

Second annual Kingston youth festival encourages hope for the future

Writers, artists receive awards for work depicting ways to imagine a better future

Author of the article:

Meghan Balogh

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Some of the award winners for this year's Youth Imagine the Future festival, which gives elementary and high school students the chance to write or create works of art depicting a better future. Award winners received their recognition during a ceremony at the Window Art Gallery in Kingston on Dec. 10.

Article content

When Jerri Jerreat founded the Youth Imagine the Future festival in 2022, she wanted to give young people a chance to imagine the future of our planet through a lens of hope.

Jerreat, a retired teacher, saw an opportunity to give young people a voice through the festival project.

“I wanted to give an opportunity for youth to think about the future in a kind of positive solution sort of way, and to really imagine a better future where communities work together,” she told the Whig-Standard on Wednesday.

Jerreat pointed out that recent studies from Canadian universities are showing a rise in climate anxiety and depression among young people, especially in high school and university-aged youth.

“Everyone needs climate education,” Jerreat admitted. “It’s part of our life. But we don’t just need to look at all the terrible things. We need to look at all the solutions that are actually being used around the world, quite successfully. Then maybe they could start imagining and thinking about a way to get to a better future.”

Jerreat has taken her “good news” climate education to 60 classrooms in the Limestone District School Board this fall, inviting students in those classes to submit artwork or written work exploring ideas surrounding a sustainable future — things such as electric vehicles, rooftop community gardens, solar power and more.

“It was believable, and it was really fun,” Jerreat said of the submissions.

On Dec. 10, the Youth Imagine the Future festival handed out more than 30 awards to honour the stories and vision demonstrated by youth from a number of local elementary and high schools during a ceremony at the Window Art Gallery in Kingston.

The awards ceremony celebrated the nearly 70 stories and 40 works of art that were submitted to this year’s festival, a news release from the festival said.

Those award-winning pieces will be available to view on the festival’s website in the near future, as well as in some public spaces in the new year.

The festival is promoting a genre of creative writing called Solarpunk, which takes the dystopian model and turns it on its head to look at brighter paths to the future.

“It’s more optimistic climate fiction,” Jerreat explained. “It’s not foolish, not magical solutions. I think we’ve had enough reading dystopian fiction. It’s time we need to see fiction set right in Kingston, where maybe in 40 years we’re living a little bit more co-operatively, with more little forests, more biodiversity.”

Jerreat is passionate about sharing this positive climate education with more students. She has prepared a workshop that’s available to any teacher who wants to invite her into a classroom to talk about the positive things that are happening right now to address climate change.

“These solutions are actually happening (in the world), but we’re not really hearing about them,” she said.

For more information, visit www.youthimaginethefuture.com.