



RIVERSIDE COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT

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IRIS/YTEC Youth Receive Top Recognition in “Directing Change” Contest

The 2017 Directing Change Program and Film Contest is part of California’s Mental Health Movement, a statewide effort to prevent suicide, reduce stigma and discrimination related to mental illness, and promote the mental health and wellness of students by offering programs, educational resources, and presentations to schools and organizations. The film contest was open to high school students and young adults in California, offering them an opportunity to create and direct their own 60-second film to raise awareness of mental health issues. Winning submissions were chosen from three categories: Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Matters, and Through the Lens of Culture.

Staff from the Riverside County Probation Department and the Riverside University Health System–Behavioral Health encouraged a team of seven youth committed to the Youth Treatment and Education Center (YTEC) to collaboratively create, direct, and edit their own film submission. The youth were housed together in YTEC’s Intensive Reintegration Services (IRIS) unit. The IRIS unit opened in January 2016, and was made possible through a funding award Riverside County received from the Mentally Ill Offender Crime Reduction (MIOCR) Grant in July 2015. IRIS is a comprehensive treatment program designed to reduce recidivism among mentally ill youthful offenders through evidence-based programs and services. Following the in-custody phase of the program, youth receive enhanced aftercare services to help them successfully reintegrate into their communities.

The IRIS team submitted their short film “Feeling Locked” under the Mental Health Matters category. It was filmed at Riverside Juvenile Hall. Despite limitations related to security and confidentiality in an institutional setting, the youth managed to creatively develop a “locked up” theme to convey a powerful message: “There’s always a key to everything that is locked.” The youth used knowledge of their own individual behavioral health diagnoses to create drawings that they used to shield their identities as they delivered a message that although people may feel “locked away” by not having their feelings heard or their symptoms treated, there is help for them. The IRIS youth are very proud to have participated in a project that will inspire others to take an active stance in helping to improve, and possibly save, the lives of others coping with mental health issues. They are pleased to know that their film will help increase prevention efforts and raise awareness of mental illness within our communities and beyond.

Over 450 films were submitted statewide from schools and organizations from various counties, 125 of which were submitted by Riverside County alone. The IRIS team’s film has been nominated for an award in the Youth and Young Adult Category in a regional contest that is judged by Riverside County and San Bernardino County behavioral health departments. Winners for the regional contest will be announced on May 4th, during a ceremony at the Fox Theatre in Riverside. Riverside County Probation was very excited to learn that the IRIS team’s film was also selected as the first place winner in the state Youth and Young Adult/Mental Health Matters category. As the statewide first place winner, the IRIS team will receive a cash prize of \$500. Additionally, they have been invited to an awards ceremony at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido on May 11th, where their film will be screened and recognized.