



Detail of "Our Brightest Futures are Connected" mural by artist AJA Loudon.



Prep-work underway before the full colour comes in on the wall mural.

The impact of community social work: Youth, art and belonging

Author: Sarah Thomas, community social worker (CSW)

In the Greater Forest Lawn area, a powerful example of community development is unfolding. Since 2024, a Youth Connector based at Bob Bahan Community Hub has been building meaningful relationships with young people in the community, creating consistent opportunities for connection, trust-building and engagement. In collaboration with a community social worker (CSW), this role has helped identify youth strengths, better understand lived experiences and co-create opportunities that reflect youths' priorities and their identities as Calgarians.

This work first took shape through the Youth for Justice Street Art Mural Project, where youth came together with artist AJA Loudon to explore racism, equity and belonging through art. The artistic process was a vehicle for storytelling, connection and leadership development. This project invited youth to explore the role of art in creating social change, share about the inequities they experience in their daily lives, and reflect on what kind of future they want to build and be a part of.

As one youth shared, "A bright future is built on the things that bring people together... leaving behind what divides us." The artist and the youth described the mural as a shared commitment to equity, learning, and collective care.

"I wanted to convey the message that cultural diversity is a strength and that every person in our city has a story worth telling. The colors and shapes I used reflect the idea of harmony within difference... The mural is not just an image on a wall, it is a promise that we will continue to celebrate what makes us both different and connected at the same time."

– AJA Loudon, Mural Artist

Youth shared their experiences, built relationships and began to see themselves as leaders and changemakers in their community, while also building confidence in expressing their ideas and advocating for change. As the project evolved, youth expressed that they wanted to continue their creative work, develop new skills and see their contributions recognized more broadly across the city. This momentum led directly to the next phase of the work: the BUMP Barriers – East Calgary Youth Artists project.



"Our Brightest Futures are Connected" mural by artist AJA Loudon. Located on the North side of the Activity Centre at Bob Bahan Aquatic & Fitness Centre.

Building Momentum

Building on the foundation of connection and belonging established through the earlier initiative, the community social worker partnered with [The City of Calgary Mobility Department](#) and [BUMP YYC](#) to support youth in designing and painting original artwork on concrete barriers that are installed in prominent public spaces across Calgary. This grant provided an opportunity for these youth to be involved in the 2026 Roadworks Program, a City of Calgary Mobility initiative, and pair them with professional artists, all BUMP festival alumni, who mentored them through the full creative process, from concept to completion.

Youth from the initial project carried momentum forward by inviting friends and peers to join the BUMP Barriers project, expanding participation and creating new opportunities for connection. Additionally, several youth who joined the BUMP project arrived knowing no one, but were able to build new relationships and become part of a supportive creative community.

The impact of this work is already visible throughout Calgary. Youth artwork, stories and perspectives are shaping public spaces and narratives, with their voices and cultures embedded into the public landscape. Youth are emerging as artists, leaders and contributors to city-building. Through mentorship, collaboration and community-led opportunities, they are building confidence, developing new skills and seeing themselves as people who can shape and influence the city around them.

Community Development in Action

This work is grounded in a community development approach that centers youth voices, experiences and goals. Youth have remained engaged because they feel ownership over the work and see that their ideas, creativity and contributions matter. The consistent presence of the Youth Connector and community social worker has helped build trust and sustain engagement.

“As the youth connector, I saw how this project made us all slow down, step away from stress, have fun, and experience creativity as something healing.”

– Karma Zeelan, Youth Community Connector

Community social workers played a key role by helping youth access opportunities, build partnerships, and turn ideas into action. Reducing barriers to participation was central to the project. Youth were provided honoraria and mentorship opportunities, ensuring they were meaningfully supported and recognized for their time, creativity and lived experiences, particularly for those often underrepresented in arts and leadership spaces. The impact was not one-time; the youth are experiencing environments beyond their immediate community, such as the Alcove Centre for the Arts, and later in the summer the youth are invited to reconnect with their mentors and attend the BUMP festival together. It is this collection of experiences that is broadening their perspectives and helping them see new possibilities for themselves as artists and leaders.



The “before” photo. Photo | Jevan Bailey



(Above) Getting Started (Below) Painting progress. Photos | Jevan Bailey



Group photo with Mayor Jeromy Farkas. Photo | Jevan Bailey

Art is a foundational tool in this work, serving as both a pathway for community development and a catalyst for well-being. Through creative processes, youth explore their identities and share their experiences and aspirations in ways that felt meaningful and accessible, using artistic expression to foster connection and a sense of belonging.

This initiative demonstrates the long-term impact of community social work and community development. By investing in relationships, collective leadership and youth driven ideas, the project has grown into a youth-led movement grounded in creativity, connection and belonging.

The youth echoed the importance of having access to programs like this, sharing “this project allowed me to contribute to my community with my creativity and passion and arts. I believe allowing youth more creative outlets to contribute to Calgary will encourage youth to become more involved in their own communities,” and how programs like this, “help youth feel a sense of belonging, knowing they have something that they were able to make.” By continuing this work, the City of Calgary is not only supporting youth engagement but also creating space for youth to lead and shape the future of our city.



