

**NYC DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT'S HEROES PROJECT AND OFFICE FOR THE PREVENTION OF HATE CRIMES PUBLISH DIGITAL COMIC BOOK "HEROES AGAINST HATE"**

*Students from across the City joined forces with the comic book industry to create heroes inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic*

**NEW YORK**—The NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) in partnership with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), the Comic Book Project and NYC-based comic book artist Michael O'Shea today announced the release of the DYCD Heroes Project digital comic book "**Heroes Against Hate.**" Through DYCD's virtual "DYCD at Home" platform, young people from all five boroughs worked with professional artists over several weeks to create the characters and develop the plot into a finished work.

"As the City faces the challenge of ensuring that fear about COVID-19 does not manifest as an excuse for harassment and discrimination, the DYCD Heroes Project challenged young New Yorkers to work together to create an original comic book about heroes fighting hate. Young people developed character ideas and story plots, learned how to translate their creativity into comic art, and built their literacy skills during this unique opportunity to work with creatives in the field," said **DYCD Commissioner Bill Chong.**

The "Heroes Against Hate" comic book features a storyline and characters created virtually by ten of this year's top participants. In all, approximately 600 NYC young people from 4<sup>th</sup> grade through high school took part in the Heroes Project. The final comic book tells the story of young New Yorkers joining forces with "Nurse Healthy" to battle the villain "Mr. No Mask" and to bring New Yorkers together against hate, discrimination and harassment.

The DYCD Heroes Project is a literacy-focused comic book initiative that challenges youth to develop stories about heroes—real or imagined—in their own communities. This spring, the Heroes Project was brought online so that young people and their families could continue to receive support. DYCD partnered with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), which was launched in September 2019 as part of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. The OPHC takes a holistic approach through education, community relations, and law enforcement to prevent hate crimes and the biases that fuel them.

"The Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes is proud to co-sponsor this project with DYCD and the Comic Book Project to offer young New Yorkers an opportunity to develop creative skills that will serve them well for a lifetime," said **Deborah Lauter, Executive Director of the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes.** "Their inspiring creations send a vital message at a time when we need to stand together and celebrate our City's diversity. These talented youth are our true Heroes against Hate."

NYC youth joined artists and mentors from the Comic Book Project for a virtual comic book club each Thursday. Youth were also invited to join an online club portal to post their original work, comment, and provide feedback on their peers' characters, storylines and comics pages. These collaborative ideas, in response to the challenge of creating "Heroes Against Hate," fed into the story and design of a professional publication.

"This was an extraordinary opportunity for us to help youths across New York City to connect in a creative literacy project. Through our partnership with the NYC Department of Youth and Community

Development, we were able to amplify the voices of young people through their creative story ideas and original comic book characters. I am very proud of all the work that the young people accomplished; it is a wonderful statement about the creative youth in our city,” said **Dr. Michael Bitz, founder and director of the Comic Book Project.**

“This club was amazing. I am really happy that my afterschool’s program gave us the opportunity to join. I enjoyed having my character featured in a comic that many will read. I really enjoyed sharing ideas to make the comic come to life,” said **participant Jasmin Reel, who created the characters of “Mr. No Mask” and “Nurse Healthy.”**

The comic is available online at [https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/DYCD\\_heroes\\_project.page](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/DYCD_heroes_project.page).

DYCD supports New York City’s afterschool and youth workforce development programs throughout the five boroughs. The agency also oversees funding for anti-poverty programs, such as adult literacy and immigrant services. For more information, visit [www.nyc.gov/dycd](http://www.nyc.gov/dycd) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

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