

Waking the Village is rooted in the belief that creative expression is one of the most healing ways for a young person to work through and understand his or her own trauma. It is with this belief in mind that Waking the Village launched the Creation District in 2015, a program devoted entirely to supporting youth experiencing homelessness in having access to the arts and in building a creative community to serve as a support net.

Charged with providing insight and generating ideas, the Creation District's Youth ARTS Council is a group of youth experiencing homelessness who are dedicated to creating change through the arts and increasing artistic accessibility for youth everywhere. Over the past two months, the Youth ARTS Council has worked together to dream up and design a mural for submission to the 2018 FYSB Mural Contest. Over the course of three meetings, youth were guided through the process of working together to design their mural submission in order to ensure that each aspect was handled thoughtfully and collaboratively. To begin, the youth got to learn about what a mural is and what purpose they serve in communities around the world. After reviewing some examples of community murals, youth were asked to brainstorm "themes" that they felt were relevant to their own lives and to work together to pick one theme that best represented their common interests. With nearly 85% of our Youth ARTS Council made up of queer identifying youth, they decided on the overall theme of "identity" with a specific focus on LGBTQ+ Pride.

Once the theme was decided, youth were prompted to brainstorm what sorts of imagery, symbolism, and colors came to mind when they thought about this theme. Youth created a document of all the words, symbols, and colors that came to mind when considering identity and the queer community. Common threads of trees, rainbows, leaves, hearts, and poetry came up multiple times so youth agreed to use these as the basic subject matter for their mural. From here, youth took turns drawing individual sketches of how they envisioned pieces of the mural and then worked together to build one final image.

In the final drawing, youth placed one large tree with visible roots in the center to represent our common identity as humans. Each branch emerging from the center of the tree represents a different facet of our identities and is labeled with words like, "Queer, Person of Color, Trans, Latino, Woman, Man, and Gender non-conforming ect". The base of the tree is made up of patches of brown in varying hues interwoven with text of poetry written by the youth that address themes of identity.

The youth envision this piece in its final form as a collaborative community mural. Upon completion of the painting, they would like to invite members of the community to participate by filling in individual "leaves" around the tree. Participants will be invited to find a branch that corresponds with a facet of their identity and to add personal color or design to a leaf surrounding that branch.

At its core, the youth artists who designed this mural articulated a need for "unity" and "connectedness" in their community. They believe that this mural will not only serve as a visual reminder that we are rooted in one another's identities, but also that the process of

working on a collaborative mural will incite connection and community building for all participants involved.