

Shining A Light In The Shadows



SUN PHOTO BY LORELEI GOFF

Artist John Paul Goncalves stands beside a portrait he created to bring awareness to the problems faced by youth who age out of state custody.

Art Exhibit Highlights Challenges For Teens Who Age Out Of State Custody

BY LORELEI GOFF
LIFESTYLES EDITOR

An innovative project created in Greeneville shines a light on a shadow that darkens the lives of many young people across the nation.

At least 21,000 youth residing in juvenile residential care facilities turn 18 and age out of state custody each year in the United States. Many have no support system in place and are at risk for becoming homeless or incarcerated. Many aren't able to complete a college education and

some, faced with the added challenges of daily survival, falter in their struggle against addiction.

Local artist John Paul Goncalves conceived an ambitious art exhibit to shine a light on that shadow in the hope that it can help bring about change.

The exhibit alternates portraits of seven youth who have aged out of the system with graphic images that depict statistics related to aging out on a single, framed background. Goncalves created the alternating images by using light and shadow.

Each portrait consists of 3,000

small, blue and white squares angled to different degrees to create varying depths of shadow. The squares form the graphic image depicting the statistical percentages. When light shines on the squares at the right angle, a pixelated image of a portrait appears from the various shades of shadow.

Goncalves, an award-winning artist with a background in architecture and industrial design is originally from Brazil and now resides in Greeneville with his family. While teaching art at Holston United Methodist

Home for Children, he involved his students in the project that he described as a merging of pointillism and shadow art.

"Between 2013-2015 I developed some shadow art techniques," Goncalves said. "In 2015, I developed that specific one. It's a hybrid between pointillism and shadow art. I merged the two techniques into one."

The process requires taking portrait photos, dotting grids on a backboard, making tiles, pinning them individually and

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adjusting the tiles to catch the light and recreate the portrait of the individual. Goncalves estimates the entire project took about 1,500 hours to complete with about 50 people assisting. It required 21,000 tiles, representing the number of youth that age out each year, and 62,000 pins. (See the greenvillesun.com website to watch a video of Goncalves explaining the process.)

Every part of the exhibit points toward the problems facing youth who age out of custody. Matt Cannon, who works in IT at Holston Home, created a custom circuit board for the portraits. While a light shines on the portrait, a youth's face is seen. After 18 seconds, representing the youth turning 18 years old, the circuit board switches off the light and a blue and white graphic image depicts a statistic related to aging out, such as the fact that only 3% will graduate from college.

"We wanted to connect people with the reality behind the statistics, behind the numbers, what they actually represent," Goncalves said.

"Say 50% of kids that age out of foster care will become homeless, there will be 50% of the 3,000 tiles that will be watercolored blue showing that 50%," explained Chloe Wolfe, who assisted with the project and will turn 17 in October.

"When the light is off, all you see is the blue-to-white tile ratio. When the light is turned on, you'll see where he slants each individual pixel or tile to a certain degree to where the light casts a shadow and creates an overall image."

"It's really mind blowing to see real portraits of real people. Then the lights turn off and it's all back to normal, it's like it was never there."

Caitlin Russel, 15, also helped with the project and hopes it will have an impact on the problem.

"(This project) is very significant to me because being in custody in the system is really hard and just him doing this for the kids that age out is very heartwarming to me," Russel said. "I know people that are about to age out and how scared they are of not having anywhere to go and not being able to do all these things. I feel like this project will help people see what these kids are going through, aging out and worrying about where they're going and what they're doing next. I feel like this might touch people's hearts and make them want to foster."

"My friend that's in my cottage with me, she's turning 18 in February, and she's really worried about where she's going next because she has nowhere to go. It's really hard."

Some of the youth involved in the project will travel to Grand Rapids, Michigan, next week to join Goncalves, who left Monday to set up the exhibit at the ArtPrize international art competition. The exhibit will return to Tennessee in October.

Holston Home President Bradley Williams welcomes the opportunities Goncalves' project has afforded the youth residing on the campus.

"One of the things that we see as our role here at Holston Home is to expose



Caitlin Russel, left, and Chloe Wolfe demonstrate how tiles are placed on a board to create graphic images. Russel and Wolfe assisted artist John Paul Goncalves with the project that is now on display at the ArtPrize international competition in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Chloe Wolfe, left, and Matt Cannon, right, stand beside artist John Paul Goncalves as he explains how a custom circuit board created by Cannon enabled him to use light and shadow to alternate between two images on a single background.

