

New Conversation About Mental Illness Prompted through Art

Issaquah leaders join artists to address the impact of mental illness on youth and community.

[ISSAQUAH, WA] The nationally acclaimed exhibit, *The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human*, arrives in Issaquah Friday, April 22, and celebrates with an opening reception on Friday, April 29, thanks to generous sponsorship and encouragement from Issaquah Schools Foundation and artEAST. Art will be on display in three Issaquah locations including artEAST Art Center, Issaquah Highlands Blakely Hall Community Center, and Swedish Medical Center Issaquah with the goal of beginning new conversations about mental illness stigma.

“We believe it is past time for our community to open our hearts to the crisis that is facing our youth, to talk openly about mental illness, and begin to understand it,” says Issaquah Schools Foundation Director Robin Callahan. “When students experience mental illness—and it is happening at all ages in unprecedented numbers — many families wall themselves off, for fear of stigmatizing their child.”

In fact, one in four people suffer from some form of mental illness. Up to 70-percent of adolescents who suffer with mental illness do not receive care. And, suicide, often related to mental illness, is the second leading cause of death among youth in Washington State.

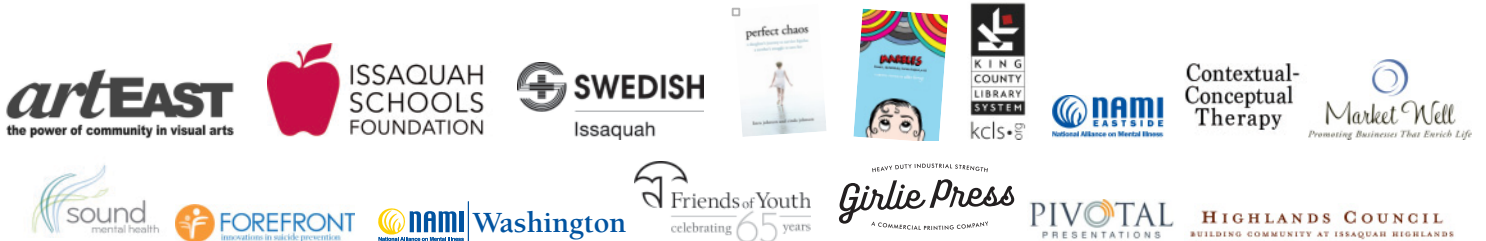
“We believe the *Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human Project* gives our community an invaluable opportunity to learn from those who experience mental illness—both personally and from a parent’s point of view,” says artEAST Director, Carla Villar. “Our goal is to prompt a very important conversation, with the goal to provide a sense of community and hope to people who are affected by mental illness.”

The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human is a provocative art exhibit designed to explore the stigma of mental illness. The artwork itself is displayed slightly off kilter — a little too high, a little too low and not quite level — to convey the idea that people living with mental illness inhabit the world differently from those better able to observe socially constructed norms.

The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human was conceptualized and curated by three award-winning artists living in the Pacific Northwest. In the exhibit, twenty-six Pacific Northwest artists mix media to express how mental illness affects their loved ones, or themselves. In addition to the visual displays, *The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human*, includes an on-going series of talks and performances about mental illness and its effects.

“By talking about mental illness, we reduce the shame surrounding it, and create a space where the prejudices and the fears we all have can give way to the compassion and the humanity we all have,” said Kate Vrijmoet, *The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human* Curator and Contributing Artist.

The stigma surrounding mental illness is powerful and pervasive. Shame and silence often hinders people from getting help and sharing their struggle with friends and family. Yet, people with mental health problems can get better and many recover completely.



This project is brought to you by artEAST and Issaquah Schools Foundation, and the generosity of a private donor.

Exhibit Highlights include the following:

Part performance and part activism, [Ezra Dickinson](#)'s *Mother for you I made this* is a film aimed at activating a conversation about the failed mental health care system in America – through memories of Dickinson's childhood and his experience unknowingly caring for his schizophrenic mother.

Artist [John William Keedy](#)'s work confronts the idea of “normal” from the viewpoint of anxiety.

