

Connecting To What They Love

By Lisa Flower



Photo: DCF Commissioner Susan I. Hamilton poses with My People Clinical Services staff and six teenage artistically gifted boys involved with "Connections" a program designed to develop art skills and foster connections to help the boys succeed now and in the future. Commissioner Hamilton presented each youth with a merit award.



Photo: Erik loves basketball

Ask a teenage boy to create an artwork and be prepared to see something he really loves: sports, the American flag, his father.

Those are the images that filled the impromptu gallery at a special art exhibit held in the lobby at the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Central Office in Hartford recently. Standing alongside their bright and hopeful creations, six teenage boys lit the room with their smiles as they showed their artwork to proud staff from DCF and My People Clinical

Services, the private service provider that offers the afterschool art apprentice program to Hartford-area kids.

The program is known as "Connections" and was previously focused exclusively on Latino males. Starting this September, the program was broadened to include African American boys as well. The purpose of the program is to develop art skills and, most importantly, to foster connections that will help the boys succeed now and in the future.

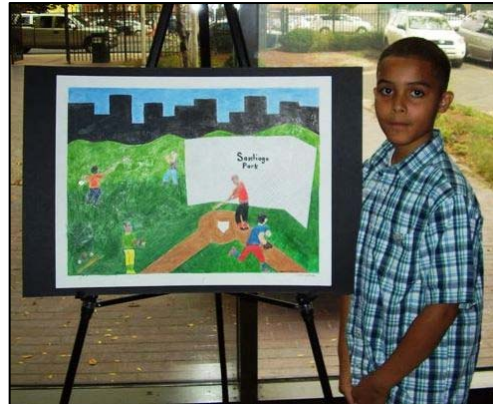


Photo: Chris loves baseball.

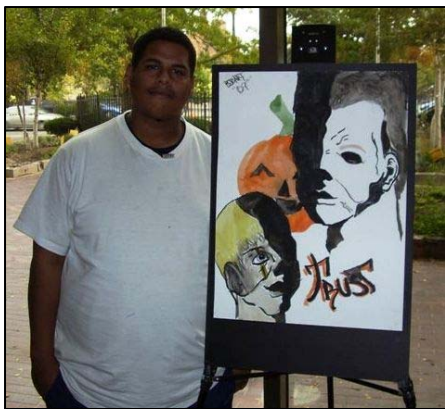


Photo: Bryan submitted two artworks.

On the day of the exhibit, the six young men proudly stood by their artwork, while they were presented a merit award from the DCF Commissioner Susan I. Hamilton, J.D., MSW, who told them, "It is always exciting to see our youth succeed, and this artwork is truly a great accomplishment for the boys."

Each of the boys took turns to talk about their creation, and the faces of the boys showed they were, indeed, quite pleased.

Here is a little information about each boy and his work:

- **Erik** is a sports fan who drew a picture that highlighted the Boston Celtics. A freshman at Hall High School, Erik loves basketball and art and intends to attend college.
- **Chris** switched focus to a different sport. His work showed a baseball field with children playing baseball and football. He stated that he loved sports and was really skilled at baseball and football. Chris is twelve years old and is in the seventh grade at Pulaski Middle School.



Photo: Felix drew an Army motif.

- **Bryan** submitted two pieces of artwork. His first piece was a Halloween depiction of a father and son going out "trick or treating." The word "trust" was the focus. His second piece was a portrait in black and white. Bryan is seventeen years old and attends Bulkely High School. He also enjoys art and really took advantage of the Connections program.



Photo: Anthony drew two youth break dancing.

dancing. Anthony and Felix are brothers.

- **Felix**, a 13-year-old, seventh grader from Carmen Arce School, drew an Army motif, highlighting the American flag.
- **Anthony**, age fourteen and an eighth grader from Quirk Middle School, drew a great depiction of two youth

- **Kadeem**, a 17-year-old junior at Windsor High School, veered from the visual path and instead rapped a poem he wrote about making connections in life. In addition to rapping and music, Kadeem loves basketball and is already talking to his DCF social worker about attending college.

In addition to the afterschool art program, My People Clinical Services, which has worked with the DCF Hartford area office since 2005, offers a variety of other programs including youth mentors, therapeutic support staff, supervised visitation, mother to mother and father to father programs, independent living, adult anger management, Young Film Makers and in-home therapy. You can learn more about My People at <http://www.mypeople-ct.com/services.html>.

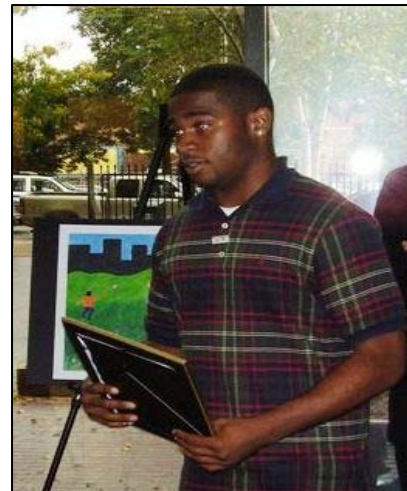


Photo: Kadeem reads a poem he wrote.