

Youth Speak

A Vaping Prevention Photovoice Project



Drug Free Northern Michigan
Coalition Alliance



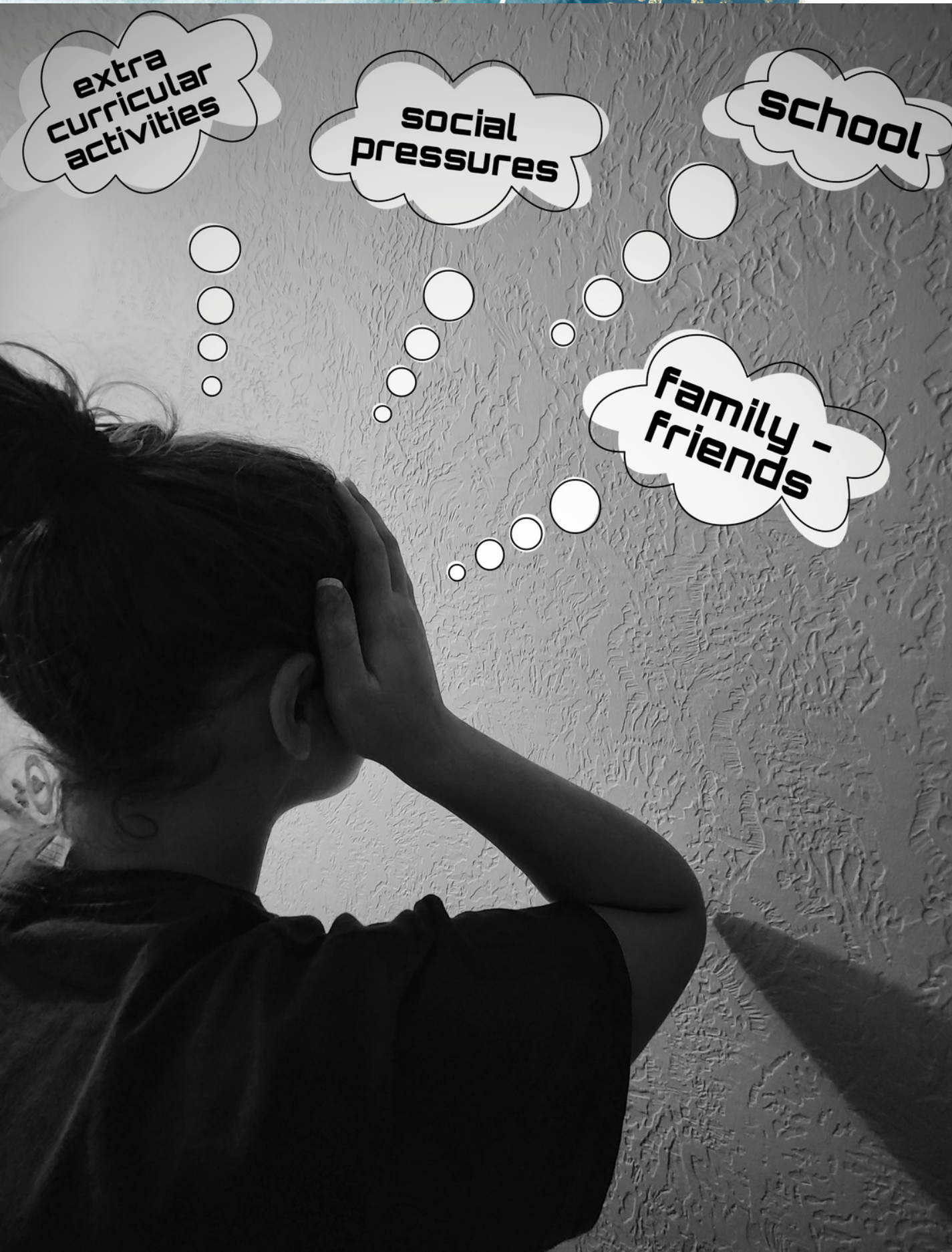
When teens look at a vape they see an escape. An escape that is dangerous not just physically but mentally too. But it's addictive. They can't stop. But when they finally look into the mirror they will realize that they can get through life without nicotine. And that is where the change will begin.

