

What Safe Place Means To Me? National Safe Place Week Poetry Contest

Dale R. Holder, Safe Place Coordinator, Janus Center for Youth in Crisis Program Director, Bridgeport, CT.

What does Safe Place mean to you? This was the topic of a poetry contest that was sponsored by the Janus Center for Youth in Crisis during National Safe Place Week. One of Janus Center's case managers, Jonathan Hevita, selected Harding High School because he has observed uniquely close relationships among its administration, faculty and some of the students.

Harding High School is located in the Eastside of Bridgeport, which is considered the most under-served area of the city, where crime and poverty are the norm, and graduation from high school is not. According to last year's Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition reported entitled "State of the Child in Bridgeport 2009," youth who drop out of school are more likely to live in poverty and be involved in criminal activity as adults than those who graduated from high school.

Dropout rates among Bridgeport high school students have improved over the last couple of years, but the rates still

alarming. According to the BCAC report, in 2007 Bridgeport's cumulative dropout rate was at 23.4% –four times the average state dropout rate of 6%. If youth are not in school, they could be subject to violence, crime, drugs, and gang involvement.

Outshining all of the dismal statistics are talented students willing to utilize their talents to raise awareness among their peers about Safe Place. A total of eight entries were submitted and a judging committee made up of three panelists picked the top three. As a result of the overwhelmingly positive response to the contest, next year we are aiming for a city-wide essay contest.

WINNING ENTRY

Safe Place

By J. Farmer

Warren Harding High School

*There's a place where one shall provoked to be you,
Become who you are as a positive youth,
Cause rage and pain just tear up my suit,
The spirit of this place is sweet as fruit,
You'll never witness or be subjected to persecution,
It's been systematically proven,
With any problem here you'll find a solution,
And to faith, hope is a substitution,
And I'm glad to see myself like Muriel,
Here I can tackle this world singularly,
Push it back to possibilities,
And take a taste of success periodically,
Peace and grace is the gift of living faithfully,
Offspring rulers genetically like a dynasty,
This place is hard to believe like a fairytale,
But its spirit spins around me like a carousel.*



Boys Town Central Florida carried on the tradition of the last few years during National Safe Place Appreciation Week by delivering cookies to their local Safe Place sites as a "thank you" for the Sites service to at-risk youth in Seminole County.



Youth Services of Tulsa conducts annual poster contest. Executive director James Walker presents Cory Brown and Jimena Castañaras with award for winning poster designs

