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**Health Department of Northwest Michigan**

**Including Otsego County Youth in Street Art Project  
*Mural panels to be installed at Gaylord Ramp Park June 21***

Students are learning how to be part of community solutions through a project with [RISE: Otsego Substance Free Coalition](#). Through the Street Art Workshop Series and Ramp Park Improvement Project, they are mixing art education and the creative process to improve Gaylord Ramp Park. The [city-owned park](#) draws young people to recreate with skateboards, BMX bikes and inline skates.

Ranging in age from 12 to 20, the youth are completing a 10-class workshop on the fundamentals of contemporary street art. Their education culminates with installing custom murals at the ramp park from 3-5 p.m. Tuesday, June 21. A ribbon cutting celebrating the fresh look takes place at 5 p.m. The ramp park shares a parking lot with the Otsego County Sportsplex at 1250 Gornick Avenue.

“The project is designed to improve space that’s been set aside for local youth,” said Ellen Templeton, Community Health Coordinator for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, which is administrating grant funding and behind-the-scenes organization for the project. “Our hope is that, through this project, the park becomes a positive place for families and creatives to come and enjoy their time together.”

The outdoor park has been closed since June 7 as the youth and a handful of hired artists create the murals. An overall theme of “rebirth” pulls the artwork together. It represents the rebirth of the ramp park after being moved to the location and now sporting colorful art.

Prior to the mural project, which also involves purchasing and installing four security cameras, the ramp park was being tagged with inappropriate graffiti. It had been identified by a community assessment as a place where youth were at risk of using alcohol and drugs – making it a perfect focal point for RISE.

“We want people to feel safe and to even hop on a skateboard and learn a new skill,” Templeton added.

[Gaylord Area Council for the Arts](#) and the City of Gaylord are primary partners in the project. The arts council was involved in the grant writing and developing the 10-session workshop. The Gaylord Area Council for the Arts’ instructors and members worked directly with the students, who found themselves diving into their murals and spending more time than was asked or anticipated, according to Lisa Marie Tobin, arts council executive director.

“Art is an important avenue for helping people – young and old – deal with stress and share their voice. In addition to teaching the youth fundamentals like drawing, shading, street art history and the difference between street art and graffiti, we hope to equip and inspire them to use art to positively

*The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit [nwhealth.org](http://nwhealth.org).*

transform their community,” Tobin added. “We think this project will show the youth how their art can create positive outcomes they can be proud of.”

The park is equipped with a variety of ramps and obstacles challenge both beginners and those experienced who ride the ramps. The park reopens with the ribbon cutting July 21.

The Gaylord Ramp Park mural project is a partnership that brings art education and community park improvements together. It is being funded through the Coalition Support & Community Change Program through Prevention Network.

“This project has exceeded our expectations in every way,” Templeton said, noting that the youth’s role has connected with other generations in the community and showed them how they’re valued. “These kids are our future. This investment goes far beyond the beautification of the ramp park. It’s amazing what people can do when they come together.”

Tobin said she plans to take the project to the next level by involving the youth in the next public art project. The arts council was recently awarded \$15,000 through the Consumer Energy Foundation’s “Put Your Towns on the Map” competition. The money will be used to add public art to a three-block alley running from the Gaylord Gateway Trailhead to Claude Shannon Park along Main Street.

The public is welcome to attend the installation and ribbon cutting at Gaylord Ramp Park from 3-5 p.m. Tuesday, June 21.

To learn more about RISE initiatives at [www.riseotsego.com](http://www.riseotsego.com).

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**Cutline:** Alecia Svensen of Grayling paints a Dragon Coy Fish, one of the new murals representing rebirth, at the Gaylord Ramp Park in preparation for the park’s ribbon cutting and reopening at 5 p.m. Tuesday, June 21.