



TOMPKINS COUNTY Office of Human Rights

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS BROADENS THEME OF LONG-TIME K-12 ARTS COMPETITION

Ithaca, NY – The Tompkins County Office of Human Rights (OHR) will be rolling out its 29th Annual K-12 Arts Competition in September 2015 with a few notable tweaks. Changes to the K-12 program will include a broader human rights theme and a launch that takes place at the beginning of each academic school year.

The program will be called the Human Rights K-12 Arts Competition and will use the 30 Articles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (30 Articles) as its annual theme. The purpose behind the new theme is to provide a more comprehensive, inclusive, and diverse framework for young people to express social justice ideals through a variety of art forms. The transition will allow students to explore not only civil rights themes, but also values associated with human, political, economic, and cultural rights.

The theme in prior years focused on the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Human Rights K-12 Arts Competition will build on the success of that program by expanding the possibilities for expression by students and the opportunities for teachers to educate for human rights. When asked about the changes, Director Karen Baer noted, "Last year young artists naturally applied MLK to issues they perceived to be current and forward looking, such as the environment and poverty." She continued, "The irrepressible creativity of the students and the feedback we gathered from focus groups and surveys were invaluable in showing us that a broader theme would benefit young people in Tompkins County."

The OHR will spend the current school year planning the Human Rights K-12 Arts Competition, conducting focus groups with students, teachers, and community members, and finding ways to engage both primary and secondary school students, as well as an increased number of the school districts in Tompkins County. "With any school program we want to make sure that we are integrating our offering with the Common Core standards and working with teachers to make sure we are helping them meet their curricular goals," says Program and Outreach Specialist Sarah Simmons. "The 30 Articles lend themselves perfectly to the establishment of classroom culture and can help build a foundation of human rights education in schools."

The Human Rights K-12 Arts Competition will be launched in September 2015. Students will be invited to submit art, poetry, and several other media categories such as videos or radio public service announcements. Submissions will be due in mid-November of 2015 with winners announced and celebrated with prizes on International Human Rights Day, December 10th. Additionally, student art will be displayed on the Avenue of Friends in the Tompkins County Public Library.

The Tompkins County Office of Human Rights has been synonymous with the MLK Art & Poetry Competition for almost three decades. When asked why OHR has decided to transition to a broader Human Rights focus Karen Baer offered, "The idea came from Dr. King's own development as a leader and a thinker. King understood the importance of human rights and his shift from civil rights to universal human rights is the model we are using as we make this transition." OHR is responsible for educating Tompkins County residents about a wide range of human and civil rights. The populations they protect include members of a diverse list of protected classes including: race, color, religion, national origin, disability, sex, sexual orientation, age, arrest record, domestic violence victim status, and many more. "With this expanded contest teachers and students will be able to explore MLK as well as many other human rights leaders and concepts," said Sarah Simmons.

During the program transition period, students are encouraged to participate in the **What Would MLK Say? Poster Contest**, which is open to **all ages**. Information and guidelines are available at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/humanrights.

The Tompkins County Office of Human Rights (OHR) is a department of the County charged with providing civil rights enforcement and outreach programming. They handle complaints of discrimination in housing, employment, lending, public accommodation, and education. If you feel you have been discriminated against or you have questions regarding your human rights or the rights of others, contact: Tompkins County Office of Human Rights: 120 W. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street, Ithaca, NY 14850, 607-277-4080 or humanrights@tompkins-co.org.

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