

This mural is about resiliency. It is about community. It is about emphasizing personal and community strengths during the most difficult times and using them to overcome adversity. Only when we know and accept our strengths, can we truly understand our potential. Our project depicts this concept through the form, medium, and shapes designed by the youth who work with Synergy Services.

The mission of youth campus at Synergy Services is to build resiliency in runaway and homeless youth. We offer resources to promote physical and emotional stability through clinical services, housing programs, and outreach services. The youth campus is home to three programs designed to meet the needs of the youth we serve. Our Youth Resiliency Center (YRC) is a youth community drop in center for 12 to 20 year olds run by the Street Outreach Program. Synergy also has two housing programs; Synergy House, a 30-day crisis shelter; and the Transitional Living Program, an 18-month program that houses teens, including pregnant and parenting teens.

This project incorporates all three programs, each symbolized in the form of a Mandala. Mandalas have a rich history in psychology and meditation, they are known for deep meaning and significant connection to the creators. A mandala is a piece of art in the form of circle; it represents mindfulness, wholeness, and a depiction of self. This project uses the form of a mandala to focus on youth and program strengths. The youth in each program learned about the symbolism of mandalas and created their own mandala by identifying five of their strengths and symbolizing the strength with a line or color. The Youth used a 5-ring layout and represented each of their strengths in a different ring; these mandalas were made into buttons that they can put on clothing, backpacks, etc.

The youth then identified five strengths as a group to represent their respective program. These could be strengths within the program itself or the strengths the program encouraged the youth to have. They brainstormed together to depict each strength through a simple line or shape. The youth decided on the following list for each program (see sketch for visual): **YRC**- Growth (flower), Dependable (Triangles), Community (Hearts), Support (Pillars), Advocacy (hands). The youth at the YRC discussed using tall and short pillars to symbolize support because they feel as though “The YRC is a place we can always lean on if we need to”, they liked that it looked like a cityscape because youth from all through the KC Metro use the YRC. The group also spent a lot of time talking about the fact that the YRC gives them an opportunity to advocate for populations for which they are passionate.

Synergy House- Nurture (Tree), Consistency (Waves), Diversity (Unique Line), Support (Triangles), Opportunity (petals). The youth at Synergy House discussed consistency as a major strength of the program, describing their consistency as like the ocean's tide. They also discussed feeling that Synergy House creates a safe environment for culturally, sexually, and gender diverse youth.

TLP/ MGH- Gratitude (Hearts), Support (Ribbons), Independence (M's), Friendship (Flower), Experience (Sun). The TLP youth discussed feeling like, for the first time in many of their lives, they were able to focus on themselves and their own goals, leading to the "M" (me) representing independence. They discussed feeling as though they are able to flourish and grow in many ways through the services of the program.

Each mandala will be roughly 4ft by 4ft. Large cardstock paper will be taped together and cut into 5 rings. The youth will divide into groups and work together to draw and cut out their shapes and lines on each respective ring creating a stencil. We will then reconstruct each mandala to prepare for making this art a permanent addition to our YRC. My hope is that we can eventually add youth's individual mandalas to this work and have an ongoing project for years to come.

Now comes the really unique part of the mural: this artwork is going to be invisible most of the time. We will be adding these mandalas on the sidewalk entryway leading to our Youth Resiliency Center using the product NeverWet. NeverWet is a spray that repels water on many surfaces, one of which is concrete. On dry concrete, NeverWet is invisible; however, when it rains, the intricacies of the youths' work will be revealed. This will serve as a reminder that our strengths and community supports are still present during adversity and oftentimes that is when we need to use them the most.

At Synergy, we feel lucky to be a part of each of our youth's lives. They are resilient, resourceful, creative, unique, and they each have different strengths to bring to our community. The youth we work with have faced many trials and often have intense and complex trauma. This mural symbolizes that trauma does not stunt a person's potential, it does not take away from their inner strength. In fact, our strengths can flourish during adversity and help us continue reaching our potential even during challenging times. We want our youth to know and believe in their own strengths and to know that they also can find strength in the community in which they live.

Synergy Services FYSB Mural Contest Submission



Mural Placement (on the sidewalk)



Example of NeverWet