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YEARS

A.C.T.
AMERICAN
CONSERVATORY
THEATER

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Media Contact: Kevin Kopjak, Charles Zukow Associates | 415.296.0677 | kevink@charleszukow.com

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AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER CELEBRATES THE CULMINATION OF ITS 2016–17 SEASON ACTSMART INTENSIVE RESIDENCIES WITH PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

A.C.T.'s ACTsmart Intensive Residencies give Bay Area youth the opportunity to experience live theater, write original monologues and short plays, and to explore the social issues most relevant in their lives, supported by Theatre Forward Staging Success Initiative and AT&T

Thursday, May 18
A.C.T.'s Strand Theater

SAN FRANCISCO (April 24, 2017)—**A.C.T. Director of Education & Community Programs Elizabeth Brodersen** announced today the successful culmination of its 2016–17 season **ACTsmart Intensive Residencies**. Selected to participate in a national evaluation effort—**Theatre Forward's Staging Success Initiative** supported by **AT&T**—A.C.T.'s ACTsmart Intensive Residencies give Bay Area youth the opportunity to experience live theater, write original monologues and short plays, and explore the social issues most relevant in their lives. A series of public performances presented by partnering youth from Downtown High School will take place on **Thursday, May 18**, in The Rueff at A.C.T.'s Strand Theater (1127 Market St., San Francisco), preceded by a breakfast attended by Theatre Forward and AT&T executives to honor A.C.T.'s participation in the Staging Success initiative. Tickets to the performances are free, but guests must RSVP to education@act-sf.org.

The longest-running residency in the ACTsmart program, A.C.T.'s partnership with Downtown High School (DHS)—a project-based continuation high school serving a diverse group of students from primarily low-income backgrounds who have not found success in conventional classrooms—has become a model for A.C.T.'s intensive residencies. Students in DHS's Acting for Critical Thought project attend weekly acting classes at A.C.T., see A.C.T. productions, and write original monologues and short plays. Each semester DHS classroom teachers work with students to identify and think critically about social justice issues and themes that affect their lives. At the end of the semester, the students perform and produce a final exhibition at A.C.T.'s Strand Theater, in which they participate in all aspects of theater production: they decide on the title and poster design for the show, perform onstage, and work behind the scenes as technical assistants and crew. This semester's exhibition explores issues of resilience and revolution inspired by the history-making musical *Hamilton*, recently attended by students from A.C.T.'s ACTsmart residencies.

A.C.T. now has five additional ACTsmart Intensive Residencies at schools throughout San Francisco, all of which serve a high percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth and culminate in exhibitions of student-created dramatic work at the end of the school year. The Theatre Forward Staging Success Initiative supported by AT&T studies the aggregate results of ACTsmart partnerships with DHS, Ida B. Wells High School, and Mission High School, together with programs at three other major theaters across the country, to measure and evaluate the impact of theater education on arts engagement and social-emotional learning. The Staging Success study, benefiting almost entirely Title 1 students, spans a two-year time period, tracking participation, school engagement, and students' beliefs and attitudes over time with exposure to twenty-first-century skills.

Says **Elizabeth Brodersen**, A.C.T.'s Director of Education & Community Programs: "The qualitative success of the ACTsmart Intensive Residency program is clear to everyone who sees these brave and eloquent students perform their powerful stories. With the support of Theatre Forward and AT&T, we hope to be able to voice those stories of social-emotional growth and youthful resilience with quantitative data in a national context."

Bruce E. Whitacre, Theatre Forward Executive Director, adds: "Theater builds community and sets the stage for individual achievement. AT&T's support recognizes the crucial role theater education programs play in their communities, and acknowledges the commitment of American Conservatory Theater to ensuring it meets the needs of young people at this formative point in their lives."

"The opportunity gap is not only about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), it's also about the arts," said **Ken McNeely**, President, AT&T California, who will attend the pre-exhibition breakfast on May 18. "Exposure to theater can provide opportunities to help engage students in learning and build valuable life skills in the process. AT&T is extremely proud to support Theatre Forward's Staging Success Initiative benefiting the American Conservatory Theater, which is engaging at-risk students in learning and personal discovery through storytelling and performance."

Under the leadership of Director of Education & Community Programs Elizabeth Brodersen, A.C.T.'s community-based educational efforts deeply involve A.C.T. in the creative lives of diverse young people and adults from across the Bay Area and shows firsthand the transformative potential of dramatic storytelling. ACTsmart—which serves more than 12,000 students each year—consists of one of the oldest Student Matinee (SMAT) programs in the country, offering schools low-cost tickets to mainstage and A.C.T. Master of Fine Arts Program performances; Will on Wheels, the annual tour of a Shakespeare classic performed in schools and community venues; the ACTsmart Partnership Program, providing tickets to A.C.T. productions, study guides, and workshops—all at no cost—to teachers at partner schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve low-income youth and adults; the ACTsmart Intensive Residency Program, which provides instruction in writing and performance for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth; and the Collaborative Youth Arts Project, which each summer brings together a diverse cast of young actors from ACTsmart, the A.C.T. Young Conservatory, and Destiny Arts Center in Oakland to create a commissioned play articulating the needs and challenges of youth in today's world. A.C.T. also offers Back to the Source, an immersive summer institute for educators who use theater techniques in the classroom, as well as ongoing professional development during the school year.

In addition to supporting American Conservatory Theater, Theatre Forward's AT&T-supported Staging Success Initiative also measures programs at Dallas Theater Center, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and Seattle Repertory Theatre. Theatre Forward is committed to advancing American theater and its communities by providing funding and other resources to their membership of 19 of the country's leading nonprofit theaters.

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