





Be The Change

2025- 2026









Be the Change!

Lynden Sculpture Garden's *Be the Change* was designed to develop the leadership and self-advocacy skills of a cohort of young refugee women and girls through arts-centered programming. From September 2025 through May 2026, the group convened monthly for a three-and-a-half-hour workshop at Lynden, meeting with local women leaders and engaging in hands-on art and writing activities guided by refugee/immigrant artists.

Workshop Co-facilitators: Maryam Durani & Kim Khaira
with assistance from Polly Morris, Executive Director.

We are grateful for the generous support of the HOME Refugee Steering Committee, the Brico Fund, and the Milwaukee Recreation Partnership for the Arts & Humanities.

Be the Change! 2025-2026
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Milwaukee, WI 53217
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Designer: Yuliia Shevtsova

We Must Always Be Learning from Others

After three years with *Be the Change* at the Lynden Sculpture Garden, we have gone through many cycles of artists, speakers and, of course, participants: around 25 young women and girls each year from Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Zambia. They all have inspired us and have pushed us to do better. No session goes by without reflecting on how we need to improve to continue our work in the community, and especially our work with youth—the leaders not of tomorrow, but of today.

The third cohort of Lynden's *Be the Change* was a nine-month workshop with nine regular sessions, two alumnae sessions, and a special celebration of International Women's Day. We touched on a variety of leadership topics, including: intentional communication, storytelling, women's empowerment, business, education, culinary arts. We explored self-portraiture using collage and by making paper dolls; we produced comic books and papier-mâché sculptural work; we designed personal logos, danced, and took advantage of the natural environment at Lynden by making botanical prints.

No matter the artwork or topic at hand, every single person in the room had a migration journey to reflect on. Most often, the story is one that speaks of forced displacement (which our co-facilitator Maryam has experienced), and in a few cases it is about self-migration (or "self-misplacement," as co-facilitator Kim refers to it). We all have also known of people dear to us, close friends and family members, including refugee artists and leaders, who have had to leave home against their will.

In our embroidery workshop with Hmong educator **Faith Herr**, Maryam heard the Afghan girls telling personal stories and sharing cultural experiences that happened "back home." They recalled their grandmothers practicing embroidery and sewing in a collective setting at each other's homes.

Kierston Ghaznavi's paper doll—or, as many participants called it, puppet-making—session became a reflection on self as participants chose clothing, colors, and designs for what were primarily self-portraits. (Mentor Madina Iqbalzada from Afghanistan was the only one who chose to depict a male character.) Some participants incorporated personal symbols of their past identities in their countries of origin, while others revealed unique internal wishes or took the opportunity to convey important messages to the outside world.

Nurhayati Ali from the Rohingya Maiyafuìnor Collaborative Network described the collaborative nature of the global organizing work amongst young Rohingya women all over the world. She explained that they called for women's and girls' rights across the board while urging their fellow Rohingya people to sustain their culture in the face of displacement. Mentor Kisanet Yosief pondered out loud about the issues that specifically affected Rohingya women and girls, comparing them to her own experiences as a young Eritrean woman.

Dr. Chia Youyee Vang shared her personal experiences as a child—experiences which led her, years later, to pursue an academic career. We saw everyone engaged with her talk, asking the prolific author: "Which one was your favorite published book?" and "What are the steps to achieving what you have achieved?" and "How did you start writing

your book? How did you go about it? Was it challenging?" Later, one of the participants echoed another version of these questions to Maryam: "Why haven't you written your book yet?" In a generation that mostly tells us that they do not read books, we know that this resonates with their struggle against digital distractions, and it resonates with the girls who secretly read books at home when no one is watching or telling them what, or even how, to read.

As we encourage our participants, they encourage us. We believe that working together, across generations of migrant and refugee women and girls, is key. Both of us have worked with youth, and girls, from our respective countries, Afghanistan and Malaysia, and we are no strangers to the power, which we learned first-hand, of having others lead leaders. When we hear stories, ideas, laughter, and even sadness, when we hear topics raised beyond the confines of the workshop sessions, it inspires us to do better, to listen to others, and to let go of control.

When we contemplated offering a special International Women's Day celebration session—a day that is widely celebrated in our home countries and in non-governmental work settings overseas—we wanted the girls to do the planning. We asked the group what they wanted to do, what they'd like to eat, and how they wanted to spend their time together.

"I just want to enjoy and relax today," said some, while others planned activities weeks in advance, reminding everyone in our WhatsApp group chat, "Don't forget to bring your white shirts this week!" We covered those T-shirts, old and new, with paint and spread our names across them in bright colors, accompanied by flowers and shapes. We decorated our papier-mâché sculptures in unusual colors and clashing designs that wouldn't normally adorn Mexican alebrijes, painting their wings the colors of the Afghan flag (green, red, black) and their monstrously shaped bodies with all the colors of the rainbow.

Just before lunch, Bibi Samrin Rahil presented about an Afghan woman leader in Canada who inspired her. She spoke about her career and efforts, and how we can all aspire to follow our goals. As co-facilitators, we couldn't help but wonder what else the participants would decide to do if they were left to their own devices for each session.

We took turns blasting and dancing to a compilation of Burmese, Indian, Iranian, Ethiopian, Afghan, and American music. Someone even snuck in a special ending theme by an anime composer. We talked about silly and "frivolous" things—like makeup, nail polish, and henna. This was reminiscent of guest artist **Maggie Bushiri's** session earlier in the year: at the end, she raffled off a fancy dress. When a participant won the long, formal dress that another one wanted, she gave it to her right away.

While we knew that this group of diverse individuals would naturally contain multitudes, we saw everyone truly showing us another side of themselves when they weren't being monitored or expected to stick to a "learning point." Mostly, we saw their fun, creative side, wild and unrestricted and uninhibited by social cues or expectations.

In other sessions, when we had time, we gave the girls the opportunity to talk about whatever topics they wanted. In one session, when it was just us and it was quiet and still, the group started discussing Ramadan, Nooruz, Lent, and Chinese New Year, which were all occurring around the same time this year. The girls were excited to talk about their differences and similarities, and we encouraged their curiosity. When sessions were left open-ended, they naturally taught and learned from each other, a perfect example of "peer-to-peer" education.

We faced difficulties and challenges, as was to be expected when running any community-focused, youth-oriented program. The personal obligations of participants often bump up against workshop scheduling—some of our older participants have other responsibilities at home, or potential nuptials, and others have part-time, afterschool jobs, as well as school demands.

We understand that refugee and immigrant youth, and especially during this time, are often carrying more on their shoulders than many of their fellow classmates or colleagues. They keep in touch with their families and best friends still left behind in their home countries. They listen in to the adult problems, try to assist to make them better and, often, become at-home interpreters for their parents and elders, or parent figures to their younger siblings or cousins. They get sick like all kids do and, sometimes, so ill that they must go to the hospital. They have to learn how to take care of their health, to sleep more, to eat better, and to move their bodies.

This year, we have had to think a lot about the safety of the participants and their families. We spoke to many parents and older siblings about providing volunteer-run transportation to Lynden if family drivers felt unsafe, yet we knew that if this situation came to be, those families would also be facing difficulties leaving their homes to go to work, to attend school, or to go to the grocery store. In many ways, this felt like a second pandemic, but two-fold, because as immigrants ourselves these situations would equally impact our lives.

When you become a leader, your goal is to help others to identify and realize their own goals, and not yours. What we have seen across nine months is that different people, from different backgrounds and cultures, can come together with the goal of finding common ground, and with the goal of building friendship. These young women and girls are resilient, strong, and will do whatever it takes to reach their goals.

To all our beloved *Be the Change* participants, we hope for you not only to achieve your dreams, but to go beyond what you could ever dream of.

Maryam and Kim

Maryam Durani
Age: 42 years,
5 years in the US
School: Payam Noor University
Origin: Pashtun, Afghanistan

Kim Khaira
Age: 38 years,
9 years in the US
School: International Islamic University of Malaysia
Origin: Dayak/Indian, Borneo/Malaysia



Participants

Nastaran Ahmadi
Nur Amirah Amanullah
Shazia Bibi (moved away)**
Madina Iqbalzada**
Marwa Iqbalzada
Catherine Kimbakimba
Farhada Malang
Dilshad Begum Mohammad Rafik
Mursal Mohammadi
Samira Mohammadi
Hnin Aye Khai Nan
Hnin Aye Moe Nan**
Nur Khaidah Nur Hasan
Nur Kayas Nur Islam
Nasima Nuruzzaman
Naziah Popal
Robinah Popal
Shamziah Popal
Zoya Popal
Bibi Samrin Rahil
Moska Safi
Nargas Safi
Ina Shahvika
Rabiyar Tozul
Kisanet Yosief**
Tigisti Yosief

** mentor

Special thanks to our *Be the Change* alumnae, and the sisters and friends of participants, for joining select sessions:

Intentional Communication Workshop with Dr. Lee Za Ong

Anisa Shamshu Alam
Lidya Gebrekidan
Niyat Gebrekidan
Mala Nan Leth
Khatera Nazari
Nazmenah Shinwari
Zeagol Shinwari

International Women's Day Celebration

Mihr Afzon Ahmadi
Kisimba Kimbakimba
Anwar Begum Nuruzzaman

Guest Artists

Kierston Ghaznavi, African American, mixed media artist, illustrator, designer
Faith Herr, Hmong educator, embroiderer
Ceci Tejeda, Mexican, folk art papier-mâché (cartonería) artist specializing in fantastical creatures (alebrijes)
Cris Siqueira, Brazilian American, graphic novelist, multimedia artist, co-owner of Lion's Tooth bookstore
Maggie Bushiri, Congolese, musician, dancer, fashion designer
Laura Farahzad, Iranian American printmaker, book artist, professor at Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design
Yuliia Shevtsova, Ukrainian, graphic designer

Guest Speakers & Leaders

Dr. Lee Za Ong, Chinese Malaysian American, licensed mental health professional, Associate Professor in Behavioral Science, Marquette University
Asiyeh Hossaini, Afghan, pastry chef, baker
Zarifa Saadat, Afghan, MA in Sustainable Peacebuilding, researcher, and community advocate focused on education, storytelling, and women's empowerment.
Nurhayati Ali, Rohingya, aspiring dentist, co-founder and director of Health & Human Services of Rohingya Maiyafuìnor Collaborative Network
Dr. Chia Youyee Vang, Hmong American, historian, author, and Vice Chancellor for Community Empowerment & Institutional Inclusivity at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee



Special thanks to the legal team at the International Institute of Wisconsin for organizing a "Know Your Rights" workshop for *Be the Change* participants at Lynden.


