

## ACES students paint pollinator mural on outdoor classroom

Carissa Woytach *The Chronicle-Telegram* Nov 28, 2024



Brianna Benjamin, center, a member of ACES and a leader for the group's project at Little Lighthouse Learning Center, paints part of a mural at the learning center on Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2024.

LORAIN — Local students transformed a bare, fenced-in space into an outdoor classroom for young learners at Lorain's Little Lighthouse Learning Center.

Led by artist Mia Cordova and team leaders Leasya Castro, Brianna Benjamin and Liz Alvarez, students from the Achievement through Community Education and Support, or ACES, group have spent weeks painting murals for children at the Little Lighthouse Learning Center's outdoor classroom.

The murals coincide with the recently opened pollinator garden at nearby Willow Park, and are meant to help raise awareness about the different kinds of pollinators crucial to healthy ecosystems, ACES volunteer Jessica Serrano said. She and ACES founder Mike Ferrer helped organize the project paid for via a Bloomberg Foundation grant doled out by the Community Foundation of Lorain County.

"The idea is if we can build an environmental outdoor classroom, then starting this year in the spring our kids are researching pollinators, researching climate change, researching migration patterns and how they're disrupted by climate change," Ferrer said. "And they're going to educate the community."

Cordova, who also works with the Start With Art group led by Jeff Pye at Harrison Cultural Community Center, was tasked with designing the mural digitally and getting approval from Little Lighthouse Learning Center staff, as well as sketching it onto the inside of the fence for ACES members to paint.

The group started working on the outdoor classroom space in September and plans to be done by the end of the year.

Castro, Benjamin and Alvarez, all Early College students at Lorain County Community College, coordinated schedules between Cordova and ACES students to get the murals underway, all while learning about pollinators themselves.

Pollinators are far from just bees, Benjamin said; they include dragonflies, hummingbirds, butterflies and other species — and the impact on an ecosystem without them.

"We learned the big effect of climate change and ... how the issue isn't as widely discussed as it should be," Alvarez said.

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