-Kylie, Emmet County

What influences teens to start vaping is peer pressure. Kids that start often see the popular kids doing it so they feel obligated to start vaping to be one of the “cool kids”. They often say stuff like, “Hey kid you wanna be cool?”, “Hey come on, it's just one hit, it won't hurt you”, “What are you a little baby and won't be one of the big kids?” That pressure can hurt you not only physically but mentally. When someone you had once looked up to puts you on the spot, you begin to feel out of place. You feel as if that is the only thing that can make you someone people see or like.

-Anonymous, Alpena County





Youth have a lot of stress/pressure in their day-to-day lives. Unlike adults, youth don't have the experience and/or knowledge of how to deal with stress and pressure. A few stresses and pressures of Youth are: extra curricular activities, social pressures, school, and family/friends. Our lives are filled with daily activities such as school work, sports, clubs and all of the fun things youth do. Even though these might sound fun or a way to relieve stress there's also a lot of pressure that comes with them. Pressures of seeing everyone else vape and wanting to try, or seeing their family and friends vaping and wanting to try. Youth relieve their stress by vaping because it relaxes their bodies to calm their mind to not focus on the stress. The pressure of not vaping and/or vaping can be very high especially when it is by their peers.

-Avery, Otsego County



On the outside it's just a bathroom door, but what's on the other side is a world that could test your friendships. Eventually you will be faced with the decision to submit to the pressure to vape or stand your ground and refuse.

-Oliva, Montmorency County



"Isabelle, it's just a vape. Don't worry I'll be fine. It's not like I do it all the time." "Oh no, I'm not addicted." "I'm going through stuff, I need this." "You're not gonna snitch are you?" "You got a vape?" "I miss my vape."

"Ugh, I don't have enough money to pay them back for the vape." "I don't have enough money to buy a vape." "I need a hit." "What flavor you got?... Can I try?" "It makes me happy."

"It reduces my stress." "Everyone else is doing it, why can't I?" "They vape." "What!? oh no I thought they didn't, oh well."

"I have a dealer." "My dealer is a friends parent." "Those kids? oh yeah they party and vape and do all kinds of stuff." "You can't tell anyone I do this "

These are all words spoken from our teenagers today. From overheard to spoken directly towards. These should not be the "norms" of our time. All of these lies are put into our heads, making youths grow up to believe vaping helps with stress, when in reality, it's all fake. it's all artificial. Vaping is not a way to "cope" with life or to "cope" with your internal voice. Vaping doesn't save your feelings or yourself. Vaping needs to stop being so easy to get, so easy to buy, and so easy to hide. Vaping needs to stop.

-Isabelle, Otsego County



When you vape you lose friends, family and you lose yourself. Vaping addiction can cause you to stop thinking the only thing that will come to mind is “where is my vape” or “when can I take another hit”. Vaping will make you go crazy the worse it gets the more things you’ll stop doing. Vaping addictions can lead to mental illnesses, decreased hygiene, and you can also stop caring about school. When your mind is so focused on the addiction your grades begin to drop you can stop caring about hygiene. A lot of the time if you keep the addiction it can be almost impossible to get rid of when an adult. Teenagers can get vapes very easily from parents, siblings, and friends at school.

Vaping is a trend that needs to stop; most teenagers start vaping because they think it’s cool and also their other friends are doing it. When the trend starts to gain more and more people of younger ages that’s where the problem starts. When teenagers see their celebrity idols vaping they can start to do it too. -Anonymous



This is around the amount of money that is spent each month on vapes that ruin your lungs. People are using money that could be going towards their education or other important things to ruin their lungs.