ART IS RESISTANCE AGAINST TYRANNY & HATE
1
Rohingya
Winners
Rohingya
Winners
Maryam Khatun (19)






“Alebrijes”



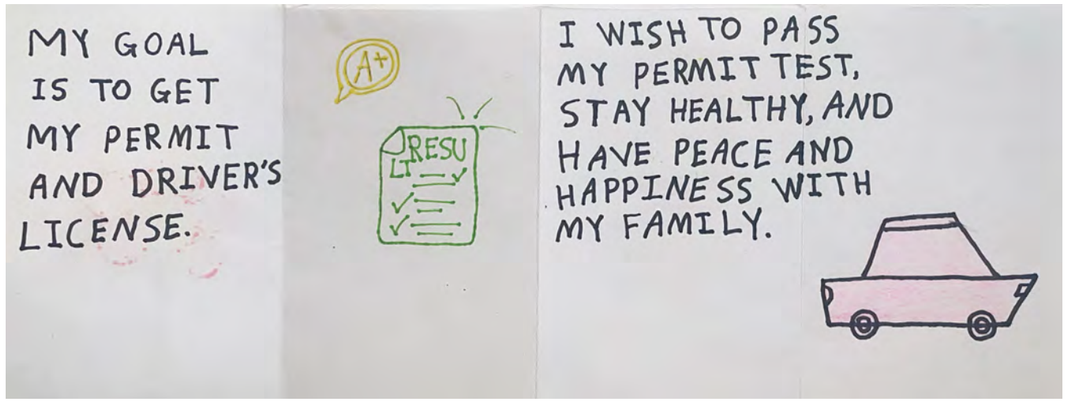


Nastaran Ahmadi

Age: 16 years, 5 years in the US

School: St Francis High School, 10th grade

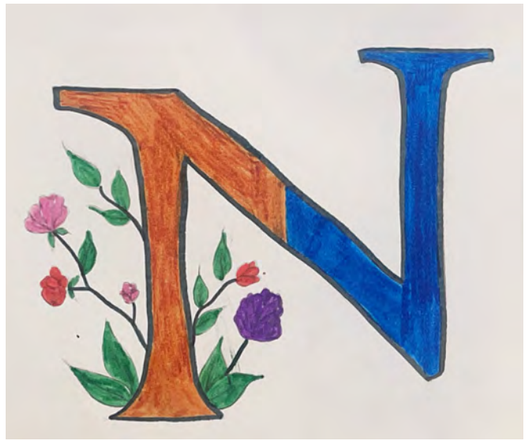
Origin: Hazara, from Bamyan, Afghanistan





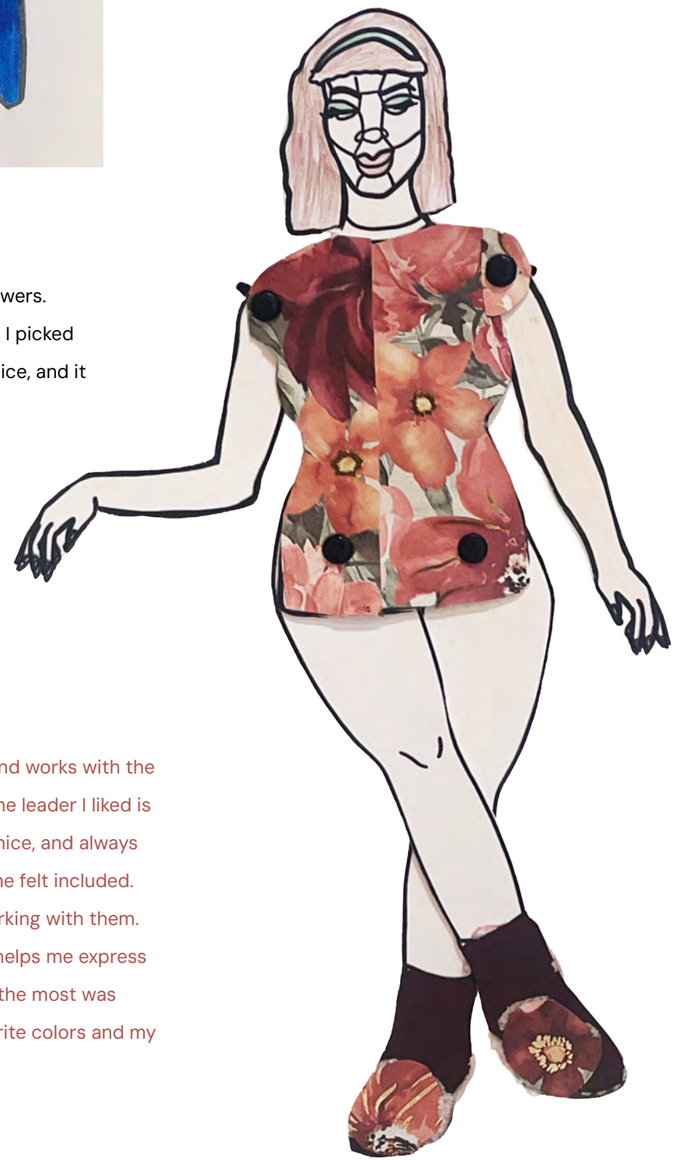
Goal 2026:

2026 loading... permit, license, car, and big responsibilities



I designed a logo using the letter "N" and added flowers inside it. It represents my name and shows my love for nature and creativity.

Ava loves to dance and enjoys being around flowers. She is gentle, happy, and full of positive energy. I picked the name "Ava" because I thought it sounded nice, and it fits her calm and pretty style.



> I learned a leader helps others, listens, and works with the team, not just tells people what to do. The leader I liked is Yuliia Shevtsova because she was kind, nice, and always helped everyone and made sure everyone felt included. I also made new friends and enjoyed working with them. Art makes me feel calm and creative. It helps me express my feelings. The artwork process I liked the most was designing my own portrait with my favorite colors and my favorite flower.

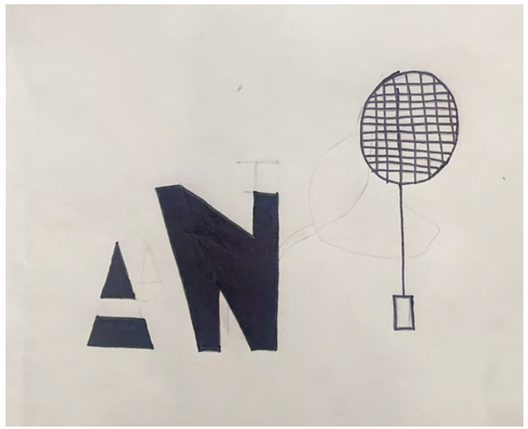


Nur Amirah Amanullah

Age: 18 years, 3 years in the US

School: Hamilton High School, 11th grade

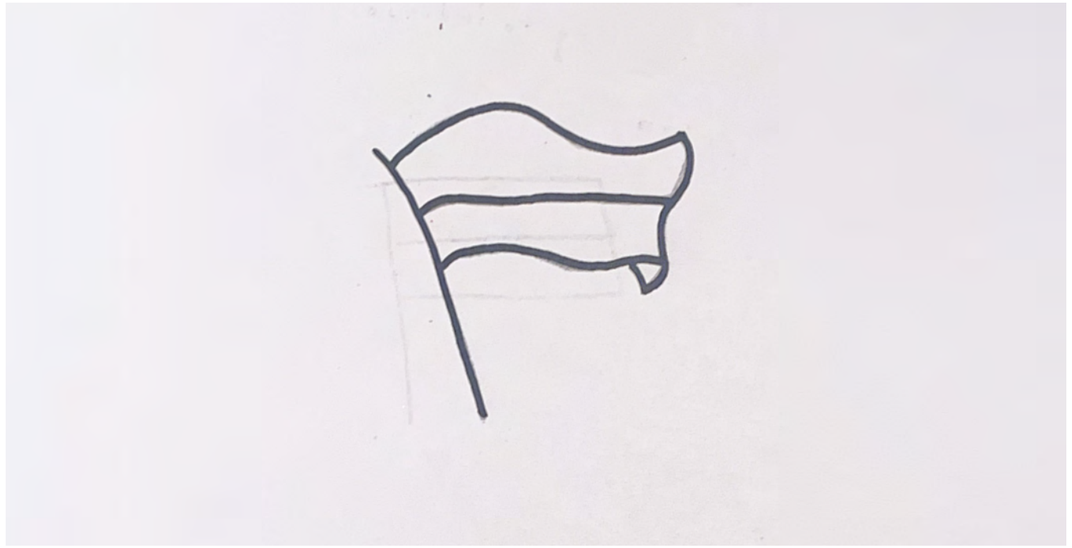
Origin: Rohingya/Indonesian, from Malaysia, Southeast Asia



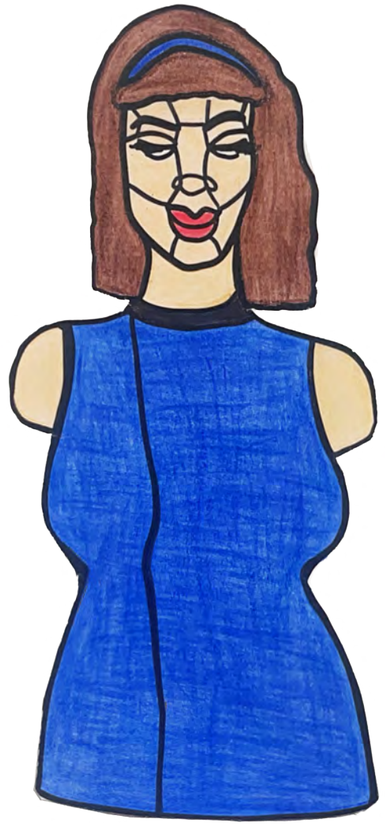
I drew this because my name “Nur” means “light.” I also like to play badminton, and I really have fun making art.



Gelli print of leaves and flowers



Indonesian flag



I have many goals, plans, and wishes. My plan is for my family and I to visit Indonesia, because I really miss Indonesia. My mom has relatives there, and I want to see the atmosphere in Indonesia. I remember Indonesia when I was 4, or 5 years old. I want to meet my sister and my brother there. I really miss them.

Eventually, I wish to get into university and study what matches my interests and what will help me grow as a person. I hope I can stay consistent in my studies even when things get difficult.



This artwork is important to me because the words on it represent the future of all girls from this workshop.

Madina Iqbalzada

Age: 18 years, 4 years in the US

School: St Francis High School, 12th grade

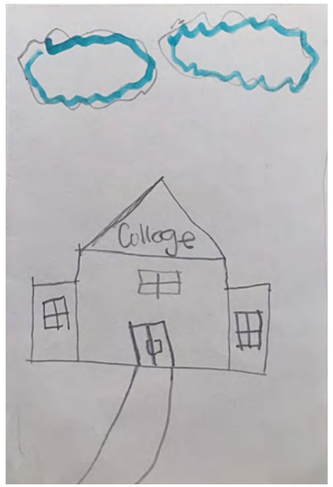
Origin: Afghan, from Kabul, Afghanistan

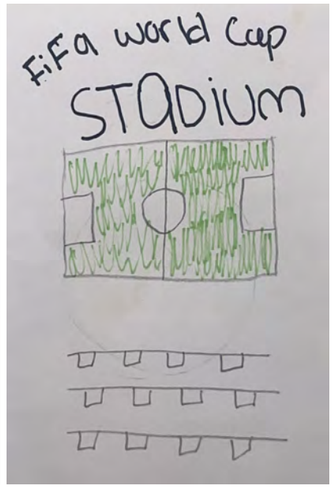


This logo represents my personality. The soccer ball and the number 18 is my jersey number, and it represents me as an athlete. The square represents an organization and the design above the ball represents elegance.



This is my other favorite artwork and my favorite hobby. This artwork is important to me because I spent a lot of time on this.





I enjoyed the practice of drawing and writing a comic book, which was my favorite, because my goals for this year and one of my wishes is written in it. One of my goals for this year, 2026, is to attend college. One of my wishes for this year is to go to the 2026 FIFA World Cup. I can make my goals come true. If my one wish doesn't come true though, it's okay, and I will make it happen in the future. **2☺26: 365 days to succeed!**



This artwork is a little funny because everyone else made their puppet into a woman, but I was the only one who made a man version.

I think that being different is not wrong.

> As a participant who has been in this workshop for 3 years, I can say what it means to be a leader. From the guest speakers that we had all this year from different communities, they are all a leader in their own community. What it means to be a leader is to have the knowledge to inspire others, to show others that you are strong enough to speak in public. This workshop raised all of us girls to be strong, to speak out for ourselves. We show our dreams, hopes, skills through artworks in this workshop. I believe that everyone from this workshop will have a great future waiting for them. Shoutout to the co-facilitators Kim Khaira and Maryam Durani for their great passion leading this workshop.



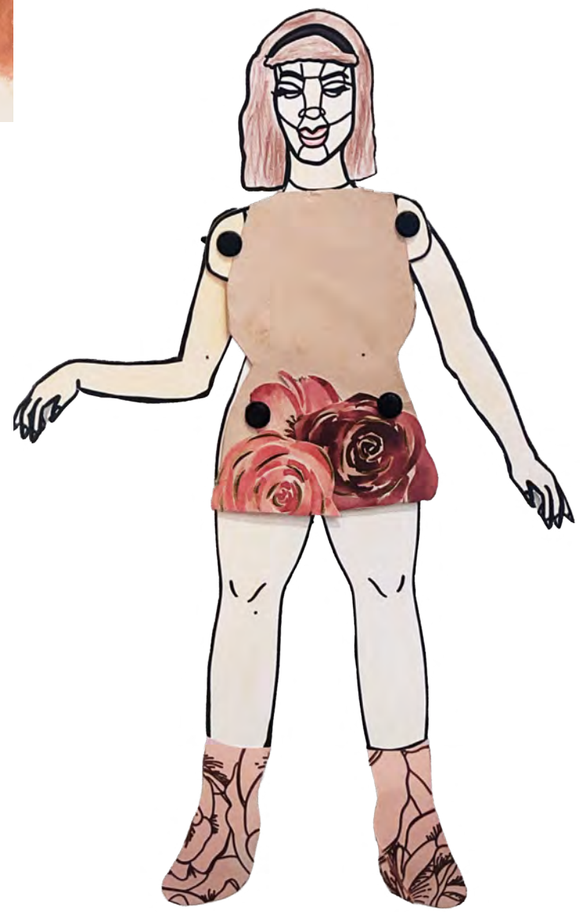
“My Personality” was my favorite artwork because it shows the creative, expressive energy surrounding it.

