

International Youth Create a Gift for Louisville through Art

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Louisville's South End neighborhood, home to a growing international population, is receiving a gift from some of the city's youngest residents.

A dozen local students, all children of immigrants or resettled refugees, are collaborating to transfer their ideas, creations and inspirations onto a 50-foot brick canvas. The mural they will create is, appropriately, themed "Empowerment Through Literacy." And this handiwork will stay right in the South End, located on the north wall of the ValuMarket at Iroquois Manor – across the street from Rutherford Elementary School.

The participating student artists are from Cuba, Vietnam, Russia and Sudan. Together with local artist Nico Jorcino, who was first trained in architecture in his home country of Argentina, they are doing their part to leave the neighborhood with a lasting piece of community art.

The students spent several two-hour sessions over the summer learning the basics about art and painting from Mr. Jorcino and local volunteers, as well as exploring their own ideas about how literacy empowers them in their new community. When the mural is complete, it will feature Mr. Jorcino's base design interspersed with the students' images. The students are working now to transfer their ideas onto the 50-foot expanse of wall over the next few Saturdays in the hopes that they can unveil their work on November 11th.

This project is funded through the Kentucky Arts Council thanks to a collaboration of Americorps VISTAs (Volunteers In Service To America) placed in programs around the Louisville metro community. The VISTAs are fundamental in the execution of the mural project. Participating members include Rachel Hershberg and Erin Driesbach representing Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Liz Shaffer-Wishner at Lac Viet Academy, and Desiree Jones, placed with Every1Reads. All are serving members of the federally-funded program. Similar to the Peace Corps, Americorps VISTAs are college graduates sent to work in impoverished areas and non-profit organizations across the United States.

Community volunteer artists have donated just as much time and artistic talent to the project as the VISTAs. Joe Welsh and Kim Sandage, graduates of Murray State's art program, have been instrumental in teaching the kids their first artistic techniques – including the concept of symbolism – and helping them to paint each Saturday.

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