[Martz](#)' ongoing series *Crooked Thoughts* is an attempt to come to terms with her daughter's diagnosis as bipolar and the subsequent grief. “It is my hope that with open discussion we can begin to dispense of the stigma surrounding mental disorders.”

[Lynn Schirmer](#)'s work focuses on combating the stigma surrounding responses to trauma such as dissociative conditions.

[Sekiguchi](#)'s work references the shattered reality faced daily by families with loved ones suffering from mental illness. "The structure is broken and though we have to strive for healing, it will never be the same reality it was. We have to find resources and support that leads us towards finding a new balance and a new 'normal'."

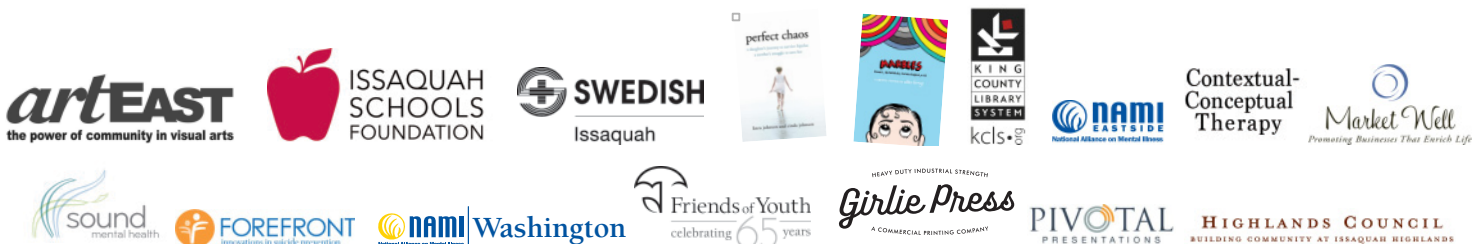
Poetry curator [Ann Teplick](#), who has written poetry with youth for 20 years in public schools, juvenile detention, hospitals, psychiatric wards and hospice centers will be curating a **poetry** reading in Blakely Hall Community Center and an ekphrastic poetry workshop in artEAST Art Center.

Social engagement artist [Michelle de la Vega](#) is interested in creating immersive environments that connect communities, illuminate unheard voices and explore concepts that are personally and collectively relevant to the human experience. Her work explores the dialogue between subjective emotional experience and objective conditions. Her process draws meaningful connections through thorough research, community engagement and innovative artistic vision, weaving image and story into holistic, genuine artwork. At its best art is a relational, experiential, transformative endeavor.

The central idea of [Vrijmoet](#)'s *Non-ordinary Reality* painting series is to give voice to the unscreamed scream, to what has been silent and demands to be heard — so that her point of departure is one highly charged with anxiety but also with the promise of breaking through. The scream is cloaked by society and everyday life. Water is a metaphor, both for keeping afloat and for a tide of change.

And featuring the work of incoming artists: [Jennifer Ament](#), [Jackie Barnett](#), [Patti Bowman](#), [Monique Catino](#), [Chris Crites](#), [Emily Dunkelberger](#), [Rebekah Tenbroek Hansen](#), [Larissa Herbert](#), [Melissa Herzog](#), [Bonnie Johnson](#), [Jody Jolderosma](#), [Becky Kaufman](#), [Kristi Kincheloe](#), [Elsie Mahler-Scharff](#), [Leslie Nan Moon](#), [Victoria Raymond](#), [Juliette Ripley-Dunkelberger](#), [Carol Ross](#), [Nicki Sucec](#), [Ann Teplick](#), [Michelle de la Vega](#), [Season Yoshida](#)

Our social media campaign is in full swing. We promote daily on facebook, instagram and twitter. Follow us, like us and share our posts. [Facebook](#), **Twitter:** @end_stigma **Instagram:** @The_Incredible_Intensity



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In *The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human*, artists and mental health professionals team up to co-lead tours of the exhibit. It brings together citizens, community leaders, and organizations to launch a dialogue about the losses to individuals and society that stigma involves. Amid fear and loss and disorientation, the artists, are signaling wildly: this could be a time for making new connections and building new strengths.

