



Artist brings mural, hope to Eastman YDC

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Nationally-renowned artist Emanuel Martinez is giving back to juveniles who fell into trouble with the law. Having been there himself when he was 13, he learned then that art was his gift. Now, he's taking his passion across the country to motivate juvenile offenders to turn their lives around.

"These kids need all the hope they can get. By taking part in this, we're finding it is helping their self-esteem," said Randy Minnick, head of project development for the Emanuel Project.

Amidst the gray, neutral-colored walls of the Eastman Youth Development Campus in Dodge County is a splash of color.

"This project actually started in south Georgia in a facility over in Sumter County. From there, it's gone across the country," said Minnick.

It's a national effort that has come full circle. The Emanuel Project is a nationwide movement throughout detention centers with the main goal of motivating incarcerated youth to make positive changes through positive images. At Eastman, it's already starting to make a difference.

"When I leave, I plan on helping my dad and he needs help with graphic design. With this, it's actually part of design and gives me new ideas on what I can do," said one juvenile.

The Emanuel Project also establishes art curriculum in the detention centers and even donates the art materials. This is the fifth mural in the state of Georgia. 16 were done throughout the country last year alone. But for the man behind every mural, Emanuel Martinez, each one is a reminder of his past, having been incarcerated three times in his teens.

"The first time I was in, I discovered my art talent. The facility allowed me to paint a mural in the facility," said Martinez.

Now, some 50 years later, Martinez is giving back. He sketches each mural, but leaves 75 to 80 percent of the painting up to the youth.

"I feel like I've accomplished a lot. And I'm really proud of myself," said a juvenile.

"This kind of message lives on here everyday. It's something they see every time they're passing by," said Martinez.

The Eastman YDC was one of 10 juvenile detention facilities in the country to participate his year in the Emanuel Project.