

Elijah Campbell

CCYS YAC Mural Project

Capitol City Youth Services (or CCYS) is an organization that works to prevent homelessness, delinquency, dependency and to ensure family preservation. This past year, CCYS has instituted a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to help ensure that the voices of the youth will be heard. The YAC, made up of 12 diverse youth, decided to start an anti-bullying campaign. I had the pleasure to be on the YAC as a board member and wanted to volunteer both mine and my older sisters' artistic skills for the mural.

The very opposite of bullying is celebrating the things that make us unique. We wanted to create something that was not only an anti-bullying message, but a celebration of individualism. We realized while designing that, while it was important to send the message to be kind, it was just as, if not more important to send the message to not be afraid to be who you are. To celebrate diversity, in all the different forms it takes. To celebrate all the ways that we are alike and all the ways that we are different. To celebrate uniqueness.

My sister and I started by discussing with the YAC different concepts that they wanted incorporated in the design. We pulled together some of the ideas and used a graphic design illustrator to create our vision. We decided that the design was going to be more abstract in nature, but not to much so that the message was lost. We wanted the message we were sending to be heard loud and clear, so we incorporated words like diversity and unity into the mural. Both the Lilly's and the birds that are flying across the mural, which are doves, symbolize peace of the deepest kind. The hands reach up and together were used to represent the diversity of the people, and the kindness of reaching out a hand to those who are struggling.

The mural is located in the heart of Tallahassee, right across from Railroad Square. We were able to partner with the Tallahassee Bicycle House, an organization that sponsors people in the community who need transportation. They generously donated their wall for us to use.

When first starting the design, the YAC knew that they wanted to have the public involved in some type of way. The message was diversity and uniqueness and we wanted to showcase that in our own work by reaching out to our community. We talked to the schools and had them send in, if they wished, a drawing that depicted an anti-bullying message or celebrated diversity. In the center of the mural, a square encapsulates the entry's that we had. We were so proud and happy to see the messages that we wanted to send be received by the community and even sent back in kind.

The dream for this mural was to create a powerful message of acceptance. Bullying is a horrible degradation of someone for the simple reason of them being unique in ways that are different from the bully. We wanted to bring our community together in recognition of our diversity. We wanted kids and adults who were struggling to know that their uniqueness, their differences are what make them who they are. That they are loved for them, that they were not alone. Uniquely them. Uniquely us. Uniquely you.