Event Schedule

February 23 2016, Tuesday, Art & Social Change Teacher Training

Issaquah High School, 700 2nd Ave SE

Theme: *Isolation as a primary corollary of mental illness*. This curriculum was developed by social engagement artist Michelle de la Vega in collaboration with *The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human* and the Issaquah School District. The goal is to creatively engage High School and Jr. High School students with the objective of moving toward de-stigmatizing mental illness in youth, dissolving cultural polarities, and creating a supportive environment. The curriculum is a multidisciplinary conceptual process that focuses on students making personally meaningful artwork out of information from their own stories, thoughts, feelings and values. It utilizes the modalities of dialogue, writing, drawing, photography, collage, sculpture and spoken word. After the completion of the workshops the artwork created will be exhibited in an installation format for the students' families and community.

February 25/26 2016, Thursday and Friday, Poetry workshop

Issaquah Middle School, 400 2nd Ave SE

VOICES UP! WRITING OUR GRIT AND SILK. Poetry workshop for middle school students with the focus of struggle and resilience. Participants explore their own lives—what is broken and what is in working order; the art of being lost and then found; the advice we give ourselves and others; what we know and what we would like to better understand. After the completion of the workshops the artwork created will be exhibited in an installation format for the students' families and community.

March 31 2016, Thursday 6:30-8:00pm Understanding the Language of Suicidal Youth

Issaquah Library 10 W Sunset Way, Issaquah, WA 98027

Walking through the darkness. Understanding the language of suicidal youth: what 16,000 suicidal patients have taught us. Featuring the Conceptual-Contextual Therapy group and brought to you by Friends of Youth. Open to the public.

April 18 & 20 2016, Monday and Wednesday, Art & Social Change in class activity

Issaquah High School, and Issaquah Middle School, 700 2nd Ave SE

Theme: *Isolation as a primary corollary of mental illness*. This curriculum was developed by social engagement artist Michelle de la Vega in collaboration with *The Incredible Intensity of Just Being Human* and the Issaquah School District. The goal is to creatively engage High School and Jr. High School students with the objective of moving toward de-stigmatizing mental illness in youth, dissolving cultural polarities, and creating a supportive environment. The curriculum is a multidisciplinary conceptual process that focuses on students making personally meaningful artwork out of information from their own stories, thoughts, feelings and values. It utilizes the modalities of dialogue, writing, drawing, photography, collage, sculpture and spoken word. After the completion of the workshops the artwork created will be exhibited in an installation format for the students' families and community.



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April 22 2016, Friday 6-8 p Soft Opening

Blakely Hall Community Center, 2550 NE Park Drive

speakers Mickayla Risenmay, mental health advocate; Carla Villar, Director artEAST; Kate Vrijmoet, Exhibit curator; Holly Ballard Martz, exhibiting artist, live music performed by Sam Foster

Mickayla Risenmay is a 16 year old Sophomore at Eastlake High School. She is the youngest of 7 siblings. Mickayla loves to play with her 10 nieces and nephews and has one on the way! She enjoys photography, drawing, drama, and event planning. Mickayla is passionate about reaching out to youth in her community and is here today to share her story in hopes others will seek support.

Sam Foster is a 16 year old singer/songwriter from Issaquah. Music has been an integral part of his life for as long as he can remember; from piano lessons in kindergarten to developing as a singer in middle school. He also began songwriting in middle school and released his debut EP during that time. Since then, he has developed a soulful sound and has taught himself to play guitar. Expressing himself through his music is his passion and release in life.

April 29 2016, Friday 6-9 p Opening Reception

Issaquah Senior Center at 75 Creek Way followed by a reception at artEAST Art Center, 95 Front Street

Grand Opening reception with keynote speakers: Ellen Forney, award winning author and graphic novelist of Marbles; Robin Callahan, Director, Issaquah School Foundation; June Sekiguchi and son Quin Breeland; Kate Vrijmoet, exhibit curator. Live music by Issaquah School District Evergreen Orchestra String Quartet includes a selection from composers with known mental illness.

