

Latest 'Artworks' project unveiled

By BEN FIELDS, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- When they finally saw it, their eyes lit up. The culmination of a summer's worth of work hung from the wall of a first-floor room in the Drinko Library at Marshall University.

The kids, all middle-school age and from Huntington's public housing complexes, had done their individual parts months ago, but had not seen the final piece assembled until it was unveiled in the library Monday.

It was assembled by Benji Davies, a professor of art at the University of Rio Grande, who ran the summer workshop with the children. Davies described the final result as "a big, crazy, colorful mess."

The work is called "Faces, Traces & Places: A Journey Through Portraiture." It's an amalgam of several squares of painting, digital art and screen-printing that the kids worked on as the 14th piece in the "Artworks" series, a joint project between the Huntington Housing Authority and the Huntington Museum of Art. The program was begun seven years ago.



"The great thing about collaboration is that everyone is working toward a common goal," said Katherine Cox, director of education at the museum. "Collaboration is when everyone comes together and something great comes out of it. ... It strengthens our community and who we are."

The goal of the program is to get children in public housing involved with art and education.

"This program keeps young people off the street and from doing things they shouldn't be doing," said Joseph Riner, one of the children who participated.

"It surprised me to see that people around here really do care about kids and what happens to them," said Bianca Canady, who also worked on the piece.

While the kids are hopefully getting something out of the project, the community is getting something in return in a lasting piece of art, said Tim White, program coordinator of the Cabell County Youth Empowerment Program. "These

kids are going to be able to bring their children and their grandchildren and maybe even their great-grandchildren here and show them the things they created," White said.

At a reception for the children at the library, Barbara Winters, dean of University Libraries, told the young artists to continue to aim high and work for a better life.

"I grew up in public housing in Charleston, and my husband did, too," Winters said. "Now I have a salary that's pretty good. That's due to God's grace and education. You don't have to stay in public housing. "Don't give up, and consider education."