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## Vaughan youth help paint the future with mural



Vaughan

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Omar Mosleh

The Vaughan Community Health Centre is helping to keep kids out of trouble by getting them into the arts.

A recent testament to this is a five-metre mural created in the youth room of the Vaughan Community Health Centre (VCHC). It was done by young people aged nine to 17. The project took place over the summer and will be unveiled Jan. 13 at 6 p.m.

The mural was launched to get youth engaged in the community, to beautify the VCHC and to teach them artistic skills.

But apart from this, David Di Benedetto, an artist involved in the project, acknowledges that the mural also serves another important purpose — to get youth to realize their creative side.

"I truly believe everyone is an artist, it's just about breaking down those barriers, giving positive feedback, and bringing visual ideas to life," he said.

The project started in May and finished in July. It features a wide range of artistic expression, and while the youth had complete creative freedom, there is a theme to the project. Project co-ordinator Mirella Tersigni describes it as "a patchwork quilt of interpretations of what the youth thought of the community."

Traditional mediums such as oil-based paints were common, but the mosaic also showcased a diverse array of artistic mediums from fabrics to spray paint.

Ms Tersigni realizes how difficult it can be to keep young people out of trouble, but said that art is an effective vessel to do so because it appeals to youth.

"The beautification piece and creative engagement is a hook, it's working, and it's getting our youth involved in a program where they don't have idle time," she said.

The project started with the VCHC sending representatives to Vaughan schools issuing a call for artists. Once youth signed up, they visited once a week for a couple hours to discuss ideas, learn techniques, and, of course, paint. Those involved got community hours for their service.

Isabel Araya, executive director of the VCHC, said that apart from providing a place for youth to learn, socialize, and simply hang out, the project also aimed to make them comfortable with the centre and to see it as a place where they belong, not just a place to go when sick.

"This project helped us to break the barriers and show the youth that we're welcoming them," Ms Araya said. "We're OK with them dropping in just to have fun and not get lectured."

Mr. Di Benedetto says the project allowed him to reminisce on his youth before he got involved in art. He says in his elementary and high school years, he didn't have the opportunity to take art courses. He only realized his passion for art after getting involved in graffiti and later graphic design.

To him, the mural gave him the chance to help Vaughan youth discover



Louise Ianacci

A student works on the mural which will be unveiled at the Vaughan Community Health Centre Jan. 13.

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their artistic aspirations, much like he did. He says a number of youth involved in the project asked him where they could find similar projects to build their skills.

"It's just amazing to help kids find themselves," he said. "To be able to reach a lot of kids who, like myself, didn't have the opportunity to experience any type of creativity, is really just more than I could ever ask for."

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