Marwa Iqbalzada

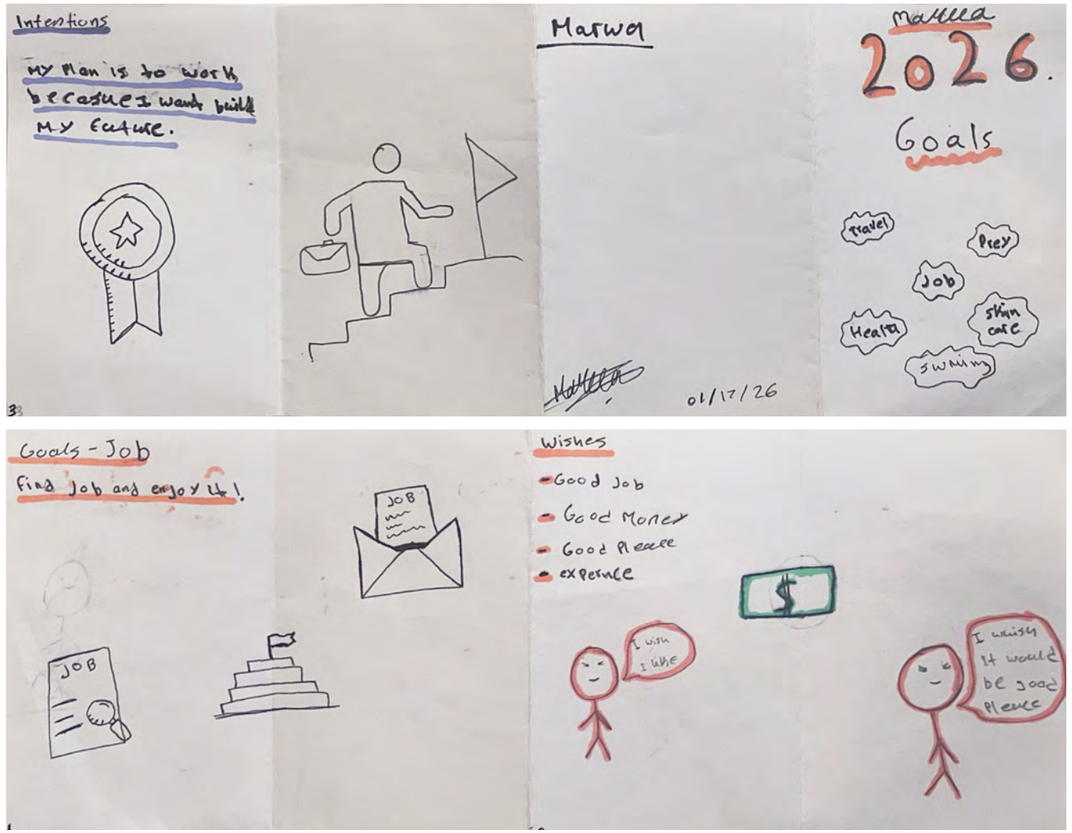
Age: 15 years, 4 years in the US

School: St Francis High School, 10th grade

Origin: Afghan, from Kabul, Afghanistan



“My Design” is my second favorite artwork because it shows my artistic style through drawing, color, and design.

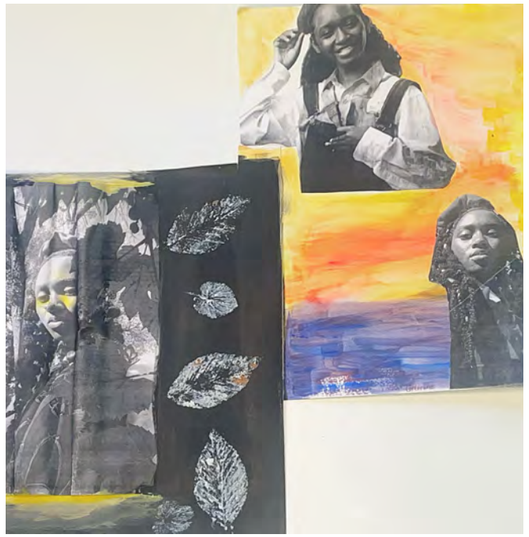


The name of this artwork is “26 Goals.” I also created my 2026 goals. This really helped me think of my goals this year.



“Café Logo”

> To me, leadership means to guide and help others work towards a common goal. It involves making decisions, taking responsibility, and supporting your team and community.



Catherine Kimbakimba

Age: 16 years, 4 years in the US

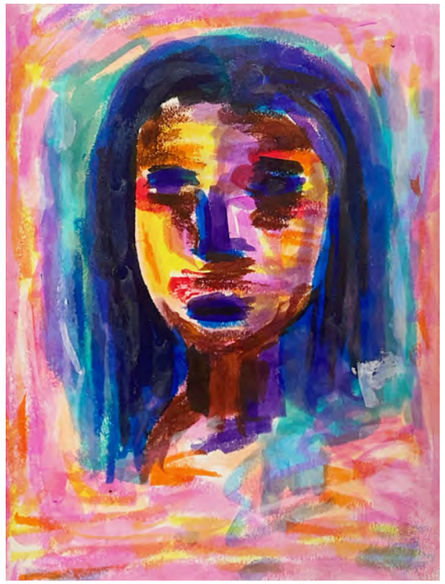
School: Milwaukee High School of the Arts, 11th grade

Origin: Congolese, Zambian, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

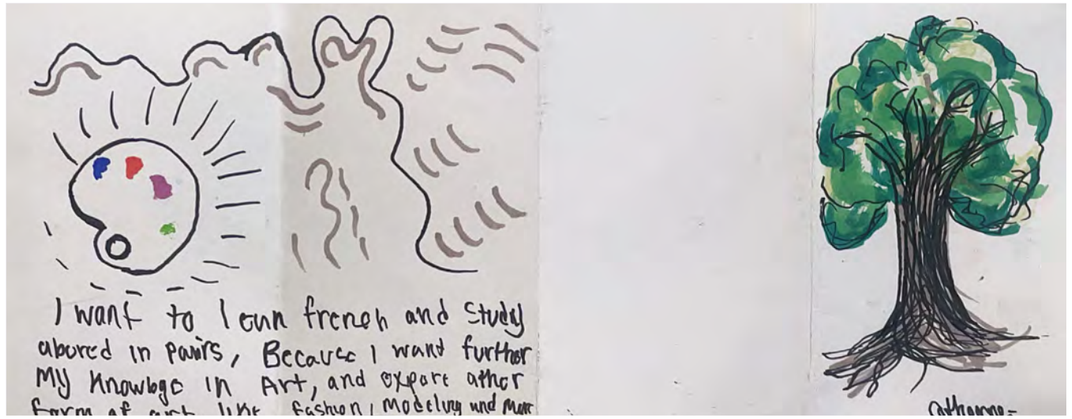
I like this artwork because it showcases my creative personality.

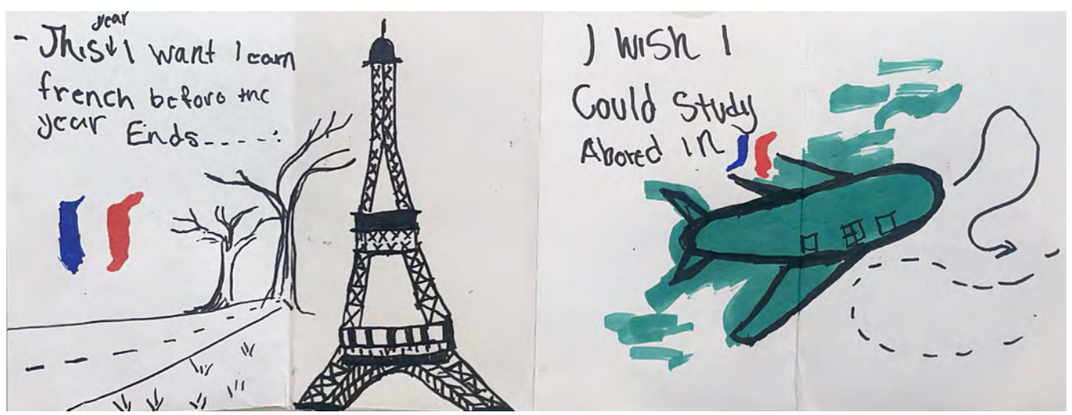
This is what a leader means to me.





This is what making art makes me feel. I like this piece because it expresses the colorfulness of making art.







Farhada Malang

Age: 19 years, 5 years in the US

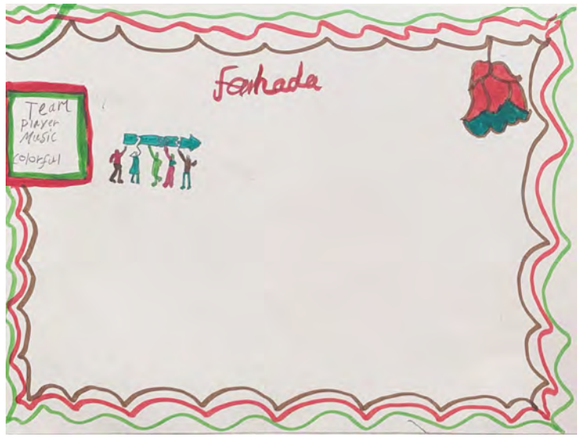
School: Milwaukee Area Technical College, Nursing

Origin: Afghan, from Kunar, Afghanistan



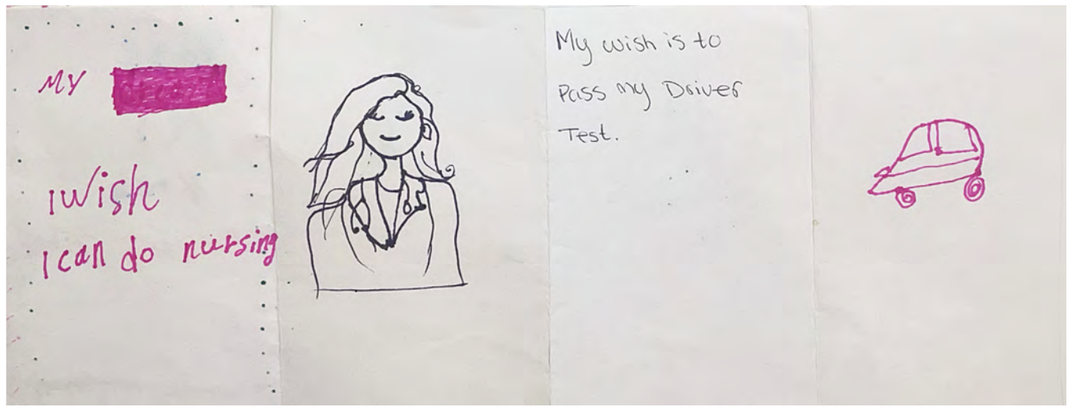
I chose this image because it captures my identity and the pride I take in my culture, and the legacy of the strength and resilience that I carry within me.

This is like a collage of all my experiences. Every map and every color in this piece represents a part of who I am and the world I carry within me.



Coming together is a beginning of progress, and working together is the beginning of success. This is the kind of teamwork that I like.





I chose this artwork because this is my whole year of planning. I will aim to achieve everything I set out to achieve.



