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## **LEADERSHIP ARTS INSTITUTE ENRICHES HOUSING FOR 35 HOMELESS DISD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

DALLAS—Thirty-five homeless Dallas Independent School District (DISD) high school students—ages 14-20--are getting a helping hand this month from the Leadership Arts Institute (LAI) class of 2020, a program founded 32 years ago by Dallas philanthropist and global art collector Raymond D. Nasher as part of the Business Council for the Arts (BCA).

Help comes in the form of funds and hands-on support to improve facilities at the Fannie C. Harris Youth Center near Fair Park. In keeping with LAI's arts and culture focus, the group of young Dallas professionals from various business sectors has raised some \$26,000 in funds and in-kind donations.

### **A Community Endeavor**

"We believe that art has the power to encourage and empower, so we're honored to be able to bring art to this residential youth center in the forms of a podcast studio and related storytelling programming for the students, an art corner for personal art expression, and inspiring art to enliven the space," explained project co-chair Kristin Cope of the Dallas-based international law firm of Baker Botts.

Facing all the traditional challenges of being a high school student, these young people have the additional burden of not knowing where they may be staying each night. So the LAI class teamed with After8ToEducate to bring a creative environment to the Harris Youth Center. After8ToEducate is a holistic program that brings in community resources to help reduce the number of unsheltered students and foster their ability to become self-sufficient. Other partners in this collaboration include DISD, CitySquare (which operates the drop-in Center), Social Venture Partners Dallas (which assists with facility management), and Promise House (which manages, staffs and operates all residential services including artistic components provided by the LAI class project).

### **The Power of Art and Storytelling**

Chelsea Holmes, program manager of LAI, explained that students staying at the Center now find opportunities for self-expression through the art of storytelling. A new podcast studio gives students an opportunity to tell their personal stories as well as hear the stories of fellow residents. This project was assisted by Outloud, an organization dedicated to community-building and amplifying of youth voices. Other donors stepped up when they heard about the project. One donor gave a MAC desktop computer to the Center library. Pacific Builders of Plano provided art space materials featuring magnetic and dry-erase boards where students can express their emotions and create meaningful art. Art installations throughout the space brighten students' stays with color and artistic energy.

After8ToEducate interim executive director Billy Lane added that the project now gives these high school students access to creative programming and activities that they haven't had before. "This will help amplify the voices of these young people who are experiencing homelessness, giving them a creative outlet to further enrich their lives as they move toward housing and stability," he explained. "Furthermore,

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research has shown that creativity and self-expression can significantly improve self-esteem and support mental health,” Lane added.

**For More Information**

Additional information about the services of the Harris Youth Center and the community contributions by the Leadership Arts Institute of North Texas’ Business Council for the Arts is available by contacting BCA program manager Chelsea Holmes at 704.890.2318 (C ) or at [chelsea.holmes@ntbca.org](mailto:chelsea.holmes@ntbca.org).

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