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Directing Change Film Contest Elevates Youth Voices in Riverside County

RIVERSIDE, CA (May 12, 2026) – Riverside County youth will take center stage on Wednesday, May 13, as the annual Directing Change Film Contest returns to the Fox Performing Arts Center in Riverside to celebrate creativity, connection and emotional well-being.

Hosted by Riverside University Health System’s Behavioral Health and Public Health departments, in partnership with the Riverside County Office of Education, the Directing Change event brings together students, families, educators and community leaders for a red carpet-style celebration featuring finalist screenings, guest speakers and recognition of youth participants from across the county.

The evening is designed to showcase student achievement in film and highlight the importance of listening to young voices and investing in prevention and early intervention.

“Supporting the well-being of Riverside County’s young people is one of the most meaningful investments we can make in our future,” said Second District Supervisor and Board Chairwoman Karen Spiegel. “Directing Change gives students a powerful platform to share their voices, uplift one another and inspire change through creativity and compassion. These films reflect the insight, courage and heart of our youth, reminding us that honest conversations build stronger schools, healthier communities and a hopeful future for all.”

This year, students from 24 schools and organizations across Riverside County submitted 213 films exploring mental health, suicide prevention, culture, animation, hope and justice.

The films are typically 30 to 60 seconds long and are developed and scripted by students to share honest perspectives and invite open conversations.

This year, the contest includes two new categories: Substance Use and the Boys and Young Men Media Challenge. These additions create new opportunities for youth to address substance use, reduce stigma and encourage conversations around boys' and young men's mental health through creative storytelling.

“Programs like Directing Change create meaningful opportunities for young people to feel seen, heard and supported,” said Kim Saruwatari, Director, Riverside University Health System - Public Health. “When students share their stories, they help create connections that can lead to support and care.”

The Directing Change Program and Film Contest is part of Youth Creating Change and continues to provide a platform for students to engage with topics such as mental health, suicide prevention, social justice and substance use through art, film and education. By encouraging honest storytelling and peer connection, the program helps foster empathy, awareness and a culture of care among youth.

“Directing Change gives young people the opportunity to speak openly, support one another, and help shape school communities where every student feels valued, understood and encouraged to reach out for help,” said Riverside County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Edwin Gomez. “Recognizing our students for expanding mental health awareness is a meaningful opportunity to show how much we value their powerful insights and inspiring creativity.”

For more information about how schools and youth groups can participate in future contests, visit www.directingchange.org/riversidecounty.

To learn more about Riverside University Health System, visit www.ruhealth.org.

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About Riverside University Health System

Riverside University Health System (RUHS) includes a 439-bed Medical Center in Moreno Valley, Calif., 14 Federally Qualified Community Health Centers, and the departments of Public Health and Behavioral Health. RUHS is Riverside County's safety net provider, offering high-quality, patient-centered care. With more than 8,000 staff members and over 125 years of experience, RUHS continues its commitment to and legacy of delivering exceptional, compassionate care with a focus on public health, behavioral health, community wellness, and medical education. Visit ruhealth.org to learn more.