Dilshad Mohammad Rafik

Age: 18 years, 2 years in the US

School: South Division High School, 11th grade

Origin: Burmese, from Myanmar

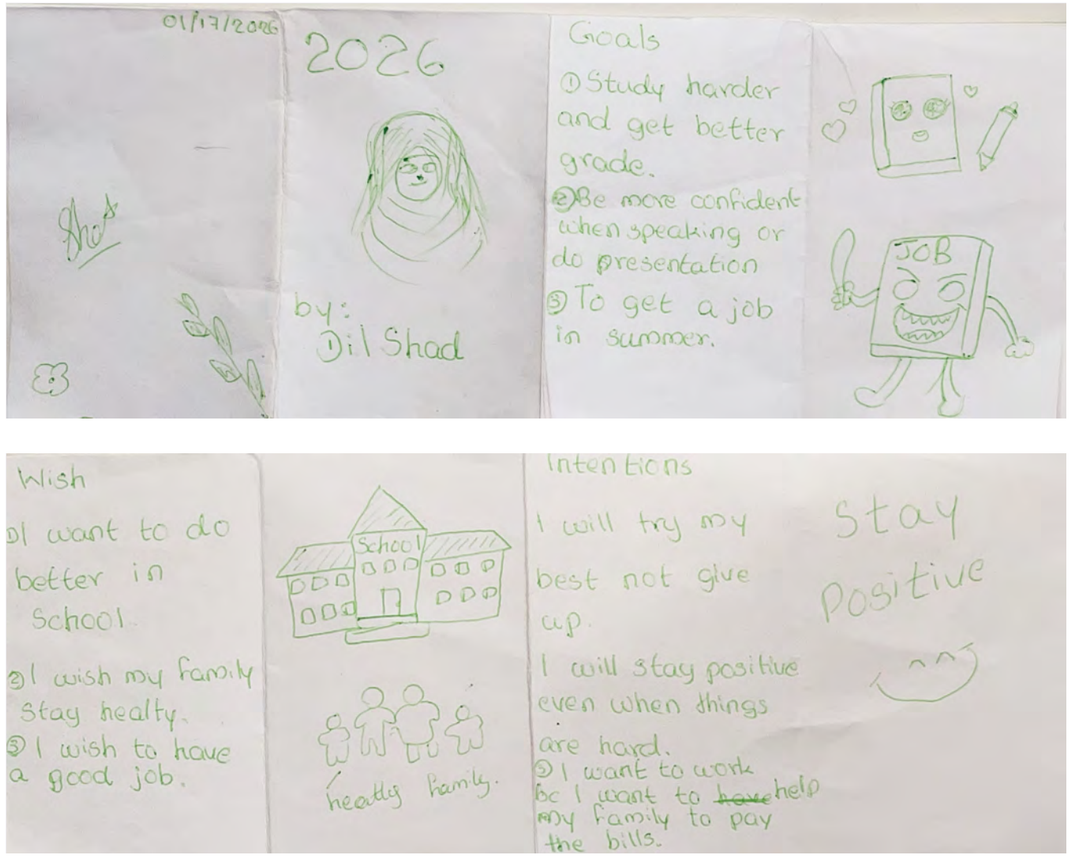
This is my favorite self portrait and “self poster” because it’s so colorful. The picture is one of my favorite pictures because I took that picture on Eid day.

This is also my favorite because I made this with my friend Nur Amira. We had so much fun making that, and it is so colorful.

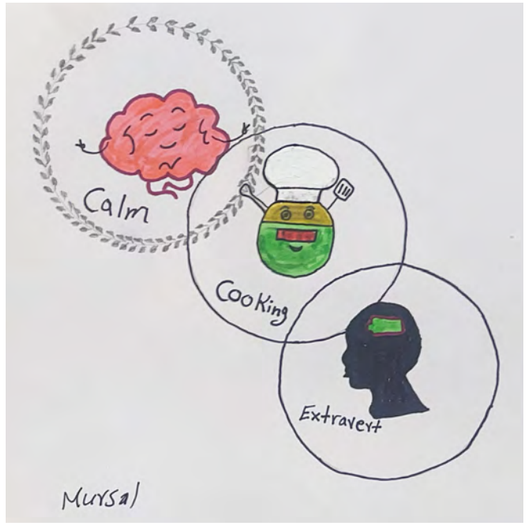




My logo represents my personality. It shows a quiet and cozy ambience for an introvert. There is a pot at the bottom of the circle, which represents my interests. There is a small cat at the corner which represents my vibe, which is to be cozy.



This comic book is also one of my favorite art pieces because I wrote my wishes and my goals for 2026 in it.



I love how this shows the different sides of me, balancing my social energy, my love for cooking, and a calm mind is what makes me feel my best.

Mursal Mohammadi

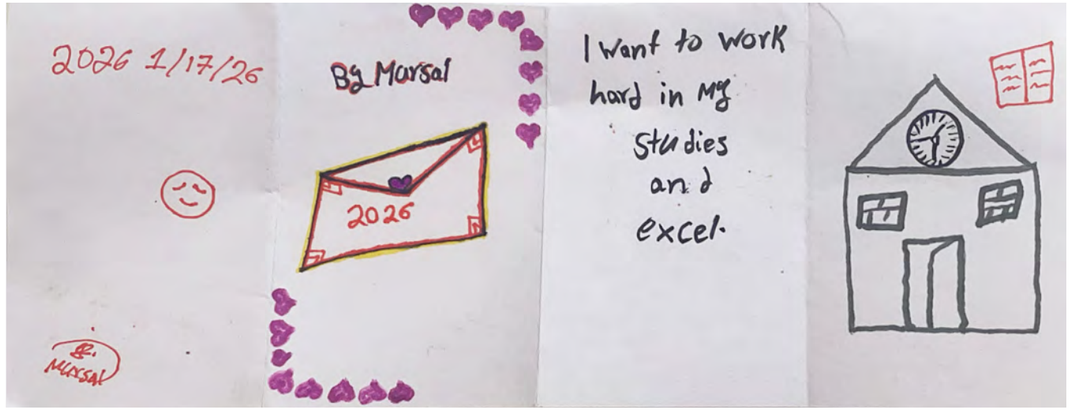
Age: 15 years, 5 years in the US

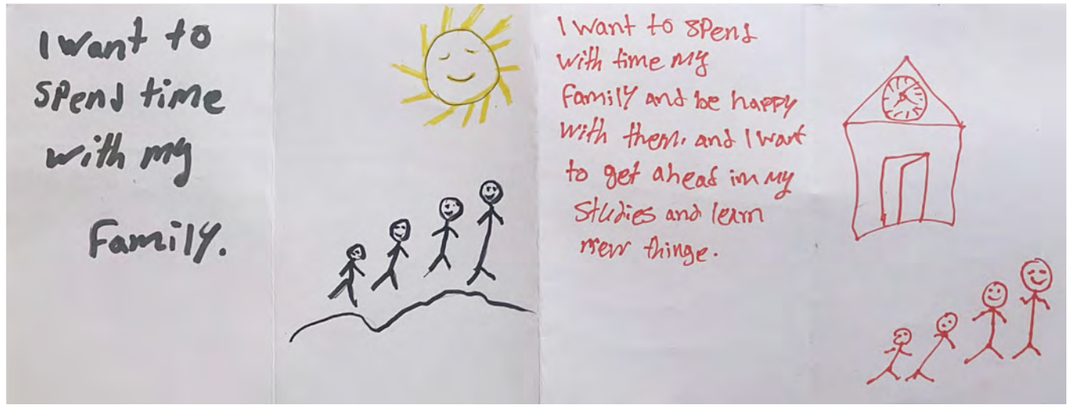
School: South Division High School, 10th grade

Origin: Afghan, from Kabul and Bagram, Afghanistan



My latest mixed media creation!
I used sequins and textured papers
to bring this fashion illustration to life.





The envelope represents a message to the future. I am sending love and positive vibes to my future self in 2026.



I chose this because volleyball is my favorite sport and I wanted to show that it's the king or queen of all sports to me.

Samira Mohammadi

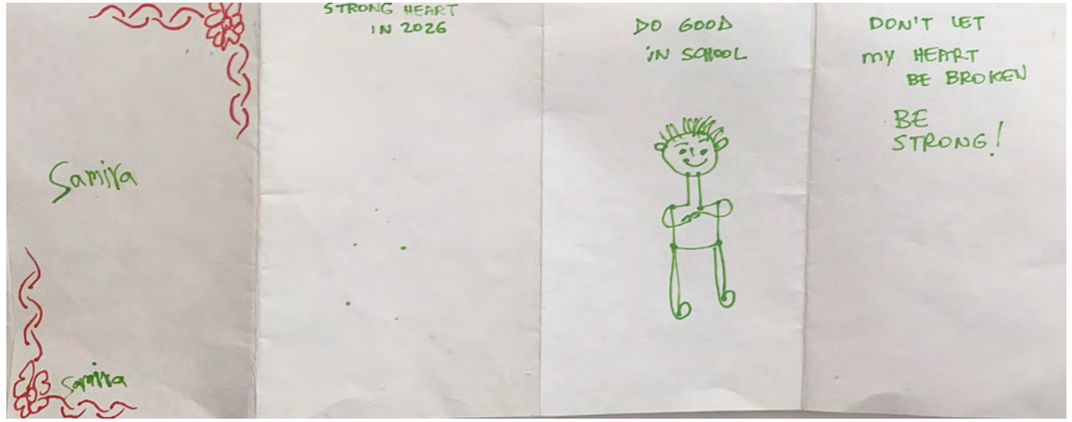
Age: 14 years, 5 years in the US

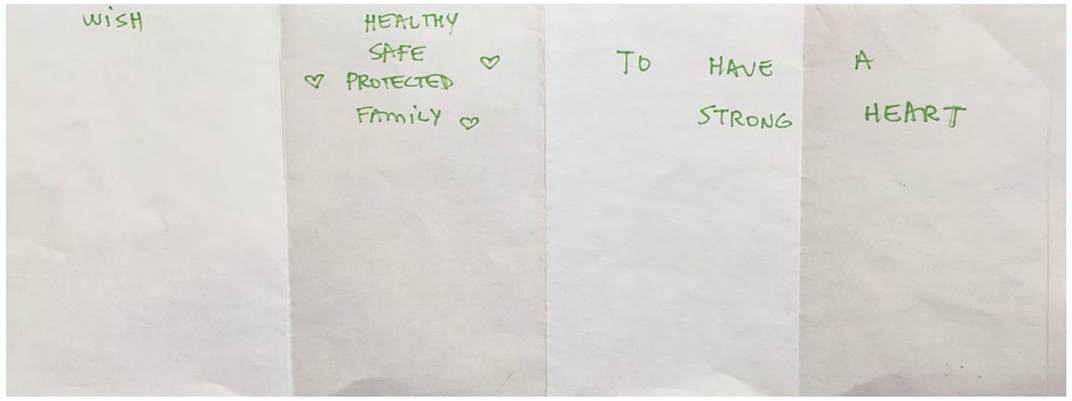
School: South Division High School, 9th grade

Origin: Afghan, Kabul and Bagram, Afghanistan



I wanted to create something personal that represents me, which is why I placed my name right in the center with bright colors.





A personalized design of my name. Green is used for the lettering of my name and I add a unique pattern to the corners to make it stand out.



Hnin Aye Khai Nan

Age: 21 years, 11 years in the US

School: Milwaukee Area Technical College

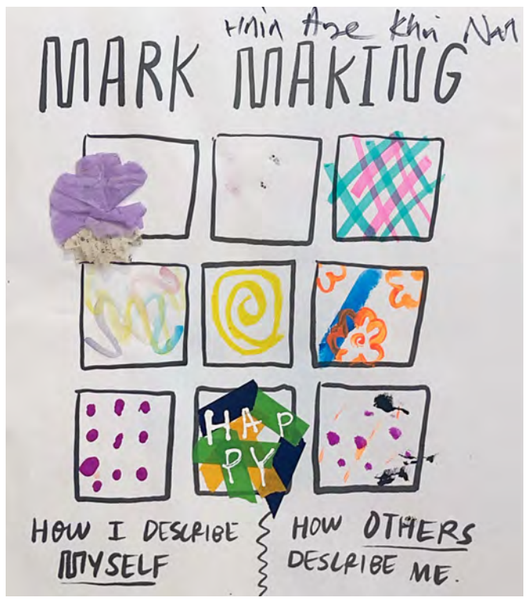
Origin: Karen/Southeast Asian, from Bangkok, Thailand



I really like the paper doll, because we got to work with different types of paper to make a dress. I like how it looks like the woman is happy with the dress I made. I want to be like her one day.

