

A yellow speech bubble with a white outline, containing the text "next step" in white and black.

**next
step**

Recognized Voices

a Studio **Vibes** Project

Recognized Voices

For Studio Vibes 2022, a group of black youth gathered to discuss the impact and intersection of race and chronic illness in their lives. By building a safe space together, they were able to engage their shared experiences as black youth more deeply. *Recognized Voices* is the term they chose to represent “*the need to listen to young people of color who are on the everlasting mile - whose voices hold a unique and valuable perspective.*”

That’s what we call the journey of chronic illness at Next Step - *the everlasting mile*. And although there isn’t an end, there are many beginnings. There are steps we can choose to take. This group’s step was to make the invisible, *visible*. In the pages that follow, you will find their narratives - shared through word, beat, poetry and personal awareness.

As a young person of color, there are prejudices and biases at play, *everyday*, that are based in racism. These forces have the potential to cancel you out. Recognizing this, the group found solace in the act of openly talking about their struggles and successes. Hearing each other created a way for this group to recognize their own voices individually AND collectively. This is the power of community.

“What we’re recognizing is that ultimately it’s about living your best life in the midst of your own beautiful chaos.”

And you do this based on your terms, your definitions. Not those of others, not family or friends. And for sure not your diagnosis. YOU define YOU. Define how you’ll handle the moment, how you’ll see yourself, and how you’ll stay true. Each of these Vibes is just that - *a recognized voice*.

We invite you to listen to these Vibes at www.nextstepnet.org.



What's a Vibe?

A Vibe at Next Step is a motivational reminder a young person living with chronic illness creates *FOR* them self, *FROM* them self.

In Studio, working with a music therapist, each young person identifies a moment in their life they want to focus on - one that needs their attention and care, that needs a way to be supported or figured out or handled.

We create original music - a beat or song - and combine that with a personal narrative such as a poem, creative writing, mantra, story, interview - whatever writing and music style captures their experience. We put the music and spoken-word together and create an audio track that can travel *the everlasting mile* with them - what we call chronic illness at Next Step. We know the everlasting mile has its fair share of very real and complex challenges. We also know that along the way there are friends to find, community to build, music to make, and new steps to take.

Their Vibe becomes an infusion of affirming energy they can listen to in *that moment* - a narrative they've created for when they need to be reminded of them self.

Our Vibes, our motivational reminders, are for the uncertain times, the real times, the times when you just don't know. They are also for the times when you need to celebrate yourself, listen to yourself - and recognize yourself.

Thanks for listening in with us.



“Clear My Mind”

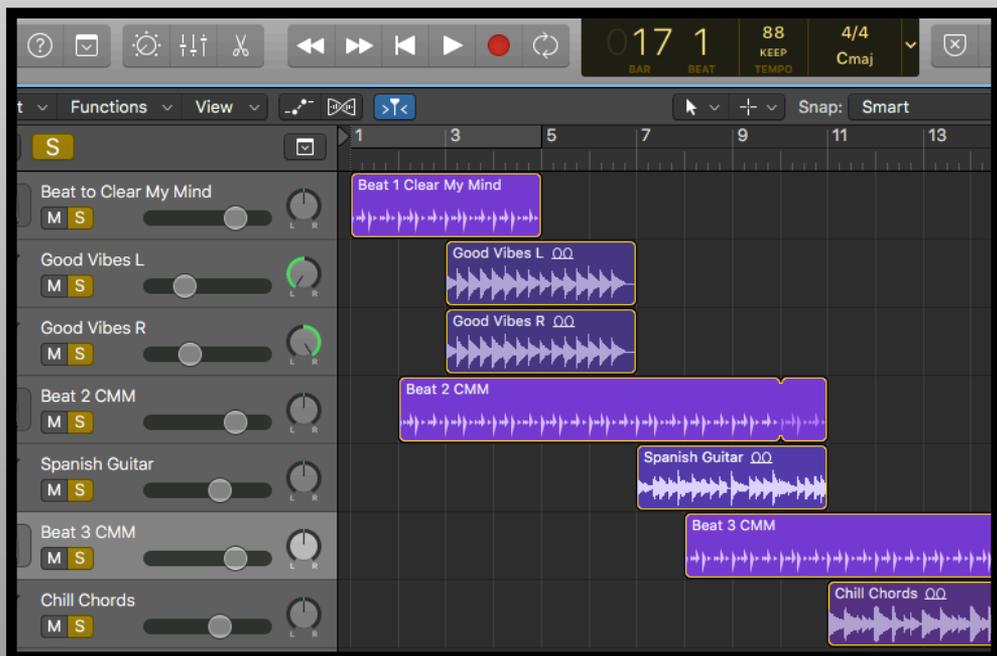


Music... it pretty much gets me through life
Basically, there's so many options
And whatever mood I'm in,
I can listen to this or listen to that
And while I'm listening
the music gives me the chance to clear my mind
That's why I feel music gets me through

