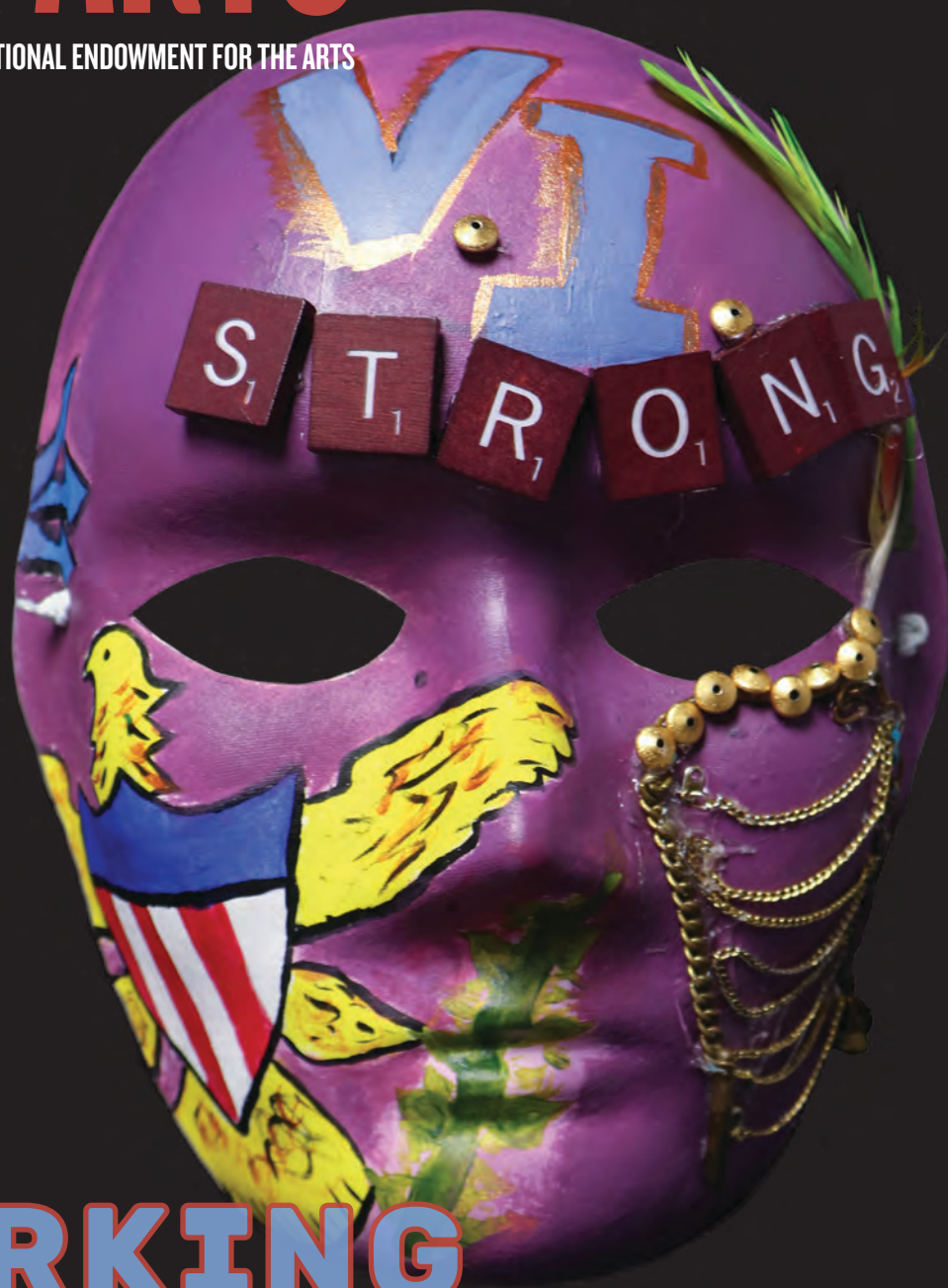


# NEA ARTS

A MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

Number 1, 2019



## WORKING

ON THE

## SPIRIT

AND THE

## MIND

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# This issue

At the National Endowment for the Arts, we believe the arts have a unique ability to heal. Our investments reflect this belief: Over the past decade, the Arts Endowment has awarded \$4.85 million in healing arts projects, which range from improving cognition and socialization of older adults through songwriting workshops, to mitigating the invisible wounds of war in service members and veterans through creative arts therapy.

But we also know the arts can be a source of social healing, bridging divides among neighbors, and providing solace for communities ravaged by trauma. This is why we historically offer support following natural and man-made disasters, and why many of our projects take place in communities touched by challenges such as poverty, violence, or addiction.

Whether we are talking about individuals or communities, physically or emotionally, we know the arts have an important role in healing across the spectrum. In this issue of *NEA Arts*, we look forward to sharing the many ways the Arts Endowment promotes the good health and well-being of our nation.

Mary Anne Carter  
Acting Chairman  
National Endowment for the Arts

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About the cover: One of the masks created in the mask-making program in the Virgin Islands, which helped those traumatized by recent hurricanes. The program was based on a similar project developed by the NEA's Creative Forces initiative. Photo by William Stelzer, St. John's Art and Cultural Long-Term Recovery Group

Lieutenant Jordan Lo (left) with music therapist Cory Woodrow at the second Pop-Up Community Creative Arts Café.



# OPTIONS FOR HEALING

A LOOK AT CREATIVE FORCES' COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS PROJECTS

**BY REBECCA SUTTON**

All photos by Angelito Bautista

When retired Navy corpsman Jason Danley finished his tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, “It was really hard to find where I fit because it was almost like I didn’t relate to anybody anymore,” he remembered. “It made it very, very isolating. I just kind of combusted into myself.” Diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain

injury (TBI), he participated in music therapy as part of his treatment at Naval Medical Center San Diego, which not only helped him begin to process his painful experiences and rebuild his relationships, but revived a love of music that had become buried beneath the demands of military service, fatherhood, and marriage.

