TAGGERS TURNED ARTISTS: YOUTH SPEAK UP TO INSPIRE CHANGE

(Fresno, CA) A group of young men from various backgrounds are putting their permanent markers, spray paint and street artistic abilities to good use, not on their traditional private property canvases, but on skateboards. Fresno Building Healthy Communities (Fresno BHC), in partnership with Fresno’s Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (Fresno BMoC), have helped these budding artists and former taggers stay off the street, and out of trouble, by using their unique talents to create one-of-a-kind masterpieces on wheels.

Since December 2012, 10 youth have worked on over 20 personalized skateboards, all inscribed with unique messages of hope and inspiration such as speaking against peer pressure or the use of drugs and alcohol.

“These young men come from different walks of life and need creative outlets where they can express themselves freely and safely,” explained Gregorio Montes de Oca, National Urban Fellow with Fresno’s BMoC. “This art project has given them the opportunity to build relationships with others outside of their neighborhoods as well as teaching them about art and culture while keeping them out of trouble and off the streets.”

Fresno’s BMoC seeks to change the community’s view of young men of color. Over the next year, Fresno’s BMoC and its partners will work to ensure that these youth are physically and mentally healthy, living in safe neighborhoods, succeed in school and work, and possess leadership capacity to contribute to their families and communities, ultimately leading to systematic changes that will increase high school graduation rates and decrease numbers of young boys and men of color who enter the juvenile justice system.

“Our young men of color are falling through the cracks and, unfortunately, have a better chance of earning their high school diploma in prison rather than from a traditional high school. These young men posses a unique talent that we should foster and guide,” added Montes de Oca.

With the skateboard art project winding down, the youth will display their artwork during the next Fresno Art Hop on Thursday, February 7, 2013, at Biz Werx Professional Center, 1600 Fulton Street, on Fulton and Calaveras in downtown Fresno, from 5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. The community will be able to meet with the young artists, learn about their pieces, as well as learn about the work of Fresno’s Alliance for Boys and Men of Color and Fresno Building Healthy Communities.

The Skateboard Art Project, a partnership between Fresno’s BMoC, Fresno / Madera Youth for Christ and Fresno BHC, is funded by The California Endowment.
MEDIA OPPORTUNITY
Fresno’s Alliance for Boys and Men of Color will be meeting Saturday, January 26, 2013, from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at Fresno / Madera Youth for Christ to place finishing touches on their art pieces before Art Hop on February 7, 2013. Fresno / Madera Youth for Christ is located at 1401 Divisadero Street, near downtown Fresno. If members of the media are interested in one-on-one interviews with the youth or shooting b-roll, please contact Augie Blancas at (559) 473-6897.

ABOUT FRESNO BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
Fresno Building Healthy Communities is doing just what it says it’s doing -- it’s building healthy and strong communities in central, southeast, and southwest Fresno. By partnering with nonprofits, community- and faith-based organizations, youth and adults alike, Fresno BHC partners are transforming "The Place" into a community where families and youth are healthy, safe, learning, and thriving.

Fresno Building Healthy Communities is a partner with United Way of Fresno County
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