



Editorial

COVID9TEEN Virtues: Help, Hope, and Holding Space



For the second year in a row, JAH Intersections issued a call for submissions for a themed contest open to young people and those who work with, parent, or serve young people in any way [1]. This year's theme was COVID9TEEN, a solicitation for creative work exploring growth and change during the pandemic's extraordinary stressors and unprecedented circumstances. We received nearly 20 submissions from around the world, with 14 finalists and three winners. The winners' work was showcased in March at the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine annual meeting. We are extremely honored to publish the winners in this issue of JAH.

Andile Dube, a young artist from Gwanda, Zimbabwe, was this year's first-place winner. As he described to audiences at Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, amid all his growth during the pandemic, he learned that "helping others is the most important thing you can do in life." This was the inspiration to his drawing, "A Helping Hand," a black and white depiction of two outstretched hands exchanging a mask [2]. It captures the simultaneous simplicity and depth of perhaps one of the most repetitive acts we have done for each other countless times over the past 2 years and one that communicates our innate concern for and desire to protect each other.

Tied for second place, Ellie Rose Mattoon, a college student from Austin, Texas, writes about the dizzying instability and unpredictability of being a young adult at the onset of COVID. In an apt and keen narrative, "Thoughts from a Life in Limbo" [3], she explores the truly hellish qualities of Limbo, a concept first depicted in the 14th-century literature, *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, and one which Mattoon suggests is comparable to how many teens and young adults experienced the earlier months of the pandemic—devoid of hope and progress. Mattoon crafted the narrative over a year and a half, pulling in the raw feelings of devastation and gloom in the early days of COVID and rallying with a realization that transition to young adulthood does not have to be a rigid set of timelines and accomplishments by which we often define it in America. She celebrates the successes she has witnessed, however, glacial their pace may seem, among young people during the pandemic—the ability to help family and community members in need, gaining the right to vote for and enact change and developing self-compassion. What initially

seemed like the entrance to hell emerged as a version of purgatory—a refocused appreciation of personal growth and hope for change.

Our other second-place winner, Caryn Coyle, is a family nurse practitioner in Boston, Massachusetts, where she works with youth in the juvenile justice system. Coyle's poem, "Imprisoned: Quarantine in Juvenile Detention" [4], is a sobering reflection on the double isolation imposed on youth in detention centers during COVID. Already removed from mainstream socialization and support structures, youth in detention centers experienced even starker isolation when asked to quarantine after COVID exposures. Coyle writes too about the weight of being the "agent of this double prison"—a feeling not unbeknownst to other health care workers in the pandemic who have held up iPads in lieu of families at the bedside and denied visitors in clinics, intensive care units, and detention centers. In these moments of darkness, she writes about the power of listening, empathy, and compassion and how she hopes these are enough to at least offset or begin to mitigate the emotional suffering incurred among our youth in multiple layers of quarantine.

Several other finalists were also accepted for publication in JAH and will appear in issues throughout the coming year. It is an inspiring collection of work that includes photography, graphic art, poetry, and personal narrative and puts forward diverse perspectives about how young people have and continue to experience the world in challenging times. It is clear to us that young people and those around them are a substantial current of the momentum carrying our communities through the pandemic—they value helping others, they do not let others suffer alone, and they thirst for change and progress. We are profoundly lucky to work with, educate, learn from, and serve them.

The full JAH Intersection Collection can be found at www.jahonline.org/intersectioncollection. We look forward to general JAH Intersection submissions throughout the year and will announce our next themed competition in the coming months.

We would also like to acknowledge our JAH Intersection Selection Committee, listed below, for their creative energy, brilliant editing skills, and diversity of talents that help support this section of our journal.

See Related Articles on p.998, 999, 1000

Conflicts of interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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References

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- [2] [Mavimba TM. A helping hand. J Adolesc Health 2022;70:998.](#)
- [3] [Mattoon ER. Thoughts from a life in limbo. J Adolesc Health 2022;70:1000–1.](#)
- [4] [Coyle CL. Imprisoned: Quarantine in juvenile detention. J Adolesc Health 2022;70:999.](#)