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THEATRE **HORIZON**

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Philadelphia Young Playwrights Collaborates with Theatre Horizon to Reach Adult Students Through Autism Drama Outreach Program Funding by The Wolfson Family Foundation Helps Drive New Class Offering

PHILADELPHIA (February 19, 2013) — Philadelphia Young Playwrights in collaboration with Theatre Horizon's Autism Drama Outreach program introduces **Young Adult Playwriting**, a new class for students ages 17 – 30 with autism. Enrollment is ongoing for the current class and a new session begins in May. Young Adult Playwriting was made possible as a pilot with funding from **The June and Steve Wolfson Family Foundation**.

In **Young Adult Playwriting**, students will explore the various ways to write plays, focusing on strong characterization, rich dialogue and engaging story lines. Teaching artists will help writers develop the skills they need to communicate their ideas effectively and make bold choices in a collaborative atmosphere. The staff's first priority is to create and maintain a safe, fun environment where eye contact, socialization and peer interaction are encouraged and celebrated. Theatre Horizon's teaching method draws heavily on the Son-Rise method, a play-based therapy program which emphasizes love and acceptance. Son-Rise and Theatre Horizon stress that autism is not a behavioral disorder but a neurological challenge and that the potential of every child – or adult student - is limitless.

"Young Playwrights is honored to enter this work in partnership with Theatre Horizon, and eager to stimulate and hear the voices of the Program's adult students. We thank Steve and June Wolfson for the thoughtful philanthropy that makes this pioneering and meaningful work possible," says Young Playwrights' Executive Producing Director, **Glen Knapp**.

Registration remains open for Young Adult Playwriting at Theatre Horizon's Autism Drama Outreach program, comprised of six weekly Saturday classes. The winter session is underway through March 9, taking place from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The spring session runs May 4 – June 8. Classes are held at Theatre Horizon, 401 DeKalb Street in Norristown. For more information on enrollment, please contact Education Director Leigh Mallonee at leigh@theatrehorizon.org or call 610-283-2230. To learn more about the program, please visit www.theatrehorizon.org.

About Theatre Horizon

Theatre horizon was founded in 2005 by theatre artists Matthew Decker and Erin Reilly and has become a lauded contributor to the arts community in Montgomery County, annually staging a three-show season, reaching more than 500 children per year through drama classes, and pioneering an autism drama program using actors to teach socialization skills to children with autism. Theatre Horizon's mission is to nurture a community of audience members and artists through theatre. Theatre Horizon is an active participant in the Norristown Arts Council as well as a founding member of Arts Hill along DeKalb Street in downtown Norristown, PA. The goal of the Arts Task Force is to revitalize the old industrial riverside town by bringing arts and nightlife to the suburban downtown area. For more information about Theatre Horizon, please call 610-283-2230 or visit www.theatrehorizon.org.

About The Program

The Autism Drama Outreach program began in 2006 and initially consisted of one autistic child, his parents and a small group of actors eager to learn how to utilize their experiences in theatre to reach children on the autism spectrum. Five years after its inception, Theatre Horizon has trained a rotating staff of fourteen experienced teaching theatre artists comprised of area actors, educators and artists. The success of the program is due largely to this skilled and compassionate group, many of whom began as program volunteers.

"Our program succeeds from the moment the participants enter the room," explains Education Director, **Leigh Mallonee**. The program's teachers are skilled at interacting with participants with differing abilities. Students' skill levels span the full spectrum of autism disorders. First and foremost, students in the program need a social forum in which to interact with peers. "We are able to provide that forum," says Mallonee.

"The program gives teachers and children with autism the opportunity to learn from each other," says Kate Altman, a teacher in the program since its first year. "The push is beyond awareness now. It is about acceptance, inclusion, and giving people with disabilities value in our society."

It is a goal of Theatre Horizon's to never let tuition be an obstacle for the participants of the program. While supplemental treatments and therapies can often be financially debilitating to families dealing with autism, Theatre Horizon is able to offer enrollment for as little as \$10 per class, due to partnerships with grant-making foundations and private donors who recognize the need for the program.

About Philadelphia Young Playwrights www.phillyyoungplaywrights.org

Founded in 1987 by Adele Magner, and led today by Executive Producing Director **Glen Knapp**, Philadelphia Young Playwrights is an award-winning program that taps the potential of youth and inspires learning through playwriting in more than 50 public and private K-12 schools each year. A leader in the region's educational programs for youth for 25 years and built upon its primary belief that all students have something important and valuable to say, Young Playwrights has enriched the Greater Philadelphia community, touching the lives of thousands of students, teachers and parents for the past twenty years. Since 1987, approximately 60 professional playwrights have led workshops, and nearly all of Philadelphia's professional theater companies have participated by performing, producing, or directing student works. More than 60,000 young people have participated directly as playwrights and audience members, seeing their work produced in class or by professionals. Young Playwrights' Literary Committee includes more than 60 educators, writers, parents, and former Young Playwrights students who read and critique each student script. Young Playwrights' participation in Theatre Horizon's Autism Drama Outreach program is made possible with seed funding from the **June and Steve Wolfson Family Foundation**.

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To request photos, interviews and more information, please contact:
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