

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Kerri S. Mabee

Public Information Officer

Riverside University Health System

P: 951.467.7542 | E: K.Mabee@ruhealth.org

Riverside County Youth Triumph at 2025 Directing Change Film Contest

Students Honored for Outstanding Films Promoting Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

RIVERSIDE, CA (May 16, 2025) – Riverside County's brightest young filmmakers were celebrated at the annual Directing Change Film Contest—a creative outlet for young people ages 12-25 to tell stories about mental health, suicide prevention and other topics. The event was held Thursday, May 15, at the Fox Performing Arts Center in Riverside.

The red-carpet event, hosted by Riverside University Health System's Behavioral Health and Public Health departments alongside the Riverside County Office of Education, showcased impactful short films created by youth to spark dialogue and promote emotional well-being. Attendees enjoyed screenings of selected films, heard from guest speakers, and recognized young filmmakers for their artistic achievements.

"Each year, I'm inspired by the passion and dedication of our students. Their films remind us of the powerful voices of our youth to raise awareness and foster change," said Riverside County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Edwin Gomez. "Their commitment to advocating for mental health helps build stronger, healthier communities for everyone."

This year, students from 23 schools and community-based organizations across Riverside County submitted 251 films focused on mental health and suicide prevention. The 30- to 60-second films offer fresh perspectives, challenge stigmas and encourage open conversations about critical issues affecting today's youth.

Submissions were judged for creativity, message clarity, emotional impact and alignment with contest guidelines.

"The Directing Change Film Contest is a remarkable example of how youth-driven initiatives can make a significant impact on public health awareness," said Kim Saruwatari, Director of Riverside University Health System – Public Health. "We are proud to support these young filmmakers who are leading crucial conversations about mental health."

Categories in this year's competition included Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Matters, Animated Short, Through the Lens of Culture, Hope & Justice, and Walk in Our Shoes. Each theme invited youth to reflect on personal experiences, community challenges and stories of hope—amplifying voices that too often go unheard.

Winners received trophies and the honor of presenting their work to a live audience—an experience that left a lasting impression on all who attended. First-place regional winners will move on to statewide judging to compete with other winning films across the state.

The Directing Change Program and Film Contest is part of Youth Creating Change, an organization that centers youth voices in conversations that matter—mental health, suicide prevention and social justice—through art, film, and education, giving students the tools needed to recognize emotional struggles, support their peers and promote a culture of care.

For more information about how schools and youth groups can participate in future contests, and to view event photos and finalist films, please visit: www.directingchange.ca.org/riversidecounty.

#

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 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.