



Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre/
Generation-eXcel Proposal

Submitted to: Gainesville Police Department

980912

HIPPODROME IMPROVISATIONAL TEEN THEATRE: PROGRAM SUMMARY

"Art enlarges experience by admitting us into the life of others" – Walter Lippman

The HITT model was created in 1984 in an effort to provide young adults throughout the Central Florida region with a venue in which they could creatively explore their attitudes about such serious life issues as alcohol and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS. Since that time, HITT has provided over 40,000 teens with a vehicle to discover the positive choices necessary to protect them from addiction, violence and mental health problems.



HITT is an alcohol and substance abuse prevention and intervention model targeting 100% at-risk youth. The HITT project team includes theatre specialists, a prevention specialist and an independent evaluator who work in conjunction with both mainstream and alternative schools, providing intensive theatre education workshops to at-risk youth. Workshops challenge students by promoting self-expression, communication skills, conflict-mediation skills, and team cooperation. The HITT program process combines a unique theatrical format with peer education and communication exercises, allowing students to explore such issues as:

- Self-esteem
- Alcohol and substance use
- Teen pregnancy and STD prevention
- Violence and delinquency prevention

The HITT program's unique peer performance format combines the most successful prevention strategies:

- Education and skill-building
- Assertiveness in practicing negative peer pressure
- Role-playing and problem-solving
- Feed-back with positive peer reinforcement

Upon completion of 7-week sessions, students present peer education workshops for students throughout the region, a leadership role in which they encourage their peers to "say no" to high-risk behaviors. The response they receive from their peers and the encouragement of the HITT team instill a strong sense of success and community, a unique feeling for many of the youth who have experienced failure for most of their lives.

HIPPODROME IMPROVISATIONAL TEEN THEATRE: THE VISION OF GENERATION-eXCEL

"You use a glass mirror to see your face: you use works of art to see your soul." -- George Bernard Shaw

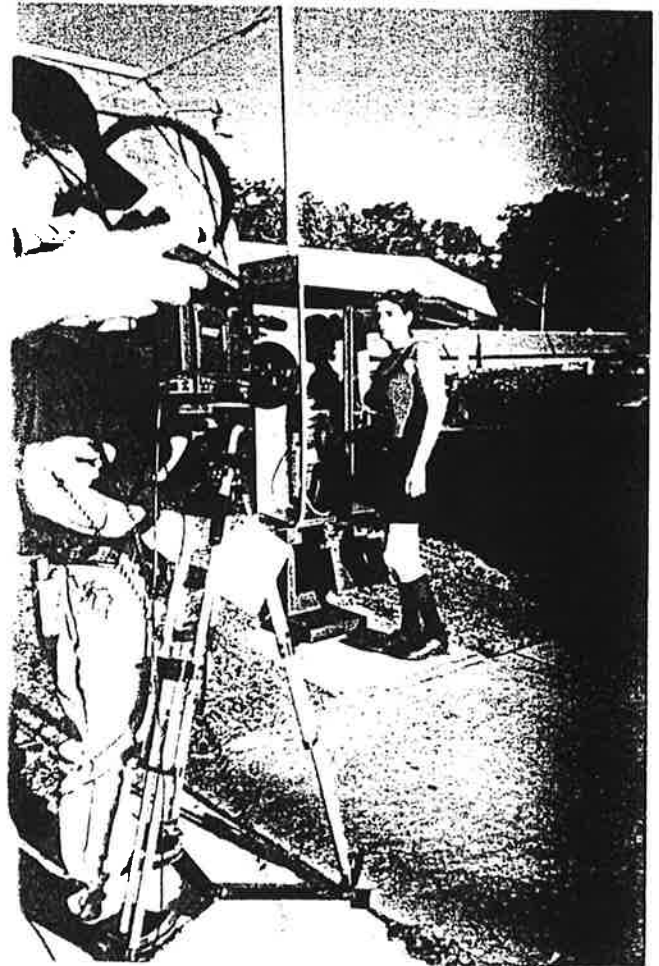
During 1998, in addition to the continuation of HITT's celebrated theatrical workshop techniques, the Hippodrome implemented an innovative initiative, Generation-eXcel, an outreach component which will extend HITT services to every county in Florida. Using the theatrical process developed in HITT, the Generation-eXcel model integrates direct prevention and intervention strategies and service learning with video and computer technologies. The process includes the creation of Florida's first on-line curriculum-based interactive alcohol and substance abuse resource center for teens.

Drug abuse, teen pregnancy, violence, STD's and school failure are only a few of the problems today's youths must face. Traditionally, when teenagers needed advice, they would first turn to their families. However, studies show that the two most important factors influencing youth behavior today are the media and peers. Cultural images and social behaviors permeate film, television, print media and the computer internet technology. However, information disseminated about such issues as alcohol and substance use, teen pregnancy, and STD's is often incomplete or incorrect. Additionally, much of the information youths receive through the media contain powerful pro-drug images. The result of this powerful barrage of media influence is that youth are having more difficulty making healthy lifestyle choices about drugs and other high-risk behaviors.

