’t run super-duper fast cuz I’m tired
I’m always tired cuz I have to wake up so early for school
I feel new when I’m at a new school
I’m so shy until school gets out
I feel old when my problems are like only having one birthday a year
I wish you could have 3 million birthdays a year
I feel new when everybody knocks on my door to see me
I feel old when I’m at the same school for 3 years
I feel new when I meet celebrities like Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, Kim Kardashian, and Jennifer Lopez when I sneak into Hollywood
To be new is impossible when my brothers punch me
To be new is possible when I can erase everyone’s mind
And I can win something like be president
When I’m president I will put Donald Trump in a straightjacket and send him to Mars and make him explode
Then I’d give all the kids and moms a $30 discount to any store
I’d be the best president
Standing in the Dust
_A poem by Alaska, age 11_

Dear Dad,

I just thought you should know what I’m doing now.
I am an energetic person who spends lots of time hanging with friends.
When we lived with you, my friends would all have sleepovers and when I asked if I could go
You would yell “leave me alone!” and would never let me make friends.
You used to tell me I wasn’t worth your time.

I just thought you should know how I’m feeling.
I feel so much hatred towards you
Because you left us standing in the dust.
You were supposed to be a good dad and you weren’t.
We would still be in our house if it wasn’t for you.
The shelter is dumpy.
I miss the reading nook in my old room, the trees behind our house.
Behind the shelter there’s only concrete and drunk people.

I just thought you should know what I’ve been through.
Since the last time I saw you, I have changed so much.
I’m not in constant fear all day,
I don’t have to pretend to be someone I’m not since we left you.

I’m so confident without you in my life.

The time that I moved to the shelter was especially important to me.
I don’t have to see you or live in a crappy hotel.
I’ve made friends that are like sisters to me now.
I don’t have to worry about you hurting my brother anymore,
Which is one less thing on my list of things to worry about.

I just thought you should know what I wish for the future.
I hope that you go to jail for doing this to my family.
For hurting my brother,
Yelling at us,
For being a horrible father.

I just thought you should know what I don’t miss about you.
I am glad I don’t have to worry about you yelling at me anymore,
Or about my mom still being married to you.

I just thought you should know what I miss a lot.
I miss the way we used to get Sunday breakfast,
Yummy pancakes at IHOP.
Back then we had a lot of money, and I could get things I wanted,
Not just things I needed.
My aunt even had to run over my phone cuz you put a tracking device in it.
You’re a butt face.

I just thought you should know that I’m finally happy.
**Home to Me**  
*A poem by Jamal, age 7*

When I think of home, I see my mom  
with her long, blackish-red hair in a bun.

When I think of home, I hear glass breaking sometimes.

When I think of home, I smell my cats, Rambo and Rex,  
and their litterbox.

When I think of home, I taste Hot Takis.

When I think of home, I touch my collectibles  
like Kyla, Chucky, Jason, Michael Myers, and Freddy.

When I think of home, I feel safe  
because my mom doesn’t buy creepy dolls.

When I think of home, I feel video game-us.
If God Were Looking at My Life

A poem by Alaska, age 11

If God were looking at my life
He’d guess why I’m living here in an old dumpy shelter that can change before your eyes.

He’d understand that I’m okay.
He’d know the way things had gone for me –
They’ve gone uphill and downhill like a Metro bus in Seattle. Up and down.

He’d remember how things went when I was very little, like when I’d get a vanilla-chocolate swirl ice cream. My dad and I would be sitting together on the back of his truck and the sun would be setting.

He’d know that I was very energetic. When I was two, I’d sing a good morning song to everything I could see, “Good morning mom. Good morning dad. Good morning stuffed animals.”

He’d know I’m trying to change certain things, like my future and a little bit of my past.

He’d know how hard it is to change because sometimes you can’t accept things like change.

He’d want me to understand that life is a bumpy ride. Life is as bumpy as driving up a mountain in a red Jeep. You know that red is a lucky color and you need luck to get up that mountain.

If God opened a new door for me, it would lead me to a new home.