Like most medical appointments, his therapy slots were held during working 9-5 hours. “But what happens from five to midnight when people are left to sit with what they’re dealing with?” asked his wife Christina, who also served as a Navy corpsman. “That’s where I think a lot of people fall apart. It opens these avenues for not good habits.” The consequences of those habits can be devastating: more than 20 percent of veterans with PTSD have been diagnosed with substance abuse disorder, and both PTSD and TBI are considered major risk factors for suicide, which kills an estimated 20 veterans every day.

To address this disturbing phenomenon, the National Endowment for the Arts launched Creative Forces in 2011. A partnership between the NEA, the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and state and local arts agencies, Creative Forces promotes health and wellness among service members and veterans with PTSD, TBI, and other psychological health conditions. The initiative provides creative arts therapies at military installations throughout the country, as well as through a telehealth program for rural and remote regions.

But what happens after clinical treatment? Christina went into overdrive to fill her husband’s evenings and weekends with positive activities—everything from salsa to surf therapy. “I had to

dig for it,” she said. “It wasn’t readily available for people that really needed it.”

Through a referral from Jason’s music therapist, the couple discovered the recreational music program at Resounding Joy, which also provides music therapy to service members and veterans who have experienced trauma. By partaking in the organization’s Semper Sound band, Jason found an ongoing emotional outlet and the camaraderie he sorely missed from his days in the service. It eventually opened up a larger world beyond his injuries and his service, and he continues to write and record music on his own and with his children.

Now, in collaboration with the Intrepid Spirit Center at Camp Pendleton, Resounding Joy is helping to replicate the Danleys’ success story through the Community Connections component of Creative Forces.

Through Community Connections, Creative Forces is building networks of arts organizations in communities surrounding clinical sites, allowing patients to continue participating in the arts after treatment to ensure a successful transition back to civilian life. The networks will also provide options for service members and veterans who have not received clinical therapy, but would benefit from hands-on experiences with the arts.

▼ A drum circle was one of many arts activities available at the second Pop-Up Community Creative Arts Café.



“In music [therapy], we always look at how can we create this safe container for somebody to express themselves,” said Barbara Reuer, executive director of Resounding Joy. “If they get connected with the arts while they’re in treatment, then it’s a connection to the community where they can keep working on expressing themselves and letting go and feeling safe. It’s expanding that safe container into the community.”

Last year, summits were held in each clinical site community, where leadership from local military installations, representatives from the state arts agency, and local arts administrators met to discuss how best to build these clinic-to-community continuums. The summits led to the creation of 11 Community Connections projects, each of which speaks to the distinct needs and populations of the site’s surrounding community. Projects will receive up to \$50,000 in support from the National Endowment for the Arts and are designed to be replicable in other communities.

The projects are varied in scope. For example, in Colorado, artists will be trained in how to effectively, responsibly, and empathetically work with military populations—while also teaching military health practitioners about the value of arts participation for their patients. A website will maintain a public directory of the trained artists, arts organizations, and military service providers. And in North Carolina, the Community Connections project will offer open studio time to the military community and have a traveling exhibition of participants’ work.

Resounding Joy is leading the California project, in partnership with five other organizations they connected with at the summit: Combat Arts, VetArt, So Say We All, Vets’ Community Connections, and the San Diego Veterans Coalition. With support from the Intrepid Spirit Center at Camp Pendleton, and the Danleys serving as consultants, each organization will host a Pop-Up Community Creative Arts Café, which will be held in various locations across San Diego County.

The purpose of the cafés is to connect members of the general public to the area’s military community, introduce service members and veterans to a wide variety of art forms that they might connect with, and raise awareness of organizations that work with military populations, which would help prevent individuals from having to scramble for resources as Christina once did.

The inaugural pop-up café was held in November at the Oceanside Library, and



featured a drum circle, art-making activities for children and adults, and information about the six participating arts organizations, all of which were in attendance. Patients from the Creative Forces music therapy program at the Intrepid Spirit Center at Camp Pendleton and veterans of the Semper Sound Band came together to perform, and many of them shared stories about their personal journey with the audience.

For some, their performance was a celebration of all they have accomplished physically following their injuries, from being able to master complicated finger work on an instrument to memorizing chords. For others, it marked an emotional milestone, and signified they were ready to move their music and their stories beyond the clinic walls.

▲ Christina and Jason Danley’s children performed as part of the second Pop-Up Community Creative Arts Café.

▼ The second Pop-Up Community Creative Arts Café invited participants to experience a variety of art forms.





▲ SGT Benjamin Tourtelot performed with his daughter and mother at the inaugural Pop-Up Community Creative Arts Café, held at the Oceanside Library.

For retired SGT Benjamin Tourtelot, the café marked the first time he performed with his family in a public setting. Tourtelot suffered catastrophic brain injury during his service with the Marine Corps, and received treatment at Camp Pendleton. As part of his performance at the café, he invited his daughter to come onstage with him to perform a song they wrote together. “I remember looking over at her in that moment and thinking to myself, ‘How did I get here at this point in my life, performing alongside my daughter on stage?’” said Tourtelot, whose mother also joined in for the finale song. “Music is the best thing for me; it brought me back to life. Having my family there performing beside me was reassuring that I am in the right place doing the right thing.”

For Creative Forces music therapist Rebecca Vaudreuil, Tourtelot’s experience is indicative of why the cafés are such a critical step in the clinic-to-community continuum. “With traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress, there’s a lot of guilt and shame,” said Vaudreuil, who previously worked at the Intrepid Spirit Center at Camp Pendleton, and

was instrumental in developing the Community Connections project. But through performance, “it no longer consumes their identity. It’s no longer a secret. You don’t have to be ashamed of it. Audiences are supportive of what the service members are presenting to them through creative expression of their stories.”

At the cafés, this support is shown in visceral ways—through hugs, handshakes, conversation, and applause. “What’s really important is that human connection,” Reuer noted. “When you sit down and do a large drum circle, you make music together, you create something beautiful, and you’re connected to the group.”

