

## TEXAS MENTAL HEALTH CREATIVE ARTS CONTEST OPENS FOR SUBMISSIONS

AUSTIN, Texas--Texas System of Care is excited to announce the return of the annual Texas Mental Health Creative Arts Contest in collaboration with the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health at UT Austin and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. The contest opens December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 and will accept submissions through March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

The contest aims to raise awareness of mental health experiences and seeks to challenge mental health stigma by facilitating open discussion. Participants may enter by submitting original, creative works in one of three categories (original artwork, writing, or photography), that draws on the contest theme “Why Does Mental Health Matter to You?” The contest is open to Texans of all ages and is judged in four age groups: elementary school, middle school, high school and adult. Last year, the contest received over 600 submissions and touched the lives of many people.

For many participants, the arts contest is an opportunity to express complex emotions through creative outlets. Jennifer Leal, whose poem, “[Look to the People](#),” earned third place in the adult writing category, highlighted the power of shared experiences in building connections and fighting stigma when sharing the inspiration for her writing: “I wrote this piece initially to show my students how adults can engage in destigmatizing mental health. It turned into something much more and I began to think about how each person’s battle and internal war is a unique, yet shared experience. I hope that readers can see themselves and others in my writing and understand that we do not have to live on alone.”

For students, the contest may offer a chance for them to reflect on their own experiences, share challenges they face, and to inspire others. Gloria H., whose painting, “[Flowering Hope](#),” earned an honorable mention in the middle school original artwork category, spoke on the message behind her piece: “In my painting, the many flowers symbolize growth, new beginnings and hope for people who are suffering. Her tears are watering the flowers and this represents how even in hard times, hope is always there.”

For more information, including past winners, rules, and how to submit your artwork, visit <https://gallery.txsystemofcare.org>