

OZ SAN DIEGO

Oz San Diego provides healing and unification to families through a two-week residential treatment program for youth, ages 12-17. This program helps teens and their families who are experiencing personal, school or family difficulties as well as runaway or homeless youth seeking a safe place. While in treatment, youth attend counseling sessions and engage in daily enrichment and recreational activities that are designed to help them learn basic living skills, take responsibility for their own behavior and interact more effectively with family members. Upon completion of a youth's stay at Oz, family after-care therapy sessions are available to continue unification with the entire family.

The youth at Oz San Diego created this mural concept over the course of six art therapy group sessions. The purpose of the intervention was to build a sense of community, teamwork, and to highlight their resiliency. All youth were instrumental in every aspect in creating this mural concept and participated in highlighting their journey through their mental health struggles. They decided to use the "Oz" metaphor to portray their transition from a lifeless past depicted as a storm with dark clouds and rain pouring into a watermill. This is representative of the endless cycle of self-harm, drugs, anger, and overall pain that they have had and are continuing to experience.

The transition continues onto recovery and seeking help as depicted in the center of the mural. Here, the youth identified with the silhouettes of the popular 1939 film characters who are on a journey to the "Emerald City". The yellow brick road leads past the dead foliage up to a sunny and lush scenery, signifying growth with the blossoming field of roses. For the youth, this growth represented coming alive out of sorrow and despair. The "Emerald City" is depicted at the top of a hill which is representative of Oz San Diego, where their needs are acknowledged and are afforded the appropriate tools for continuing their journey beyond treatment. The youth carved their initials onto the doors of the "Emerald City" as a memorial to the youth that participated in this art therapy group. The yellow brick road continues past the "Emerald City", illuminating that their journey to recovery continues past their treatment and into their future with endless possibilities. Making this mural sketch provided the youth with a sense of belonging and empowerment. They felt like they were leaving behind a piece of themselves as a legacy for the future residents of Oz San Diego on their own journey towards recovery and overall healthy living.