

For immediate release

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Railroad Street Youth Project to Inaugurate 'Courage Wall' at Annual Block Party

Great Barrington, Mass. – The Railroad Street Youth Project (RSYP) invites you to celebrate the inauguration of the Courage Wall on Saturday, May 27 at 1 p.m. at the alleyway between Railroad Street and the Triplex Cinema. The inauguration will kick off RSYP's daylong block party that includes an awards ceremony, food, and games. All are invited to attend.

"It takes a lot of courage to be a young person today. They are growing up in a time when young people are faced daily with uncertainty in an economically, environmentally and politically precarious world," says RSYP Executive Director Ananda Timpane. "The Courage Wall has the capacity to support young people in South County to feel empowered and valued, and envision a hopeful future for themselves."

The inspiration for building a Courage Wall in Great Barrington was first brought to RSYP by author Barbara Bonner, who was working on her second book, *Inspiring Courage* (published last month by Wisdom Publications). In her research for the book, Bonner came across a community project in Alexandria, VA. There, on Mount Vernon Avenue, an 8' x 20' chalkboard was erected with a prompt at the top: "I wish I had the courage to..." The prompt encouraged passersby to consider their fears, and what it takes to overcome these fears.

"I discovered the history of the original Courage Wall and then brought the idea to Ananda because I believed it would resonate with RSYP's mission and community," says Bonner.

Bonner and many community members, including State Representative Smitty Pignatelli and RSYP alumni will attend the inauguration and offer up a few words about the most sought "action of the heart."

"The Courage Wall will bring our community together to recognize and celebrate each other's strengths and daily accomplishments," says Rachel Bozza, an intern with RSYP. "I think it will be empowering for me to share my own moments of courage and to be inspired by what others share."

The Courage Wall will remain in the alley through the fall, and people, including school groups and community organizations, are invited to visit the space and share their thoughts and inspiration. RSYP encourages everyone to share on the wall during the block party, and to return to it time and again.

"I like that I can hear what other people fear or have overcome," says Youth Operational Board member Chris Wiltshire. "It provides a space for us to be vulnerable and publicly recognize each other's strengths and struggles."

About Railroad Street Youth Project:

At RSYP, youth take the lead. They explore their full potential and become equipped to meet the challenging transition to adulthood. RSYP's professional staff matches youth-generated ideas with community resources, empowering youth to create and oversee a wide range of innovative, life-changing projects. Unmatched in mission and scope, RSYP excels in helping youth find their voice and realize the benefits of their commitment to themselves and their community. RSYP serves 14-25 year old residents of Southern Berkshire County and the surrounding area through mentoring and apprenticeship programs, a sexual health education initiative, an all-youth board that funds innovative, youth-inspired projects and trips, job training and career counseling, and a drop-in center offering referrals, mediation, and advocacy services. Railroad Street Youth Project's drop-in center is located at 60 Bridge St., Great Barrington, MA.