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UCSB Arts & Lectures resumes its Justice for All series with examination of mental health

It would be easier to shrug off depression among youth as just another iteration of teenage angst, if it weren't so dangerous. Rates of mental illness appear to be climbing across all age groups, with teenagers seeing steep increases following the pandemic and its long periods of social isolation.

In an unstinting look at how youth experience, struggle with and overcome — or succumb to — mental health disorders, a new documentary film features first-person accounts from more than 20 young people, ranging in age from 11 to 27, who live with mental health conditions.

In the two-part documentary, "Hiding in Plain Sight: Youth Mental Illness" from executive producer Ken Burns, youth from a wide variety of demographic backgrounds share their personal accounts of anxiety, depression, addiction, suicidal ideation and other, often disabling, mental health conditions.

The film will be screened Tuesday, Jan. 31 at 6:30 p.m. ("Part I: The Storm") and Wednesday, Feb. 1 at 6:30 p.m. (Part II: Resilience) at UC Santa Barbara's Campbell Hall. The showings are part of the UCSB Arts & Lectures (A&L) Justice for All series. Local experts on youth mental wellness will be on hand at both screenings to conduct panel discussions.

“We are grateful to the Justice for All faculty committee for their guidance in choosing to address this crucial issue,” said Arts & Lectures Miller McCune Executive Director Celesta M. Billeci. “Our partners at the Gevirtz School, at UCSB Counseling & Psychological Services and in the Santa Barbara community have all had a profound impact on this initiative. Together we seek to understand the implications for equity and inclusion of the current youth mental health crisis.”

By including first-hand accounts from youth and young adults, along with families and advocates, the film explores the impact of childhood trauma, discrimination, stigma and social media on mental health and recovery. It also explores the criminalization of mental illness, the tragedy of youth suicide and the double stigma that occurs when mental illness is combined with racial or gender discrimination.

After the screening, on both nights, UCSB Arts & Lectures’ Thematic Learning Initiative will hold a panel discussion with local leaders in mental health to discuss how they are addressing psychological distress among young people, including improving access to resources both on campus and in the community. Additional resources can be found here.

First launched in 2021, the Justice for All series centers around ideas and insights about justice in an effort to broaden the campus’s examination of the topic and consider it from every angle. Taken as a whole, the series is intended to confront the inequalities that so often shape policies, institutions and lives — and, through its presenters, to advocate for a just, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world.

Upcoming programming in the series also includes:

• Step Afrika! on Thursday, Feb. 16, at 7 p.m. in Campbell Hall. The performance demonstrates preserving culture and subverting oppression through body percussion and movement.

• Ainissa Ramirez will take the Campbell Hall stage Thursday, Feb. 23, at 7:30 p.m. to discuss the scientific impact of people of color and women whose accomplishments have been hidden by mythmaking, bias and convention.

• Dr. Thema Bryant will address racial, sexual, cultural and societal trauma in their talk on Friday, March 3, at 7:30 p.m. in Campbell Hall.

• Tracy Kidder in Conversation with Pico Iyer will take place at The New Vic, in downtown Santa Barbara, Tuesday, March 14, at 7:30 p.m. Kidder is a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning literary journalist.

For a complete list of UCSB Arts & Lectures programming, visit artsandlectures.ucsb.edu.

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