The Danleys are both grateful that through Creative Forces, they’re able to “pay it forward,” as Jason said, and give others the opportunities they had to succeed. “It’s a scary world if you don’t have what you need to move forward,” said Christina. “To know that it’s there and it exists and people love you no matter what—that’s what we want to do.” ▲

One of the masks created in the mask-making program in the Virgin Islands, which helped those traumatized by recent hurricanes. The program was based on a similar project developed by the NEA's Creative Forces initiative. Photo by William Stelzer, St. John's Art and Cultural Long-Term Recovery Group



# ADVANCING RECOVERY

THE ARTS AND CULTURE IN DISASTER RELIEF

BY PALOMA LOSADA

A

ndi Mathis, the state and regional specialist at the National Endowment for the Arts, found a post-apocalyptic landscape when she arrived in the U.S. Virgin Islands after Hurricanes Maria and Irma decimated the region in 2017. There were heaps of scrap metal by the side of the road. Many buildings had their roofs blown off, leaving them open to the sky.

Normally bustling public areas were eerily empty, and people seemed haggard and battle-worn. “It was heartbreaking, just heartbreaking,” she said.

Mathis had traveled to the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as Puerto Rico, to facilitate the National Endowment for the Arts’ relief efforts following the devastating storms. It was part of the Arts Endowment’s long history of responding to natural and man-made disasters, and using the arts to promote healing following community trauma. After the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, for example, the National Endowment for the Arts led design charrettes to create a memorial honoring the 168 men, women, and children who died in the attack. Following Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma in 2005, the Arts Endowment invested \$700,000 in support for the Gulf Coast’s emotional and physical recovery. And in 2017, the agency awarded emergency funding to the state arts agencies in Florida and Texas

to re-grant to artists and organizations affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. The NEA also sits on the steering committees of coalitions that help arts agencies both prepare for and respond to emergencies, including the National Coalition for Arts Preparedness and Emergency Response (NCAPER) and the Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF).

After Hurricane Maria, the National Endowment for the Arts carried out a multipronged relief effort, awarding emergency funding for re-granting to the affected state arts agencies—the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) and the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts—and as a member agency in the federal Natural and Cultural Resources Recovery Support Function (NCRRSF), working in coordination with other federal agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of the Interior to help address recovery for the arts and cultural sector. Mathis, as the NEA’s representative to the NCRRSF, has deployed multiple times to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, while NEA Historic Preservation Officer Brian Lusher has deployed four times to Puerto Rico to date. Through these multiple approaches, the Arts Endowment has been able to provide financial support, technical and policy assistance, and leadership when asked and needed.

▼ NEA State and Regional Coordinator Andi Mathis and FEMA City Planner Beth Otto met with representatives from the local arts community in St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, to determine their needs after the hurricanes. Photo by Phyllis Benton, courtesy of FEMA



▼ NEA Historic Preservation Officer Brian Lusher met with Puerto Rico’s Galería Nacional Registrar Laura Quinones to view collections and prepare cost estimates for the repair of the gallery. Photo courtesy of Brian Lusher





“[The arts] can help in communal healing, can help with economic recovery, and can help with community development recovery,” said Mathis. “A lot of people don’t realize how arts and culture can advance recovery in so many different areas.”

“The National Endowment for the Arts has played a key role in ensuring that the arts and culture is represented in the Economic and Disaster Recovery Plan for Puerto Rico after the impact of the hurricanes,” said Carlos R. Ruiz Cortés, executive director of the ICP. “The support has helped artists and the general population.”

During Lusher’s deployments, he served as the cultural resources coordinator for FEMA’s Natural and Cultural Resources Sector (NCR RSF) in Puerto Rico, and aided the recovery of historic properties and districts, like San German, Aguirre, and Old San Juan.

NCR RSF assessed damage and drafted plans for the long-term repair of the natural and cultural resources of Puerto Rico, focusing on national forests, coral reefs, parks, municipal town squares, historic buildings and districts, archaeological sites, ruins, and museum collections.

“Cultural places represent the heart of a community,” said Lusher. “The Plaza Colón in Old San Juan, for instance, is a place where Puerto Ricans have gathered for over a century.”

When Lusher saw the extent of the damage, he “felt the desperation of the place because so many people were affected by the storms.” Nonetheless, he was motivated and made hopeful by the many stories of strength and perseverance he heard along the way.

As part of his deployments, he worked with the Galería Nacional, a museum inside the Saint Aquinas monastery in Old San Juan that houses the largest and most important collection of Puerto Rican artworks. The Galería was suffering from pervasive black mold and a destroyed HVAC system. FEMA removed the damaged HVAC condenser unit and is currently planning a comprehensive repair of the gallery’s damages.

By repairing the properties, Lusher and his team in turn helped to preserve the character, history, and special culture and social fabric of Puerto Rico. “It’s important to focus on preserving areas of Puerto Rico’s cultural heritage because they are a physical reminder of the island’s values and history,” said Lusher.