Generation-eXcel combines each of the primary peer influences (media, peers and adults) to create a comprehensive arts-based alcohol and substance abuse prevention and intervention program that promotes active learning among the at-risk participants. The program:

- **Integrates** the media of video and computer technology educate youth
- **Uses** the power of peer relations to challenge and examine teens' concerns
- **Establishes** an adult role model/teen team

The primary goal of the program is to provide an environment in which students turn experiences into knowledge and promote learning. The program provides youths with an opportunity to collaboratively explore ways to help their peers to understand and appropriately apply the information they receive regarding alcohol and substance abuse, violence and other critical life issues. The message is all the more powerful because the messengers are at-risk youths.



HITT student actor, Ariel Latham, 16, on location during filming of Generation-eXcel "Drug and Alcohol Abuse" Public Service Announcement, 1998.

HITT/GENERATION-eXCEL: PROJECT ACTIVITIES

"For us, adolescence is a time filled with promise and possibility—service learning is one of the best ways available for young people to fulfill that promise." -- Alice L. Halsted

HITT/Generation-eXcel is a prevention and intervention service learning model designed to:

- **Educate** at-risk youth through the creative venue of dramatic arts
- **Inform** students of the dangers of alcohol, drugs and other high-risk behaviors
- **Target** youths as the messengers of positive choices and drug-free lifestyles
- **Provide** a forum for at-risk youth to discover alternatives to high-risk behaviors

Theatre improvisation workshops offer youth an opportunity to explore their lives and relationships as they learn the principles of group ensemble work and improvisation. Upon the completion of the intensive education sessions, students apply these skills through in-service peer education workshops, performances, and the creation of Public Service Announcements (PSA's) and an interactive drug and substance abuse resource center on the World Wide Web.

In-service workshops/performances are presented to schools throughout the region, fostering collaboration between at-risk educators and their peers, promoting discussion and curbing high-risk behavior. Peer educators share their hopes, dreams and fears as they discuss the benefits of participating in the HITT/Generation-eXcel program and the process of creating improvisational performances and PSA's. Ultimately, the HITT/Generation-eXcel model offers at-risk youth an opportunity to transform their lives and the lives of their peers and communities.

Under the supervision of the HITT project team, at-risk participants:

- **Collaborate**, compare opinions and exchange information with their peers
- **Create** games, stories and songs for inclusion in the Generation-eXcel site
- **Create** Public Service Announcements
- **Develop** service learning peer education workshops and performances

Through the technical support of specialists in juvenile justice, alcohol and substance abuse and mental health, participants compile data for inclusion in the Generation-eXcel World Wide Web site. Additionally, participants develop scenarios into scripts for PSA's which are filmed, digitally attached to the Generation-eXcel web site and distributed to television stations and schools throughout Florida.

The goal of the on-line resource center and PSA's is to dramatize alcohol and substance abuse as the nation's number one risk factor among adolescents. During 1998-1999, the resource center will be incorporated in the curricula of schools throughout North Florida. The peer-developed Generation-eXcel web site will offer up-to-date and accurate information on alcohol and substance abuse, high-risk behaviors, improvisational exercises, curriculum materials and community resource directories.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS

"Art teaches nothing, except the significance of life." -- Henry Miller

Program Goals:

- Educate broad-based at-risk populations throughout North Florida through a unique blend of theatrical exercises, peer performance strategies and creation of peer-developed PSA's and on-line resource center
- Increase appreciation of theatre through intensive arts-in-prevention workshop sessions
- Offer a long-term project that provides positive role models to at-risk youth
- Increase students' skills in saying no to drugs
- Inspire students to become peer educators
- Provide a nurturing environment in which youths may explore their own creative abilities

Objectives:

- Provide arts-based prevention services to 10,000 students annually
- Provide an on-site source of information and referral
- Target at-risk youths as the message carriers of drug and alcohol-free lifestyles
- Furnish students with the skills necessary to resist or desist from high-risk behavior
- Inspire students through the collaborative process of creating service learning workshop/performance tours, Public Service Announcements, and World Wide Web materials

Student Benefits:

HITT and Generation-eXcel creates an environment which:

- Provides arts in education exercises designed to promote drug-free lifestyles
- Allows students to use the creative power of the arts to compare experiences, discuss emotional reactions and overcome the obstacles of high-risk activities
- Promotes active and collaborative learning among students
- Increases students' self-esteem and verbal and non-verbal communication skills

FUNDING REQUEST

The Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre Program is a miracle program that has changed the lives of thousands of at-risk teens and has proven that the power of the arts is an innovative and effective educational tool in the promotion of healthy and positive lifestyles.