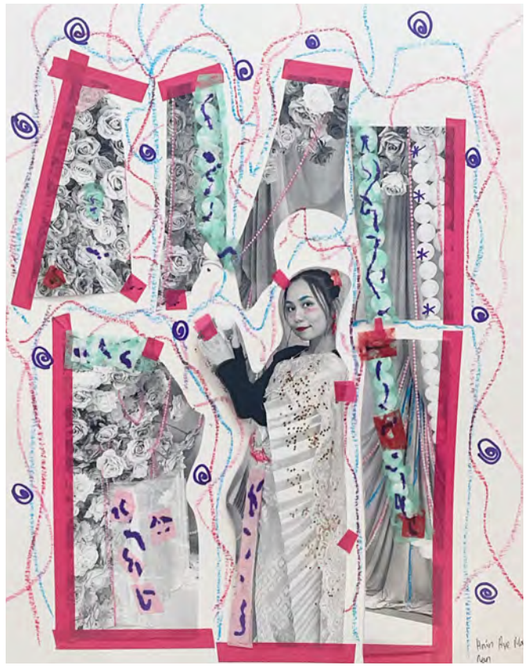


I picked this because even though I saw a lot of mistakes, it is still beautiful and it makes me happy.



This was my first time making a logo, but I like how it has my name and something I like doing in my free time. I am happy with the color I picked and how everything came together.





Hnin Aye Moe Nan

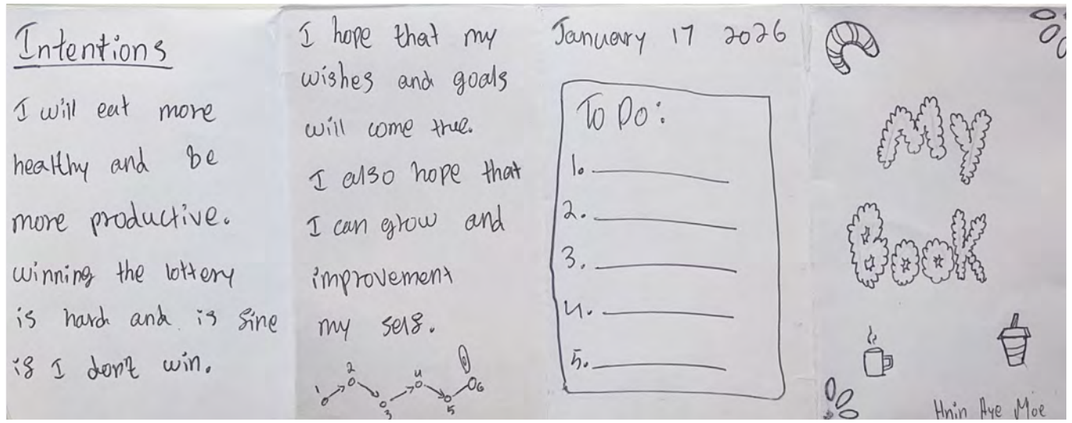
Age: 20 years, 11 years in the US

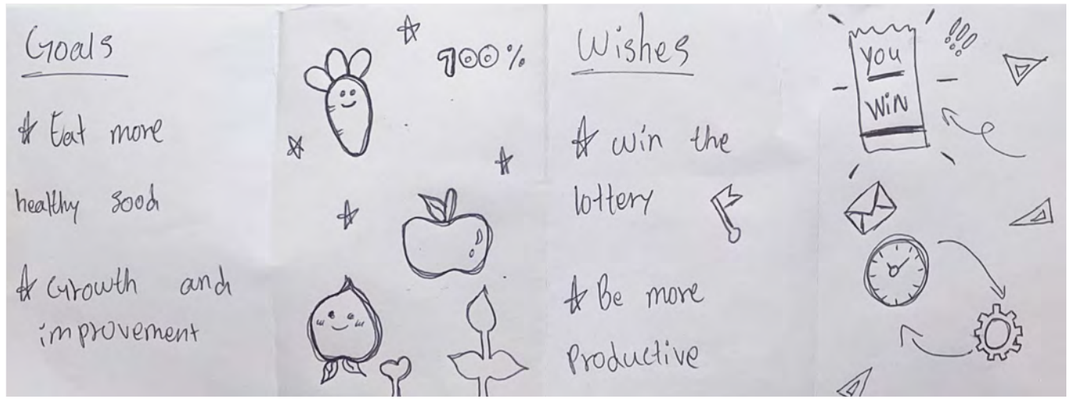
Origin: Karen/Southeast Asian, from Bangkok, Thailand

From all my other artworks, I like my self-portrait the most, because in the picture I have my Thai traditional dress on, and I love how the art turned out. I like how there are pieces of the picture spread out, meaning that there are pieces of me, or things about myself that I still need to learn about. I am putting all the pieces of myself together.

I like how I drew my initials, and I used purple sharpie because purple is my favorite color. I was able to use different materials to create my logo, which was fun. I drew a controller, because I enjoy playing video games.







I like how my comic book turned out, because from last year, I realized that my tastes have grown, just like how I am growing into a woman. I now drink more coffee than I did last year, and this year, I discovered my love of croissants, which is why I drew them on the front page.

> I learnt that leadership is not just about someone taking in charge, but also someone who sets a good example by helping and encouraging others. When I practice artmaking, it makes me feel relaxed, and it helps me to self-reflect.



Nur Khaidah Nur Hasan

Age: 17 years, 9 years in the US

School: Milwaukee High School of the Arts

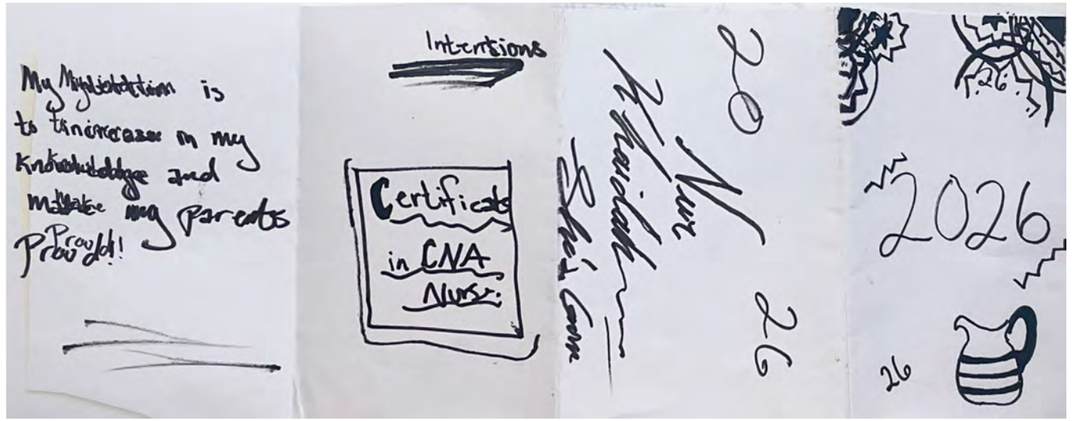
Origin: Rohingya, from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

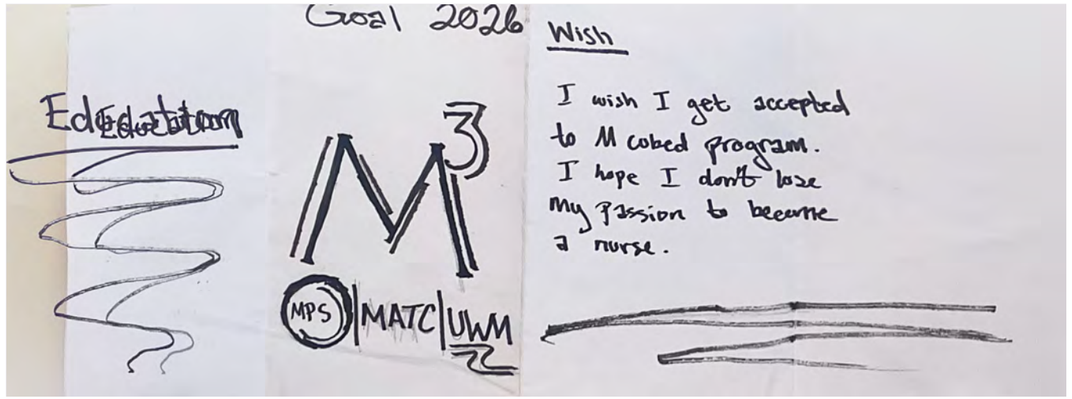


Gelli print of flowers and leaves



Personal logo





Comic book



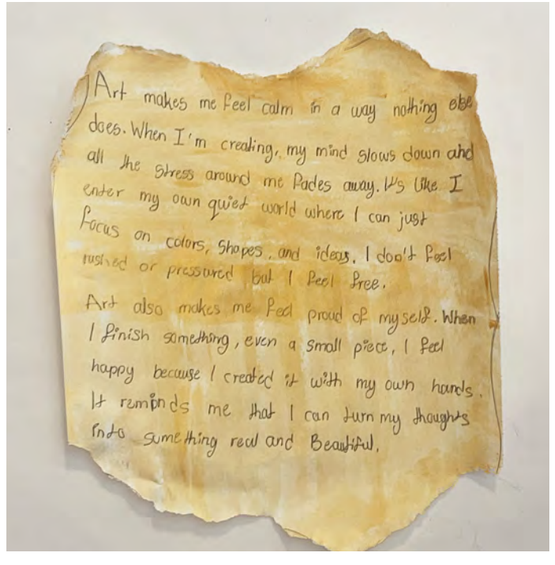
Nur Kayas Nur Islam

Age: 19 years, 2 years in the US

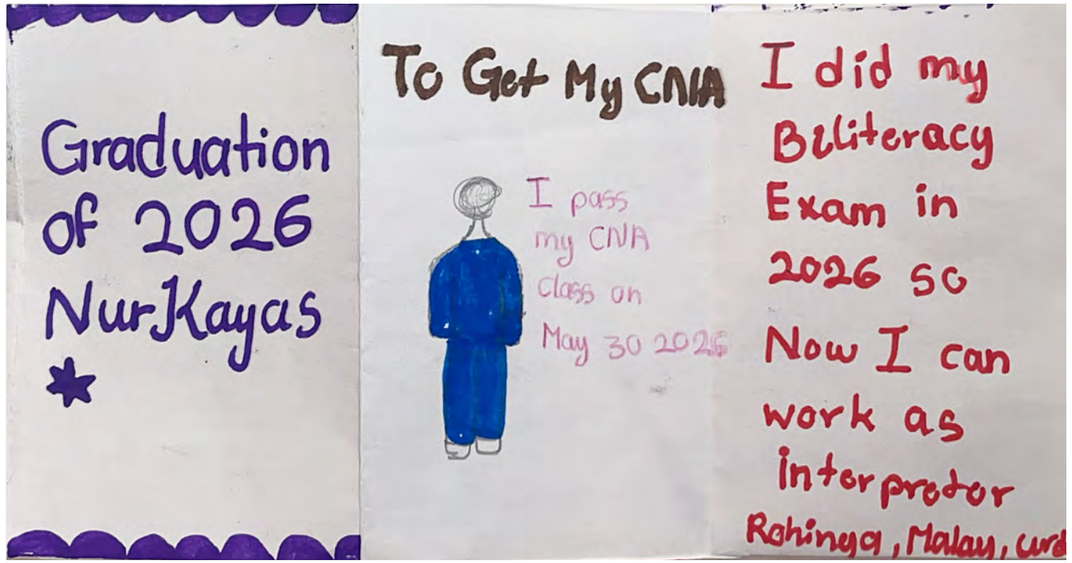
School: South Division High School, 12th grade

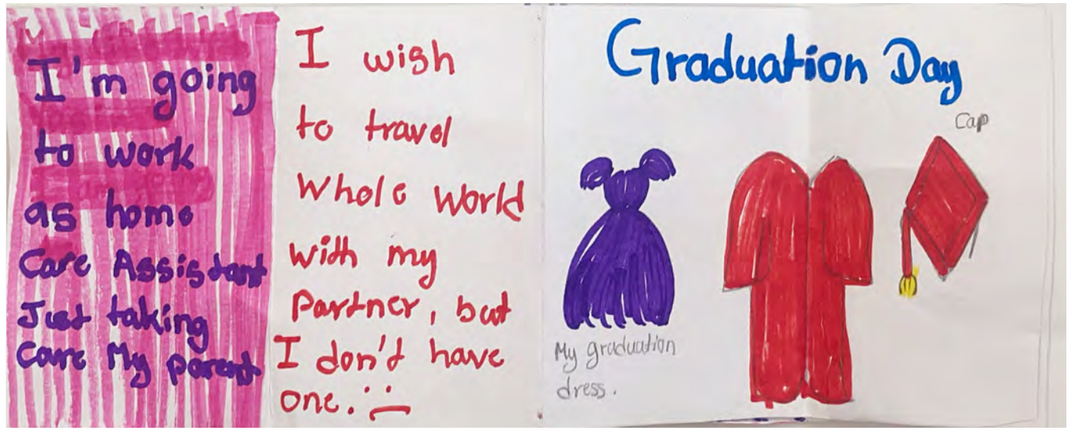
Origin: Rohingya, from Malaysia and Burma/ Myanmar

Art makes me feel relaxed and it takes me to an imaginary world. Whatever I am feeling I can express it via art. This image is how I think of myself. I love how I am right now, but I wish I had green eyes, so I drew that on myself on paper.



