

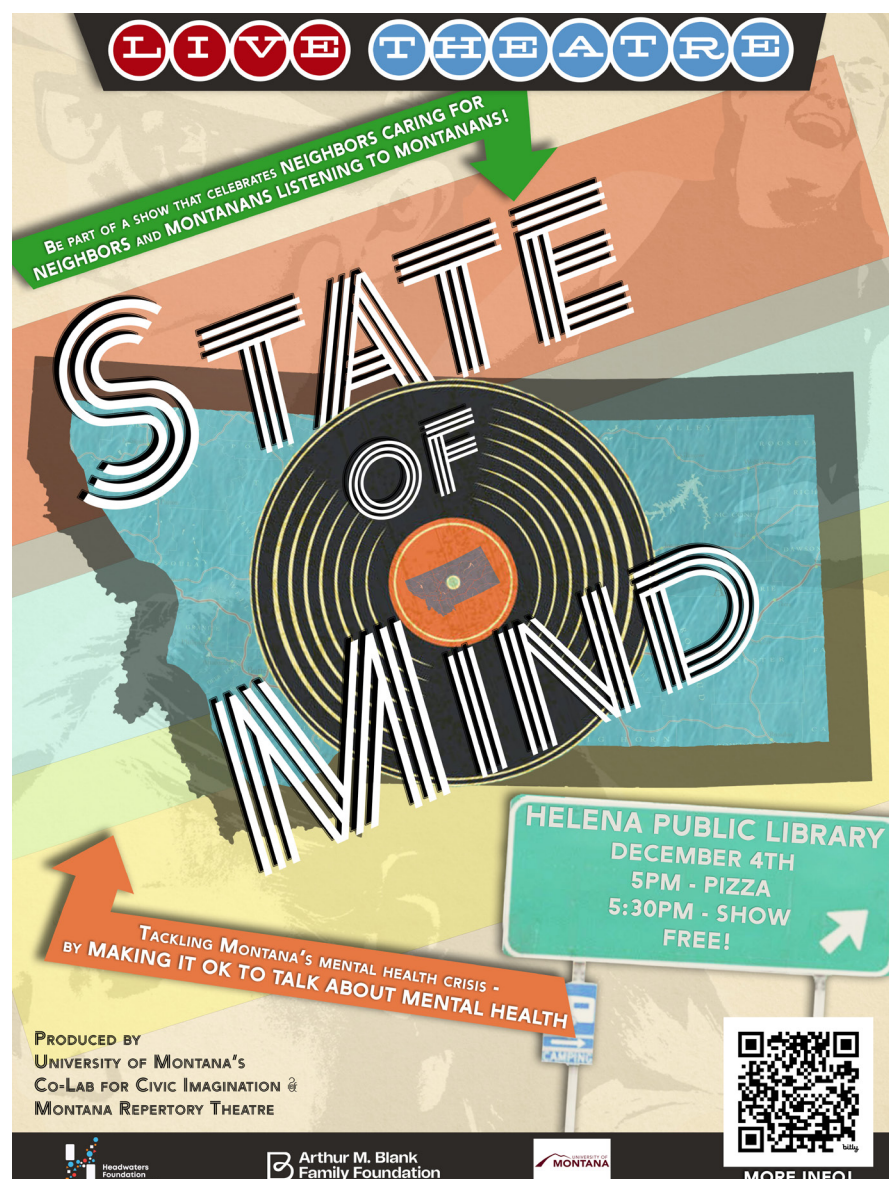
# Theater

## Just the *State of Mind* Montana Needs

“The next 12 months in our Hi-Line area is going to be transformative, I just know it.”

That’s how Kari Prewett, executive director of the Fort Peck Fine Arts Council, summed up her experience at a recent community meeting in Glasgow that concluded the local residency of *State of Mind*. Kari’s sentiment was met with emphatic nods of agreement by others in attendance, including a school counselor, a math teacher, and professionals from the mental and behavioral health sphere in Valley County.

