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To the FYSB Mural Contest Panel:

Jackson Street Youth Services is a youth-serving organization that serves Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties in Oregon. Jackson Street provides support to youth through a continuum of services which include: emergency shelter services, case management, life skills training, community outreach, mentoring, activities, and transitional services. Through these programs, Jackson Street is able to serve an annual average of 1,000 youth in Linn, Benton, and Lincoln Counties, including rural communities. The mission of Jackson Street Youth Services is to promote safety, stability, and well-being for youth. We work to prevent homelessness by showing a path to long-term success through building positive relationships and skills for self-sufficiency.

Jackson Street is partnering with two local organizations, The Corvallis Arts Center and Determined Art Movement, for a special mural project celebrating the amazing resiliency and potential of the youth in the Linn and Benton County communities. The Corvallis Arts Center is the oldest arts commission organization in Oregon, and has been connecting Corvallis and neighboring cities to art and artists for over 55 years. Determined Art Movement, started in 2014, is an artist organization with roots in the Corvallis community and Oregon State University, and whose purpose is to bridge art with equity actions in creating safe, brave spaces that facilitate positive community synergy. Through this partnership, artists, art educators and youth advocates have worked together to create opportunities for youth's stories and perspectives to take a central role in developing concepts and designs for the collaborative mural project.

Youth self-representation has been the primary focus for creating the mural narrative and design. Youth staying at the Corvallis House shelter were given the 2018 RHYTTAC Mural theme, "Realizing Youth Potential" and a set of questions to help guide their meditation on how to represent that theme. At the first meeting between all three organizations, one youth from the shelter was present to contribute their feelings and perspective on the possible meaning of the mural design. The youth prepared a statement and was moved to confront stereotypes of teens experiencing homelessness. Particularly, the youth wished to dispel the stereotype that youth experiencing homelessness are "lazy" or "trouble-makers"; instead, they stated a wish for others to see that homeless youth are resilient and determined to better their own lives. The youth shared their own personal story of experiencing discrimination but also hopefulness for their future. The youth also provided feedback on ways to connect the theme and project to other youth at future discussion groups, and was an advocate for their peers in shelter who were also interested in the project.

Following this initial planning meeting, Jackson Street facilitated a group visit to a current mural project organized by Determined Art Movement on campus at Oregon State University. In this visit, youth were provided sketchbooks, in which they could practice collecting visual elements and themes they wished to see represented in the mural design, as well as use for their own journaling and art-making. Elena Valdes-Chevarria, a muralist with Determined Art Movement, also led the group in a discussion about visual themes and concepts for murals. Some youth enjoyed contributing to the OSU mural, and learned some techniques in painting and design from mural artists.

Jackson Street helps youth 24/7/365

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The next day, Valdes-Chavarria and other artists visited Jackson Street’s Corvallis House shelter to talk with youth there about their RHYTTAC mural proposal. Youth contributed ideas for visual elements in the mural based on important self-care activities, pastimes, and experiences. Special stories that are significant to the youth were also discussed, including the “Seven Grandfather Teachings” which reveals that even the most challenging tasks can be accomplished by those who “put their mind to it.” The theme of Hope was also a main point that was important to youth.

Major visual elements that youth advocated for in this discussion included galaxies, stars, planets, eyes and bubbles. Youth collaborated on ideas to include written messages in the mural: the irises of eyes will contain different words and aspects that represent youth potential, resiliency, and self-affirmation; bubbles in the design would contain quotes from notable people who are important to the youth, as well as quotes from the youth themselves. Concepts that are important for youth to include in the mural include helping one another, community support, and good advice. Youth were engaged with the idea that the mural would be something that other youth in the future with similar experiences could draw inspiration from and feel more connected to their community.

Included with this application essay is a mock-up digital sketch, created by a local professional graphic designer in partnership with Determined Art Movement. The sketch includes the significant visual elements that emerged from collaborative discussions with youth. However, missing from this mockup are the text (quotes and statements), suggested by youth. This has been intentionally left out at this time in recognition that as planning and execution of the mural may take time, and the nature of youth services presents a challenge in consistency, particularly that of youth involvement as youth experiencing homelessness and instability are often transitioned between service locations with short notice. That being, the youth who have helped create this design may not be the same youth who help paint it, and therefore youth who contribute to the future painting of the mural will still have the opportunity to include statements, messages, and quotes that are important to them, personally, while fulfilling the artistic vision of the youth who have helped from the beginning.

Youth participation in discussions with professional artists and youth advocates has been invaluable to the process of creating greater visibility of youth potential and resiliency, and in making space for youth voices and youth-led self-advocacy. The staff and artists at Jackson Street Youth Services, The Corvallis Arts Center, and Determined Art Movement are privileged to work with the inspiring youth in our community for this empowering project.

Thank you for your consideration.

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