

THE METRO

West Broadway youth represent Manitoba

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM CREATES MURAL FOR CANADA'S 150TH

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From left: Nahome Bekele, Aishat, Hikmat and Fathi Oladeji stand in front of the mural they have been working on at West Broadway Youth Outreach. The piece will be part of an art installation in Toronto in celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary.

Blizzards, booters, and bison — what says "Manitoba" to you?

At West Broadway Youth Outreach (WBYO), a group of young artists are answering that question in the form of a mural for Canada's 150th anniversary.



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Hikmat Oladeji (left) and Amanda Impey talk about where they will make additions to their Canada 150 mural.

WBYO has partnered with VIBE Arts, a Toronto-based free arts education program that is calling on Canadians from regions throughout the country to represent their home through visual art. WBYO is the only group representing Manitoba, and the youth at the centre are taking their jobs seriously.

Amanda Impey, co-ordinator of the WBYO Dreams career mentorship program, says that youth have been busy creating their piece throughout the month of March.

"We only had the month of March to do it," she said. "We've been very, very busy learning how to do rough drafts and how you have to incorporate everyone's ideas into one, because it is a lot of different ideas."

Impey said about 10 youth, Grades 5 to 9, have been taking part in the project each week. For some, it's an introduction to painting, drawing and collaborating. For others, it's a chance to improve on skills. Above all, it's gotten the artists thinking about all the things that represent Manitoba — old and new.

"We have the polar bear, the Human Rights Museum included in there, something to represent how cold it is," Impey said. "We have our lakes, some teepees, the whole ground is wheat to show the prairies and of course we have the Canadian flag in there, the 150 years."

"At the beginning we were looking through books and articles and all over the web about what we thought represented Manitoba... We looked at maybe what's historically represented Manitoba and Louis Riel, Nellie McClung, and now we've come into more modern representations."

It's been a bit of a history lesson for the kids as well as a chance to try their hand at challenging imagery, such as the northern lights.

Aishat Oladeji and her sister Hikmat and brother Fathi have been helping out after school. Oladeji is in Grade 6 and attends Islamic school in the city.

"I've been working on some of the northern lights and Louis Riel," she said. "I've painted before. (I like) mixing the colours to blend it."

What does Manitoba mean to her?

"Beautiful, no war, peace, and sunsets and grass."

When the project is finished it will go to Toronto where it will be displayed in the subway station there with dozens of other pieces from other parts of the country.

"The kids are amped that there will be thousands upon thousands of people seeing their artwork," Impey said. "They've been so energetic about being the ones to showcase Manitoba and all of its diversity."

Read more by Alana Trachenko.