Photo of BUMP Mentors: Kat Simmers, Matthew Springer, Josee Palacio, and Harvey Nichol (left to right). Photo | Jevan Bailey

Keep an eye out for these barriers around the city

Each barrier was created by a youth artist as part of the BUMP mural project, expressing their stories, creativity, and perspectives. Alongside each barrier is a quote from the artist, sharing what the piece means to them or their experience of being part of this work.

To watch the video of the event click here [Instagram link](#).

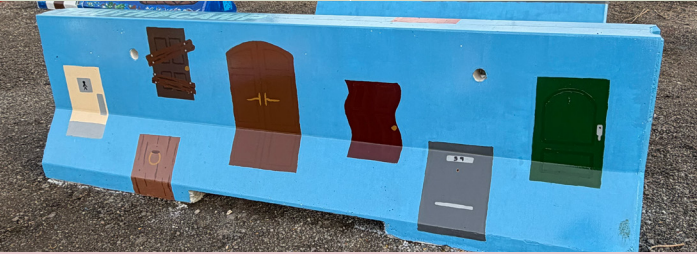


Artist	Quote
Abena Owusu 	African Dream tells the story of a young African girl imagining her future. The graduation cap represents education, and the airplane symbolizes opportunities and dreams. The family portrait, heart, peace sign, and scroll represent family, love, unity, culture, and heritage. Together, these symbols show that while we dream big and strive for success, we stay connected to our roots and the values that shape who we are. The African Dream is about chasing your future without forgetting where you came from.
Angelica Ty 	The BUMP art project was empowering and allowed us youth to innovate and share our visions with the public sphere of Calgary. For some youth, it was an excellent opportunity to bring cultural influence and representation into the city, sharing a piece of their identity as a Calgarian.
Angelo Bear-Sinclair 	I can seem pretty quiet at first, but I'm a really expressive person once I'm comfortable. I like to create art pieces that convey deep meanings through different visualizations.
Bao Ngo 	My artwork is a simple design about nature where everything is clean and nothing is being littered.
Christina Tremblett 	My artwork is about how music can flow and connect individuals together.

Artist	Quote
Dylan Brael 	Difference is everywhere, you just gotta claim a spot.
Elizabeth Tremblett 	Art blooms from person to person.
Hasset Mihrete 	Working alongside other youth, mentors, and artists for the BUMP roadworks project has been an incredible highlight for me this past spring. My inspiration for my barrier is rooted in my cultural background and features elements of the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony. The bright colours and patterns surrounding celebrate deeper themes of diversity, connection, and community to fit the vibrant, cultural mosaic that is the city of Calgary.
James Crowchild 	This is David Crowchild, he wanted to push education for his people and he was my great-great-grandfather.
Julina Sin 	While first starting, I felt very excited as I haven't done any work like it before. It turned out to be really fun.
Phoenix Eagle Bear 	My artworks mean so much to me as an Indigenous woman because I don't often see myself represented. I hope my art can be that for someone.

Artist	Quote
Quan La 	I've always enjoyed music and consider it a large part of my identity. It connects people to one to one another and I wanted to represent that in my design, with crowds of people celebrating the music above.
Randy Linklater 	I am a artist but still in the learning stages of it. I use my own type of style that works with me.
Riva Chaphekar 	Painting with BUMP was an amazing experience! My art project isn't just about how I feel as an artist but it reflects how even when you're in a dark place, there will always be a spark of possibility with the right people around you to help!
Samuel Harerimana 	Being part of the BUMP project was an amazing way to connect with the community. My first artwork featured sunglasses with planes emerging, representing my love for travel and adventure with a sense of freedom, and my second piece, which I call the "Smiling Village," depicts a happy nature scene with smiling trees along a river.
Thu Ngo 	The BUMP festival is awesome because it shows people how art can send a message to the world just as a barrier. We also had time to meet more people that gave us advice, learned with us, and helped us through the journey.



Artist	Quote
Tony Pham 	Everyone has different doors to open, which lead to different paths in life.
Yonden Zeelan (Karma's cool sister) 	Thank you for giving me this opportunity. The bump project really made me happy and it pushed me more towards my art side and embracing my creativity. At my age with school and how fun the internet is I don't really do anymore so the Bump Project gave me the opportunity to enjoy my hobbies again. I also picked up the guitar alongside painting because I overheard the mentors speak about how art isn't just about painting but how art takes many forms.
Zainab Albuhsen 	I really enjoyed being part of the BUMP project. It was such a fun experience, and I appreciated how kind and welcoming everyone was throughout the process. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute my artwork and be part of something so positive.
Chelsea Pham 	The BUMP project was filled with so many amazing people; it was such a joy to be apart of!
Gwyneth Perina 	I painted rainbow trout in bright colours to showcase Canada's aquatic wildlife. I found myself stuck on an idea. I didn't like it, but with encouragement I painted over with a new painting that was even better. I learned sometimes it's better to move on and restart. Sometimes your new idea will be even better.
Karma 	The BUMP project showed me that art has meaning, whether or not it is seen. It reflects the beauty in our city and our world. Before, it was easy to feel the future wasn't bright, but this experience changed my perspective. The mentors showed me that I can find something to care about and contribute to in the same way they do about their art.