-Abby, Iosco County



What influences youth to start vaping? A lot of youth start to vape because friends are doing and you wanna look cool in front of your friends right? Another reason is all the flavors, you can get bubblegum, rainbow sherbert, blueberry, strawberry, etc you can get a vape in almost any flavor you could imagine. Another reason is how they look, a lot of vapes today have cool colors or cool lights that can really draw kids in. Another reason is that parents are always smoking and telling us not to do it, kids follows by example and when the parent isn't leading a good example. -

Anonymous



“Hmm I wonder what happens if I hit it?”
“Or I need something right now my life is turned upside down i just need something to help me calm down”
“This feels weird but not in a bad way”
“I like how it taste”
“Everybody else is doing it whats the worst that could happen it's not like im going to get addicted to it “
“Ugh mine died could I hit yours really quick”
“Could you get me one? I got the money.”
- Anonymous



I never thought it'd get this bad. At first, it was nothing I couldn't handle. It was nothing but some butterflies before a test, it was nothing but feeling like throwing up whenever I thought of talking to someone new, it was nothing but getting jittery whenever I thought about school, it was nothing but overthinking whenever I picked up the negative changes in someone's facial expression. It was nothing. I could deal with it. It was. No. Big. Deal.

At least, that's what my pride whispered into my ear in the middle of the night when I'd wake up from nightmares that shook my soul, at least that's what my mind had the gall to murmur when I collapsed in the school hallway when I was late to math because the very idea of eyes being on me as I walked into that room made me only want to die instead, at least that's what my bloody heart whispered when I would stretch out a hand for help, claiming I was nothing but an attention seeker.

I had watched other people do it. I knew where to get them. There was literally a smoke shop right in my town and, the last time I checked, one of the employees would sell them to my friends under the counter for half the price as long as they promised to be loyal customers when they were “legal.” I tried not to self diagnose myself. Anxiety, Google, random mental health Tik Tokers, and the people that saw me bounce my leg up and down like a horse ready to run a race that was never meant for him in the first place, said. Anxiety just seemed like such a dirty word. A word that should be meant for people who could afford to take the meds. People who deserved the sympathy of others. And, now, two years of buying something that felt like nothing but a hobby, I looked that same employee of that same smoke shop in the eye as I stretched out my grubby ten and five dollar bills into his bent fingers, already awaiting for my payment with an eager grin. His teeth were a sickly yellow. I tried not to acknowledge what obviously made them like that. “There you are. Five vanillas, my friend.” His smile seemed to grow wide enough to take up most of his small face. He kind of reminded me of a rodent, with how small his eyes and nose were in comparison to his mouth and eyes. He definitely wouldn’t have won any prizes for attraction. I gingerly took the bag that I had gotten in exchange for the money that I had worked for and waved goodbye as I quietly left the shop. The walk to the park went as fast as it always did. I tried to keep the fact that I was consuming flavored vapor as fast as a vacuum cleaner does with dirt a secret from my mom.

She didn't need to know all the details about what I was spending my money on, doing after school. But, for some reason, I wished she did. It always felt good when I got a hit. It always tasted good, my "anxiety" always lowered, the thoughts in my head quieted down. But, as I was walking, the metal in my lips, the words of a friend seemed to echo through my head I could still perfectly picture the furrow of her brow, her lips pulled taunt into a thin line. Her frustration was obvious. And so was her displeasure at what I had just told her. "You're medicating the symptoms, not the problem."

Since then, I hadn't really taken her words seriously. I mean, after all, she didn't really know what I was going through. But, now as I looked down at my hands, my mind filled with a fog and the 70 dollars worth of vapes in the bag in my hand, I paused. Was there a better way to go about this? A way that could lead me to a better life without

having to take a hit whenever I felt my heart speeding up within my chest?

I ran the numbers in my head: the sheer amount of money I'd spent on something temporary, the many times I'd lied to my mom about where I was going off to, the times my friends have covered for me while I was "using the bathroom".

There had to be a better way to deal with this. But, here I am, stained by my own addiction. My own method of fixing myself. I never thought it'd get this bad. -