Every artist has their own message with their music
And I can either relate to them
Or feel for them
I can hear there are others
Going through their own struggles
Their own scene and challenges
And despite that – or because of that
They make music to make themselves
To get the pain off their chest or out of their mind
To make space for what's good in their life
This helps me realize I am not alone

I make sure to include the good in all my relationships
Because what's good
Are the people who are actually there
To hold me down thru whatever
When I'm at my worst
They tell me to keep going, keep my head up
It's like I've lost the beat for a second
But they help me get back in the groove

I would hate to be in a world where there's no music
Where I'm sitting in the quiet
Just losing my mind

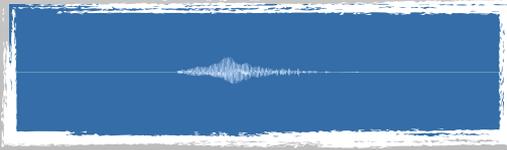


Artist Statement

Throughout my whole life, music has been a part of it. It has helped me find myself and understand who I am.

Music gave me a different view on other people and on how society is.

“Unpredictable”



Close your eyes
What do you feel?
Is it a tight pain?

Breathe...

It's just anxiety

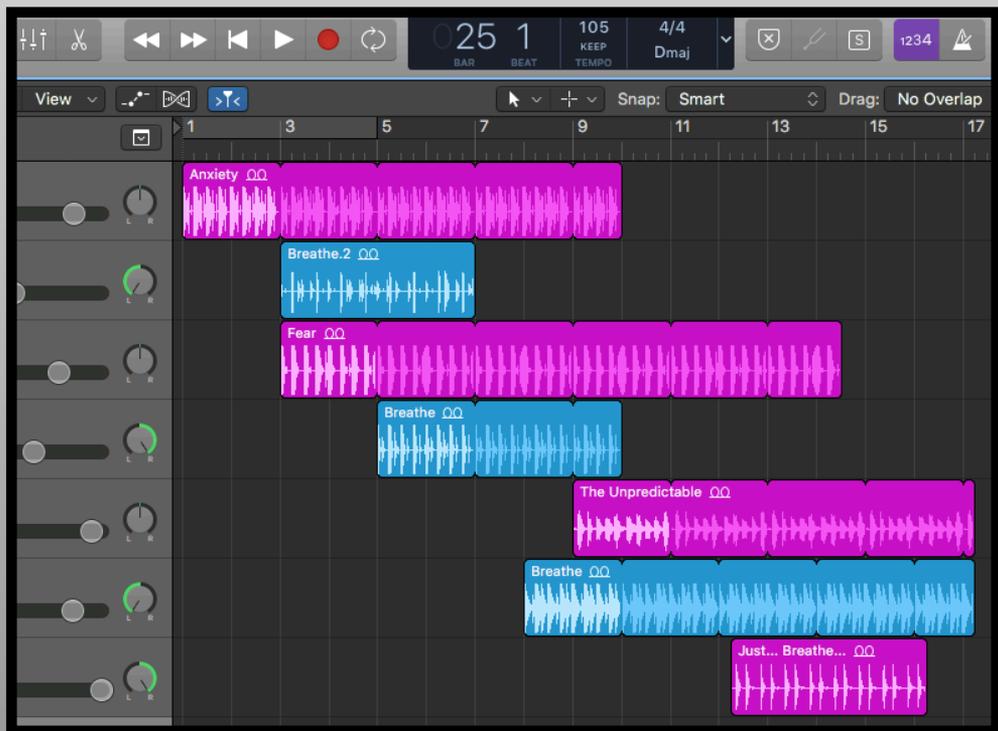
Anxiety
It's fear
Fear of the unknown
Fear of what's to come

**It's the
u n p r e d i c t a b l e**

So Breathe...

You plan
You decide
You plan again

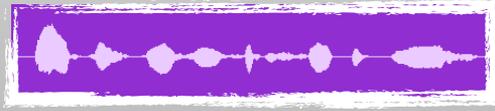
Breathe ...



Breathe...