Then I could start over with my life.
How to Live
A poem by Jennifer, age 11

Eat spicy fried chicken
Because it will improve your taste buds
Dance like Zendaya
Because it will improve your strength
She dances like she’s free
And when I dance I’m free too

Laugh like little kids are tickling your feet
Laughing a lot will cause you to smile
My mom said smiling will make you look beautiful

Talk with honesty, if you don’t you’re letting people know you don’t respect them
Look them in the eye and speak truth to them
 Seriously listen, listen like you mean it,
So people know you don’t take them for granted
Be silent so you can clear your mind
I do that when I’m upset about not doing something right and my mom yells at me for it
So I go breathe in my bed, after that I’m as calm as a koala
Being silent will help you deal with life
Life can be a hard game
First thing when you wake up, breathe to prepare yourself for the day’s unknowns
Because it will help you through hard times
Like when my mom left home without telling my dad
I breathed through it
I knew she didn’t want to be a slave the rest of her life,
And wanted to keep us safe
I breathed through that

Enjoy the good times when they’re there
You never know when things will change

When you’ve had a bad day, you can always think about the time when the whole neighborhood came to your first birthday party
And you were smiling big with your two front teeth.
Why Do Dads Lie
_A poem by June, age 9_

Why do dads have to lie?
Do they just want us to believe what they are saying?
Why do dads have to make kids cry?
Let me tell you my story
Whenever I go to my dad to visit him
He talks about my mom
And he will cry,
then make us cry,
And he puts lies in our mind
I felt sad after this
Why do dads have to make us believe them?
Do they just want us to believe them?
Dragon Lives
A poem by Sarah, age 8

I think I'm gonna live forever

In my next life I'll probably be a dragon

And then when I die I'll just come back to life as another animal

Like a dinosaur, yeah, a dinosaur!

That would be awesome.

I'd roam freely and probably go live on other planets that are better than this one

And I'd never really die, just become other people or other animals.

Yeah, that's how it works actually.

You didn't know that?
Letter to Mom  
*A poem by Jazmin, age 14*

Dear Mom,

I want to thank you for taking care of me,  
for helping me when I’m struggling.

I tell people you are really beautiful  
because every time I see you, you glow.  
Your eyes sparkle like the stars in the sky.

I remember you holding me at night when I was a baby.  
The last time I cried, I was in our car because I fell down  
and scratched my knee.  
But I knew to be strong because you were strong when you caught me.  
We’ve always wanted a dog that’s a German Shepherd.  
You’ve always wanted to be happy, every time I’m sad and angry,  
like the old sky is blowing.

You never stop taking care of me. You just keep going.  
You are warm like the sun,  
healthy like a banana,  
and strong like a superwoman,  
and I’ll always love you every day and night and won’t stop,  
thinking of you every time you’re gone.

Love,  
Jazmin
This Is What You Mean to Me
A poem by Jennifer, age 11, in honor of Mom

In my ocean, you were a dolphin
Because you made me jump with joy, you kept me afloat
But I doubted you would keep me happy all the time

In my grassy field, you were a flower
Because you were delicate
I admired your beauty

In my galaxy, you were a planet with moons
Because you kept our family in your orbit
I want to be just like you
I wondered how I can be like you

In my heart
You were the beat
Because you kept me alive
I will always remember you
But I will always regret why I was a bad child
I will always dream about being like you
And this is what you mean to me.
Red Flags, Bees & Robins
A poem by Alaska, age 11

Anger is a bull with a red flag held in front of my face taunting me, weakening me

Anger is a swarm of bees whose nest just got chopped off their tree

Anger is a baby robin who just can’t find out why they can’t fly

   Angry because no one will listen
   Angry because no one will do the right thing
   Angry because they just won’t quit

Maybe anger won’t always attack

Maybe there is a new day for me when the man holding the red flag will just drop it

Maybe the bees will find a new nest

Maybe the robin will finally learn how to fly
Start the World Again
A poem by Jennifer, age 11

When I was young I used to wish to be a princess
Today I wish the world would be a better place to live
Every day I wish people would understand other people
My wish is the color of purple
It is the sound of elephants stampeding through some sand
My wish feels like an empty stomach
My wish is always in my head
My wish is never going to happen
My wish is to start the world again
Things I’d Like to Understand
A poem by Destiny, age 17

The things I’d like to understand

About fathers
Why do they act so protective?
Why do they use weapons as a joke when it comes to boys?
Why do they treat daughters like little kids?

About mothers
Why do they get super nosy about everything?
Why do they think they’re doing something wrong as a parent
   When we choose to be ourselves?
Why do they cry so much?

About boys
Why do they have to be so confusing?
Why do they do one thing
   But mean another?
Why do they think they can’t show emotions?

About girls
Why do they bash one another?
Why do they date boys who are jerks?
Why do they think they have to look a certain way to be pretty?
About love
Why is it so cliché?
Why do adults think you need to be a certain age to be in love?
Why is it such a big deal
   What gender you love?

About life
Why is life considered a race?
Why do people work so much?
Why are there so many expectations?