About art





This notebook will remind me of 2026 in the future, what I did in 2026, and what my wishes were. It will remind me of memories of this *Be the Change* program.

Nasima Nuruzzaman



I imagined myself, carefree, in a flower garden.

Age: 16 years, 1 year in the US

School: South Division High School, 10th grade

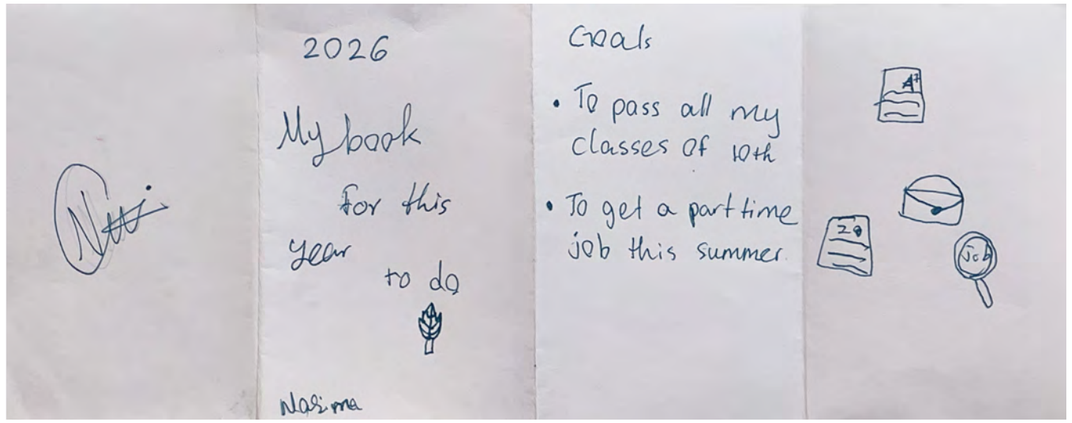
Origin: Rohingya, from Yangon, Myanmar

Artmaking makes me feel good. I didn't know that I can paint and make art and sew. I started to get interested in art, and from all the artworks I made, one of my favorite ones is the embroidery, even though it was the most difficult one to make and it took me days to finish it. I also love my little comic book.

You can be young and be a leader. This is something important that I learned about myself after joining *Be the Change* program. The stories of women that come here to America amazed me. All the people I met here are nice and inspiring, and I met a lot of amazing people. I love to be in this program. I am looking forward to joining this program again next year.



This is a handmade embroidery, and it is something new I learned. I learned how to sew and use thread while doing this. This is one of my favorite artworks because it took me days to finish it, and I really enjoyed doing this.

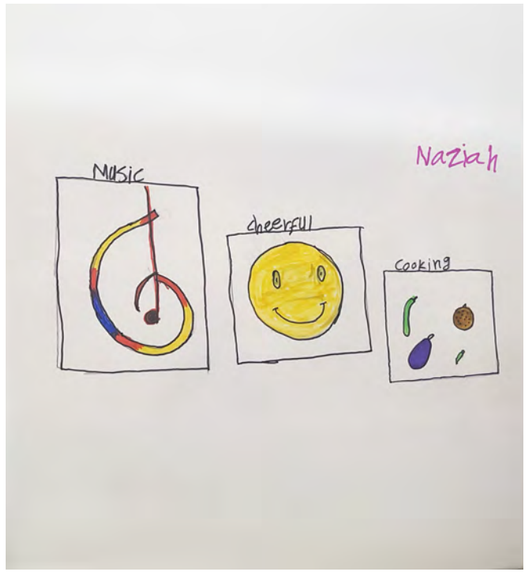


This is my little comic book.

I wrote my 2026 goals in there and all my wishes. I hope to complete these wishes.

This represents my calm personality, and my love of flowers.





