

# SCHOOL HONORS YOUNG GIRL'S LEGACY

Mural features Braille, sign-language tribute to beloved student

SHANNON BARR • U-T

SAN DIEGO

Described by her teachers and peers as highly motivated with a strong personality, fifth-grader Yusra Nasir loved to laugh and spend time with her friends. She loved colors, pink playdough and jewelry, especially bracelets.

All that — her vibrant character and her favorite things — were the inspiration for a colorful mural at Clairemont's Lafayette Elementary School, where Yusra was a student.

Yusra passed away last summer from health complications, but her memory at the school



Artist Rob Tobin (right), Sebastian Gonzalez (left) and Dylan Ginther helped create "Yusra's Legacy." K.C. ALFRED • U-T

lives on through the 60-foot mural, called "Yusra's Legacy." The mural, which covers the wall of a building facing the schoolyard, was formally unveiled during

the sixth-grade promotion ceremony on June 13.

"The best part was the unveiling," said ninth-grader Dylan Ginther. SEE MURAL • B3

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## MURAL • 75 volunteers put together memorial wall

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ther, a former schoolmate of Yusra's, "because everyone was so surprised and they were happy to see it."

The artwork, paid for by Proposition Z funds and some ASB funds, came together thanks to a partnership between the school and the nonprofit A Reason To Survive (ARTS), founded in 2001 to help kids facing adversity through art and music programs.

Rob Tobin, artist in residence with ARTS, said the project, an image of hands signing "I Love You," took a couple of months to complete. The first phase involved handmade ceramic and glass tiles that spell out, in Braille, an inspirational quote from Helen Keller: "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched — they must be felt with the heart."

The second phase — painting and putting the materials on the wall — took two days.

About 75 students, teachers, parents and ARTS volunteers worked on the mural to honor Yusra, who was deaf and blind.

"She was very girlie," said Kim Chaney, the aide who worked with Yusra since first grade. "She just had personality and sparkle and shine ... she really was an inspiration."



A tile on the mural has the name of student Yusra Nasir, who died last year. K.C. ALFRED • U-T

Getting the mural completed took "a lot of teamwork," Tobin said. "Every one of those 75 people who were involved really played a part — we couldn't have done it without them."

Dylan helped paint, put the plaster and cement on the wall and wash the grout off the tiles. He admitted the project was not easy, but it was worth it.

"She was a good friend of mine — I'd call her my best friend," Dylan said. "We would always play during recess time together."

Yusra lost her eyesight around first grade. She communicated through Braille and tactile signing, in which the listener places their hands on the signer and feels the movement of each word. Despite losing her sight, Yusra remained in the same classes as her peers.

with Yusra since preschool. "I did it in her honor and memory. And I really miss her — she was my friend."

Sebastian proudly pointed out which tiles he made — an eclectic mix of green, yellow and gray rectangular and circular tiles with unique etchings.

"I knew Yusra would like the designs, so I just came up with them."

Mary Kay Cook, Yusra's fifth-grade teacher, recalled Yusra's impressive ability to memorize, allowing her to draw pictures from when she had vision.

"She always knew you just by your sense," Cook said. "We would go to sign to her and she would know who you were without you identifying yourself."

Yusra learned how to tie her shoes with Cook after someone didn't believe she could.

"She had a lot of determination and grit," said Fischer-Garza.

Though Sebastian no longer attends Lafayette — he's now going into the seventh grade — he believes the mural will continue to serve its purpose.

"The kids in the future growing up will be able to see it," he said. "I won't be able to see it anymore, but they will ... and as they grow up, they'll learn more about it."