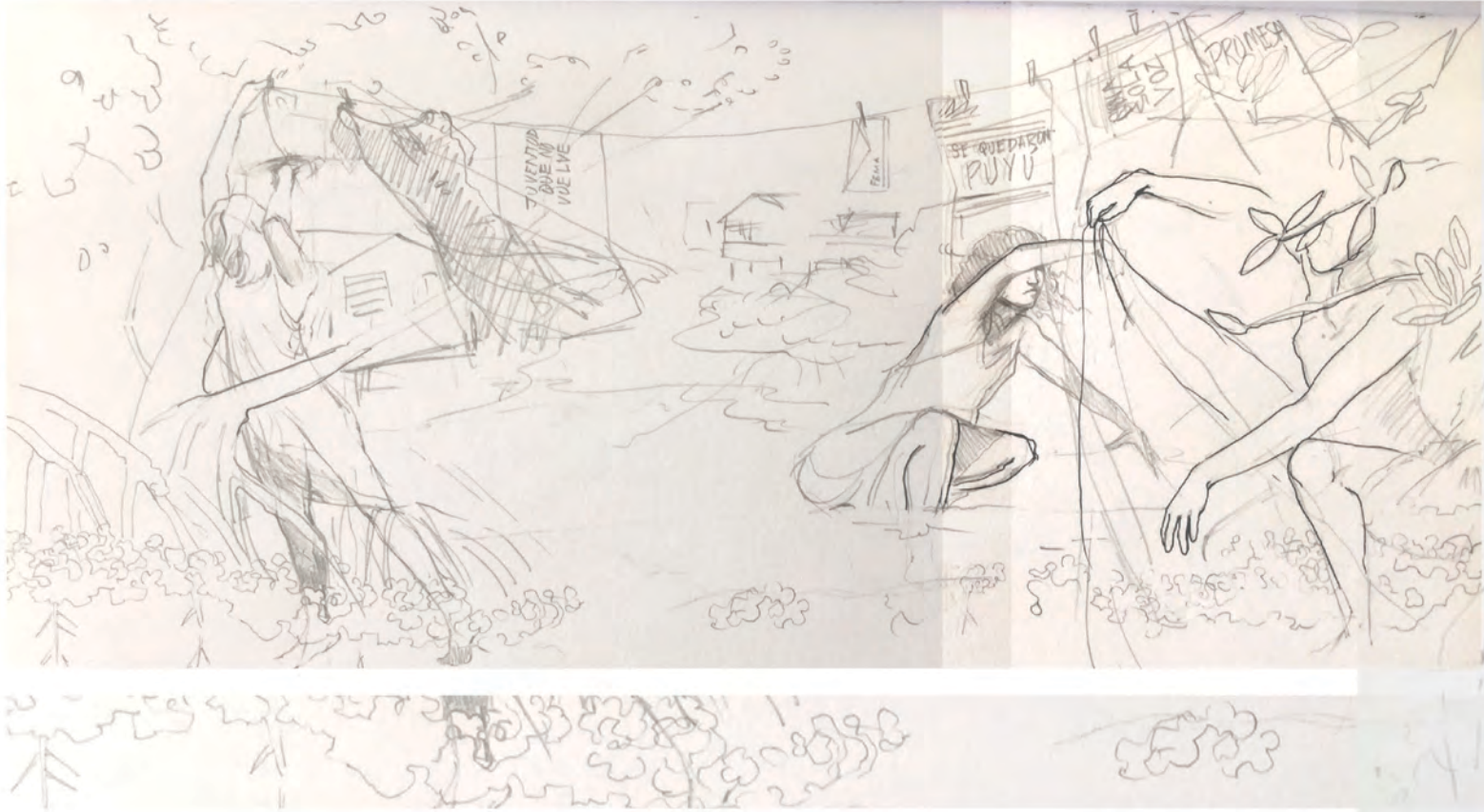
He emphasized their economic value, as well. “San Juan is not only a historic district, it’s an economic hub where cruise ships restock supplies and tourists explore the community. It’s an example of a historically significant place that is also an important part of the economy.”

Kristin Fontenot, the director of FEMA’s office of environmental planning/historic preservation, noted that addressing the island’s current needs goes hand-in-hand with securing its future. With the combined expertise and resources from so many agencies, including the NEA, Fontenot, said, “I am confident we are thinking strategically about how to benefit artists and arts organizations in ways that will long outlast their individual efforts in the Commonwealth [of Puerto Rico].”

While the arts have helped the large-scale physical, economic, and cultural healing, they have also helped individuals in both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands continue to process their collective trauma. “The arts are so important to both of those cultures,” said Mathis. “I think it helped them retain a sense of normalcy when they were able to participate in the arts—to see beauty and experience art and make art.”

On her first visit to the Virgin Islands, Mathis met with a group of local artists and arts administrators and talked about the NEA’s Creative Forces program, which brings creative arts therapy to service members and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. She said that Creative Forces’ mask-making project, which invites patients to create masks with expressions of their feelings, memories, and identities, resonated with the group in the Virgin Islands, and they developed a mask-making program of their own in St. John.

▲ The female art collective *Moriviví* held a workshop with students in Cataño, Puerto Rico, to create a mural reflecting their community. Cataño has suffered from high substance abuse and suicide rates since the hurricane. Photo by *Colectivo Moriviví*



▲ A sketch of the mural that the female art collective Moriviví is creating to show how the residents of Cataño are working toward a better future after the hurricanes. Photo by Colectivo Moriviví

“They tied it in with the whole notion of Carnival and shedding the past and moving into the future,” Mathis explained. “There is a big mask-making tradition in the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean. They rolled all that in together and had workshops all over the islands for schoolchildren, seniors, and anybody who wanted to come and make masks.”

Even though the state art agencies were just as ravaged as their grantees, Mathis found they worked incredibly hard to support their constituents with disaster funds from the NEA. “The [Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña] developed a special program called *Cultura Rodante*, Culture on Wheels, where they brought arts programming into the barrios, into the communities and neighborhoods, into senior centers,” Mathis explained. “It was great because it brought arts experiences to people who couldn’t go out anywhere because there was no power. So there were no restaurants, there were no lights, no movie theaters, and no live theater. Nothing was open, things were growing mold, and nothing had power. And it provided employment for artists whose other jobs had dried up because there were no performance spaces for them to work in.”

In another example of interagency collaboration, representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services reached out to the Arts Endowment for advice on the cultural aspect of a behavioral health campaign in Puerto Rico to combat post-hurricane increases in alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide. Mathis connected the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña with the project, and with NEA support, the ICP employed the female art collective Moriviví to develop a mural with the residents of Cataño, a community that has suffered from high substance abuse and suicide rates since the hurricane.

Chachi González, an artist with Moriviví, explained that the mural is being done in collaboration with the local high school. To decide on a subject for the mural, the collective held a series of workshops, where students were asked to brainstorm words that best represented their community and experiences in Cataño. The students were also asked, “How can I be a part of the change that I want to see?”

The mural’s creation is already underway, and depicts the Cataño that was—a beautiful area filled with mangroves. A girl, representing



leads to generating the image is fundamental to the healing process. It is in this discussion that we make sense of our experiences,” she said. “Healing is about not denying the situations we’re in and forgetting them, but turning them into stories of what we are able to do and what we can overcome.” 🌱

*Paloma Losada was an intern in the NEA Office of Public Affairs in spring 2019.*

▼ Local high school students work on creating the mural. Photo by Colectivo Morivivi

the city’s youth, sits amongst the mangroves sowing the seeds for the future. To her left are three women hanging wet newspapers with relevant headlines on a clothesline under a bright sun, symbolizing the community coming together to mourn openly in the light, heal, and work towards a better tomorrow.