Anonymous, Alpena County



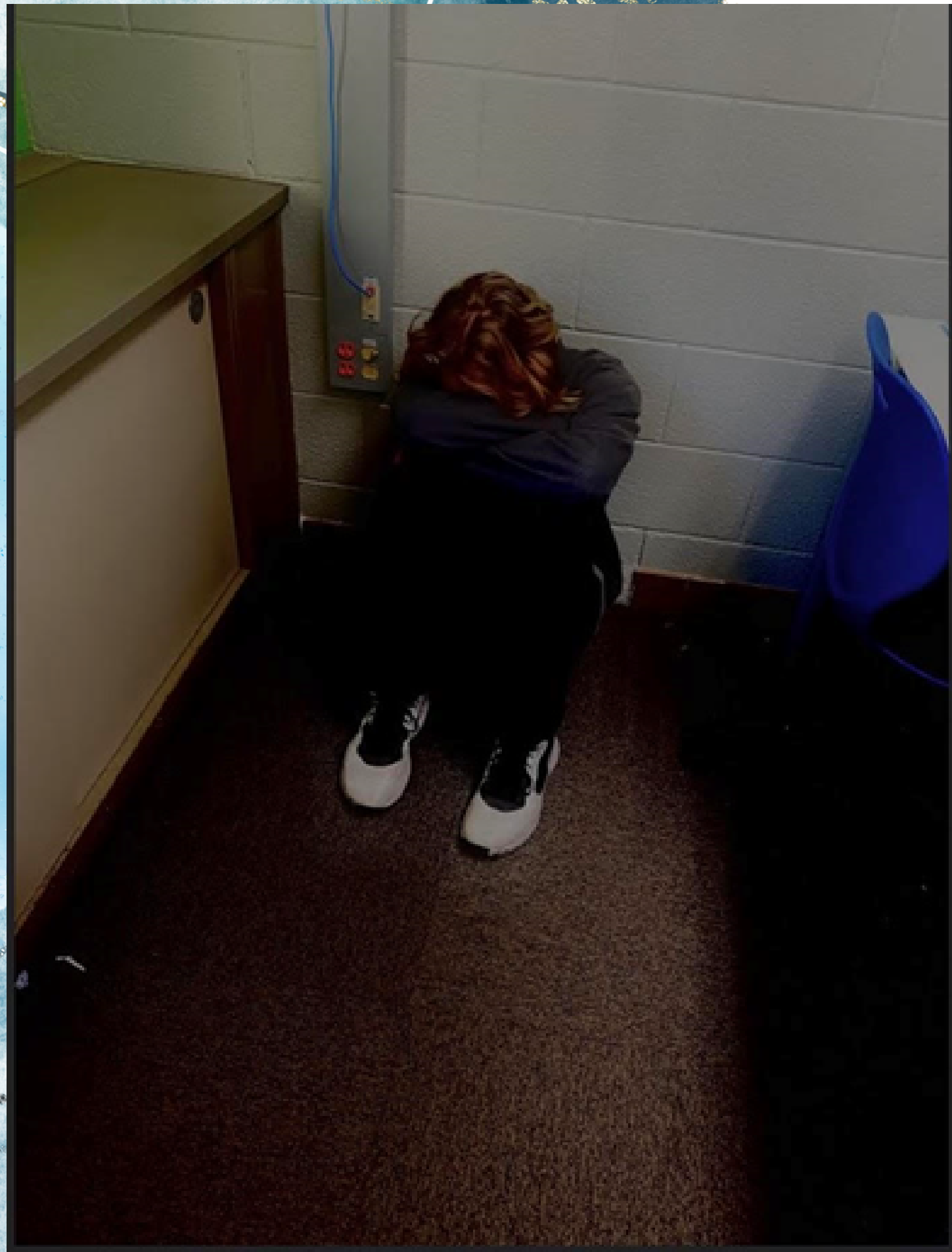
I don't vape because I want to be able to do sports like running. I want to stay healthy and vaping would negatively impact sports and my life. I know vaping would make me struggle with breathing and they would slow me down when I run.

-Anonymous, Benzie County



All kids love crayons! Their colors are attractive. The names of the colors are fun to explore. Vaping is the same. Youth are attracted to the fun of experimenting and trying out the cool flavors. My friends and I enjoyed trying out all the different flavors. Did you know that vapes come in blueberry, apple, cotton candy or spearmint and many more? Those names seem pretty harmless, but before you know it you are addicted to vaping.

