



Indy Arts Council Launches NEA-Funded Initiative Linking Arts, Health, and Mental Wellbeing

One of nine projects funded by the NEA that demonstrate promising local arts and cultural approaches to address social connection, belonging, and mental health through the arts.

Indianapolis (August 13, 2025) – The Indy Arts Council announced today the official launch of its partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) [Arts, Health, and Wellbeing](#) initiative. It is one of nine projects [funded by the NEA](#) that demonstrate promising local arts and cultural approaches to address social connection, belonging, and mental health through the arts.

This initiative is a collaboration between local arts professionals and public health experts and builds upon Indy Arts Council's past work at the intersection of the arts and substance use disorder, including its [Recovery Starts With Us](#) awareness campaign, microgrants to artists and arts administrators for mental health services, and [grants for arts-based programs focusing on substance use disorder](#).

Aiming to connect the power of the arts to substance use disorder awareness, recovery, and prevention, this initiative provides funding, cohort guidance, and case studies for four arts-based programs:

- **American Lives Theatre** will continue a playwriting workshop series which was previously funded by Indy Arts Council's Arts for Awareness grant. Individuals in recovery are invited to a regular writing circle facilitated by playwrights, dramaturgs, and a therapist. This opportunity offers folks the opportunity to develop confidence and skills to write about anything, including their own addiction and recovery.
- **REACT and Asante Art Institute** will collaborate to provide reflective, self-discovery activities for youth as they experience Love Overdose, a theatrical performance focusing on substance use disorder. This experience cultivates self confidence in young people and reinforces their initiative to access resources for substance use disorder.
- **Ventiko**, an independent artist, will collaborate with performer **Lukas Schooler**, and others to facilitate a mask-making and storytelling experience with unhoused youth. Using masks as a powerful allegory, Ventiko will share how art helped them express their own story of addiction and recovery.
- **Overdose Lifeline** will partner with **Boxx The Artist** to facilitate cohort-based art therapy workshops for folks at any stage of their recovery journey. With a keen awareness that the societal shame of addiction are steep barriers to recovery, the

creative activities focus on identity, stigma, processing personal traumas, emotions, journey of recovery, relapses, coping, celebration and empowerment.

Additional partners will gather regularly to learn from the arts-based programs and provide their own expertise. These partners include grantees of the Indy Arts Council's Arts for Awareness program as well as local health agencies:

- **Lauren Briggeman**, Founding Artistic Director of **Summit Performance Indianapolis**, an Art for Awareness grantee, creates theatrical stories of addiction and recovery. Summit collaborates with researcher Sally Wasmuth, Ph.D., OTR, to measure change in stigma among audiences before and after viewing the performance.
- **Philip Campbell** is also an independent artist, an Arts for Awareness grantee, and a person in long term recovery. He is also a supervisor of Project Point, a team of peer recovery coaches and social workers housed within the emergency department at Eskenazi Hospital.
- Members of the **Indianapolis Office of Public Health and Safety**, those focused on behavioral health and social determinants of health including Kesha Conner, Chunia Felder, and Alexis Weaver.
- **Dana Fuhrman** is Chief Clinical Officer at **Dove Recovery House**. Dove House was a recipient of the Arts for Awareness grant, which demonstrated the power of art to bring joy into treatment programs.
- **Sarah Grubb** is the Forensic Epidemiologist at **Marion County Health Department**. As a self-professed data nerd, she watches trends, focuses on reducing overdose rates, and enhancing access to harm reduction and education.
- **Sally Wasmuth, Ph.D., OTR** is an Assistant Professor at IU Indianapolis department of Occupational Therapy. Her research focuses on translational and implementation science, particularly in the areas of occupation-based intervention for addictive disorders and dual-diagnosis. She is involved in several arts-based recovery initiatives, including the use of theatre as both a therapeutic intervention and a means of stimulating community conversations on critical topics including the opioid crisis and health-care inequities related to race.

All arts-based programs and cohort convenings will take place from July 2025 through Spring 2026.

Indianapolis is home to a wealth of art experiences that support health outcomes, including landmark art and performances in healthcare spaces and art therapy in higher education programs. However, these efforts often operate independently, limiting their collective impact.

At the conclusion of this initiative, Indy Arts Council will produce case studies of each arts-based program to demonstrate the impact of this work and explore structures and support needed to expand art-and-health initiatives across the city.

About Indy Arts Council

[Indy Arts Council](#) is central Indiana's leading arts advocacy and services agency. Their mission is to champion arts and culture. Indy Arts Council believes every resident should experience arts and culture in a way that nourishes and inspires them. This vision of a creative life for all is central to the work they do to support artists, arts organizations, and the community.

For more information and to start exploring, visit www.indyarts.org.

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