Daily

LIFE

PULSCE COMBATS CAMPUS LONELINESS WITH 'FRIENDSGIVING' CELEBRATION



Two students perform a musical piece at an open mic night. The open mic night was hosted this Thursday in Homer Babbidge Library.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATHIEU PINTO, CONTRIBUTOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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The University of Connecticut's Prevention, Unity, Leadership, Service and Community Engagement club had a "Friendsgiving" gathering Thursday in the Humanities Institute, combatting campus loneliness with touches of holiday cheer and community service.

Members of PULSCE came together to celebrate the holidays with each other and make gift bags for nurses.

The event emphasized the club's focus on mitigating substance misuse issues on campus not just through raising awareness, but through friendly, welcoming and substance-free gatherings.

"People are aware of substances, especially on a college campus, but the issue is that they feel like they have no other option. Going out on weekends, they feel like they have to be drunk," said Daniel Senior, the president of PULSCE. "We view connection as a means of prevention for substance abuse."

A fifth-semester sociology student at UConn, Senior started PULSCE because he realized that there is not much support for college students with substance misuse issues. Now, PULSCE has spread to Central Connecticut State University and to a college in Kansas.

"College is such a pivotal time for substance issues to form, because people are now exposed to alcohol and other substances on campus," he said. "There's a lot of support for youth, there's a lot of support for adults, but there's no support for that gray, coming-of-age area."

Though this meeting was focused on celebrating the holidays, PULSCE is also focused on community service.

"I think that PULSCE gives you a place to channel your love for your community and giving back," said Analise Jones, a first-semester allied health sciences student. "Taking care of yourself and taking care of others."

Club members made gift bags filled with notebooks, pens, fidget toys and thank-you notes for nurses during the meeting. Throughout it, members talked and bonded.

"I feel like it's really nice to have people you can be on a closer level than in a larger club," Jones said. "I feel like I could reach out to any member and ask for help, and they would help me."

Even with the hang-out atmosphere of the club, members are encouraged to speak about any issues they are having, especially with substance misuse.

"If you are using substances, we encourage you to come by," Senior said. "No one is here to shame you, we are just here to help you feel like a human again and not be judged."

As the holidays approach, Senior hopes that more people will seek out PULSCE, even just to combat loneliness and not substance misuse issues.

"The holidays can be a time when people are alone," he said. "So, to be able to make family wherever we go is so impactful."



ILLUSTRATION BY CONNOR SZREJNA, STAFF ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

BALLARD INSTITUTE HOSTS *WHIMSICAL* PUPPETRY PERFORMANCE, 'ISIDOR'S CHEEK'

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The University of Connecticut's Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry featured the puppetry show "Isidor's Cheek" on Saturday.

The show was performed by Jana Zeller, a puppeteer of Sandglass Theater. Zeller said the show was created by her mother and based on a German children's book. Her mother performed the show for 30 years, which included a stop at the Ballard in 2015.

"She does not perform her children's repertoire anymore, so I'm so proud of her and so glad to carry on the tradition," Zeller said. "My sister and I, we are second-generation puppeteers, and we are leading Sandglass into many years to come."

The story centered around a boy named Isidor who lives in a dreary, gray house. One morning, one of his red cheeks ran away, which forces him to leave and journey around the world.

Zeller took to the stage with a mini harpsichord, an umbrella and a suitcase filled with items that would appear during the performance. She introduced the story as if she were Isidor's niece, who had the story passed down to her by Isidor himself. After revealing the objects to the audience, she took the place in the center of a rotating puppetry set.

From the middle of the rotating board, she had access to the entire small world of the show. Various scenes were built into this "mini stage" that could be rotated to show Isidor traveling around the world.

Isidor himself was about 5 inches tall and manipulated directly by Zeller's hands. Many of the other puppets, like his dog, a wild bird mother and the other humans encountered throughout, were of a similar size and type. Occasionally, Zeller would use puppets that she'd manipulate with strings or could be controlled from under the table.

As Isidor traveled around the world, his cheek kept finding its way among similarly-colored items, like apples or bouncy balls, and it taunted Isidor whenever he got close. When Zeller rotated the stage to move through different environments, like town squares, orchards and the middle of the ocean, she would sing as recorded accordion played in the background.

Some of the exciting and unexpected moments were the mini performances within "Isidor's Cheek." During Isidor's travels, he encountered a puppet booth. Zeller controlled two tiny puppets inside with string as they reenacted a condensed version of "The Princess and the Frog."

Toward the end, Isidor came across a travelling circus. From within the carriage, Zeller pulled out a horn caravan, a man whose body folded in on itself and a man riding a horse with human propeller legs, among other delights.



Jana Zeller holds up two animal puppets in Storrs on Saturday. Zeller was performing "Isidor's Cheek" an original puppet show, in the Ballard Institute of Puppetry.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL JEFFERS, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Once Isidor's cheek returned to him, he made his way back home. After he arrived, his house and yard were refurbished with a blooming garden and much more color.

Throughout the show, the various antics, as well as sound effects made by Zeller, created a whimsical atmosphere. The audience often broke into laughter or applause during humorous moments.

Joe Newman-Getzler, a third-semester graduate student in puppet arts, said the show was a great way to immerse himself in other styles of puppetry. His own work focuses on the hand and rod style of puppetry, like what's seen on Sesame Street.

"I thought it was very charming," Newman-Getzler said. "When she said it was a show that her mother had been doing for 30 years that she took over, it made perfect sense to me because this felt like something that was very handed down. It was almost like hearing a bedtime story that she was told when she was a kid."

Newman-Getzler said the show, especially with how Zeller controlled the puppets, was a reminder that anyone can be a puppeteer.

"If you've ever played with your dolls or action figures or stuffed animals as a kid, you've been a puppeteer without even realizing it," Newman-Getzler said. "And when you see a show like this, it's just more proof of that theory."