

**Love yourself pretty much,
before you love anyone else**



Cover Art:

Kama Warburton

Kama is a young Dunedin artist who loves colour and has previously worked out of Studio2

Figure 25. Vibrantly coloured poster-paints have been used to create a colage of images. A curtain of bright blue and yellow and grey and orange polka dots look as if they have been pulled back to reveal stylized flowers in one corner of the painting and a red heart, be-speckled in ladybird black dots in the other. A small yellow cat sits unobtrusively at the bottom of the page and the artists name is painted diagonally centre-stage.

Love yourself pretty much, before you love anyone else

I do remember a lot...

Well I can start from the very beginning. So pretty much I was bought up in foster care because my parents couldn't look after me. My Mum had sort of a similar experience to me but hers was physically worse. She was physically beaten up, she's still lucky to be here and she's still alive but she's not with that person anymore. That was my Dad and because of that, Mum couldn't look after us because Dad kind of brain washed her a lot and she did try to leave apparently but that never worked because he'd track her down.

[It was] domestic family violence and us kids kind of had to, me and my brother and my half-brother kind of saw it, but my half-brothers were of the age where they could leave and live with their Dad. They were worried [about us] but they didn't have to deal with it because they could just pack up and leave because they could decide what they wanted to do. And me and my brother were left but I think from what I was told about it, one of my [half-brothers] rang Oranga Tamariki, which was CYFS back then, and got me and my brother out of that situation and there were a whole lot of family meetings about it but I was never able to live back with my [mum].

[So I went into foster care] and the situation wasn't better, it took Mum about 10 or 11 years to finally get out of her situation and that caused a rift between my relationship with my mum but we're a lot better now - but it's never going to be....

I was five [when I went into foster care]. I was very young ... No-one really wanted to look after me because I was the kid with ADHD and that was kind of full on for anyone.... I was very full on. And also in saying that, Mum's side of the family, they would have tried to look after me but they couldn't because Dad kept threatening them and

stuff like that so that put them in an awkward situation and they had families of their own so it wasn't fair.

There were some good foster places and some not so good. I had lots. I went to about 24 homes, I think. From the age of 5 till the age of 16 or 17.

[One foster home in particular] wasn't good for me though, a lot of stuff happened there, there were other really bad foster children there and it just, wasn't a good situation. Then I went to another home and that was around this way - they didn't have children of their own because they couldn't have children and because of that they didn't really know how to bring up another kid that wasn't their own and just, it wasn't their fault, they just couldn't really understand me. Like I said, I was very hard to raise so they struggled. I didn't have the best behaviour, I understand that and I know that kids with ADHD can be very full on, because I was full on for a fact but I'm not going to compare anyone else.

I went to two primary schools...

I went to two primary schools. School for me growing up, especially primary school was really hard for me. Because I didn't really fit in with the other kids. I got bullied, I kind of bullied them a bit as well, just like struggling with things

One time because I was getting annoyed because these people in my class were just being real horrible to me, I got angry and I was like right, I'm going to teach them a lesson, so what I did was, I kind of threw a chair at them, like a plastic chair and I got suspended for like two or three days because of it. But I felt really awful afterwards.

The [teachers] never really realised [that I was being bullied and that was why I threw the chair] and I did try and talk about it but it was always when the teacher wasn't around so like they couldn't do much about it unless they were caught out on it. I think [the teachers] just thought I was struggling with everything in life and that. I found there were some nice teachers though, I felt like my teacher aide was really good with me and did a lot with me. [I didn't have my teacher's aide] at lunch time or morning teas, I kind of had to figure that out.

I didn't really have friends. Eventually in year four or five, I did make a friend. This girl was really lovely. I'm still friends with her, we still kind of keep in touch at times. Yeah, [she's] a long-time friend, although we don't see each other much and she's doing her thing, and she's a bit older than me. But she's always been my friend. Yeah, but then she left a year before me and I was left, because I got held back a year a primary school. I was kind of left to deal with that and it kind of sucked.

I found [having ADHD] really hard, and still struggle now. Whether that be because my home life wasn't settled enough because of going from home school I struggled with my math, still struggle with my math. And they tried to teach me and also, my learning wasn't up to the standard it should have been for my age.

High school got worse...