During 1998-1999, the Hippodrome anticipates outreach to over 10,000 teens in Alachua County. Through the support of the program's sponsors, HITT/Generation-eXcel services will be offered to schools and students at no cost.

The Hippodrome has mounted an extensive development campaign to ensure the continued success of the program. The total cost of the program is \$100,000. We have submitted funding requests to state juvenile justice agencies, community organizations, and other groups who have a vested interest in arts education programming and prevention and intervention services.

We are requesting funding of \$30,000 from the City of Gainesville Police Department which will help us to realize our goal of establishing HITT and Generation-eXcel as Florida's premier alcohol and substance abuse prevention and intervention program.

HIPPODROME IMPROVISATIONAL TEEN THEATRE: PROGRAM HISTORY

HITT was created in 1984 to help teens explore their attitudes about critical issues that face them daily. Using improvisational techniques, the teens and Hippodrome staff create theatrical presentations that explore the participants' hopes, dreams and fears -- examining their pasts and futures.

Outreach

Regional:

HITT enjoys recognition as one of the best prevention and intervention programs in the nation. During 1997-1998, the program worked with students at the following service sites:

Alachua Halfway House, a residential commitment facility for female juvenile offenders

Lincoln Middle School, a mainstream middle school

Loften Educational Center, an alternative education facility for pregnant teens

Horizon Center, an alternative middle school for children with disciplinary problems

New Pathways, a mandatory admittance school for students with disciplinary problems

Evelyn Hamblen Center, an alternative secondary school for students who have become disenchanted and disengaged with learning in a traditional setting

HITT International:

In 1996, because of the reputation and success of HITT's service-learning component, the Hippodrome was invited by Florida International Volunteer Corp and the Antigua Ministry of Education to travel to Antigua to work with peer counselors and educators in developing a pilot HITT program in the West Indies. The program was highly successful, providing training for 25 peer educators, school counselors and representatives of the Ministry; receiving extensive television coverage; and presenting a performance to over 200 dignitaries, students, teachers and family members. In 1997, the Hippodrome was again invited by Florida International Volunteer Corp to lend the HITT program's expertise in developing a second pilot program in Barbuda, West Indies.

Awards, Honors and Recognition

SERV

In 1993, HITT was recognized as one of the best educational programs in the Southeast by the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERV). HITT is one of 30 exemplary programs honored for providing integrated student services through curriculum-based programming and was featured in SERV's annual publication "Sharing Success."

Service Learning

In 1995, HITT participated in the National Service Learning Conference in Philadelphia where it garnered 1st Place as the best service learning project in the nation.

HITT was one of 100 groups in the nation selected to participate in this national conference sponsored by Learn and Serve. The HITT program was honored at an award ceremony featuring remarks and congratulations from Hillary Clinton, a "Liberty Bell" presentation by Philadelphia Mayor Edward Rendell and medals and awards presented by James Kielsmeier, CEO of the National Youth Leadership Council.

HITT celebrated this honor in Gainesville as Mayor Paula DeLaney declared March 24th "Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre Day." Gainesville Chief of Police, Wayland Clifton, presented a Certificate of Congratulations and First Lady Hillary Clinton's message was presented to the program attendees: "Congratulations to the winners of the Philadelphia Service Learning Conference. . .It is encouraging to learn of positive programs that benefit the lives of youth and our community" Representative Cynthia Chestnut offered words of encouragement to the HITT program participants: "This award is proof that the youth of our community can dream and achieve national recognition while learning to work with others and grow within themselves." Secretary of State Sandra Mortham, congratulated HITT "on the distinction of being selected to represent Florida in this national program."

HITT: Performing the Art

Since HITT's creation in 1984, at-risk students have performed and conducted workshops at numerous conferences and symposiums, including:

- 1988: Public Forum on AIDS sponsored by Florida Endowment for the Humanities
- 1989: HITT and Southeast Network create, *AIDS: It's Up to You*, a peer education video for high-risk teens, distributed to 300 runaway shelters nationwide
- 1990: Florida Legislature invites HITT students to perform in Tallahassee
- 1991-1996: HITT hosts Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association's annual conference, *Prevention through Arts*.
- 1994: HITT performance at Victims Advocates Conference: *Sexual Battery and Violence in the '90s*
- 1995: HITT command performance for Florida Governor Lawton Chiles
- 1995: HITT performance for the Federal Juvenile Justice Program
- 1995-98: HITT performances at National Learn and Serve Conferences

Commitment to Education

Since 1995, the Hippodrome has provided community college scholarships to students who have completed the HITT program and graduated from high school. The Hippodrome continues to develop incentives for at-risk students to change their lives and those of their friends and families.