-Maddy, Cheboygan County



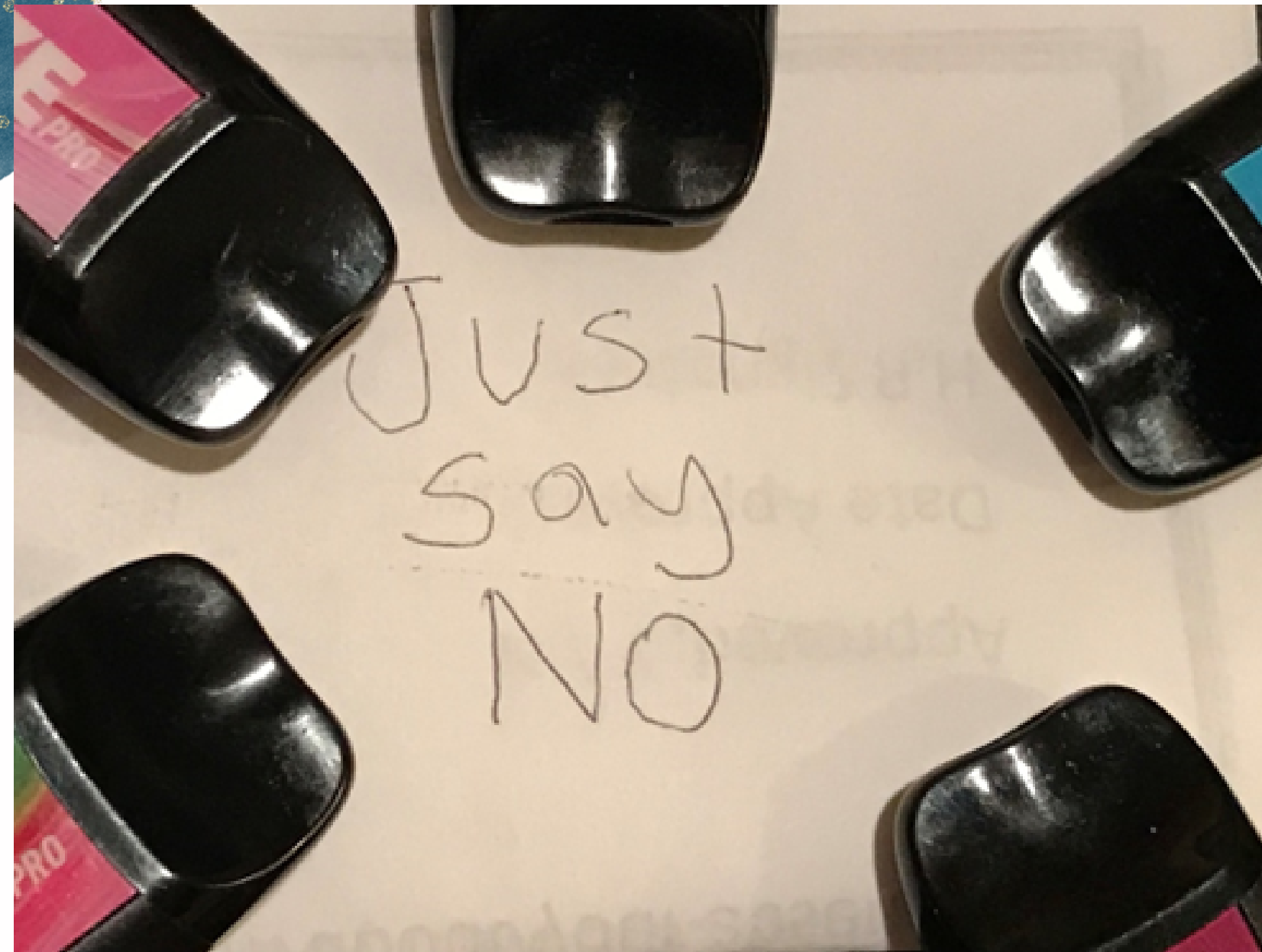
Woah, is that a vape? Cool! It must help my depression and anxiety at least a little bit, right? Well, it did for a few minutes of high from the serotonin of “oh that was cool” but in all reality it made things worse. Vaping only caused more of “the sads”. At first it seems like a good drug, but it turns out its dragging me down more than before. I was addicted to the short high, but then my anxiety got worse because I couldn’t get my hands on it. Or, if I had a vape on me, I was so nervous about getting caught. I would go crazy thinking it was the end of the world.