*When times are rough ~
Remember to breathe*

“Forgiveness”



Hey little me,
There are going to be people in your life that don't always have your best interest, and sometimes they're family. But you don't have to let them off just because they're family. No.

You are your own person – especially now you've grown. So that spot they're comfortable in – their blissful ignorance – you don't have to deal with that anymore. You get to choose – and you choose you:)

Yours is the path of forgiveness because forgiveness is an act of self care. It's saying, "I forgive you for the sake of me." It's saying, "I don't want that in my heart," and "I won't carry around your pain."

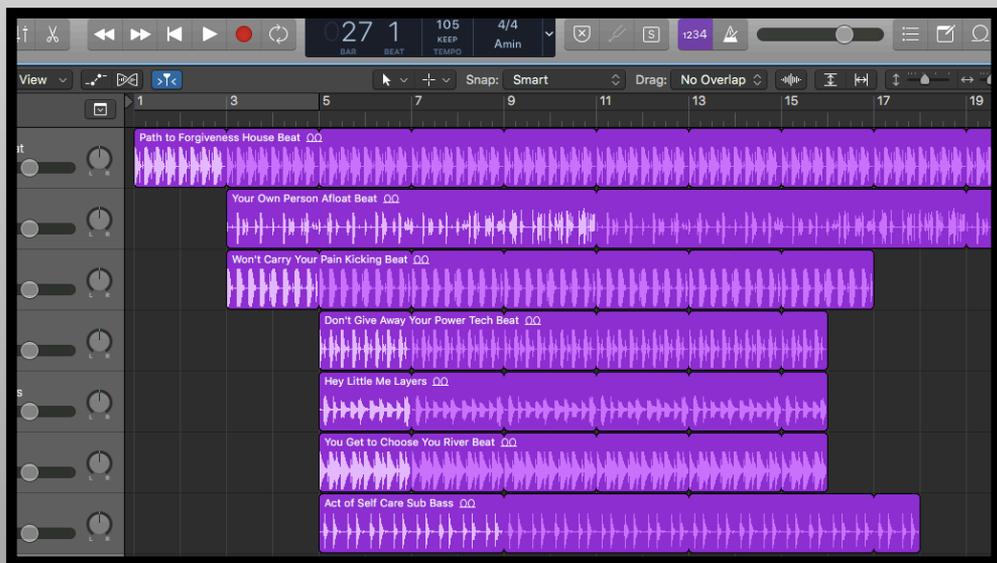
In your heart you want space for light and love, plants and peace... You can have peace. I can have peace. We get to have peace.

I know you know life is not perfect, and I know you feel that "not perfectness" right now because you know that things happen. Things have happened and... well... In time you will begin to heal. You will. I mean, I'm here, right?!

Don't give away your power. That's the secret. We can't let them cancel out our power AND we can't cancel it out.

We do have a little more control over our lives than we let on so you have to tell yourself, "I'm running the show. I've got the power – and no one can take that from me."

Hey little me – just thank you for holding on, for not giving up. For somehow finding your way through a whole lot of hell to become me. *To become a person who can forgive...*



Artist Statement

This Vibe is about me finding the comfort within myself - because nobody can make you feel as good as you can make yourself feel. I've learned this the hard way, the easy way - all the ways.

In writing to my little me, I wanted them to know...

*“You deserve the life you want -
not the life people think you're going to have.
What you are is nothing to be ashamed of.
This is your reminder.*

*You are unique.
You have your own right.
And you are a beautiful thing.”*

“MindWeight”



There’s a mind weight I live with. The disease I have might be incurable. This mind weight affects my whole life and makes it hard to hope.

To add to this, I’m needing to build up my health advocacy. When I was a kid my Mom managed all my medical stuff – she talked for me, but now I need to talk for me. I need to manage my health, my illness - my medical everything. And as I’m starting to understand what it takes to manage this full and challenging medical life, it’s been putting me in a depressing mood. I’ve been told by my doctor that if I don’t take care of my illness in a certain way, I could die.

