

2019 FYSB RHY Artistic Expression Contest

Submission Narrative
Youth Service Bureau of St. Joseph County
May 2019

Youth Service Bureau's emergency shelter serves runaway, homeless and at-risk youth between the ages of 12 and 18. The shelter, located in St. Joseph County, in Northern Indiana, serves youth from across the region in need of safe shelter and support during difficult times in their lives.

Youth may stay in the shelter for up to 21 days; youth come and go as they work through a crisis. Because stays can be short or lengthy, and residents change throughout the month, identifying just one youth as the creator of the "Peace Window" is difficult. This project was the work of many hands and is the creative process of many.

Approximately three years ago, the shelter was fortunate to benefit from the generosity of a private donor. The donation received made it possible to replace the 40-odd aging windows in the shelter with new energy efficient windows. In the spirit of recycling, reusing and restoring, staff suggested the old window frames and glass could be put to good use . . . somehow!

The "Peace Window" became the summer project of the youth who cycled through the shelter in 2018. A large 36 x 36-inch discarded window was selected, and youth got busy rehabbing it to fit our need. They sanded and painted the frame. Youth scrubbed years of grime from the original glass. They then went about designing the piece to represent the environment we work hard to model in the day-to-day interactions between staff and youth in the shelter.

Youth designed the background of the window to reflect the "rainbow of diversity" among homeless and runaway youth. Shelter staff understand that these youth come from many different backgrounds, challenges, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, etc. As a group, we attempt to help youth understand and accept differences and blend together- like the colors of the rainbow, beautiful individually but magnificent when together.

One very artistic youth learned a new skill piecing together the beveled glass representing the dove. He learned to join the individual pieces by a process of applying tape, flux and solder. This youth worked diligently and enjoyed one-on-one time with staff who assisted him. He was so delighted and proud of his work!

The peace symbol in the middle of the work represents an emotion that is often lacking in the lives of our young residents. We work hard to keep the environment of the shelter quiet; a place where youth can reflect and grow. Using mindfulness and mediation, we attempt to teach youth in crisis alternatives to violence and aggression. Many youth tell us the shelter is the first place in their young lives where they have felt accepted, supported and cared for. We hope the youth we encounter can translate these feelings of well-being into their personal lives as they move forward into safe and stable placements. We are very proud of our "Peace Window" and all it represents.