González hopes the mural, which will be painted by the students themselves, will continue the conversations that led to its creation. “The dialogue that



# ASK THE QUESTION

A Public Health and Art Initiative  
to Help Prevent Suicide

BY MICHAEL GALLANT

*Are you okay?*

These three words may seem simple on paper or screen, but when spoken with kindness to people in pain, they can transform worlds and save lives. This was the powerful concept at the center of Ask the Question, an Oregon-based public health and art initiative that explores the topic of suicide—and how the alchemy of heartfelt compassion and creative expression can stop such tragedies before they start.

Ask the Question grew from a partnership between Oregon's Clackamas County Arts Alliance and Clackamas County Behavioral Health division, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The initiative was created to address a disturbing rise in the suicide rate of the county, the third most



A photograph of a suicide survivor featured in the *Ask the Question* exhibition, part of a public health campaign addressing suicide rates in Clackamas County, Oregon. Photo by Julie Keeffe

populous in Oregon. One person dies every five days by suicide in Clackamas County, the Arts Alliance reports on its website, a number that is 16 percent higher than the national rate—and going up.

The NEA has long believed in the power of arts to impact mental and physical health, and Ask the Question is far from the first healing-oriented program to receive support. The Arts Endowment sponsors widespread research focusing on the nexus of arts and health, for example, supporting investigative labs at Rice, Drexel, George Mason, Vanderbilt, and other leading universities. The NEA's Creative Forces initiative also helps wounded and traumatized members of the military, via creative arts therapy clinics across the nation.

The idea of an arts-based remedy to Clackamas County's troubling suicide rate was born of a brainstorming session between the partnering organizations. "We were tossing around ideas of how to reduce the stigma associated with suicide, especially suicide attempt survivors," said Galli Murray, suicide prevention coordinator for Clackamas County Health, Housing, and Human Services. "The idea came up—why don't we capture individual stories in a way that's external-facing, something that the community can see and experience?"

Organizers including Nina Danielsen, health promotion coordinator for the Behavioral Health Division at Clackamas County, drew inspiration from Live Through This, a groundbreaking online collection of stories and images from suicide attempt survivors. "Stigma around suicide, and those who have attempted suicide, prevents people from seeking help and connecting with others," said Danielsen. "By modeling our work after Live Through This, we hoped to counter that on a local level."

Ask the Question began taking shape in the first half of 2018, as commissioned local artists Julie Keefe and Mic Crenshaw started interviewing and photographing suicide attempt survivors who had volunteered to join the initiative. By September, the resulting portraits—accompanied by quotes related to the survivors' struggles—were on display as part of a stunning public art exhibit. The goal? To start conversations about suicide and break down the crippling shame and fear that can surround the topic, to provide inspiring stories of survival to those in pain, and ultimately, to encourage community members to simply ask each other the question, "Are you okay?"—and stop suicide attempts before they start.



Even from the program's earliest moments, it was clear that Ask the Question resonated with residents of Clackamas County. When organizers first posted an ad asking for volunteer participants who had survived suicide attempts, responses poured in. Among them was a note from Jane, a suicide attempt survivor whose name has been changed here to protect her privacy, and whose journey in many ways encapsulated Ask the Question's success.

Suzi Anderson, programs manager for Clackamas County Arts Alliance and an Ask the Question organizer, recalls the group's first encounter with Jane. "At the beginning

▲ A photograph featured in the *Ask the Question* exhibition. Photo by Julie Keefe

of the program, we had a meet-and-greet with the artists and participants, and she was so physically uncomfortable even being in the space with everyone,” Anderson said, noting that Jane suffered from intense anxiety and was unable to work.

Through the course of creating the *Ask the Question* exhibition however, organizers witnessed a remarkable evolution. “When we opened the exhibit in September, she was there with a lovely haircut, a beautiful neon pink dress, and she was glowing,” said Danielsen. “She told

us that there was something so special to her about sharing her story, and feeling that her experience could help others in need. It gave her courage to believe that such a scary experience in her life—her attempt at suicide—could have a different purpose. The program helped her find a voice that she didn’t know existed.”

Anderson described how Jane was even the very first to respond when a local media partner requested participant volunteers for a television interview. “She said that she’d love to talk and did an amazing job,” said Anderson. “They filmed her

right in front of her portrait. Her journey was such an amazing transformation to see.”

Hopefully, Jane’s transformation is just the beginning. “Ask the Question is right in the petri dish phase,” said Anderson. “We could not have done this project without the financial support of the NEA, and we are truly grateful for the grant. There are many ways that we could expand it. We just know that it’s an important project and our work is not done.”

Yet even at this early stage, Ask the Question’s gains are real, and its potential remarkable. The Clackamas County organizers report numerous conversations with colleagues and community members, all praising the courage, honesty, and impact of the exhibit and program. “Even in our own county building, the impact of what we’ve heard from employees and visitors has been resoundingly

► Another of the photographs featured in the *Ask the Question* exhibition. Photo by Julie Keefe



positive,” said Anderson. “People have told us that it’s an amazing way to capture people’s stories, that it sends the message that we are all in this together. Those portraits look just like the rest of us. These survivors, these people, are our people, and talking about suicide is a conversation that we, as a community, can have.”

Ask the Question is inspiring courage not just within the borders of Clackamas County, but in other communities around Oregon, with nearby counties forming similar cross-organizational alliances, gathering information and lessons learned from the Clackamas County organizers, and laying the groundwork for their own manifestations of Ask The Question. Some of the strongest ambassadors for Ask the Question actually have been the participants themselves: one featured survivor recently served as lead presenter for a statewide conference in Sunriver, Oregon, speaking in support of a proposal to expand the program’s reach, breadth, and funding.

