

COMING UP TALLER AWARD - 2009

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THE AJA PROJECT TO RECEIVE COMING UP TALLER AWARD IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) The AJA Project's Journey program, a San Diego-based initiative that offers immigrant and refugee youth photography based educational programs to illustrate and reflect on their experiences of migration and resettlement, is being nationally recognized as one of 19 youth arts and humanities programs to receive the prestigious 2008 Coming Up Taller Award. Youth and adult representatives of the program will travel to Washington, D.C., for a (time and date) ceremony, where they will accept the award.

Coming Up Taller is an initiative of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH). The President's Committee partners with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to administer the program, which was founded in 1998.

The Coming Up Taller Awards recognize and support outstanding community arts and humanities programs that celebrate the creativity of America's young people, and provide them with new learning opportunities and a chance to contribute to their communities. The awards also highlight the contributions that historians, scholars, librarians and visual and performing arts make to families and communities by mentoring children. More than 350 nominations were received by the program in 2008.

Participants in the AJA Project are youth who have recently arrived to the U.S. from countries all over the world. They meet twice a week during the school year to learn photography basics and create digital photo essays on themes that reflect their transition from their home countries to their new lives in the U.S. Students explore cultural issues through the lens of the camera as well as additional activities such as documentation of oral histories, group discussions and writing projects.

To help fulfill its mission to raise awareness of the realities faced by displaced people, the AJA Project recently placed 150 large scale photographs and text banners in public spaces including: shop windows, street fencing, building fronts and free standing frames and displayed another two dozen 7 x 8 foot photographs on a fence encircling the San Diego Museum of Art. In doing so, the organization is building on the individual accomplishments of Journey program participants to enable San Diego area residents to

gain knowledge and perspective about their experiences and facilitating a larger social dialogue.

"I have witnessed incredible transformations with students who doubted the importance and value of their heritage, and were at risk of losing their cultural identities to the stereotypes they saw depicted around them. The photographs serve as entry point to the type of reflection and analysis that leads to this transformation. I witness these moments frequently, when students find the courage to talk about the memories of their old home and the confidence to talk about who they want to become in their new home." Sandra Ainslie, Executive Director

"Arts and humanities activities have a wonderful way of enabling young people to discover their unique talents and interests as they forge a path to success in school and in life," said Adair Margo, Chairman of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. "Journey's photographic works speak from the hearts of young people who are facing tremendous cultural transitions. While they gain a sense of direction and accomplishment through their participation in this program, we can all learn a great deal from the stories they have to tell."

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities bridges the interests of federal agencies and the private sector, supports special projects that increase participation, and helps incorporate the humanities and the arts into White House objectives. The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education. Because democracy demands wisdom, the National Endowment for the Humanities serves and strengthens our Republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. The Institute of Museum and Library Services is an independent federal grant making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners.

For more information please visit the following Web sites:

The AJA Project, Journey: www.ajaproject.org

Coming Up Taller: www.cominguptaller.org

President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities: www.pcah.gov

National Endowment for the Arts: www.arts.gov

National Endowment for the Humanities: www.neh.gov

Institute of Museum and Library Services: www.imls.gov