-Maddy, Cheboygan County



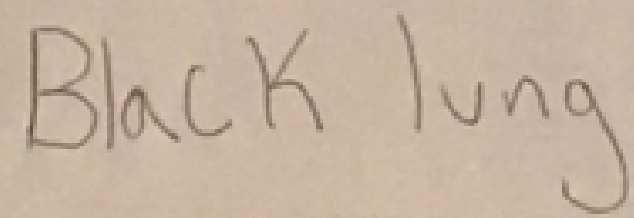
Peer pressure influences youth to vape. It is easy to assume that this pressure only comes from friends, but it can also come from family members. Parents encourage their kids to vape. “It’s safer than cigarettes”, they say; or “You need to calm down, take a hit [from my vape]”. It is not unusual for a parent or older sibling to legally purchase a vape for their kid and then this kid sells a vape to other kids.

-Logan, Cheboygan County



It is hard to say no when so many youths are vaping. Vaping is a huge thing! In my school, I estimate that 8 out of 10 youth vape. At school or other community events, everywhere you look there are people vaping. It seems like a completely normal thing to do.

-Logan, Cheboygan County

A piece of light brown paper with handwritten text in black ink. The text lists health effects: "Black lung", "Tooth Decay", "organ Damage", and "Explosions". The word "ADDICTION" is written in larger, spaced-out letters and is underlined with three horizontal lines. To the left of the paper, several black vape pens are visible, with some having red and blue labels that say "FREEZE PRO".

Black lung

Tooth Decay

organ Damage

Explosions

ADDICTION

The first question I was asked when I shared this photo, “where did you find all those vapes?”. It was easy. I took a short walk around my neighborhood and empty vapes were easy to find laying on the ground. Littering is also an issue with vapes, but I want to talk about all the reasons I listed for not vaping. I used to vape. It was hard to say no to my friends. I liked the buzz it gave me the first time I vaped. Each time I kept doing more and more trying to get back that buzz. When that didn’t work anymore, I moved on to marijuana. It was hard to quit. I was addicted. Now, when I think about vaping, I think about all these bad things and how I need to be smart about my own health.

-Logan, Cheboygan County



I want to share this photo because I am a teen who sees this most days of my week when I shouldn't. I see the effects it has on my friends when I find them vaping. Their entire attitude changes and it affects me cause I hate seeing them like this. They say it improves their mental health, but in reality, they don't see it but it is making it worse cause all vaping is doing is making you numb and when the numbness wears off you still feel the pain.

The main importance of this photo is to spread awareness that teens are vaping in our schools and it isn't doing anything besides causing bad habits.

Most people think vaping isn't bad but they aren't looking at it like I or other teens. This photo shows our community that there are teens vaping and getting addicted when we think they aren't and yes it is in our school. Our schools aren't all safe like we think they are. If you spent a day at my school you would look at it differently like I do every day. They think our school is safe and clean but it's not and it's hard to realize that but it sadly isn't and this affects other teens who don't vape.

It's not helping anyone at all.

-Onika, Emmet County



There is no one monitoring what comes in these doors. It's where it all begins and where it could all be stopped.
-Anonymous, Oscoda County



It may seem cool, but vaping adds up. Vaping is costly and damaging. Vaping isn't worth the financial burden that it can put on a person. Addiction is only growing in this community, and I would like to end that, I have since I was a kid.

-Elizabeth-Rae Kalkaska County



Yep. Believe it or not, there's a 2nd hand pollution for vaping! Say someone is vaping nearby. You think you're gonna get some sweets or whatever but it's just a vape. Just like the toxins release from the fire in this photo. Dang. I wish we could live without vapes but here we are. People exhale their smoke, their breath, their toxins into the air which allow other people to smell that, and that's gross. Not cool guys, really.

-Alan, Cheboygan County



This is a picture of two people in the same stall for the purpose of vaping. In my school, this is a very common occurrence. It affects other students everyday by forcing us to wait for the bathroom for long periods of time. Even when students don't share a stall, kids who are vaping often take a long time before they give other students the chance to use the bathroom. It's gotten to the point where we have a bathroom monitor in the girls restroom, which violates my privacy as I don't vape.

-Bailey, Antrim County