High School, got worse. Let's just say that, I wasn't the bully. I was the one who was getting bullied. Year 10 camp, let's start with that. Year 10 camp we went to [the country]. I was in main stream, I wanted to be in main stream because I wanted to make friends and just be a normal.... Like I know that I'm normal but like fit in, try and at least fit in for that thing but that never happened. Until year 13.

[On school camp], what happened was, we were told to go to bed at a certain time. Everyone had their cell phones and some of the girls, they were just being really horrible and stuff like that and asking inappropriate questions to me. Just being really inappropriate.

And I'm just like, I don't know what to do about this. Tried to get a teacher, teacher told me to go back to bed so lucky I had my phone on me and I rang a person and this person rung the teachers of the school and really said something to them like.... it's like 11 o'clock at night and these kids are tormenting my child. Well yeah, and she's like and my child is very upset about this and this is not on. This is a school camp, and you guys are meant to have a no tolerance for bullying at this school. And anyway, so the teachers came in and I ended up sleeping the night in the teacher's cabin. But that didn't really change anything.

I don't know [what would stop bullying], but like maybe, there needs to be more put in place for the people with disabilities and like trying to maybe, discussing things with the [other] students in a way that they'll understand and they'll respect these people and remember that their brains don't always exactly be like theirs but in a way that's not going to affect these people and make these people feel like they're stupid of something cos also I think a lot of respect needs to be given to these people and like the [non-disabled] students need to spend time with the people who have disabilities and just make them feel wanted and not horrible about themselves.

For a while, a long time [I always felt horrible about myself]. I did, because of what was going on, I thought yeah I'm usually different from the rest of these people, I'm stupid, I'm all of those and I used to come home crying and just get really angry about it.

My behaviour got very out of control

Yeah I was going through the teenage years, some really bad teenage years, let's just say that. Ummm, with all the bullying, besides that, there was the relationships, the people I sort of connected with. I look back now and think, why on earth would I go out with those people? Or hang out with those sorts of people? I really don't know [why I did hang out with them] to be honest. I just think maybe I just thought like, I was cool or something - but that wasn't the case. I don't know.

At the time, I just wanted a boyfriend and you know, everyone else my age, in my class had boyfriends and people used to kind of torment me about it. Like, oh have you done this, have you done this? Or have you got a boyfriend, you should get one, and then I'd turn around and they'd try and get me to talk to people I didn't even know. And they asked me if I've ever done that or ever done that? I felt uncomfortable actually, really uncomfortable. I don't know [if they did that to other girls] to be honest, I kind of I don't know. I just know that they were trying to make fun of me and stuff because I was a little bit different.

But so anyway, I'm going to get onto the topic about this relationship. He just wasn't a nice person. He had all these charges against him and I was just stupid, young. [He was] a lot older. And I don't know why.....people did try and not allow it but I just wouldn't have a bar of it! I was living at [my foster] home because I was only 16. [The relationship ended], but that was after a big screaming match.

He asked me for sex all the time

And then the other person I met. So, we went out for a couple [of] years. He was older than me. He asked me for sex all the time. I felt I couldn't say no, and that he called strangling me, play fighting, used to argue with me, he'd sit on his play station. I got [a pet] at one point and when my [pet] arrived, he was jealous of [it]. I don't know why he'd be jealous of [an animal], to be honest and when [it got a bit older], this person tried to [hurt my pet] and I literally screamed; it was just really horrible.

[I started getting support from a disability service] and my boyfriend was allowed to stay two nights and I used to go round there and stay at his house. That wasn't good either. Any time he got the chance to like maybe physically hurt me, and claim it was play fighting, he'd do it.

He wanted sex all the time. Even if I said no, he'd literally drag me on the bed and really badly pressure me. And I don't know, one

point, I got to the point that I rang my mum in tears. And I was like this is what's going on, and she yelled down her phone. [And when I got invited out he said] you're not going unless I'm going. And I was like, what, so now I'm not allowed to go out by myself and have fun.... And he was like, "[no] - I'm coming". So, I had to ring [the person I was going out with], I felt like I had to and he made me feel really guilty. And then we did, and we were drinking and that then we got a taxi back home and that night he spewed up all over my toilet floor and I woke up the next morning and I was busting to go to the toilet. I was busting to go to the toilet and what happened was he kept refusing to go to the toilet to clean it up. And he was all "you clean it up, I'm lying in bed, I'm staying in bed", and I was like, you made the mess, you clean it up, it's not my job. So, I ended up scrubbing the floor, cleaning the whole floor up. This was round the time I'd had enough of it all because it got really bad. And [because of him] I would stop contact with my family and all of that and it wasn't good.

