COVID-19_UMaine News_University of Maine Project Tells Story of COVID-19 Pandemic through Arts

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Maine residents are invited to participate in a new project at the University of Maine that is using the arts to tell the story of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Jack Pine Project, a collaboration of the Maine Folklife Center, Maine Studies Program and the Hutchinson Center, connects professional artists, including UMaine faculty, with residents statewide, including vulnerable groups such as incarcerated people and cancer patients. The free workshops are underway; registration is online.

"Art is something that everyone can relate to, and that touches us in powerful ways," Ettenger says. "One goal of the project is to bring people together who share a common experience, such as health care workers or teachers, and have them work with an artist to present this shared experience to others."

Art can also help people begin the process of healing from the shock and grief of a pandemic that has killed over 100 people in the state, sickened thousands, and touched the lives of many more. Several of the workshop instructors are trained as art or music therapists, Ettenger says, and will use their skills to help participants deal with their emotions while creating art.

The project involves a number of workshops in various genres, from visual arts to songwriting and the dramatic arts. Instructors include printmakers, theater producers, songwriters, fiber artists and others. Each will work with a small group to teach them a craft, then help them produce projects that reveal different facets of Maine’s coronavirus experience.

Among the project’s dozen or so workshops: music therapist Carla Tanguay is working with cancer patients in the Ellsworth region to create a group songwriting project. Stephen Legawiec, artistic director of the Camden Shakespeare Festival, is meeting via Zoom with other theater producers, directors and actors statewide to put their coronavirus experiences into dramatic monologues. Another instructor is working with veterans in the Maine prison system as they explore the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives, which have become even more isolated and dangerous as a result of the pandemic.

A full list of workshops with registration information is on the project’s website. All Jack Pine Project workshops are free for participants, although space is limited, and some workshops are restricted to certain groups. A live event next year and the project website will share the art with the wider community.

"The Hutchinson Center is proud to be a part of this important project, supporting our community as [people] explore their COVID-19 experiences and begin the process of healing through the art," says interim director Kim Wilson-Raymond. "The project aligns with the goals of the Hutchinson Center to provide education, arts and cultural opportunities for our community."

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