

## **My Story, Your Story, Our Story – Overview**

Maine youth are in crisis, and the evidence is everywhere.

According to the Maine Resilience Building Network, a 2021 study showed that "41% of middle schoolers and 43% of high school students felt they did not matter in their community." The pandemic left young people disconnected and isolated, and teachers and youth services providers are alarmed at their behavior, lamenting the dearth of models of togetherness in communities today.

The goal of this project is to advance healthy youth integration into the life of the community, and include youth in developing solutions to overcome the current crisis.

The project's initial set of activities are workshops led by Peter Bruun and Leigh Perkins at 5-6 partner sites with primarily Lincoln County youth, parents, and elders. Over 4-6 sessions (8-10 hours of contact time), each workshop cohort will reflect on experiences with and beliefs about community through art and writing. By the conclusion of the workshops, we will have 50 or more works of art with accompanying narratives on the topic of community health and youth engagement.

Teen workshops happen first, and the resulting work will be showcased at an event for friends and family. Publicly presenting at this informal event allows teens to practice leadership roles, learn the value of sharing their story, and build self-confidence.

From all workshop participants, we will identify collaborators with whom to co-create the final program (understanding that the teens themselves are the best co-creators of public programming around issues impacting them).

The culminating public program includes a reception (a time for guests to view the art and engage with community resource tables) followed by presentations (speakers, performances, and music). It ends with a community conversation focused on how the community can better support youth, integrating them more intentionally and effectively into community life. The event presents an opportunity for families to find resources, and for organizations to reach more broadly people they aim to serve; in essence, it will be one big networking opportunity around the topic of youth wellness.

A project website will expand the reach and impact of the project and will include a gallery of the youth art and stories and a resource page, collecting in one place a variety of youth programs in Lincoln County. A legacy of the project, the website becomes a youth resource hub accessible to all (and potentially a model for other organizations or counties).

By engaging youth in questions of community and intentionally connecting their experiences and interests to the larger adult community, we address the current disconnect and isolation experienced by young people, bringing youth involvement and constructive dialogue into the public sphere.