*State of Mind* is a unique behavioral-health focused theatre and public engagement residency that is touring Montana through May of 2025. Developed in collaboration with the University of Montana’s Co-Lab for Civic Imagination and Montana Repertory Theatre, this two-day event consists of a free theatre performance for the general public, a workshop for local students, a workshop for school staff and local health providers/public officials, and a coalition gathering for local behavioral health stakeholders.



*State of Mind* has been developed over two years by a group of professional Montana artists, facilitators, and mental & behavioral health professionals in response to the troubling trends in Montana’s behavioral and mental health outcomes. **35% of adult Montanans report symptoms of anxiety or depression, and Montana ranks in the top five states for highest rates of suicide across all age groups.** With so many Montanans living in rural areas, it can be challenging to connect with professionals like psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, or addiction counselors in times of crisis or just for regular counseling support.



Kendra Mylnechuk Potter at a presentation of *State of Mind* at the Montana Healthcare Foundation Symposium in Bozeman. Photo by Bride Side Photo and Video.

Health providers and policy experts believe that in addition to having more professionals around the state, we also need to change how we talk about mental health with one another.

“If someone has an accident on the ranch or the job site, we know how to get them the medical help they need, but if someone’s struggling with addiction or other mental health crisis, sometimes it’s less clear how to help. And that’s where *State of Mind* comes in,” says the project’s director Michael Rohd.

“The arts are a powerful way to not just share stories, but to gather and imagine the futures we want to see and build together. *State of Mind*’s goals include tackling stigmas around seeking help, making local resources more visible and contributing to local capacity for community care.”

**The project, which is completely free to all communities,** kicked off its tour on September 19th in Missoula, and has since visited Conrad, Great Falls, and Glasgow.



**State of Mind performers Kendra Mylnechuk Potter, left, and Jackie Vetter, right.**  
Photo by Andy Kemmis.



**Kendra Mylnechuk Potter, left, Jackie Vetter, center, and Mack Momborg, right, performing at the Missoula Public Library.** Photo by Andy Kemmis.

“It truly stands out as one of the best conversations I’ve had with both students and staff,” said Raymond DeBruycker, the principal of Conrad High School.

“It was inspiring to see students and teachers engage in authentic conversations on such a tough topic. This workshop not only addressed important issues but also empowered us to support one another in our collective journey toward emotional well-being within our school and our community. I highly recommend it to anyone.”



**Students from Conrad High School participate in State of Mind workshop.**  
Photo by Michael Rohd.

**In Great Falls, students took what they had written in their workshop—a document stating what they need to feel safe and supported in their school—and presented it to the school board, which brought the room to a standstill.**

“We’ve had several community members from a variety of different businesses ask how they can get involved in the work our students are doing. Pretty great to see the community reaction,” shares Marla Hauser, the Youth Leadership and Success Community Coordinator at Great Falls Public Schools.

Word is traveling about the program, and several towns are lining up to bring the project to their community.

“Our goal is to visit as many communities as will have us—hopefully 20-30. And we still have availability in the spring,” says Josh Aaseng, the project’s producer for community partnerships.

State of Mind’s premise that arts are powerful contributors to civic conversation seems to be validated by one Glasgow participant who reflected, “The way we act is learned behavior. Out here in the frontier, we silo off our individual communities. But it can be unlearned.”

State of Mind will be touring Montana through May of 2025 at no cost to communities. For more information about State of Mind and the people involved, visit: <https://www.uncivicimagination.com/state-of-mind-1> or follow them on Facebook @ <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61556751081311>

## Performing Artists: **Want to Showcase?**

Performing artists of all disciplines can build audience and expand their reach by performing at showcases across Montana, the region, and the continent. Now there’s a great new tool, “I Want to Showcase,” a clearing house of showcases, deadlines, and application links. Check out their “Partner Conferences” page to see upcoming deadlines, and scout showcases you might want to plan for in the future.

Applications open soon for the **Montana Performing Arts Consortium Conference 2025** (Oct 10-12, Great Falls) and the **Arts Northwest 2025 Conference** (Oct 13-16, Beaverton, OR). And there are plenty more to check out. Go to: [www.iwanttoshowcase.ca](http://www.iwanttoshowcase.ca)



Photo courtesy of Montana Performing Arts Consortium website.