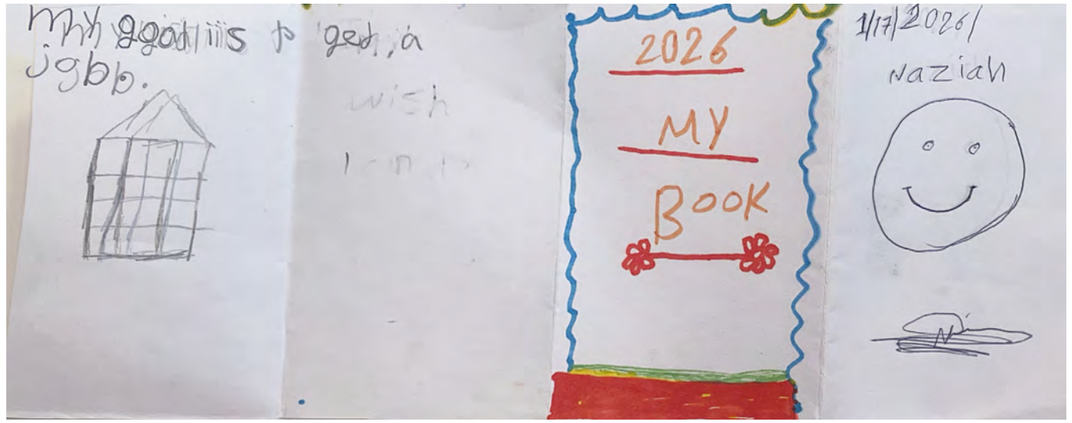
Naziah Popal

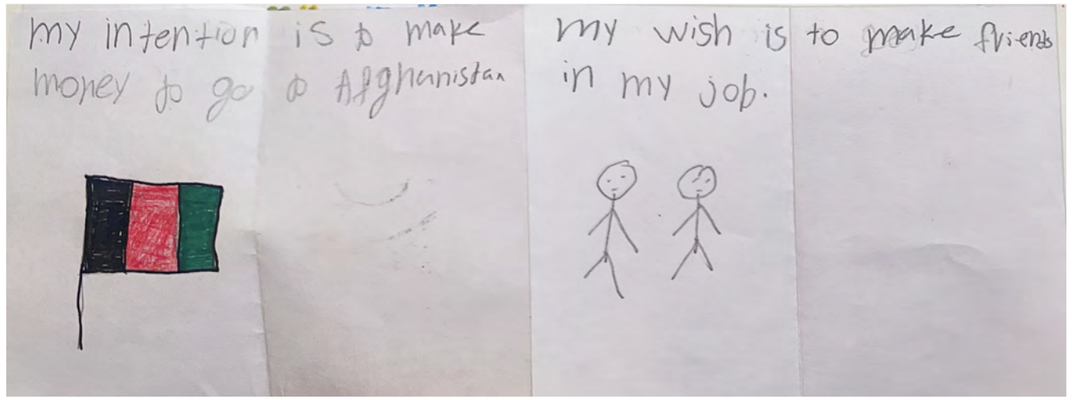
Age: 20 years, 5 years in the US

Origin: Pashtun, from Kandahar, Afghanistan



Handmade embroidery





Comic book





Gelli print of flowers and leaves

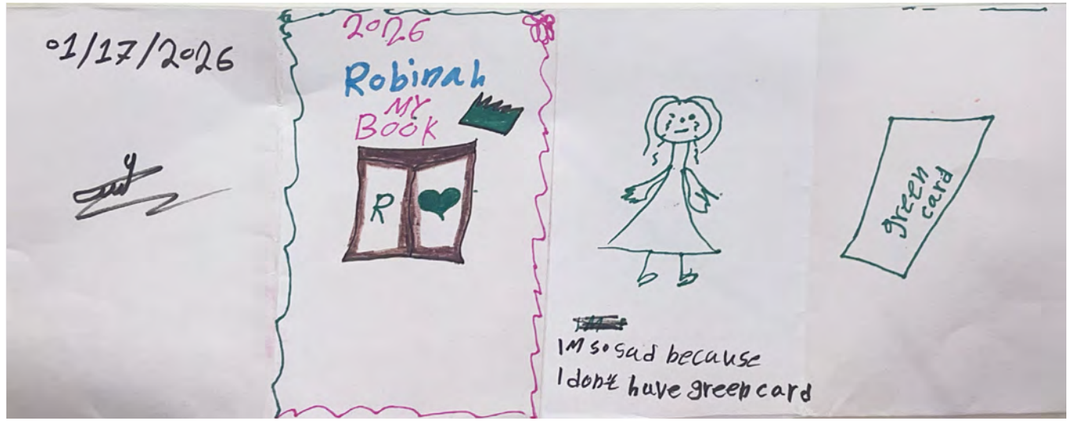
Robinah Popal

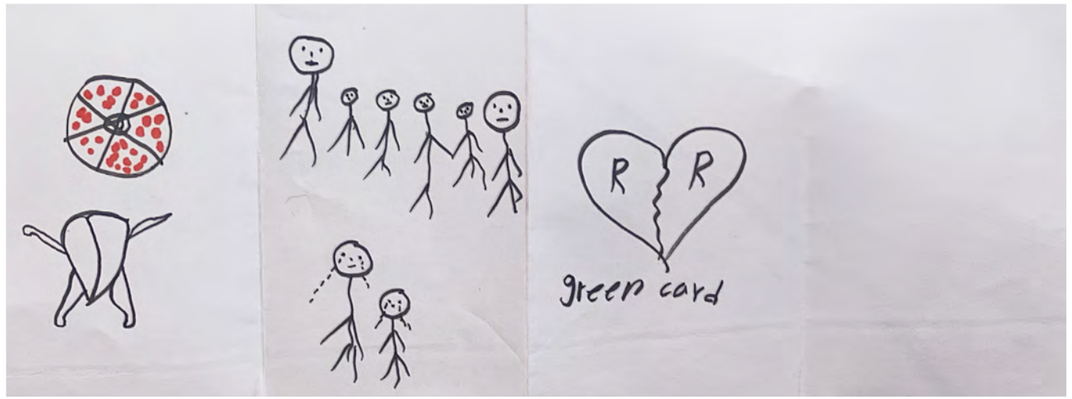
Age: 21 years, 5 years in the US

Origin: Pashtun, from Kandahar, Afghanistan



Paper doll





Comic book



Shamziah Popal

Age: 16 years, 4 years in the US

School: Bay View High School, 11th grade

Origin: Pashtun, from Kandahar, Afghanistan



Handmade embroidery



Paper doll



Personal logo

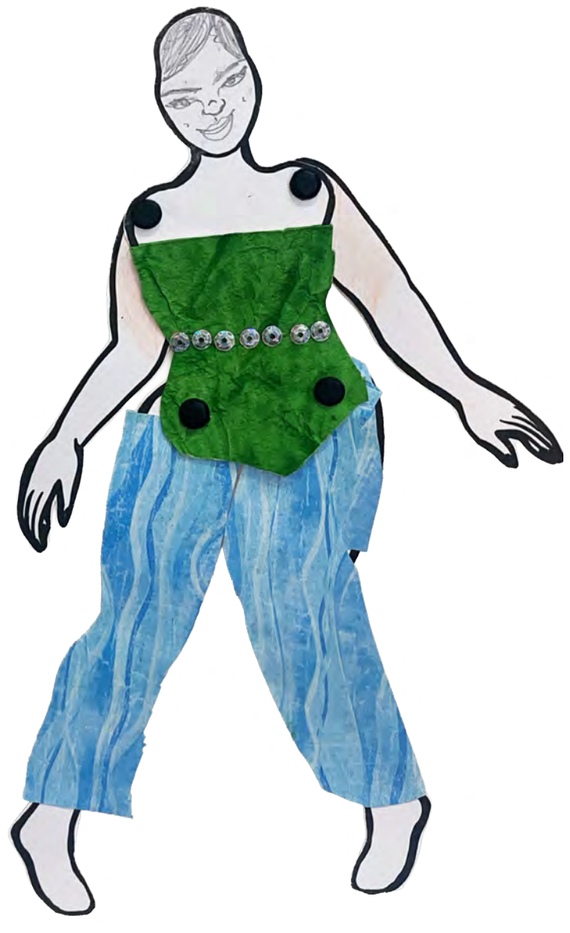


Zoya Popal

Age: 15 years, 5 years in the US

School: Bay View High School, 9th grade

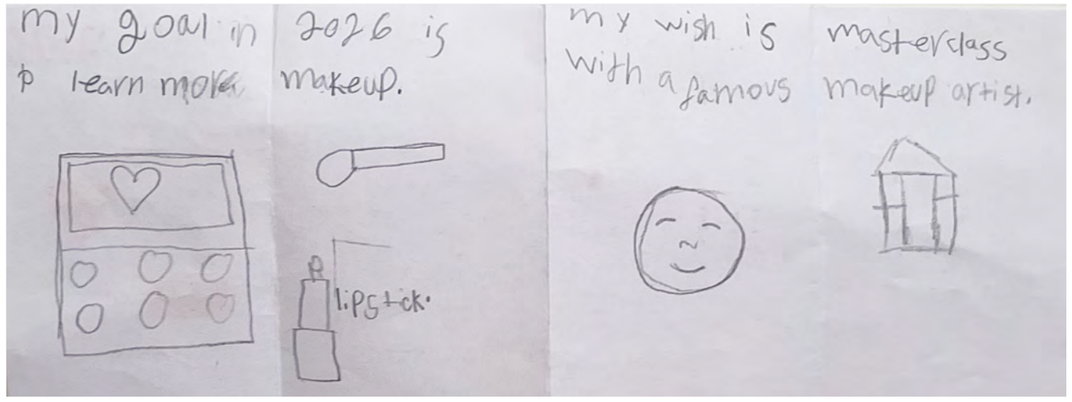
Origin: Pashtun, from Kandahar, Afghanistan



Paper doll







Comic book



Gelli print of flowers and leaves



Eyes are the windows to the soul. I chose this piece to show that no matter where I go, I see the world through the lens of my traditions and my heritage.

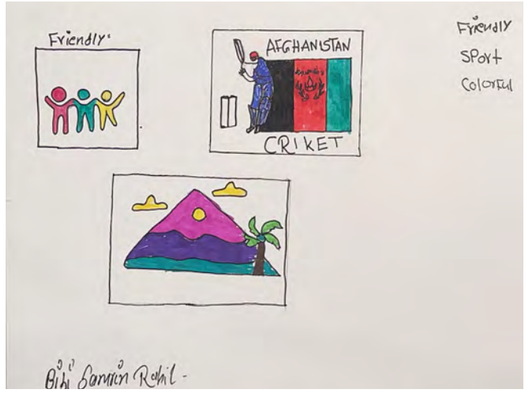
Bibi Samrin Rahil

Age: 17 years, 1 year in the US

School: Hamilton High School, 10th grade

Origin: Afghan, from Nangarhar, Afghanistan

Art is the language of the soul.
I chose this handcrafted piece to bring the warmth of tradition and the beauty of patience to these pages.



This page is a snapshot of who I am: a proud Afghan, a sports lover, and I believe in the power of friendship. I chose these drawings to show that my identity is built on honor.





This hand-painted flag is a symbol of my resilience and pride. I chose to create this piece to honor my homeland and to share the beauty of my Afghan heritage with my peers. It is more than just colors; it is my story.

This collage is a reflection of my inner world—diverse, colorful, and rooted in nature. I chose this style to show that beauty lies in how we piece our different parts together.





Moska Safi

Age: 20 years, 2 years in the US

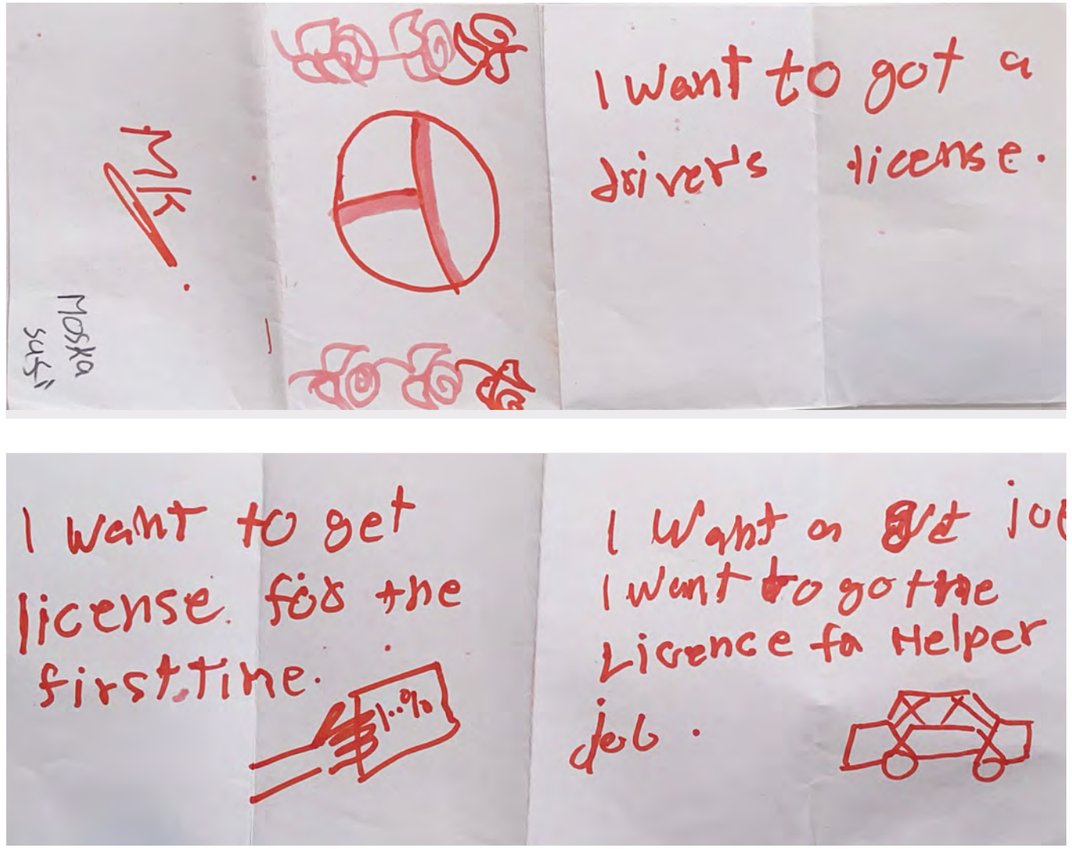
Origin: Pashtun, from Jalalabad, Afghanistan



Hand embroidery



Paper doll



Comic book



Nargas Safi

Age: 14 years, 2 years in the US

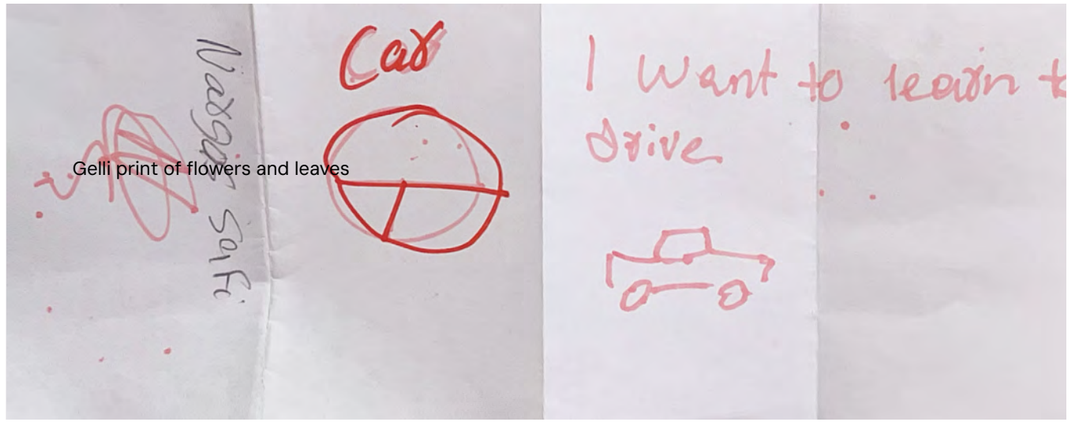
School: West Allis Central High School, 9th grade

Origin: Pashtun, from Jalalabad, Afghanistan





Gelli print of flowers and leaves



Comic book





Ina Shahvika

Age: 16 years, 3 years in the US

School: Pulaski High School, 10th grade

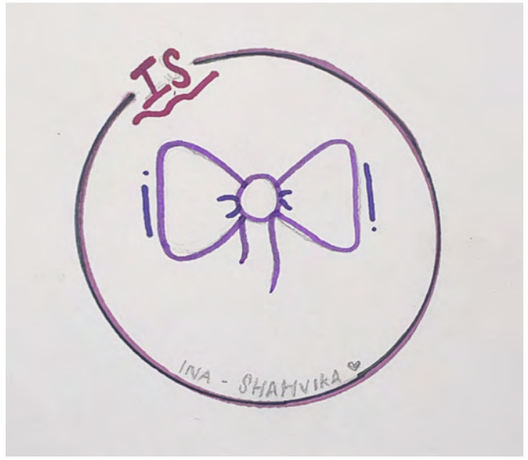
Origin: Rohingya, from Malaysia



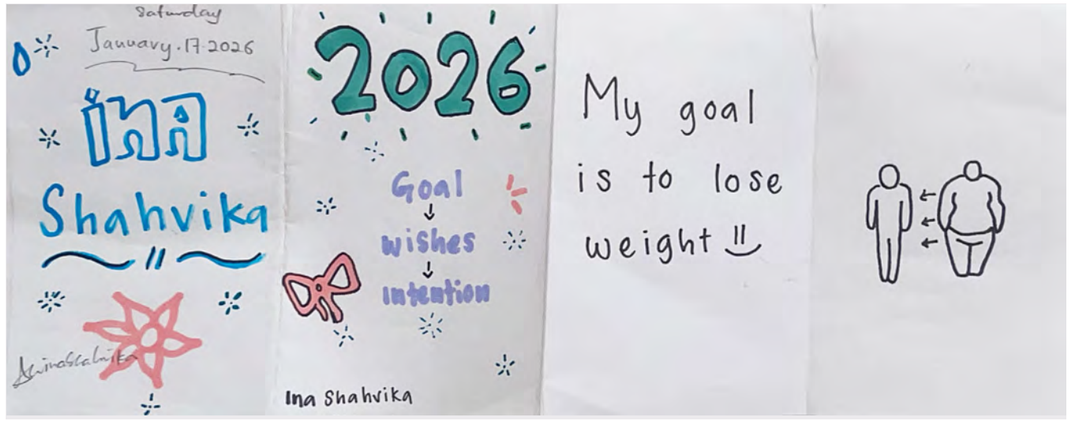
This image represents me. I like the color blue and I am a smiley person.