[A close friend] actually knew about it, well she actually picked up, I didn't really talk about it. They had a couple of things that I think they were worried about but I never really discussed it. I think I refused to discuss it for some reason. [I know it was an abusive relationship] but my mum was beaten up more than I was beaten up to be honest.

I snapped...

A couple of weeks after the bathroom incident, we were on the bus and I think we went somewhere, we were doing something and on the bus, he kept winding me up and winding me up, and I don't think the bus driver realised, and anyway, I slapped him across the face because..... I snapped, I had just had enough and then he got off the bus and he was really upset and I kind of was in the mental state where I decided I was going to ring the police on myself which is the most ridiculous stupidest thing to do, see my brain was not right. [But] I wanted to resolve the situation, because I'm a nice person like that.

I felt I was in the wrong when it was actually him that was in the wrong. More or less.... So, what happened was the police went round to his flat and he decided he wouldn't press charges. I don't know why but that just made me feel even more guilty but in saying that, I shouldn't have felt guilty because he was the one who was treating me terribly and then after that with everything, on day, I don't remember the time frame but I do remember this, I'd had enough, and I was like right, this isn't on, this isn't fair to me. This is not a healthy relationship. So, I ended things and I told him to pack up, come down and grab all his crap and all of that. He wouldn't so I ended up chucking a whole lot of things out and he was all "Oh, I can't carry all of that" and I was like "well, if you're not going to get it, then I'm going to chuck it all out", so I chucked most of it out, then he tried to contact me again and I blocked him on everything.

I think I realised this - I didn't want to end up like my mother and live with that for like 10 years or more, and I don't think it was fair to my family to see me go through all of that, and plus I was struggling with my schooling as it was. I was trying to get NCEA level one and I couldn't even focus on that, and I was like well my education is more important than someone putting me through that. That person doesn't deserve to have someone like me.

It felt good that [the relationship] was gone actually to be honest. I was still processing in my mind what had happened. It was kind of hard to process because I kind of knew all about that stuff but yet it happened to me, and I should have been more aware of the warning signs, the warning bells.

I've learned this...

Well first of all, how do I explain it... I've learned this... maybe if a guy just sits around and does nothing, expects you to do his washing, expects you to do everything, not even taking turns at cooking, you know like normal relationship things that you'd do.

Another warning sign would be the really bad arguments all the time. The constant arguing and as soon as he started physically hurting me, claiming strangling was play fighting, that should have been another warning sign I should have taken into consideration.

And, I should have told someone else sooner. I shouldn't have kept it all to myself. But I did because I didn't want anyone to worry about me. After I broke up with [my former boyfriend] I do know that from the experience, it took me a long time to recover from that. He never come back but he told everyone a whole lot of lies about me and claimed that I was pregnant to him. I wasn't.

He's lovely

Yeah, so I kind of met him online, but I did it the safe kind of way. He decided one weekend he was going to come to [where I live] drive all the way here and meet me. We met at [a park]. And yeah, things just progressed from there and we kind of had a connection and we just talked and talked and that and he ended up staying the night and yeah, it just kind of progressed from there. And in saying that, I wanted someone who was going to treat me right and I think I've finally got that because he is really lovely. Like he comes to see me and I to see him. We go out for lunch, do things normal couples do and you know. He has respect for me. We have our disagreements but at the end of the day we still care about each other. And like even after a hard day at work, he always will talk to me.

[I have found someone] who respects me and has loyalty and love for me, who is not going to abuse me in any form or way. And in saying that, my [close family and friends] absolutely love him and that's the way it should be. Your family should be able to know your boyfriend is a nice person and respect him. And I know his Mum and his Dad. They respect me. Like first time I was really nervous because I haven't really had the best experience meeting [the family of] a person I went out with.

[A good relationship is when the person] respects you and has loyalty and love. It doesn't always have to be about the intimate stuff, it can just be maybe going out to a movie. Maybe going for a walk or something? For a while I was really scared [of intimacy]. It just kind of happened with me and [current boyfriend] aye. Yeah it just kind of happened. No pressure, he never pressured me, it just kind of happened, like I said, yeah... In my opinion, don't rush into things. Wait till you meet the right person. Love yourself pretty much before you love anyone else.