

Museum allows youth to create art

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HUNTINGTON -- In Studio 5 at the Huntington Museum of Art, at first glance, one might see a few teenagers and instructors bustling about the room, hovering over a chalky-looking concoction. But take a closer look and much more is happening.

Since July 24, nine teens working through ArtWorks have dedicated five hours a day to complete a cast paper relief project of a mosaic of scenes in Huntington. The piece will be displayed at the Huntington Bank on 5th Avenue.

ArtWorks is a program coordinated between the Huntington Museum of Art of the Huntington Housing Authority offered to at-risk teenagers living in public housing who are willing to commit to continuous participation in the creation of a group art project.



"There's a stigma about people that live in public housing," Tim White, resident support services supervisor Huntington Housing Authority, said. "People think they're always into drugs or on the streets or have no value of education, but these kids have risen above that."

Students who participate in ArtWorks are enrolled in Operation Right Choice, a year-round program that is directed toward youth ages 11 to 17 that live in and around public housing communities. Within this group, students attend weekly classes about drug, alcohol and substance use prevention. Once they complete these classes, they can participate in ArtWorks, according to White.

Katherine Cox, director of education at the museum, said working with art is one of the most beneficial projects these students can do. "Art is an ideal vehicle for broader learning," she said. "It's almost like art is a safe place to learn who you are and share ideas with other people."

Because of the value of ArtWorks, students are recruited within their public housing facilities to join Operation Right Choice and to participate in the art program. Andrea Gilman, youth programs coordinator for the Huntington Housing Authority, helps with the recruitment process and also transports the teens from their homes to the museum each day.



"They not only are contributing something to the city of Huntington, but 50 years from now they can look back on this and can personally take something away from it," she said. "A day they spend with us is a day they aren't on the streets exposed to drugs and violence. These programs give them an alternative."

Ja'Leeza Canada, 17, a student at Huntington High School, said she loves participating in ArtWorks because it makes her more confident and gives her an experience she might need someday.

"I want to go into art education," she said. "So, I really enjoy doing this. From day one, I wanted to keep doing this and I always wanted to come back."