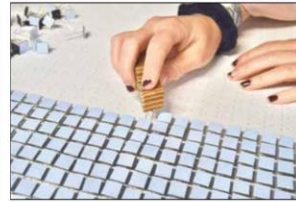
kids to as many experiences and opportunities as we can," said Williams. "A lot of times they're not even aware of the talents and skills that God's given them that they would really thrive and be passionate about."

"We want to expose kids to not just the technical skill side, but to the relation-

ships with the people who do that, like John Paul."

As for Goncalves, he hopes his collaboration with Holston Home's youth will make people think and move some to foster, serve as mentors or simply provide youth aging out of the system with friendship and a sense of family.

"The main thing is when those kids age out, literally, they are on their own for the most part," Goncalves said. "My goal is to show the need first. Then I think mentorship will be a good thing for the kids. For people to literally just be like a family member. They don't have to go live with



Chloe Wolfe uses a wood block to press pin-backed paper squares into a board. The squares are angled to produce varying shades of shadow when a light is shined across them, causing a pixelated portrait to appear.



Chloe Wolfe stands by a light and shadow portrait of her created by artist John Paul Goncalves.



Caitlin Russel, left, and Chloe Wolfe, chat about working on "Aging Out/18 Years Old," an exhibit designed to bring awareness to the problems facing youth who age out of state custody.

them but just follow up with them. See how they are doing. Help them find a job.

"The other thing is to help on the other side so they don't age out — more a preventive situation — to

have more families to foster kids, especially teenagers — even if just one person goes to the exhibition and will contact their local foster agencies and see how it will work for them."

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Local Artist Wins Top Prize In Global Show

Exhibit Involved Holston
United Methodist Home
For Children Students

BY LORELEI GOFF
LIFESTYLES EDITOR

Local artist João Paulo Gonçalves, known to many as John Paul or J.P., took the top \$10,000 prize in the two dimensional category of the 2021 ArtPrize contest, an international competition held in Grand Rapids Michigan.

"It was amazing," said Gonçalves, who said his wife and children were with him when he got the news.

The innovative project created in Greeneville called "Aging Out/18 Years Old" shines a light on a shadow that darkens the lives of many young people across the nation.

At least 21,000 youth residing in juvenile residential care facilities turn 18 and age out of state custody each year in the United States. Many have no support system in place and are at risk for becoming homeless or incarcerated. Many aren't able to complete a college education and some, faced with the added challenges of daily survival, falter in their struggle against addiction.

Gonçalves said about 50 people helped with the project, the majority of whom are his art students at the Holston United Methodist Home for Children in Greeneville, some of whom attended the exhibition with him.

"The students were so happy that we got an award," he said. "It wasn't like it was just me as an artist that got an award."

Winning the prestigious competition will boost Gonçalves' visibility in the art world.

"This competition is the world's largest," said Gonçalves, who is sponsored by a gallery in Miami and who won a people's choice award in



SUN FILED

Artist John Paul Gonçalves stands beside a portrait in September he created to bring awareness to the problems faced by youth who age out of state custody. It's part of an exhibit for which the artist won the top prize for the two dimensional category in the 2021 ArtPrize competition.

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PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Greenville artist John Paul Goncalves won the top \$10,000 prize for the two dimensional category in the 2021 ArtPrize competition. The exhibit highlights challenges faced by young people aging out of state custody within an overburdened foster care system.

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the 2020 competition. "It's a juried award category so it adds to the first award. The first one was public choice. This is more in the category of experts in the arts who come and judge and say your project is the best one seen. That means a lot."

Winning the prize also makes it possible for the native Brazilian who now resides in Greenville to participate in other shows, including one he has already booked for the exhibit in Los Angeles. Goncalves hopes the media attention the exhibit has received will make it possible to be accepted for entry under Holston's nonprofit status for Art Miami, one of the most popular international art shows according to Goncalves, where booths for exhibits typically run as high as \$50,000.

Above all, Goncalves is happy that the message of his exhibit, to raise awareness of the challenges faced by young people aging out of state custody in the foster care system, is going far and wide.

"From Michigan to Los Angeles to Miami — and it started from Greenville, Tennessee," he said with a grin.

Bradley Williams, Holston Home's president, said participating in the project with Goncalves was a win for students in a variety of ways.

"Kids, developmentally, should be having fun. They should be experiencing new things," Williams said. "It expanded their view of the world outside of Tennessee. All but one had never flown on an

airplane. That experience was a real blessing to me, hearing the 'oohs' and the 'ahs' at take-off and landing was really cool. So fun and new experiences were some of the benefits.