Service program puts youth center stage

by John Williams

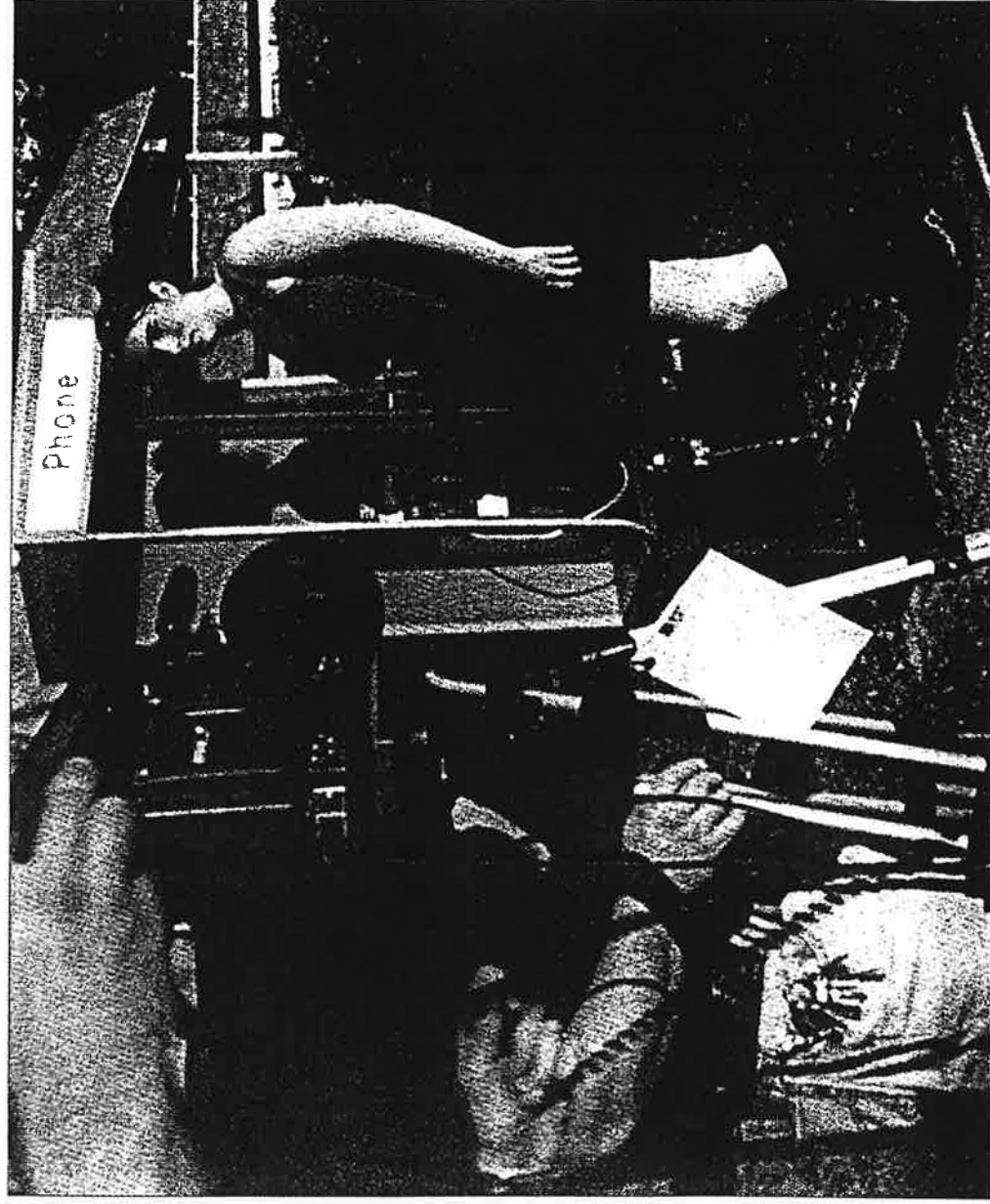
GAINESVILLE — If you had a microphone and the whole world was listening, what would you say?

The question was recently directed to a group of 30 at-risk teens at the start of a seven-week Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre (HITT) workshop. HITT is a nationally-acclaimed, service-learning model that places youth center stage. More than 40,000 Florida students have participated in the creative and unique program since its inception in 1984.

Over the following weeks, theatre educators and a mental health counselor worked with the teens and found out that the students had quite a lot to say. They put their words and ideas into their own improvisational creations such as *This is Your Life*, a game show about overcoming obstacles and peer pressure to reach goals, and *Jack and the Budstock*, a popular fairy tale transformed into a drug-free message. *See You In Court* is about a teenage father forced to provide child support. The teens also created their own rap song about safe sex and HIV/AIDS:

**LIGHTS,
CAMERA,
ACTION!**

— Student actor Ariel Latham, 16, on location during filming of the Generation-eXcel *Drug and Alcohol Abuse* public service announcement. Ariel is one of dozens of students involved in an innovative service-learning theatre project.