About death
Why are there so many crappy ways to die?
Why do people make so many jokes about death?
Why isn’t it talked about?
Patterns
A poem by G, age 12, dedicated to my sister

I feel old when I can’t find something important,
Like when I forget where my phone is

I feel new when I can make good deals with my mom
Like “if we go outside for a little, I’ll let you play videos on my phone”

I feel old when my problems are the same
Like getting evicted all the time, same old problem

I feel new when I learn more about life,
I learned a tremendous amount by observing relationships,
I learned I should always take things slow

I feel old when I’m used for the same things,
Like helping people

I feel new when I have new purposes in life,
Like getting the relationship with my dad back

To be new is impossible when I’m at school
Trying to have as many friends as possible

To be new is possible when I am helping my mom

I will be new when I have a good friendship with everyone.
What If?
A poem by Tiffany, age 8

What if people never died?
What if they died for four days and then came back to life?
What if people never got sick or fat?
They would be healthy all the time
And no matter how much they ate
They’d still be skinny
What if predators weren’t invented?
But all animals are predators
What if people never kill people?
What if guns weren’t invented?
What if schools weren’t invented?
People would just grow up and wouldn’t even know they’re not learning
What if there’s no such thing as foster homes or orphan cages?
Parents would learn to love and take care of their kids
Even if they didn’t want them.
Ten Reasons to Love Me
*A poem by Gohan, age 10*

1) I may not be perfect, but I can punch you.
2) I always wish to be Super Saiyan.
3) I do my best to understand being mad.
4) I can create potions.
5) I want the people around me to feel happy.
6) I hold onto some things forever, like my Xbox 1.
7) I have unusual ideas, like I am smart.
8) If I were an animal, I’d be a cheetah.
9) I have a secret talent – I can slam dunk.
10) I am Goku.
I’m Me
A poem by June, age 9

I am the happy one, who likes to eat chocolate ice cream.
I am the hyper, crazy one who might eat candy and drink coffee.
I am the easy going one, who would never say “No” to nobody.
I am the one with the scars and their secrets.

I am the messed up one, who thinks that it’s always my fault.
I am the helpless one who can’t change my life.
I am the hurt one but much more hurt on the inside.
I am the one with the scars, and I say, “No one talk back or be mean to me.”

I am the strong one, who is determined to change my life.
I am the dreamer, who imagines a different life, imagines a time when
I get to see what happens to me.
I am the childlike one, who remembers when my sister was playing
around with me.
I am the one with the scars, but they are not me,
And one day their meaning will be happy.
You Don’t Know Me
A poem by G, age 12

You see that I’m respectful
You see that I have lots of friends
But you don’t know me

You would know me if…
You knew how hard it was to be homeless
How tired I am of losing housing
It’d just go away
And we’d be back in the hotel, heartbroken

You would know me if…
You knew how I feel anger sometimes
I’m usually the one that brightens people’s day, but I’m really angry
Angry about this lifestyle
Just sitting with my mom with nothing to do,
Suppressed in my room like I’m under a thumb

You see that I am a joyful person with no regrets about my past
You see that I help you a lot
But you don’t know me

You would know me if…
You knew how I got in trouble a lot in my past,
Jumping over fences
And playing with things a child shouldn’t play with

You would know me if you knew
How I felt when I was your friend
I Am

A poem by Alaska, age 11, dedicated to the haters

Today I am 11 years old, I feel young even though I am old and aged

Yesterday I was younger, more lively, like a newborn butterfly

On the street I am anonymous, lonely because no one knows me

In my room I am me, I can be who I want to be, I do what I want to do

(In moderation, my mom has rules)

To my mom I am her Gemini twin, her first born, responsible young woman

To my dad I am worthless, a waste of time, not applicable to his life

My friends think I am energetic, that I laugh too loud,

sometimes like a howling hyena,

other times like a caterpillar, quiet and barely heard

Really I am loud, caring, and a good person

But not everybody sees that, because people judge a lot

From rumors, what I look like, things I did in the past

But I know I am who I am

I look like what I look like

And there’s no changing that

I wouldn’t want to

So don’t try to drag me down, because I’ll just come back up

Like a floaty

When you push it down, it always comes back up
Life’s Backflips  
A poem by June, age 9

I wish I knew how to do a backflip.

I wish life was easier.

I wish I knew a whole different group of friends.

I wish life was easier.

I wish I could remember the days when I was a baby.

I wish seeing my dad for only eight hours was easier.

I wish I had a phone to text my friends with, especially Tianna.