May 4 2016, Wednesday 6-7:30 p Exhibit Tour

artEAST Art Center 95 Front Street

A parent's perspective and therapist's thoughts: Anxiety and depression in youth, Artist Holly Ballard Martz & mental health professional Jenna Genzale from Sound Mental Health, co-lead tour. Holly will share her journey parenting a child with depression and Jenna will provide education and clinical resources in the community.

Jenna Genzale, LMFT, CDP specializes in serving those experiencing anxiety and trauma. She has been working on the Eastside for 8 years. Jenna's experience also includes Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and many other evidence based treatment models. She is passionate about helping clients find their inner strength and developing healthy family attachments.

May 6 2016, Friday 7-8:30 p Exhibit Tour

Blakely Hall Community Center 2550 NE Park Drive

Double Trouble: Dual Diagnosis of Psychosis and Addiction. Artist June Sekiguchi, son Quin Breeland, and mental health professional Katherine Jo Glaves from Sound Mental Health, co-lead exhibit tour of psychosis and addiction. Katherine Jo Glaves is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and art therapist. She works at Sound Mental Health in Bellevue, primarily with children and families struggling with anxiety, behavioral problems, autism and the effects of trauma. She leads several groups for teens, including an art therapy group and group teaching social skills through role playing games and cooperative board games.

May 12 2016, Thursday 6-7:30 p. Poetry Reading

Blakely Hall Community Center at Issaquah Highlands, 2550 NE Park Drive

Poetry curator and poet Ann Teplick hosts a reading of five local poets who will share their work that reflects personal mental health challenges; navigating the challenges of those whom they love; and their experience writing with others who struggle to stay afloat.



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May 17 2016, 6-9 p, Wednesday, [Influence the Choice Student Video Awards](#)

X-3 Teen Center Sammamish [825 228th Ave. NE/Sammamish](#)

The winning videos of The Influence the Choice Drug Prevention Alliance for Youth video contest will be viewed and cash awards will be given. The 2-minute videos were created by Issaquah School District boundary students grade 6-12. The videos show how youth can Positively Influence and encourage each other to stay mentally and physically strong to deal with the pressures of drugs/alcohol in their community.

May 19 2016, Thursday 6-8:30 p Panel Discussion

Swedish Medical Center Issaquah, 751 NE Blakely Drive, Second Floor Conference Room

Panel discussion: de-stigmatizing mental illness. Panelists: **Lauren Davis** (Forefront), (consumer advocate), **Theresa Winther** (Sound Mental Health), **Dr. Megan Chiarelli** (Swedish)

May 20 2016, Friday 6-7:30 p Exhibit Tour. *Specialness Versus Stigma: Is it Cool to have Parts?*

[artEAST Art Center, 95 Front Street](#)

Lynn Schirmer with Karen Fuller. Lynn Schirmer and Karen Fuller from Sound Mental Health, dispel disinformation surrounding Dissociative Identity Disorder, review the critical importance of trauma aware practices, and deconstruct the trend of youth self identifying as DID personality systems on social media, discussing its potential to impact stigma and acceptance.

Karen is a clinician at Sound Mental Health in Bellevue. She has been a licensed mental health professional in Washington and in Idaho for over 20 years. A professional artist and Certificated Special Education teacher, Karen uses art in every aspect of her working and private life.

May 21 2016, Saturday 12-1:30p Youth Truth: Straight Talk With Parents and Teens

An opportunity for parents and teens to dialogue about school and community environments that lead to stress, anxiety and depression. [healthyouthinitiative.org](#)

May 24 2016, Tuesday 9-11a CREATIVE WRITING FOR SELF-CARE

In this supportive two-hour writing workshop, facilitated by poet and teaching artist Ann Teplick, we will read and be inspired by poetry in order to explore ourselves and our place in the world. The role of “caretaker,” in whatever form that may be, is one of heart, hard work, empathy, and compassion. Let’s give ourselves the time and space to decompress, which may bring clarity and calm to the work we do in all corners of our lives. Hosted by exhibit partner, Friends of Youth

May 26 2016, Thursday, 6-7:30 p. Film Screening and q & a with the artist

artEAST Art Center, 95 Front Street

Mother for you I made this Film screening & q&a with Ezra Dickinson on schizophrenia and compassion