John Williams ■ Special to Florida Seres!

When the seven weeks of workshops end, the student ensemble hits the road, conducting peer education workshops and dropping into state and national conferences along the way.

Serve K-12 statewide program and a commissioner with the Florida Commission on Community Service, applauded HITT's participation in the this year's Service Learning Conference

by June. Generation-eXcel recognizes that the media plays an important part in teens' lives. During planning sessions for the website, Harrison asked stu-

*Me and you tawing 'bout that virus too,
talking 'bout how it kills slow
when it gonna get 'cha
ya might not know.*

"We want students to turn their experiences into knowledge," said Bonnie Harrison, Hippodrome education director. "Theatre — for at-risk kids particularly — is a forum that lets them really think about their lives and express feelings they normally might not be able to. We use theatre exercises to talk about their concerns: drugs, HIV/AIDS, STD's, violence, teen pregnancy, peer pressure, relationships, and the importance of setting goals."

The program is more than "acting out" life in the classroom. HITT nurtures students' creative abilities — all the while increasing their confidence, self-esteem, and teamwork skills.

The process of creation, the act of performing and peer education are revolutionary for our students, said Alachua County Principal Ellen West. "Something happens during the program, and they really bond, maybe for the first time in their lives, they make a friend," West said.

"I've realized how to take everyday teen problems and give other teens positive outlook," said 18-year-old HITT student CheeChee Mahan.

WE'RE NO. 1

HITT has piloted more than 25 programs in schools throughout north Florida, impacting 3,000 students annually. Members of HITT have conducted command performances for the Florida Legislature and the Federal Juvenile Justice Program, and presented annual workshops at the Florida Alcohol and Drug Association, Dropout Prevention and Learn and Serve conferences.

In 1995, HITT students attended the National Service Learning Conference in Philadelphia, and took first place among more than 100 service-learning programs throughout the country. Governor Lawton Chiles later proclaimed Florida's HITT "the best program in the nation."

During 1996–1997, under the auspices of the Florida International Volunteer Corps, HITT students traveled to the West Indies to develop pilot programs in Antigua and Barbuda. Joe Follman, director of Florida's Learn &

in Orlando. "Invaluable! That is what you are to service learning in Florida... I know I can always count on you to show what service learning is all about," Follman said.

GLOBAL EXPANSION

In 1997, the HITT program developed Generation-eXcel, an outreach component extending HITT to every county in Florida. With the help of a \$50,000 grant from the Drug-Free Communities Program with supplementary funding provided by Florida Learn & Serve, the City of Gainesville and Florida Department of State, Generation-eXcel's novel approach to service learning will integrate peer education with video and computer technology. The outcome? Florida's first interactive Internet resource center for teens, created by teens. Hippodrome Producing Director Mary Hausch, co-founder of HITT, describes Generation-eXcel as "an opportunity to put an important message within the grasp of every student and teacher in the state — giving true meaning to the phrase service learning."

Hippodrome officials say the Internet site should be up and running

dents what they would like to see on their web pages and who their major influences are. The answers poured in: Oprah, Rosie, President Clinton, and Magic Johnson to name a few.

"The students wanted a chance to talk to their role models," said Harrison "and we want to create Generation-eXcel to let them do just that." As such, Hippodrome is working to develop special on-line chat sessions with some of the nation's leading role models for teens.

The on-line center will also be complete with public service announcements dramatizing teens' concerns — all written and performed by HITT students — and will offer information on alcohol and substance abuse problems, community resource directories, and the students' original stories, games, and songs.

"We want them to know that their voices are being heard. We want to give them the huge microphone for the whole world to hear," Harrison said. ■

Williams is the arts administrator for the Hippodrome State Theatre in Gainesville. For more information about HITT, call 352-373-5968.



LAWTON CHILES
GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

Office of the Governor

THE CAPITOL
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-0001

April 21, 1995

Greetings:

It is a great pleasure to extend congratulations to The Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre At-Risk Program for winning First Place and being selected as the best program in the nation at the National Service Learning Conference in Philadelphia.

This honor was earned through the hard work and dedication of the program staff in helping at-risk youth and I commend all of you for your extraordinary efforts. I join your community, family and friends in being proud of you.

My best wishes are sent for continued success.

With kind regards, I am

Sincerely,


LAWTON CHILES

LC/hlm

Neighbors



Loften's HITT troupe attends conference; member is emcee

Special to The Sun

Members of the Lofton Center's Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre (HITT) troupe not only attended the eighth national Learn and Serve Conference in Orlando, they led the way!

One of the members of the team, Kizzy Gibbs, served as the mistress of ceremonies for the three-day conference with an estimated 2,000 participants.

The Lofton team performed and led several small group workshops, including student program is the outcome of a cooperative Learn and Serve Grant endeavor between the Hippodrome State Theatre and The Lofton Center.