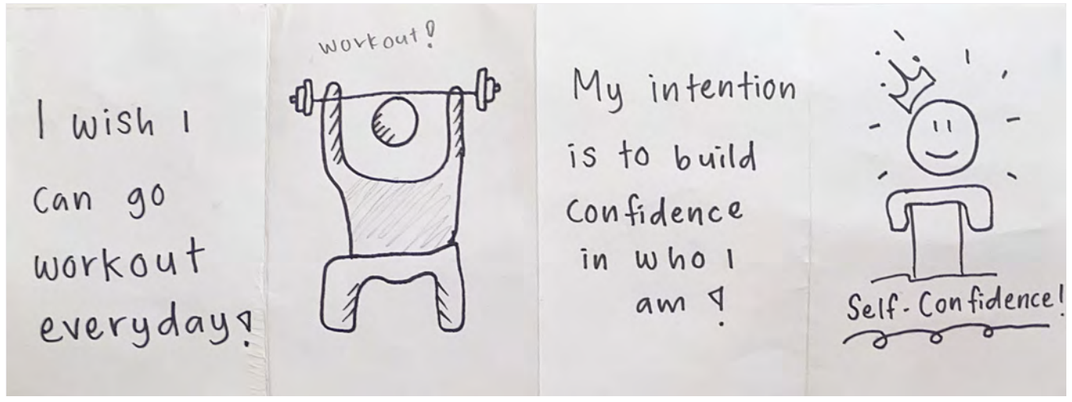
This art piece is made of paper and maps that represents a woman traveling the world. It shows the beauty of different cultures.

> I learnt that leadership is how to help a group work together to reach a big goal. I learnt how to listen to others and make smart choices that are fair for everyone. It also helps you become a person that others trust and follow because you lead by example.



My logo is based on the initials in my name. The bow design in the center represents creativity and balance. The curved lines show movement and energy. I chose this design because it is simple, but still unique.





These are my 2026 goals—trying to lose some weight.



Rabiyar Tozul

Age: 18 years, 2 years in the US

School: South Division High School, 11th grade

Origin: Myanmar Muslim, from Malaysia

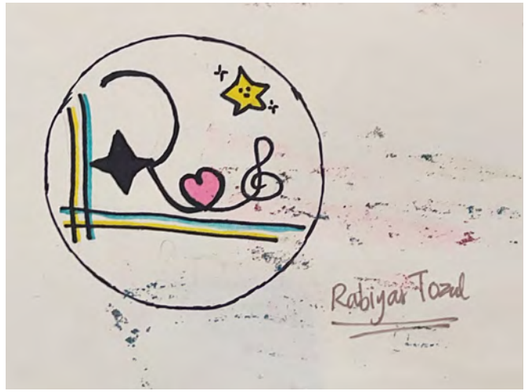
This is my poster of myself—that is how I feel, or how I want it to turn out to be.

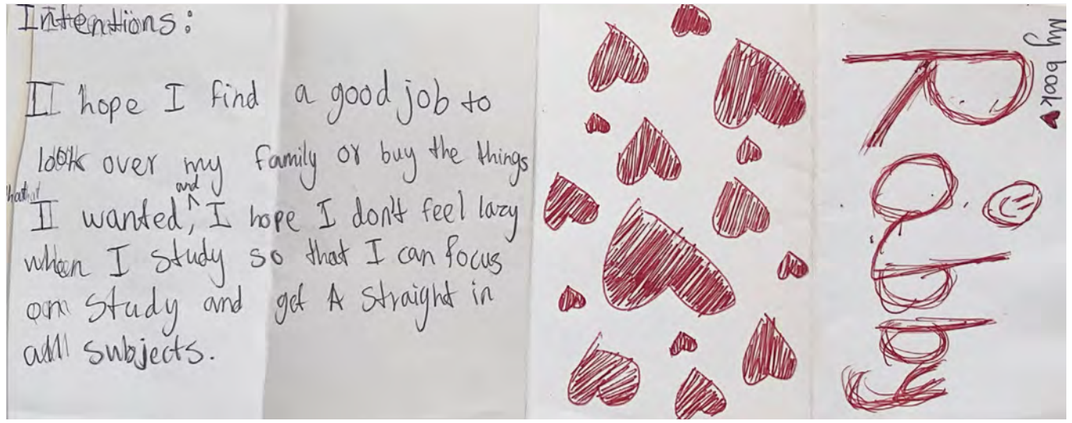


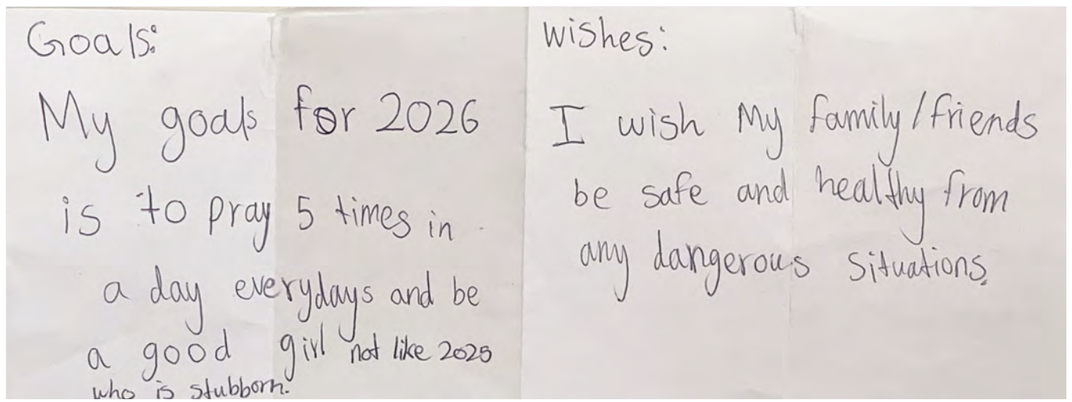
This artwork shows the Malay traditional clothes. It turned out so pretty.

> Artmaking in this program made me feel so focused and interested in art. From all my artworks, I liked my puppet or paper doll art the most, because it turned out so pretty like I wanted. I made a lot of friends, but I am shy to talk with them, so most of the time, I talk with the one I know more. I learnt a lot of stories from this leadership program. I didn't expect it to be this real.

This is my logo, which spells out the short form of my name, "Rab." I made "R" both fancy and gentle. "A" is a heart, and it leads to my love of music, which is "b," a music note. The star at the top is fun.







This art book is my wish list of things that I want to happen this year, 2026



This artwork reminds me of my strength. It shows that I did my hair while my hand was broken.

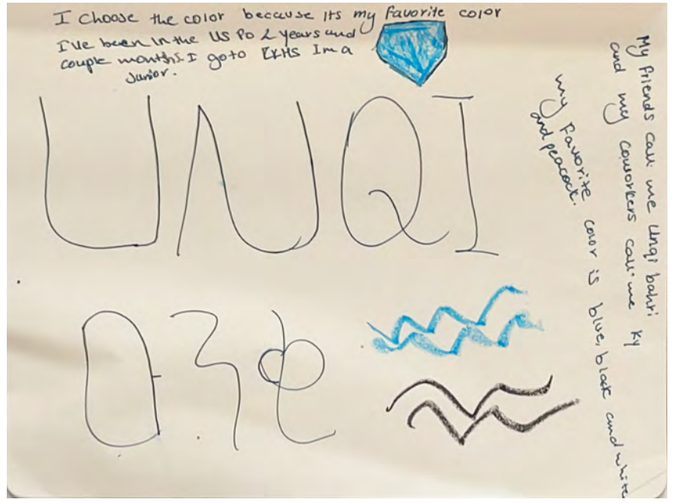
Kisanet Yosief

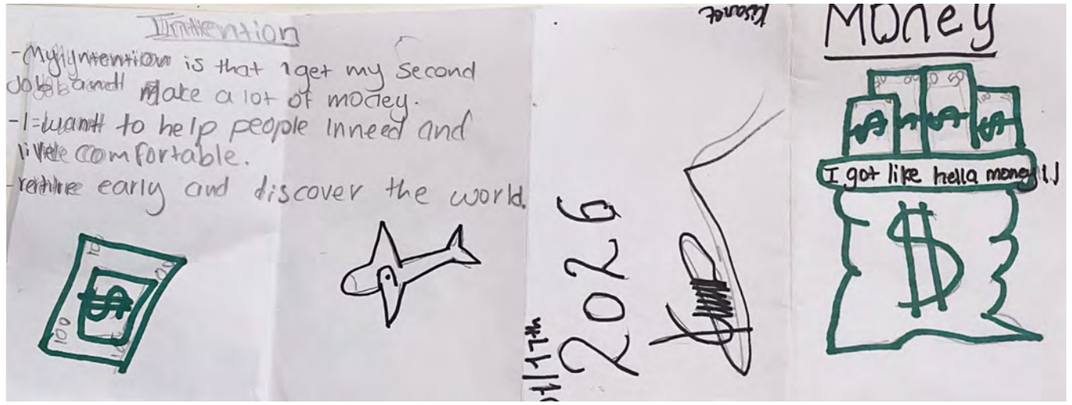
Age: 18 years, 3 years in the US

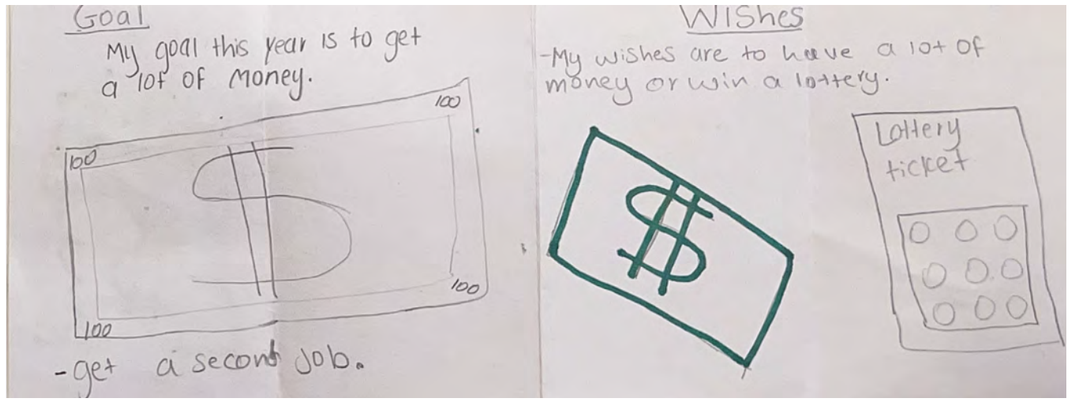
School: Rufus King High School, 11th grade

Origin: Habesha, from Segeneyti, Eritrea

I picked this because it was my first day in my 3rd year in *Be the Change*.







This reminds me of what I want to do this year and it keeps me on track.



I selected this because it's one of my favorite artworks.

Tigisti Yosief

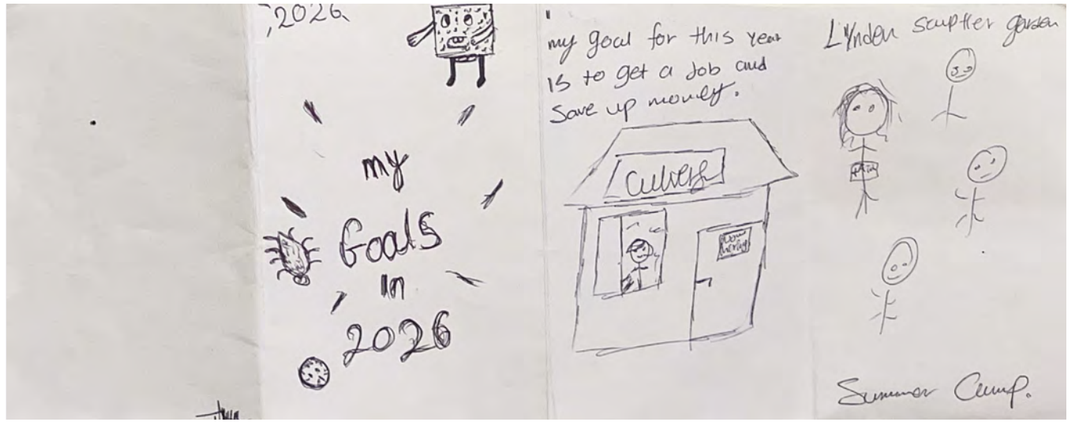
Age: 16 years, 3 years in the US

School: Rufus King High School, 9th grade

Origin: Habesha, from Segeneyti, Eritrea



I selected this artwork
because she is beautiful.



I selected this because these were my goals for this year and I achieved all of them, and I'm grateful!


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