"But then when they got there, they were part of the exhibit and showing the art to the general public. They got to see that first modeled by a professional artist who is skilled in being able to communicate the meaning of his artwork but then they also got to do it themselves — the social skills, the public speaking and presentation skills, the self-confidence that comes with it."

Goncalves said he believes bringing the students to participate in the exhibit helped to instill a deeper sense of ownership in both the project and its success that shifted their thinking about themselves.

"There was a good sense of 'I see all those percentages and charts with statistics,' but there was also a good, healthy level of 'I'm within this foster care system but there is something different between those statistics and me.' Of hope, a level of responsibility that those statistics don't happen to more kids and I'm also not one of (those statistics)."

Williams said providing art classes for the youth at Holston Home and involving them in Goncalves' project was a kick off to a larger arts initiative.

"This was an initiative we're looking at having, called The River Academy School of Arts," Williams explained. "Our school on campus is called River Academy. It's a licensed, private school during the day but we would like to begin an evening art

school with various arts and this was our first go at it, having a professional artist in our backyard.

"Our bigger, more audacious goal would be for the youth in our community across Greenville and Greene County to be able to attend here on campus."

He added, "Our hope is to not have to charge anything to families. If we can get it underwritten from our fundraising efforts, that would be my hope."

That initiative, as well as the other programs Holston runs, including one that follows youth who don't have foster homes after they age out of the system, to maintain positive relationships with caring adults who will encourage and guide them, can only operate if the public supports the programs.

"We want there to be a call for people who have considered being foster parents ... for those who would be open to it. Take that next step. Make that phone call," Williams said. "For those who can't foster, mentoring is another way to get involved and make a difference. And then the third thing is being a financial partner."

Upcoming fall fundraisers include The Friends of Children fundraiser on Oct. 26 in Knoxville. Donations can be made at any time. To learn more about Holston Home visit www.holstonhome.org/. For information about volunteering, mentoring, or foster care, contact Sue Bernier at 423-767-8753 or susanbernier@holstonhome.org. To give a financial gift, visit <https://gift.holstonhome.org/>.

Goncalves is also working on projects for the Miami gallery that sponsors

him including one inspired by the painting by Botticelli called "The Birth of Venus" that incorporates the same light and shadow technique but in a mosaic of marble.

Others incorporate iconic images from pop art such as Stars Wars and Pac-Man.

"I make a silhouette. There's a light bulb in the middle and then I create a collage of something that looks like a specific object and when the light comes on, the same object in the middle creates a silhouette of something else."

"The one I'm going to create now is of Darth Vader and the Death Star," Goncalves said, explaining that the Death Star is made of wood and when the light bulb comes on, Darth Vader's silhouette appears.

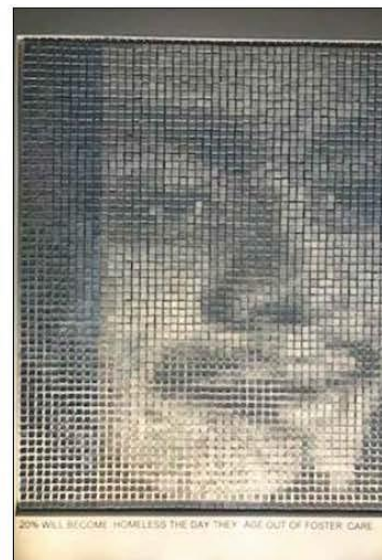


PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Twenty percent will become homeless the day they age out of foster care.

For Goncalves, "Aging Out/18 Years Old" was just one of the ways he hopes to use his art. He feels a call to use his art for activism and to help others.

"I have three main passion projects. This was the first one," he said. "My goal with this one now is to display it in as many places as possible and connect people to the cause, recruit people to the foster care system, even to work here to work with the kids (at Holston United Methodist Home for Children)."

"Another project that I have is a human trafficking project. It's almost more interesting, the way it's made, because there is more participation of the general public. They participate and learn about the different stages of human trafficking."

Goncalves hopes that

project will educate the public about human trafficking and what makes people, including children as young as 12 or 13, vulnerable to it.

The third project will take objects salvaged from sites of natural disasters and turn them into art.

"I want to go to places, collect wood from houses that have been destroyed by hurricanes and create art pieces to go back to the families, who don't have insurance," he said. "Those pieces can be sold for a very decent amount of money that will go directly to the families."

Goncalves is not content to have his art merely imitate life. He creates with the intent to improve the lives of others.

Follow J.P. Goncalves at <https://www.facebook.com/JPGoncalvesArt>.