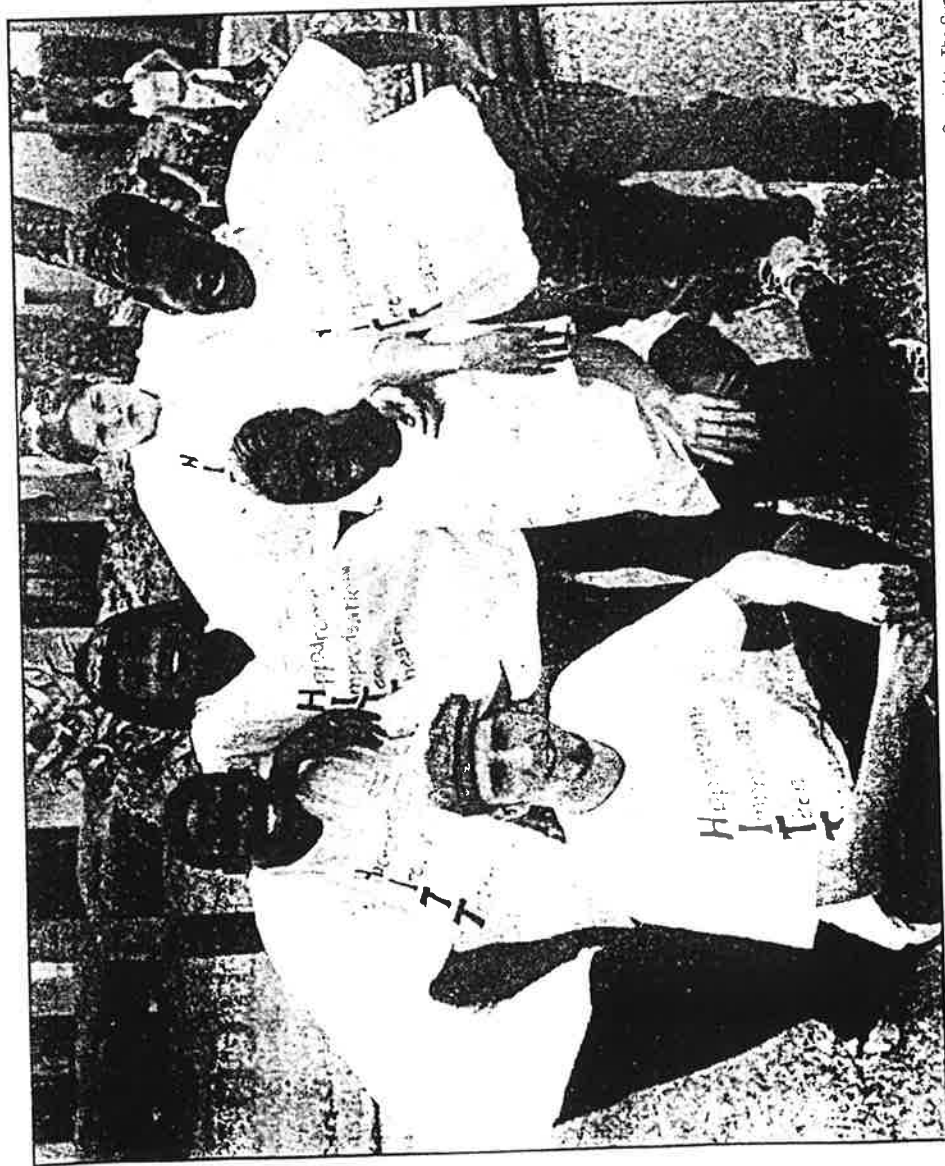
The Hippodrome's educational director, Bonnie Harrison, and her staff arranged the team's participation in the conference activities and is credited with the grooming of

these young actors and actresses.
This annual conference

The team performed and led several small group workshops.

focuses on youth programs throughout the United States that promote learning through service in the students' home communities.

Other members of the HITT team are Gabe Ellenberg, Bernard McCullough, Shantell Burkett, Kim Mayze and Lori Haven.



Special to The Sun

Members of the HITT team are front, Gabe Ellenberg; middle from left, Bernard McCullough, Kizzy Gibbs, Shantell Burkett and Kim Mayze, and back, and Lori Haven.