As communities everywhere deal with the dark echoes of suicide, Ask the Question’s organizers want the program’s momentum to continue spreading knowledge and hope to those in need. “Research has shown that the vast majority of people who attempt suicide and survive do not attempt again, and that for every person who dies by suicide, there are 25 people who attempted and lived,” said Anderson. “I hope to see this project not only reduce stigma, but to expand the messages of recovery and resilience around people who have survived, and have gone on to lead hope-filled lives.” 🌱

*Michael Gallant is a composer, musician, and writer living in New York City. He is the founder and CEO of Gallant Music.*



▲ Visitors at the Ask the Question exhibition. Photo by Suzi Anderson



# MUSIC as Medicine

## The Power of Music in a Healthcare Setting

BY JUSTIN WISE

All photos courtesy of South Dakota Symphony Orchestra

▲ The Dakota Wind Quintet performs at the Avera Prince of Peace Retirement Community as part of Music as Medicine's Memoirs program.

The National Endowment for the Arts has long supported programs that intertwine music and well-being, including the recent Sound Health initiative, collaborating with the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts and the National Institutes of Health to examine how the brain processes music and to look at the impact of music on health, science, and education through research, performances, and presentations. The Arts Endowment has also supported numerous research projects involving music and health outcomes, including a study at the University of Florida that evaluated the impact on patients when professional musicians performed in emergency and level-one trauma care settings. And through the NEA's Creative Forces partnership, research has been conducted on the effects of music therapy on service members experiencing mild traumatic brain injury and other psychological health conditions.



The agency also has supported music and well-being projects through its grantmaking, projects such as Music as Medicine in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The South Dakota Symphony Orchestra (SDSO) teamed up with Avera Health and Sanford Health to provide patients, their families, and staff with the opportunity to listen to live classical music while in the healthcare facility. This program received a Creativity Connects grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2018. These grants support arts and non-arts organizational partnerships like the one between the orchestra and the healthcare facilities.

Every month, a wind quintet and a string quartet travel to Avera Health and Sanford Health facilities and perform in various locations, including hospital lobbies, hospice centers, children's wards, and retirement homes.

The performances typically involve classical music for adult crowds, while for children, music can range from video game theme songs to Christmas music. These performances can often change the atmosphere of healthcare facilities and lift the spirits of patients and residents, who are sometimes in pain, often filled with fear and anxiety, and whose days are typically only punctuated by visits from nurses to take vital signs.

"Having the opportunity to help people through a difficult time is something that we really pride ourselves on," said Kristy Kayser, the SDSO community engagement manager. Kayser said musicians frequently hear from healthcare staff about patients who haven't left their room in weeks, but get up from their beds because they heard music and wanted to see the performance. For bed-bound hospice patients, even just hearing music drifting to their rooms from the lobby can provide a momentary escape from their circumstances. "It's about making people feel like they are a part of something," she said.

Dr. Mark VandeBraak, a music therapist and thanatologist at Avera Behavioral Health Center who works with Music as

Medicine, agreed, noting that the program "can brighten the mood," as he described it. "It can add a different dimension of the day, something to look forward to, something to provide hope, and something to instill confidence."

To measure such effects, the SDSO is in the process of conducting a study that will track the mood of patients at the Avera Behavioral Health Center before and after a Music as Medicine performance. VandeBraak, who hosts the monthly Music as Medicine performance at the behavioral health facility, said the program can be particularly impactful for the patients he sees, who are dealing with a variety of psychological health conditions.

Through arts interventions, "[Patients] are given the opportunity to change how one thinks, the opportunity to change and grow," said VandeBraak. "That to me is so important, because when, for example, depression is one of the main diagnoses, you get so secluded and so isolative [that] many people think there's no way out. What music and the arts do is they provide that opportunity to expand the mind."

To extend these positive effects, patients are invited to talk post-performance about how the music made them feel, which creates a dialogue and provides an outlet for emotional expression. "Having music as a platform to allow people to open up is really important," said Kayser. "It's building this culture to have very open conversations about emotions and mental health."

▼ A rehearsal by the Dakota String Quartet (Doosook Kim, Magdalena Modzelewska, Jia Cao, and Yi-Chun Lin), which regularly performs at healthcare facilities through SDSO's Music as Medicine program.





► South Dakota Symphony Orchestra Principal Viola Yi-Chun Lin, who participated in the Music as Medicine program.

At times, Music as Medicine has helped in medical observations by revealing underlying issues in patients. There have been instances of nurses observing sensory issues that needed to be addressed because of a patient’s reaction to various sounds from a performance. Kayser also recalled a time when a child told the concert master that he saw different colors during different parts of the songs, which led his nurse to discover that the boy had synesthesia, a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sensory pathway leads to an automatic, involuntary experience in a second sensory pathway.

VandeBraak also discussed how the program is beneficial to dementia patients, helping them cross barriers and make connections in their minds. “Working with dementia patients, maybe their language is limited or they’re not able to recognize family members,” said VandeBraak. “But yet remarkably, they still can remember a song. They can tap along with it or they can actually sing the words to it, which then keeps the brain activated.”

Kayser agreed, noting that, “[Dementia patients] seem vacant inside their bodies,” she said. “They just light up as soon as they hear a familiar tune.”

To bolster Music as Medicine’s offerings for older adults, the SDSO wind quintet also partners with storyteller Darrel Fickbohm for the program’s

Memoirs project, which serves the residents of Avera Prince of Peace Retirement Community. This program allows residents to talk to Fickbohm about their life experiences, which he shapes into a script that is sent to SDSO musicians so that they can prepare complementary music. During performances at Avera Prince of Peace, residents read the scripts narrating their life stories, with music for emphasis, to their families, other residents, and staff.

“The point of the program is everyone has their own story to tell—you just need to take the time to listen,” said Kayser. “People have said it’s been so special, especially for the people that tell their story and then soon after pass. Their families have recordings of this to share with future generations.”

For the performers who bring such experiences to patients and their families, Music as Medicine has been equally rewarding. “They’re constantly finding ways to experience music differently than [how] they’ve been trained to experience music,” said Kayser. “This is their full-time job; sometimes it’s easy to forget the feeling of it. These patients constantly remind them of the way that music can move people.”

