

In the Community...

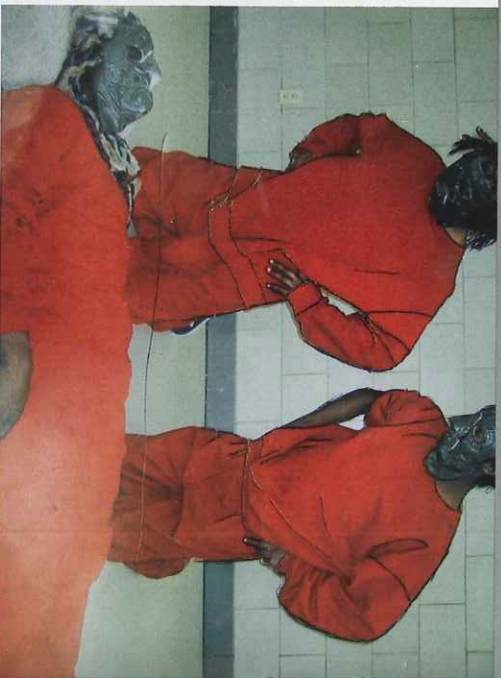
The Walls are Alive: JDC and the Mural Arts Program

The Mural Arts Program began this spring at the Juvenile Detention Center in St. Louis City. Housed at the JDC are up to 100 teens in 7 units. They face challenges that many adults would find overwhelming. The following summary of this year's program was submitted by JDC Activity Coordinator Nathan Graves:

The Mural Arts Program began on the heels of one of our most

creative and dramatic programs of the year, the Hip Hop Project. The mural instructor, Lezlie Silverstein, was insistent on being a part of JDC culture from the moment planning began. The initial design work created a multitude of images that allowed teens to build skills and produce a body of work that would later provide the templates for the tile designs. It was an intensive process that laid an important foundation.

At first, I don't know if the kids realized the scope of what was happening. We don't have projects like this every day, and something that spans a four-month period rarely happens at JDC (the average stay is only a month). Most teens



don't look four months ahead in their lives. We were asking them to be a part of a process that would produce a product they might never see. Pretty heady stuff for a group of kids who are already dealing with the stresses of a pending court hearing, certification as an adult, severe abuse, abandonment, grief, loss, and a myriad of other issues.

The program evolved, as did the mural. Music was incorporated and snacks became a regular part of the weekly sessions. Those little things helped create an atmosphere of normality in an otherwise unnatural setting. Then it got pretty quiet around here for a couple of weeks. Where was Lezlie?



Lezlie had moved to Craft Alliance to fire the tiles. Charlie, whose imagery and input was so vital to the project, participated fully in the Craft Alliance portion of the mural project. It was incredible to have a kid

from the inside involved outside. This was one of the most rewarding parts of the project. If we could have every JDC teen participate in a follow up program once they are released, it would be a great



accomplishment. Many of our kids return to their homes and communities without enough support to make a successful transition. For Charlie to return to the community and fully participate in a program he started while at JDC is a great feat. His future is uncertain at this point, but hope has now been planted in one young man. The Mural Arts Program is a success just for this one outcome.

As I watched the excitement buzz around the JDC in the days leading up to the dedication, I became very thankful for the work of Robert Longyear, Lezlie Silverstein, Craft Alliance and Emerson. This was a

great opportunity for our kids, and hopefully the start of a lasting partnership. Now that the tiles are mortared onto the wall forever, it is refreshing to realize that a handful of teens will be written into Detention history in the best way possible.

Our kids are just like those other kids you see everyday, and in some ways better. It's not easy for people to understand when they look at the criminal masks they wear on their exterior, that there is another side, an inside, that glows with hope, dreams, talents, love and a longing for a better day.

Top Left: Students pose for tile imagery

Bottom Center: Mural instructor Lezlie Silverstein poses in front of the mural flip it

Top Right: Close-up of mural Paillaff

The Mural Arts Program was started by Craft Alliance in 1995. With the generous and dedicated support of Emerson, the Mural Arts Program works with two schools annually in the creation and installation of a permanent ceramic tile mural on school grounds. This year's mural at the JDC was the first time that the program operated outside of a traditional school setting.