

Bridgeton Youth to Youth “AlterEgo ... The Choice To Be”

Installation gives voice and action to 15 social issues that effect teens and communities

More and more teenagers are becoming activists for social issues, and succeeding in the mission according to numerous documentaries and reports. A social issue/problem is a condition that at least some people view as being undesirable. Other social issues/problems may be viewed as undesirable only when they enter into an individual’s comfort zone. In Bridgeton, NJ, youth enrolled in the Bridgeton Youth to Youth Summer Peer Leader Academy spent 6 weeks identifying and exploring social issues/problems, pressures and choices that they believe negatively impact them, their peers and their community.

To make their point they converted their thoughts and results into an artistic medium, Alter Ego Photos, which are complimented by audio and written narratives that address the following: Teen Pregnancy, Homelessness, Body Image, Suicide, Driving Under The Influence, Involvement In The Criminal Justice System, HIV and AIDS, Academic Failure, Substance Use/Abuse, Global Warming/Environment, Employment/Career, Peer Pressure/Self-Esteem, Sexual Roles, Violence and Religion. All of the fore referenced are intricately woven into the fiber of adolescents, families and communities learning to cope with change and searching for goals that will give their lives and communities meaning.

Each participant chose two characters that they wanted to portray. One was typically the character that most perceive youth to be, the other character being that of the complete opposite. After, the photographs are merged to appear as one seamless photograph that combines both characters, representing that the possibility to choose which individual you become is a matter of “choice.” The final moment for each participant’s passion was shown and shared by through their artistic, written and audio narration of each issue.

The photos were first unveiled as part of Bridgeton Youth to Youth’s 2010 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend of Service and Advocacy. To date, over 1500 individuals have viewed the photos and either listened to or read the narratives that challenge individuals to exercise the power of chose as a catalyst to change, as part of the Bridgeton Youth to Youth 5C Challenge:

- Character and Conscious Driven
- Community and collectively focused
- Challenge and consciously ready
- College or Career Bound and
- Committed to a better future for you and our community as a whole.

“The transfer of knowledge and power of choice is mutual. Not only can viewers learn from each artistic interpretation, but individuals and communities can activate the power of choice through the voices and actions of the future generations”, explained Director Karen Barnett.

The installation was so well received by students, teachers and community members that in addition to being on display at the Gallery 50, Inc. , for the month of July, it will be traveling to other art galleries to continue to impact youth and communities. In our technology driven society, art and multi-media is a powerful and current genre that youth and the younger adult generations are receptive and responsive to. Other advocacy and socially relevant topics have also been addressed in Public Service Announcements and short videos as scripted by membership and can be viewed at: www.bridgetony2y.blogspot.com , <http://vimeo.com/12372198> and www.bridgetony2y.tumblr.com.