

JAMAICA PLAIN

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Paint for Peace program aims to stem gun violence

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In the biblical story of the Great Flood, Noah, from his ark, deploys different birds in search of dry land. The dove returns with an olive branch, a sign that there will be life after the storm.

In a similar fashion, local youth from the Hyde Square Task Force, a nonprofit neighborhood group, and Spontaneous Celebrations, a community-based arts organization, sent out their own symbolic doves, searching for solid ground in the struggle against gun violence.

On April 25, about 50 youths gathered on the steps of Jamaica Plain's Curley K-8 School to learn from Robert Guillemin, a.k.a. Sidewalk Sam, a Boston artist, who showed them how to produce 5-foot doves with paint and a stencil. The prototype shows the bird in flight, outlined in purple, with a banner clenched in its talons that reads: Stop Violence*Create Peace

That day, Paint for Peace stenciled 50 doves in front of Jamaica Plain bodegas, pizzerias, schools, a housing development, and other locations.

"Art just helps me," said participant Stefanie Baez, 17. "It helps me just relax."

Guillemin launched the project last summer, working with local youths to decorate City Hall Plaza with a 5,000-foot dove. Then came a spate of shootings in JP, the victims local teens, prompting the task force youth to contact Paint for Peace, asking to participate.

An ongoing project, Paint for Peace aims to create 600 doves throughout Boston. Including the Jamaica Plain doves, it has completed 80 so far.

"I find it very encouraging, here where the children of Boston have all been painted with the same brush," said Guillemin of the project. "They're all thought of as violent and disrespectful. But 99.9 percent are peaceful children who desire to have the peace they feel for their neighborhood."

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