SDSO Principal Viola, Yi-Chun Lin, who participates in Music as Medicine, agreed. “I feel like I’m helping [patients] even though I’m just playing the music. We are providing them with a few minutes of peace and they can put their guards down,” she said. “The part that strikes me the most is when the music starts, people’s faces start to soften. They start focusing on the music instead of their own issues.”

Ultimately, Music as Medicine amplifies the healing power of music, and its ability to bring people from different backgrounds together and provide a shared experience. “It’s really become a community effort,” said Kayser. “We all have the same end goal. We want people to feel good, we want people to be happy, and we want everyone to have a dialogue about what they’re feeling. The orchestra, the doctors, the patients—it’s a community that’s looking to better the situations that we have on hand.” 🎻

*Justin Wise was an intern in the NEA Office of Public Affairs in spring 2019.*

The cast of the 2018 Shakespeare in the Streets performance of *Blow, Winds*, held on the steps of the St. Louis Public Library Headquarters in downtown St. Louis. Photo by J. David Levy



# ONLY CONNECT

Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide  
through Theater

BY PAULETTE BEETE

One of the oft-repeated phrases from literature is E.M. Forster's dictum: "Only connect." In context, Forster is talking not only about human interconnection, but the connection of human beings to art. Shakespeare Festival St. Louis takes this instruction to heart.

Through its Shakespeare in the Streets program, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the organization works to heal the wounds of social disconnection and alienation caused by racial, economic, geographical, and other barriers.

► The Shakespeare Festival St. Louis's tour van. Photo by Emily Clinger



The program began in response to actual physical barriers formed when St. Louis city streets were blocked off to form cul-de-sacs in certain neighborhoods. The theater decided to see if it could deploy (temporary) barriers in the opposite way: to create sites for fostering conversation, connection, and healing by presenting community-based theater works inspired by the plays of William Shakespeare. The objective was to encourage residents to get to know each other and feel a sense of joint ownership of their communities by telling their own personal stories as well as the stories of their neighborhoods.

According to Shakespeare Festival St. Louis Executive Director Tom Ridgely, “Anytime that you erect a barrier or separate yourself from someone else or another group of people, you’re opening up a wound in the social fabric. But to [engage with the arts can] accomplish the opposite, to bring people together and to actually break down those barriers and bring people across them into a community or neighborhood that they’ve been separated from in some way. That sort of bringing back together is healing.”

Each Shakespeare in the Streets project is built on a series of relationships. Once Shakespeare Festival St. Louis has identified the

neighborhood in which the company wants to work, they build a relationship with a partnering organization in that location. For past projects, partners have included mayors’ offices, libraries, and a number of community nonprofits. Then, with the help of the project partner, a team of artists put together by Shakespeare Festival deploys to the chosen neighborhood over the course of 12 to 18 months, and fosters connections with community members through interviews, story circles, workshops, and other relationship-building activities.

As Ridgely explained, “[The artistic team will] do anything they can to get close to and start to try to understand the people who live and work there.” The goal is to gather the residents’ own stories about where they live, their impressions, their hopes, their fears.

After the initial research phase, a playwright working with Shakespeare Festival St. Louis takes the lead in adapting one of Shakespeare’s plays to tell the story of the community. The final script, as Ridgely described, “draws from both Shakespeare’s text, texts generated by the community, and the playwright’s own original creation.”

The current Shakespeare in the Streets project, built around *As You Like It*, tackles the urban

and rural divide, which Ridgely believes is “one of, if not the most urgent issue facing the country today.” He further believes that arts organizations may have inadvertently exacerbated this tension between urban communities and rural ones. “It’s so easy for us as arts organizations to be so city-centric; that’s where the resources are,” he said. “It leaves out an enormous number of people who don’t have easy physical access to [urban areas.]”

Still, argues Ridgely, the arts are also uniquely positioned to help heal this divide. “The reason why theater is important is because the whole exercise of going to see a play is asking someone to look at and get to know and understand a person that they haven’t before, and to let that enlarge them and hopefully extend their empathy.”

He added that using the work of Shakespeare as a starting point is particularly apt when attempting to find common ground between disparate communities. “[Shakespeare’s] great gift was this ability to put himself fully into the point of view and the kind of lived experience of another human being,” he said. “His plays pull off that magic trick better than probably anyone else’s.”

For the project, Shakespeare Festival is working with Beyond Housing, an urban renewal organization based in St. Louis. The project is supported by a Creativity Connects grant from the Arts Endowment, a grant program that is specifically designed to support projects by nonprofit arts organizations in concert with non-arts partners.

The project will connect two distinct communities, making it the first Streets project to move beyond the confines of St. Louis, as well as the first one centered around schools. The Shakespeare Festival is working with students served by St. Louis’s Normandy High School as well as students served by the high school in Brussels, Illinois, a farming community located 45 minutes away across the Mississippi River, and accessible from St. Louis by a ferry.

There are many stark differences between the two populations. For example, Normandy has for a long time been a predominantly African-American community, while Brussels is populated by the descendants of German settlers. Brussels has only one high school serving four communities, and the school’s enrollment hovers

▼ **Gentlemen of Vision**, a step team with Riverview Gardens High School in St. Louis, Missouri, perform in the 2018 Shakespeare in the Street’s performances of *Blow, Winds*. Photo by J. David Levy



around 80 students. Normandy High School, on the other hand, serves 24 St. Louis communities, with an enrollment of nearly 500 students. While Normandy High has a dedicated drama teacher and a thriving fine arts department, Brussels High has no tradition of theater activities.

Ridgely believes that one of the reasons for the urban-rural divide is that people often don't feel seen by "the other side," or that they only see their differences rather than acknowledging their commonalities.

"What feels painful and what feels like a wound to any person is that feeling of invisibility,

of not being seen, of not being understood," said Ridgely. "The sense of isolation or alienation is as true in Brussels, Illinois, as it is in Normandy, St. Louis, [which is something] we would never know if we weren't doing the work of going to those communities and getting to know those people."

