



Oregon

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Youth at OYA's Tillamook facility honored for creativity in national contest



"Dreamcatcher," a photo by Nathan Smith

Two young people in the care of the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) were among winners in a national writing and art contest for troubled kids.

Josif Wilson, 19, (hometown: Albany, Ore.) took top honors for his essay "Untold War" and Nathan Smith, 21, (hometown: Lebanon, Ore.) won for his photograph captioned "Dreamcatcher." Both are at Tillamook Youth Correctional Facility (YCF).

Their works were submitted for judging in the Untold Stories Essay and Visual Art Competition sponsored by the Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings (CEEAS). More than 200 youth held in juvenile facilities nationwide competed in the contest. Wilson and Smith were joined by several girls at Oak Creek YCF in Albany who were also selected as winners from Oregon.

“Our youth have again proved that incarceration need not stifle creativity,” said OYA Director Fariborz Pakseresht. “We are deeply proud of their accomplishments and thank CEEAS and the committed educators who nurture the creativity of their students. Untold Stories represents the innovative education partnerships that help at-risk youth lead productive, crime-free lives after completing their OYA commitments.”

This is not the first time youth in OYA’s care have received national recognition for their artistry. In May, a young girl at Oak Creek YCF took first place in the [Words Unlocked poetry contest](#) sponsored by CEEAS, and three other OYA youth finished third. Chelsea Clinton was among the judges for Words Unlocked.

“Many of the youth who competed in Untold Stories wrote about universal themes, such as love, belonging, redemption, overcoming obstacles, taking control of your life and saying you’re sorry,” said David Domenici, executive director of CEEAS. “But often their stories were haunted by violence and tragedy, reminding us of the traumatic experiences so many young people in the juvenile justice system have confronted.”

Untold Stories is a partnership between CEEAS and [Richard Ross](#), whose photography collection “[Juvenile in Justice](#)” offers glimpses of life inside the nation’s youth detention and correctional settings. Selected entries from Untold Stories will appear in the next project by Ross, a writing and visual arts collection entitled “Juvie Talk,” expected to be published in 2014.

To encourage entries for Untold Stories, CEEAS developed a 10-day [curriculum](#) to inspire the sort of writing that Ross was looking for—contextualized, personal and real. The curriculum included materials that encouraged creativity and originality, but also helped students address their academic weaknesses and build on their strengths.

The winners received cash prizes ranging from \$25-\$100. A number of the winning essays and artwork have appeared in the CEEAS online publication, [Untold Stories](#).

Wilson and Smith are students at [Trask River High School](#), administered by the [Tillamook School District](#), which provides education services at Tillamook YCF and Camp Tillamook.

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The Oregon Youth Authority is the state's juvenile justice agency, reducing victimization by helping at-risk young people lead productive, crime-free lives. Learn more at www.oregon.gov/oya and follow us on Twitter @OregonYouth

The Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings maximizes teaching and learning in alternative schools. Its mission is to help alternative schools—in community settings and in locked facilities—implement transformational, student-focused practices. Learn more at www.ceeas.org and follow on Twitter @SecondChanceEDU