

Be Your Own Hero

2018 FYSB Mural Contest Submission
Youth Service Bureau of St. Joseph County
Safe Station Emergency Shelter

Youth Service Bureau of St. Joseph County located in northern Indiana is the recipient of a FYSB Basic Center Grant known as Safe Station. This eight-bed emergency shelter serves youth age 12 to 18 who are homeless, runaway and/or in crisis. Safe Station is the only temporary emergency shelter in the county. Staff engage residents in learning life skills, identifying coping mechanisms and in setting life goals while providing a safe place to stay, nutritional meals, positive interactions with caring adults and other amenities aimed at increasing well-being and personal growth. Youth may remain in the shelter for a period of 21 days or less. Family and individual counseling is offered as a means toward successful family reunification.

The **Be Your Own Hero** mural project is one of many art-based therapy projects residents completed during the past year. This project began as an informal conversation between staff and residents during a family style meal. Residents and staff were discussing the concepts of “Super Heroes” and the individual powers possessed by comic book characters. From there, the conversation turned to how each of us holds the power to change our lives, using the “powers” within.

Residents were asked to define internal characteristics of youth resilience. Although the youth could designate many characteristics, the overall themes were “knowledge,” “bravery” and “strength.” Youth stated that resilience required knowledge to dispel ignorance, bravery to overcome fear, and strength to persevere in the face of adversity. These three characteristics are included in the illustrations of the mural. A story board mock up was written on a piece of scrap paper and became the basis of the completed mural project. One youth, a 17-year-old male, who aspires to become a graphic artist, became the champion of the process. Using PhotoShop, he created the illustrations with little input from staff.

Looking at the mural, one notices the first drawing depicts youth caught in “The Struggle” which is illustrated by the dark figure holding the youth captive. A passerby calls for help and the call is received by the police (who represent adults in authoritarian roles). In the second drawing, youth are seen lounging, playing video games and talking on cell phones- typical activities for their age. The adult figure calls on these youth to ban together to help the struggling youth depicted in the first drawing. A youth announces there is “Trouble in the city” in the third drawing. The fourth drawing illustrates a diverse group of youth calling on the resiliency powers of youth potential. In the fifth drawing, youth state “Together we can do anything.” Drawing six illustrates the three powers coming together to defeat “The Struggle.” The Struggle is defeated in the seventh illustration. In the final drawing, the youth saved by the group thank

the Super Heroes who tell them they, the struggling youth, possessed the power and potential all along; it is hidden in all of us.

Overall, the message to youth is that each of us, no matter our age or circumstance, has the potential to rise above adversity and hardships by harnessing our internal powers. A youth empowered is a youth with potential.

Because the shelter is a short term stay for residents, should the mural win, the plan is to allow residents to create a copy of the full-size mural during their stay. Due to the time limited stay, many youth will be involved in the completion of the project. Therefore, turning one dinner conversation into a community-based project from which the youth will learn the importance of harnessing their individual attributes rise above "The Struggle" and claim the internal characteristics of resiliency to realize their potential.