I wish my friends wouldn’t joke around with me because they hurt my feelings.
Courage & Fear
A poem by Alaska, age 11

In my life I’ve known Courage.
We met when I was two:
I had to start walking – my mom and dad were trying to hold and guide me
But I just kept falling down.
Then I met Courage
And it made me stand right back up.
Nowadays, Courage hides under bridges and in ceiling cracks and shadows;
It takes a while to find,
But when you do, it will embrace you warmly.

In my life I’ve known Fear.
We met when I was four:
When I thought there were monsters under my bed.
Big
Scary
Monsters.
These days, Fear is knocking at my door.
Fear finds me when I think of a bad memory,
When I’m at the wrong place, at the wrong time.

I’ve learned that Courage and Fear are different.
When Courage tells me to keep moving forward,
Fear says there might be dangerous things out there.
Fear’s voice is shaky, afraid of his own shadow.
Courage’s voice is powerful – her voice is strong enough to defy the Universe.
Usually I listen to Courage,
And wish that Courage and Fear could get along,
Not fight over who I will choose.
I wish that Courage and Fear would just shut up,
So that I can think for myself.
Find my own path,
Afraid or not afraid.
I will go anyways.
Dear World,

* I just thought you should know what I’m doing now.*
I am a strong person
  - A disciplined person
  - A fun person
Who spends a lot of time hanging out, watching TV, and going places –
  going shopping, going new places.

* I just thought you should know how I’m feeling.*
  - I am nervous
  - I am unhappy
  - I am confused
    - Confused about everything, about this place, about these buildings
Because … life.

* I just thought you should know what I’ve been through.*
In the last month, I have changed so much.
Change that is black.
Black that is depressing.
Change that hurts like fire.
What happened is this:
  - The first thing was moving to a new place.
  - The second thing was experiencing change.
    - And the third, the third thing was understanding.
Moving, changing, understanding.
I just thought you should know what I wish for the future.
I hope for a better future.
The future looks like this:
    Better education – a better school
    A house – I really want a house
Those two things will make me a better person.

I just thought you should know
That I have grown from who I used to be.
Grown like a cheetah.
    Growing fast
    Changing fast
    Understanding fast.
And that is what I want you to know.
Lies Like That
A poem by Tiffany, age 8

When I think of my home I see my mom taking care of me
When I think of my home I hear my dad snoring
When I think of my home I smell my mom’s sandwiches
When I think of home I taste my mom’s noodles
When I think of home I touch my bed of clouds
When I think of home I feel safe with my mom and in danger with my dad
When I think of home I feel safe with my mom because my dad tells lies and says bad things about my mom
My mom never lies like that.
Running
*A poem by Malikah, age 12*

When I was really little, I ran away from home and I was mad and really wanted to leave.
I was afraid of getting in trouble.
At the time, I ran toward my favorite hiding place, a swimming pool.
I dreamed about being famous and I wish Gohan and Geo was with me being famous.

When I got a little older, I ran away from my grandma’s house to my auntie’s house when my grandma was asleep.
When I ran, I expected that my grandma was worried.
She called the police to search for me to bring me back to her house.
At the time, I ran toward my friend’s and my favorite restaurant.
When I ran, I hoped for my mom would come and pick me up.

Today when I run, I run away from nothing.
More than anything I wish I could run away from my life.
Today when I run, I run toward my mom.
More than anything I wish I could run enough to be a football star.
Words of Wisdom
A poem by G, age 12

Dance calm and steady so girls won’t think you’re doing too much

You could say I’m a comedian among my friends
We tell jokes about boy stuff, you wouldn’t understand

I talk with friends about their day or what’s going on in our families
My old friends in Kent, I could talk to them about anything
My new friends here don’t have time for all that,
Too busy on social media
I think social media makes you braindead,
Only caring about popularity and looks
I care about making people happy and respect, that’s it

Be silent so you can learn
When no one’s around for me to talk to
I Youtube math skills and games, silent and learning

First thing when you wake up, take a shower
It will wake you up so you don’t fall asleep in class like me

In the Winter of your life, make sure you have a good heart
When me and my mom were homeless people helped us
Because we gave respect to them and they gave respect back to us

In the Spring of your life, make sure you remember life’s steps
How did you get here?
How did you treat everything and everyone to get where you are?
In the Summer of your life, make sure you never forget where you came from

In the Autumn of your life, make sure you cherish having your whole family around, don’t take that for granted

When I have a bad day, I can always think about the time when I was ten and people accepted who I was
Now people don’t accept my jokes or who I am

I still have these memories though
When I was ten I was right at home at my school
Right at home with my family
Right at home with my Italian cousins, eating and laughing
The scent of real wine and good cheese
We don’t see them anymore.

I still have these memories though
They keep me warm through the Winter.