CITY OF GAINESVILLE FLORIDA
Office of Mayor-Commissioner Paula M. DeLaney

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre was founded in 1984 as a peer education project to address critical issues which affect teens and to provide high-risk youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to resist or desist from substance abuse and/or drug abuse; and

WHEREAS, the Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre was one of 100 groups in the nation selected to participate in the National Service Learning Conference in Philadelphia on March 9 through March 11, 1995; and

WHEREAS, the Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre was chosen to participate in the Service Learning Fair; and

WHEREAS, the Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre received First Place among the service learning presenters and was selected as the best Service Learning program in the nation; and

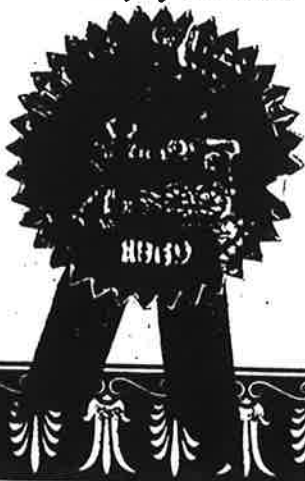
WHEREAS, the Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre was honored at an award ceremony featuring remarks and congratulations from Hillary Clinton, a "Liberty Bell" presentation by Mayor Edward Randell of Philadelphia and medals and awards presented by James Kielsmeier, CEO of the National Youth Leadership Council.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Paula M. DeLaney, by the authority vested in me as Mayor-Commissioner of the City of Gainesville, do hereby proclaim the 24th of March, 1995 as

HIPPODROME IMPROVISATIONAL TEEN THEATRE DAY

in the City of Gainesville and encourage all our citizens to join me to help celebrate this day by recognizing the Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre's contributions to the community.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the official seal of the City of Gainesville, Florida, this 22nd day of March, A.D., 1995.



Paula M. DeLaney
Paula M. DeLaney
Mayor-Commissioner

Program Profiles "PUTTING YA'SELF IN"

Can acting out, on stage, situations where teens are

faced with some of life's toughest and most important decisions, help them when they face those same decisions offstage? Does portraying a character with strong moral and ethical values instill in the actor or actress the same strength in their own morals and ethics? And finally, can the performance arts change the lives of young people who have been branded by society as at-risk, and in terms of making something of themselves, been written off?

The answers: Yes, Yes, most definitely Yes! That is, of course, if those teens are working with the Hippodrome Improvisational Theater Staff, and it's counter part The Lofton Center Staff.

The Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theater

challenge, examine and portray the very serious issues that today's teens must deal with on a daily basis.

The teens who work with the HITT create original, issue based performance pieces that deal with the choices that many teens are faced with everyday. Topics range from AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, teen sex and teen pregnancy, teen suicide, date rape and family issues. Not stuff for the squeamish, but these are the types of issues that must not be swept under the rug, but brought out in the open and dealt with truthfully. As Michael Fidalgo, a former HITT performer and UF student put it, "The teen audience is happy that someone has the balls to speak out and say what they're feeling. It gives the younger generation a chance to be heard." Pretty straight forward talk. But, straight forward talk is exactly what this group is all about. The philosophy is that if teens are given accurate

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a publication of the

volume 3 issue 1

Florida Prevention Association, Inc.

information on relevant issues, can see the positive decisions being made on stage in front of them, this image and information will stay with them and influence them when it comes their turn to make some of those same choices.

In its fifth year of life, the HITT program continues to provide prevention and intervention services to teens. Using the performance arts, peer communication, and peer education, the program strives to provide open lines of communication between teens, their adult counterparts, and the audiences at all its performances. In addition, the HITT program will tour more than 2,000 targeted students in the eighth and ninth grade in Alachua County this year.

One final question: Do the actors/actresses practice what they preach, or do they leave their ideals on stage? The answer expressed by Lauren Caldwell, a HITT Stage Director, gives a good hint to the answer, "Human compassion is a quality they can carry with them offstage and throughout life."

If you want to learn more about the HITT-at-Risk program, The Hippodrome Theater group, the young people who participate or The Loft Center please contact Bonnie Harrison at The Hippodrome State Theater at (904) 373-5968, or write to her at 25 SE Second Place Gainesville, FL 32601-6596.

HITT was created in 1994 to help teens explore their attitudes about critical issues they face daily. The program provided a forum to find alternative behaviors necessary to protect young people from addiction and mental health problems. The Loft Center, which has joined forces with HITT, is a multi-purpose campus serving at risk students. They provide a steady stream of at-risk young people who, with some persuading, will soon become actors and actresses, as well as poets and writers.

Using improvisational techniques, the teens and Hippodrome staff create theatrical presentations which explore the ensemble's hopes, dreams and fears-examining their pasts and futures. The impact of the program has been phenomenal.

Not only has the process and the theatrical presentation affected the HITT ensemble, they have also had a tremendous impact on the participant's families, friends and the audiences who have gathered to share their performances.

In 1990, the HITT developed the HITT-at-Risk program. This program works specifically with the at-risk population in after school programs, special schools and in residential commitment facilities. The 1994-1995 HITT-at-Risk program served 3000 members of the at-risk population.

