

## **Thank you, Teen Theater Youth Actors!**

In the past year, the young people involved in Teen Theater put forth an amazing effort to continue and expand the program despite changes in directors and other challenges that have come their way. They truly believe in the mission of the program -- to educate their peers about rape and relationship violence -- and have done so in an excellent manner. We have seen the fruit of their dedication in the responses from audiences, their ability to perform and relate to a variety of audiences, and the national recognition they have received.

Teen Theater's strength continues to lie in the power of teens speaking to other teens. Many of the youth who see the play are witnesses to relationship violence but do not know to label it as such. Seeing the play can make a big impact, as shown in some of the comments we've received from youth audiences:

*"The play affected me because it made me listen and think about some of my relationships and my friends' relationships. It really showed me that people our age could be listed as sex offenders." – Paul*

*"It was nice to have teens come in for a change and talk to the class, rather than always just having adults come in. To me, having teens talk to teens seems to be more effective." – Esteban*

*"It affected me greater by seeing kids my age who I could relate to demonstrating how easily it can happen. I know now what red flags to look for in relationships" -- Kirsten*

*"It is much more real and appealing to young people to see kids our own age talk about issues that are happening right now in our lives. It really gets the point across and lets us know that we aren't alone in dealing with these issues." – Gabriella*

A recent last-minute show at Skrappy's demonstrated Teen Theater's ability to speak to youth from many different backgrounds:

*"A couple of my bands could not make it down to Skrappy's to perform. Four of the Teen Theater youth actors were there, so I asked if they would like to perform in place of the bands. They said, "Give us a few minutes to go over our lines and we will be ready." The youth at the show were one of our harder groups to work with because they have a short attention span and will often stand outside the building until they hear something they are interested in that makes them come inside. I wasn't sure how Teen Theater would be received, and the Teen Theater actors weren't sure either. One of the actors got up on the stage and said, "Who knows someone who has been raped?" The entire audience turned and looked at her. The crowd started grumbling, and the youth actors started their performance. Some of the youth began to leave. Noticing this, the Teen Theater actors raised their voices and everyone turned and watched the performance. After the performance, many of the youth went up to Teen Theater actors, telling them that*

*was an awesome performance and that they do not think about rape until it happens to someone they know. Thank you, Teen Theater, for jumping in at the last minute and putting on a great performance.” – Kathy Wooldridge*

The realities of rape and sexual assault among homeless and at-risk youth are often seen at Skrappy's. Too many young people are in unhealthy relationships and accept them as normal because they are far less violent than the treatment they received from their parents. Teen Theater's ability to face these myths and create new discussions at venues like Skrappy's is important for both those who hear the message and those who deliver it.

We think Teen Theater's recognition by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center for Outstanding Response to and Prevention of Sexual Violence is well-deserved. These young actors' commitment to providing education to their peers serves as an inspiration to us and we hope as an inspiration to other prevention educators in the field.

--Submitted by Andrea Stuart and Kathy Wooldridge