In this version of the project, Shakespeare Festival teaching artists are working with students in both locations on an opt-in, in-school basis. As it's still early in the process, the students haven't yet been introduced to *As You Like It*. They have, however, been engaging in guided

► *Remember Me* in the Maplewood municipality of St. Louis County. Photo by Michael Kilfoy



activities and writing prompts that mirror the action of the play with questions such as, “Have you ever had a crush? Have you ever run away from something?”

There are several exchanges planned, which will bring participating students from Brussels to Normandy and vice versa for joint workshops and other activities aimed at capturing their stories and facilitating conversation between the two groups.

Over the summer, the playwright will take on alchemizing the community stories with the text of *As You Like It* before passing it on

to a production team and cast made up of both Shakespeare Festival staff and members of the Normandy and Brussels communities.

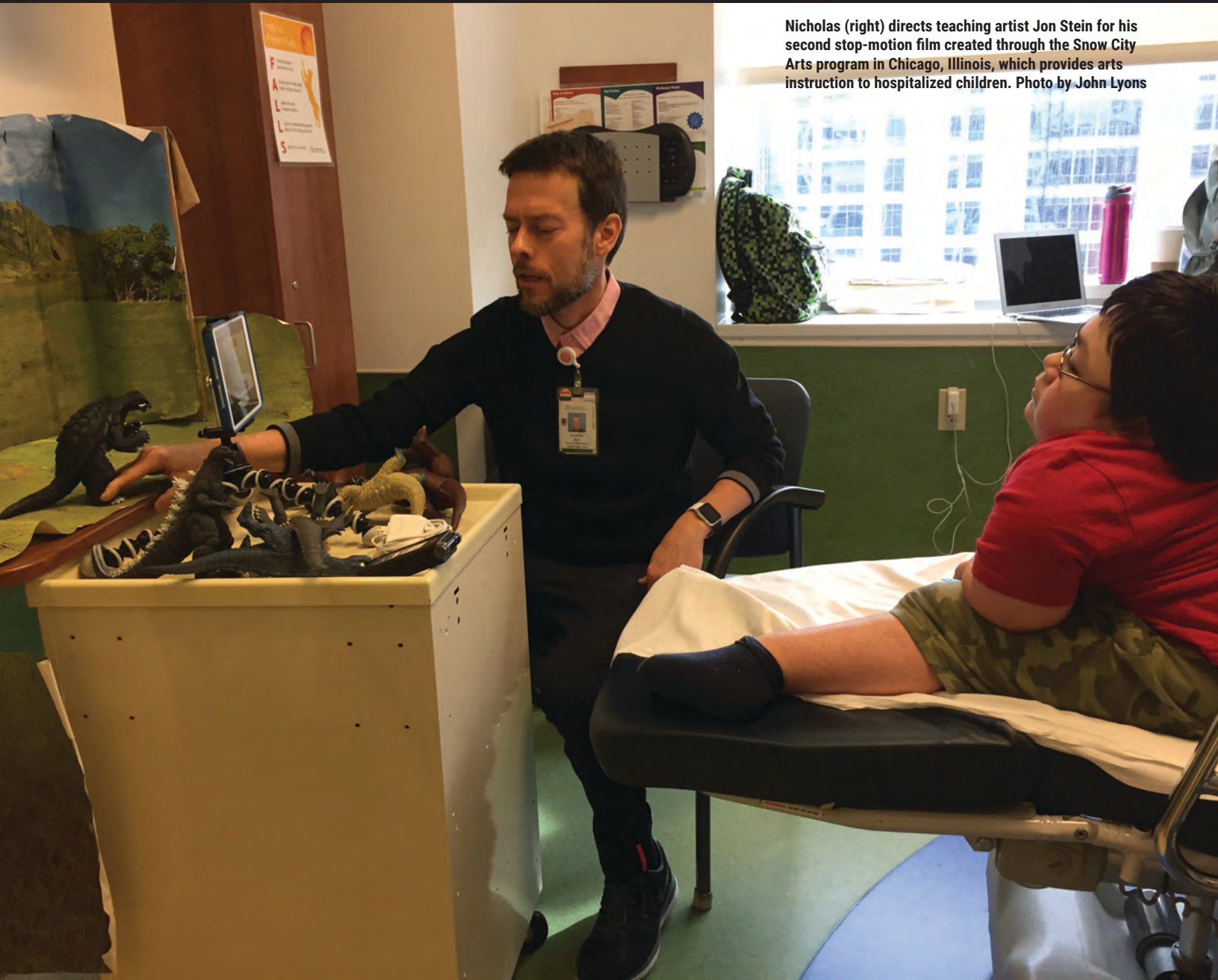
The final result will be performed over two weekends structured to underscore the ways in which the two communities have worked together to create a unified theater work. For each performance, the play’s first act will be performed simultaneously in both Normandy and Brussels. At intermission, audience members will board school buses and experience a more participatory version of Act Two performed on the bus. Finally, both sets of audiences will converge at a midway point to jointly watch the play’s finale.

Ridgely explained that though the performance set-up complicates logistics, it’s absolutely necessary to accomplish the goal of breaching that barrier between urban and rural.

“For the urban-rural exchange to work, we’ve got to get the urban people out of the urban, and the rural people out of the rural, and we’ve got to get them into the same place,” he said, noting that it was the funding support from the Arts Endowment that enabled the theater to add the travel element into the production. “We know that we have to actually bring people physically together.”

The theater is still several months away from knowing if the project has made any real difference, and if that urban-rural divide has been, if not eradicated entirely, at least somewhat mitigated. Ridgely, however, is optimistic because he believes in the power of the arts. As he said, “What art does is it, even in small little ways, shatters that illusion of separation.” 🎭





Nicholas (right) directs teaching artist Jon Stein for his second stop-motion film created through the Snow City Arts program in Chicago, Illinois, which provides arts instruction to hospitalized children. Photo by John Lyons

# In our special online audio features,

we look at National Endowment for the Arts grantee Snow City Arts in Illinois, which provides arts instruction to hospitalized children, providing them with a creative and educational outlet. We also speak to True Story Theater in Arlington, Massachusetts, which is addressing societal and health problems such as opioid addiction through community storytelling.

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