Many studies have indicated that peer relations are the most influential powers in a teen's life. HITT-at-Risk uses the power of this process to

Communiqué

Fall 1996

The Newsletter of Florida's Unique Development Partnership with the Caribbean

Vol. 13, No 3

Antigua Teen Improv Great Success

Bonnie Harrison called her first mission as a FAVA/CA volunteer a "life changing experience." Harrison, Director of Education, and her co-trainer Mary Hausch, Producing Director at the Hippodrome Improvisational Teen Theatre in Gainesville, FL, took their show on the road in July.

With training from Harrison and Hausch, more than twenty-five young Antiguans, ages 12-18, created theatrical presentations in which they explored their hopes, dreams and fears by examining their pasts and futures. These presentations used "rehearsed improv"

and taught the teens alternative behaviors to help them avoid obstacles such as teen pregnancy, HIV and AIDS and drug abuse. Rehearsed improvisation means that teens mapped out what would happen but improvised dialogue, said Harrison.

"These kids were more task oriented than some we have found in Florida. They all had goals of becoming doctors

Continued on page 2



Members of the teen theatre improvisation course pose for photos after a performance.

The Florida International Volunteer Corps is a program of FAVA/CA the Florida Association of Voluntary Agencies for Caribbean Action.



Bonnie Harrison, left, and Mary Hausch outside the Hippodrome Theatre in Gainesville, FL.

Antigua Teen Improv

Continued from page 1

and teachers. Through improv, we discussed how things such as teen pregnancy would affect them attaining their goals," said Harrison. They also had great attitudes, she added.

"The Teen Theatre project was a great success! Bonnie and Mary were great trainers and the children enjoyed working with them," said Maureen Lewis, Director of the Youth Division in the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Community Development. Lewis requested the two-week course which was an adaptation of a six-week course at the Hippodrome Theatre.

In order to keep the momentum going with the students, there have been recommendations to develop a six-week course as part of the regular school curriculum, said Harrison. Adult leaders would continue to work with the teens to start the peer education program in schools. ♦

HITT

Student Perspectives

We all would like to see our youth grow up in a positive environment without drugs and violence. As artists and educators, we realize we can only tackle this problem one step at a time--on a very human

"The arts are the only universal language to express that which is often inexpressible through other means."

— Richard Fallon

level. HITT/Generation-eXcel addresses the problems one child at a time, enriching their lives and offering them the opportunity to discover positive choices in life.

"The HITT program has changed my life because I did not know how to face my problems."

The following statements offer a glimpse of how the program has shaped students' lives:

"I've realized how to take everyday teen problems and give other teens positive outlook on the problems."

"HITT has made me self-confident and broke me from my shyness."

"Thanks, HITT. No one's ever believed in me before."

"I've learned the many dangers of drugs and being sexually active."

"HITT has a lot of great things and ideas for your life and others. It also teaches you teamwork."

HITT also has numerous success stories. We would like to share a few:

A public schoolteacher comments, "This program should be performed for all middle and high school students."

A halfway house felon who sent a picture of her high school graduation to let us know that she'd reached her goal

A teen mother who, through our program, won a scholarship to Santa Fe Community College

A teen who overcame tremendous peer pressure and turned his back on a gang

We would like to thank the HITT program's sponsors for their continued support. Without their help, these success stories would not be possible.

Melba speaks for HITT-At-Risk program

Although everyone by now knows about Melba Moore's fine performance in the Hippodrome's production of "From The Mississippi Delta," it may not be such public knowledge that Ms. Moore appeared in several other important settings during her visit to Gainesville. As part of the Hippodrome's HITT-At-Risk program, she travelled around the Gainesville area to speak to at-risk youth.

She addressed an auditorium filled with children at Lincoln Middle School on Jan 22 and spoke to a packed house at the Hippodrome on Feb. 2 on the Michael Doyle Mainstage. A longtime believer in mentoring and a former educator herself, Ms. Moore spoke and sang to the children, mixing her Broadway know-how with an innate concern for the well-being of these young adults of tomorrow.

Youth are classified as At-Risk due to lower-income backgrounds, family problems or other factors and are a topic of great concern in today's society. Programs such



as the Hippodrome's innovative HITT-At-Risk, with the help of such concerned participants as Ms. Moore, are helping to make sure these children and young adults stay on the right course and have the bright future they deserve.

"Presentations like these are very important for these kids," explained Hippodrome Director of Education Lauren Caldwell. "These were once-in-a-life chances for them to talk with someone who has been something of an idol to many of them. Getting to meet a celebrity like Melba Moore helps them to understand that the seemingly unattainable is attainable and provides them with a model that they can follow and from which they can learn."

The Hippodrome presented a special matinee performance of "From the Mississippi Delta" on Feb. 3 to which many At-Risk children and high-schoolers were invited. The response from these young people, many of whom had never seen a play before, was thrilling and exciting.



Actress/ singer Melba Moore spoke to more than 250 At-Risk youth at the Hippodrome on the importance of staying in school and following one's dreams.

Photos by Michael McLane

