

## Four Rivers students recount pandemic experience in audio gallery

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GREENFIELD — Each QR code on the wooden stakes spread out across the Four Rivers Charter Public School lawn Thursday told a high school junior's story.

Pandemic stories of loss, depression and isolation were common in the "Reflections on the Pandemic" exhibit, but lessons of growth, community and empathy among the Four Rivers Class of 2022 were even more prevalent.

History teacher Alex Wilson wanted to create an oral history of the COVID-19 pandemic when students returned to in-person learning four weeks ago, but he soon learned the project would better serve as a reflective piece for his students and himself.

"It started as a history project documenting the world," Wilson said. "As we returned to school, a lot of the processing was internal ... a reckoning with the changes that happened and the changes that continue to happen."



Four Rivers Charter Public School junior Isaac Larkin-Harmon helps his parents, Jessica Larkin and Luke Smith, tune into his recorded thoughts on Thursday at the Greenfield school during the "Reflections on the Pandemic" exhibit. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Over the course of three weeks and three reflections, students were asked to answer the questions, “Where have I been, where are we now, and where am I headed?” After writing the reflections, students recorded their responses into a podcast format for Thursday’s audio gallery.

This was the first time the students had worked with audio software, but Wilson said the students quickly adapted to the challenge of listening to their own voices.

Guests were asked to use their phone to scan the QR code on each post, which would lead them to a Google Drive link where each podcast episode was stored.

The project’s goal was to “center the student voices in the narrative” while also giving students a place to reflect and process the events of the past year.



Four Rivers Charter Public School juniors gather Thursday at the Greenfield school during their class’ “Reflections on the Pandemic” exhibit. From left are Taylor Ezell, Liv Kingsley, Joy Bohonowicz, Ashley Schlinger, Afri Flynn, Amalia Rubinstein and Nick Forbes. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ



Four Rivers Charter Public School parents Jessica Larkin and Luke Smith listen to their son Isaac Larkin-Harmon’s recorded reflections on life during the pandemic on Thursday at the Greenfield school. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ »

“Culturally, we’re supposed to move on,” Wilson said. “I thought this was a way to approach what we’ve gone through.”

Wilson said he wanted to emphasize the importance of the students’ work, and this project could serve as an outlet for the school as a whole.

“I hope they feel good. I want to communicate that their work matters; it’s important they put it out there,” Wilson said. “This sets a tone for the school ... and I hope it creates a community where they can be themselves.”

Vivian Goleman centered her podcast around the mental health struggles she and other teens went through after a normal year of high school was stripped from them.

“The pandemic has done irreversible change to me,” she said in her podcast.

Goleman said it was a vulnerable year for her and it was important to show these raw emotions to the world, despite the difficulty of sharing personal struggles with society.

“I took journal entries so I have clear snapshots. ... It felt important to paint a picture of the teen mental health story,” Goleman said. “It’s hard to do and not everyone wants to.”

Fellow junior Ashley Schlinger said the project served as a great way to process the past year.

“It’s been very difficult, but rewarding to reflect,” Schlinger said. “I missed out on a lot of things ... but I like hearing the culmination of things about the year.”

Student Nick Forbes said the project helped provide an “open perspective” on his experiences.

“This year has been all over the place,” Forbes said. “When we started, I was like, ‘Ugh, we have to keep thinking about this,’ but it was better than I thought.”

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