June 2 2016, Thursday 6-8 p. Author Speaking Event

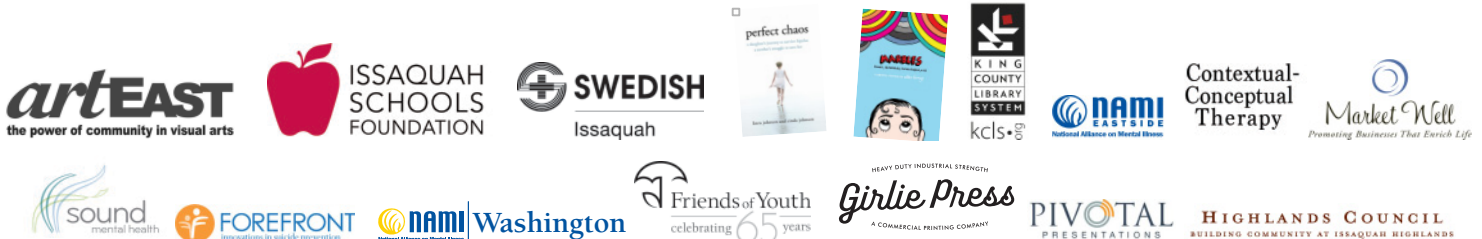
Blakely Hall Community Center at Issaquah Highlands, 2550 NE Park Drive

Author Cinda Johnson, *Perfect Chaos, A Daughter's Struggle to Survive Bipolar and a Mother's Journey to Save Her*

June 7 2016, Tuesday 5-7 p. Student Art & Social Change exhibit

The Commons, Issaquah High School, 700 2nd Ave SE

Student art & social change exhibit. Featuring the work of Issaquah High School and Issaquah Middle School students in conjunction with artist Michelle de la Vega and poet Ann Teplick, Installation, Exhibit and



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Performance Piece. Live music by Issaquah School District Evergreen Orchestra String Quartet includes a selection from composers with known mental illness.

June 9 2016, Thursday 6-7:30 p Exhibit Tour *It's not what happened to you, it's what you do with what happened*

artEAST Art Center, 95 Front Street

Artist Elsie Mahler-Scharff and mental health professional Scott Johnson from Sound Mental Health, will discuss the consequences of early childhood trauma and how expressive art assists in facilitating recovery and healing.

June 10 2016, Friday 6-8 p Ekphrastic Poetry Workshop

artEAST Art Center, 95 Front Street

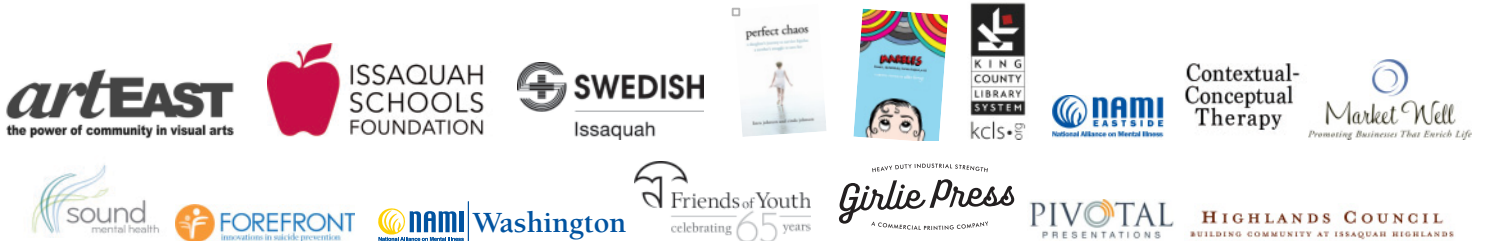
Poetry curator and poet Ann Teplick will lead an ekphrastic writing workshop where participants will respond through poetry, prose, and script writing, to the artwork on display that reflects the theme of mental illness.

June 15 2016, Wednesday 6-7 p Artist Talk

artEAST Art Center, 95 Front Street

Special guest artist Michelle de la Vega presents outcomes of social change art including the work done with Issaquah High School and Middle School students. This presentation is also made possible by the Artist Trust Fellowship Grant.

For additional information please visit: www.theincredibleintensity.com



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