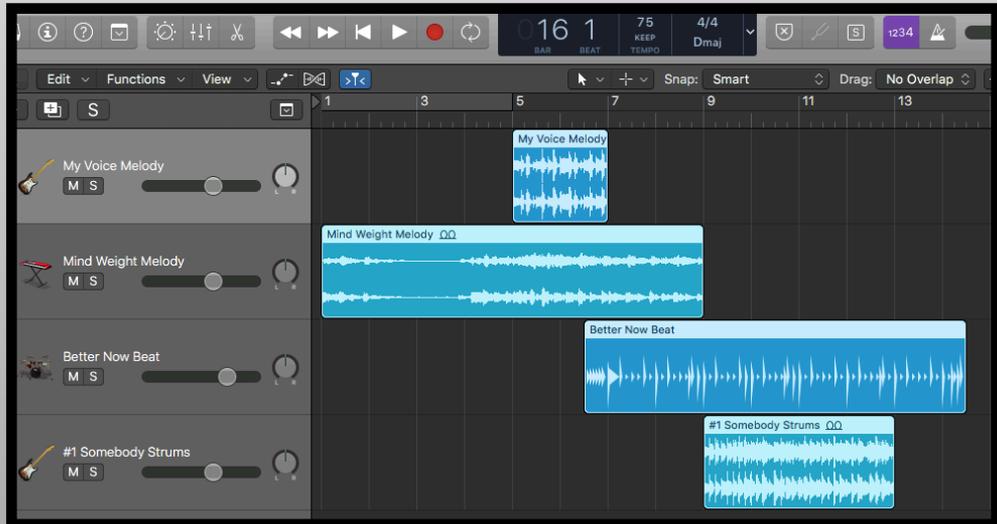
So... My choices become even more important. I have to be about what I can do for me. The context of my decisions needs to be about how I can make myself better. So my “better now” values that I try to keep are:

**I pick my battles*

**I take time to meditate – I focus on my deep breaths*

**I create my safe space*

Even if it’s just finding a quiet area somewhere to take those deep breaths, I make sure to do so and focus on what would help get my health back better.



So this means I'm making myself my priority - making myself my #1 somebody. This has taken me some time to develop, to find the mental capacity and ability to hold on to the good memories and leave the bad stuff in the past so I can keep focused on what's coming ahead.

It's the difference from depression and frustration. Frustration is "I can get over it." Depression is your body saying "f this" and just crashing. You don't know if you can dig yourself back up because you don't know if it's going to be a never ending rabbit hole.

It's this kind of heaviness that makes it harder to choose me over others. That plus the fact we've been taught NOT to choose ourselves. All this mind weight. Trying to keep me down, pulling on my head and heart. It's all I can do each day to take step with it.

But I can't back down on me. Not for anybody, and not for this mind weight. There's only one me and that's why I've got to be my #1 somebody. If I'm going to be advocating for anyone - it better be me. That's my definition of better now - **Better be for me.**

“5 Steps Ahead”



