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Wilmington youth musician performs in Washington D.C.

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Wilmington - Ten youth, including Mike Carroll of Wilmington, from Express Yourself Drumming recently traveled to Washington D.C. and performed at the Kennedy Center before a number of celebrities, including First Lady Michelle Obama.

Express Yourself, a Beverly program that immerses young people into the creative world of music, dance and visual arts, is being nationally recognized as one of 15 youth arts and humanities programs to receive the prestigious 2009 Coming Up Taller Award. The youth performed for a kick off celebration for the awards.

The group received a standing ovation and was cheered on by members of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, including stars Kal Penn, Edward Norton and Alfre Woodard. On Nov. 4 at 2:30 p.m., co-directors Stan Strickland and Paula Conrad and youth Tracy Powers, attended the ceremony at the White House and received the award from Michelle Obama.

Coming Up Taller is a national initiative that recognizes and supports outstanding out-of-school and after-school arts and humanities programs for children, especially those with great potential, but limited outlets for creative expression. A project of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Coming Up Taller Awards honor programs that offer exceptional learning experiences in the arts and the humanities and that have a tangible effect on the lives of young people as evidenced through improved academic scores, enhanced life skills, and positive relationships with peers and adults.

Express Yourself immerses young people into the creative world of music, dance and visual arts and empowers these youth with life changing results. Express Yourself celebrates cultural diversity and collaboration with isolated youth from 17 Department of Mental Health residential and inpatient facilities who form their own large community. Since 1989, over 2,200 youth in newly created communities have worked collaboratively with artists and celebrities such as Blue Man Group, STOMP, Keith Lockhart, conductor of the Boston Pops, and Broadway dancers in a culminating performance at the Citi Performing Arts Center in Boston. Youth and artists become inspired during a full year program creating set designs, visual art, and performance pieces for their grand celebration followed by exhibition at Endicott College's Center for the Arts.

"The most amazing thing about winning this award is seeing the exuberance of these youth being celebrated," said Paula Conrad, co-executive director of Express Yourself.

"Children who are not normally seen and heard for their strengths, have a voice and a presence that is valued through winning this award," noted Stan Strickland, co-executive director of Express Yourself.

"We knew it was happening but when we actually experienced it, it was amazing," said youth Tracy Powers. "Once Michelle Obama spoke, I knew she genuinely cared. I knew we deserved this award, but it is so wonderful that we were recognized."

Express Yourself youth will celebrate the award at the Beverly studio at 200 Rantoul St. on Nov 19 at 4:30 p.m. Youth collaborators from Greater Lawrence Technical School's culinary program will host the dinner for youth and special guests.

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