



the arts empowerment project



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Tryon Street news racks to display The Arts Empowerment Project's "Promoting Peace" mural

Who: The Arts Empowerment Project
What: Promoting Peace mural
When: Monday, August 28 – September 30
Where: Tryon Street News Racks

CHARLOTTE –(August 29, 2017) Yesterday in Uptown Charlotte, a mural created by local at-risk youth and members of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department appeared on the backs of 10 news racks along Tryon Street.

The mural, entitled "Promoting Peace", was created over the course of nine months (September 2016-April 2017), during a series of workshops staffed by visiting speakers, professional counselors, teaching artists and facilitators from across a variety of disciplines, focused on creating open dialogue and addressing social justice issues through collaborative art.

Charlotte artist Sharon Dowell, took this art, and organized it into a mural. To broaden the impact and the audience for their work, Charlotte Center City Partners replicated the original mural and displayed it on the news racks for the month of September.

This mural project began on July 20, 2016, when The Arts Empowerment Project's Founder and CEO, Natalie Frazier Allen decided to cancel a scheduled pottery class for area at-risk, court-involved youth to address rising tensions across the country and in the community.

In place of the canceled class, The Arts Empowerment Project quickly assembled a panel discussion between the would-be pottery class' youth and CMPD officers. The result was a discussion they called, "Promoting Peace". The panel allowed the youth and the participating officers to come together, connect and give voice to their feelings.

“The Arts Empowerment Projects' mission and core values are centered around the belief that art can be a powerful tool for positive self-expression, empowerment and healing”, said Allen. “Our community, particularly our youth, have experienced a lot of sadness, loss and trauma. The students also learned that the police share a lot of the same feelings.”

Due to the success of this initial discussion, The Arts Empowerment Project, CMPD, Transforming Youth Movement, Inc., Community School of the Arts and artist Sharon Dowell agreed to expand this single panel into a series of workshops, and incorporating art into them to deepen the conversations the youth and officers had begun.

During the next session in early September 2016, students and officers were asked to draw one another's profiles. This powerful exercise encouraged participants to see one another not as teenage troublemakers or men in blue uniforms, but as fellow human beings with real emotions and good intentions. The workshops that followed the Keith Lamont Scott shooting and resulting protests took on added significance, helping both groups express their pain, hurt and loss through additional art projects.

“Rebuilding of trust, promoting peace and justice and finding healing in the community can be very complex and very challenging. However, through the universal language of art, officers and students are better able to express their feelings and be heard and understood, said Allen. “The added benefit and evidence of their connection is that they are able to convey their positive strides toward justice and understanding to the community at large through the art they created together to promote peace.”

Building on the success of last year's workshop series, the original community partners are committed to expanding the program by hosting a second round of Promoting Peace workshops for twelve Saturdays in 2017 through 2018.

While the “Promoting Peace” murals will only be installed for one month, Charlotte Center City Partners and the Arts and Sciences Council regularly feature temporary art installations from ASC's ArtPop program. The news racks also often feature special exhibits like this one, and the recent selections from Antoine Williams' “Kidnapped Pagans” exhibit that were on display in June 2017. For more about ASC's ArtPop program see <https://www.artsandscience.org/programs/for-community/art-pop/> and for more about The Arts Empowerment Project see <http://theartsempowermentproject.org/>

About The Arts Empowerment Project

The Arts Empowerment Project believes in the transformative power of art to heal and inspire children impacted by neglect and abuse. Our organization matches at-risk youth to existing arts and enrichment programs in Charlotte, NC.

About Charlotte Center City Partners

Charlotte Center City Partners envisions and implements strategies and actions to drive the economic, social and cultural development of Charlotte's Center City. The organization's vision is to help create a viable, livable, memorable, and sustainable Center City with modern infrastructure, a tapestry of unique neighborhoods, and a diversity of thriving businesses. For complete information about Charlotte Center City Partners, visit www.charlottecentercity.org