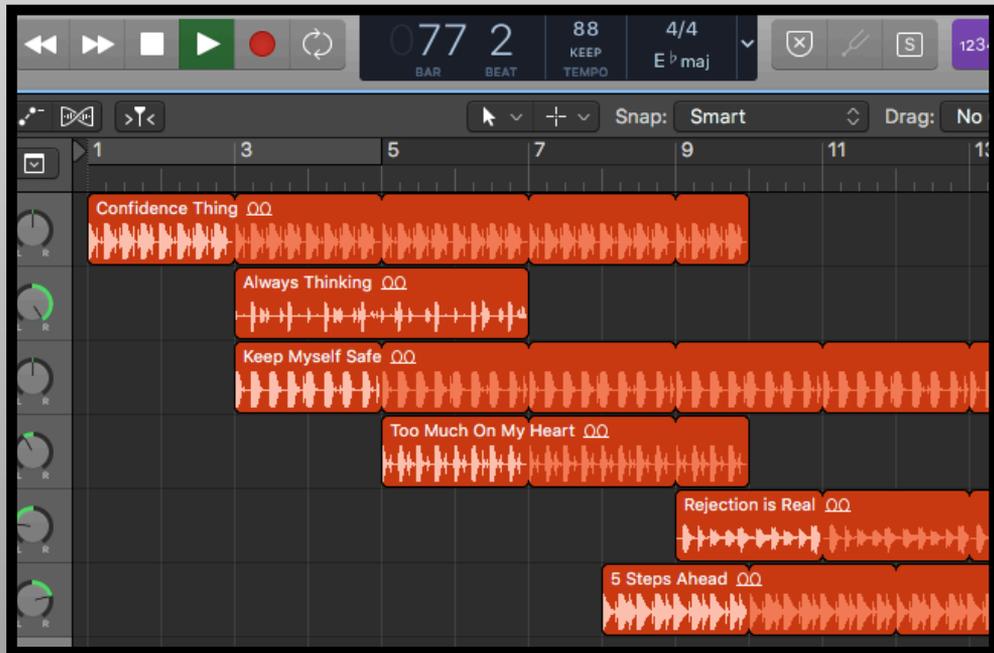
It's a confidence thing

I'm always thinking 5 steps ahead

**I do this to keep myself safe
Because so many times
things have unraveled
And it's just too much on my heart**

**I want to put myself out there
But rejection is real**

**So I think things through
Many times
And I try to see 5 steps ahead**

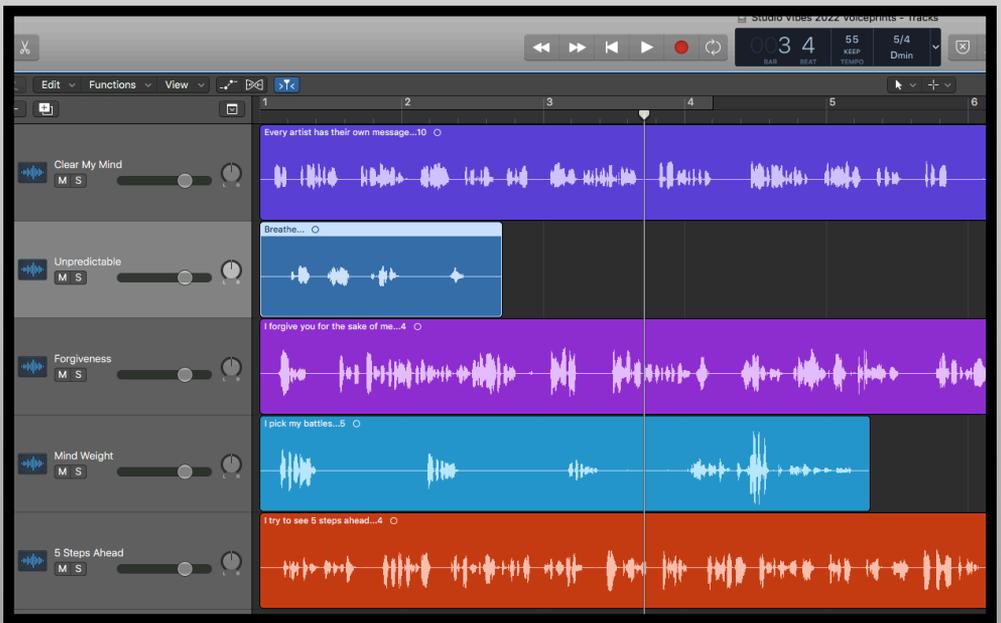


Artist Statement

I initially wasn't going to choose this Vibe topic but I stuck with it because I felt this was one of my bad qualities that I have. I let my indecisiveness lead me into not doing a lot of things I would like to do in life – not finishing or accomplishing things I want to do in life. This slows me down and it makes me very skeptical of trying new things because I'm always unsure of how things are going to pan out – and my self esteem is going to be more crushed if I try something and fail – so I stay in my safety net instead of moving forward.

Sometimes I will think I want to start practicing for a test - but I'll already be thinking of the failure of me - of me failing this test and how that will make me feel and how people will think of me as a failure. But I don't want to see myself as a failure.

This kind of thinking really brings me down - so I felt that writing this Vibe could help me acknowledge this character flaw and hopefully work on it. By acknowledging it, I could work on it. By saying it out loud I'll be admitting to it AND giving myself the chance to know that I have possibility.



Voiceprints

Each of our voices is a distinct signature.

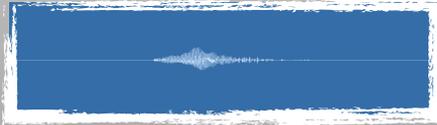
In recognizing our voices, we wanted to distinctly choose one message from our own Vibe as a way to acknowledge and share an essential step we each needed to take as part of our Studio Vibes journey.

These steps are helping us walk our everlasting mile.

Maybe there's a step here for you...



“Every artist has their own message with their music - and I can either relate to them - or feel for them.”



“BREATHE.”



“I forgive you for the sake of me.”



“I pick my battles.”



“This kind of thinking really brings me down - so I felt that writing this Vibe could help me acknowledge this character flaw and hopefully work on it. By acknowledging it, I could work on it. By saying it out loud I’ll be admitting to it AND giving myself the chance to know that I have possibility.”

next step



Next Step is a nonprofit that serves young people living with chronic and serious illness.

We believe that a young person's medical condition should not define them.

Our programs empower our young people to live their brightest future.

For more information, please visit our website at www.nextstepnet.org.

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