



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Dr. Sarah N. Keller, MSU Billings
T: (406) 896-5824 C: (406) 672-2348
E: skeller@msubillings.edu

MEDIA PROJECT TACKLES TEEN SUICIDE IN BILLINGS

BILLINGS, MT, January 8, 2014

Three original theatre productions created and performed by Billings high school students will premiere at NOVA Center for the Performing Arts at 7 pm on Friday, January 24, as part of an innovative suicide-prevention campaign using media and arts workshops to reach teenagers in Billings. The performance will be followed by a town hall discussion on youth suicide and depression, facilitated by a licensed mental health counselor.

The project is based on a similar effort in Eastern Montana, *Let's Talk Miles City*, where a group of teenagers reached out to their peers using theater to address the topics of suicide and depression.

"The play has opened a door in the community for creative outlets of personal expression for young people in Miles City," said Michelle Strain, on-site project coordinator. *"It has been very exciting to watch the growth of the participants and this project, and we look forward to replicating it here."*

The performances are directed by West High School drama teacher Myra Nurre; theater professional and owner of "Sacrifice Cliff Theater Company" Patrick Wilson; and a partnership of international director and actress Jane Lind and Plains Indian sign language instructor Ron Garritson.

Let's Talk Billings is a project of Global Health Equity Foundation (GHEF) and sponsored by the Montana Idea Network for Biological Research Excellence (INBRE). GHEF is a non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of people who lack access to health education, prevention services, and healthcare.

"Let's Talk Billings provides a unique opportunity for young people to communicate about difficult issues through multiple art forms," said Dr. Sarah N. Keller, lead researcher at MSU-Billings and GHEF. *"Using creative media to empower youth to speak out about obstacles they face has historically been shown to bring about positive community change."*

To create the play, teens chose materials relevant to the cause of suicide prevention and wrote their own works about this issue ravaging the entire state. The teenagers and three theater directors created unique pieces with an overall message: become more aware, speak up, seek help, and intervene to save lives. After the January 24 premiere, the plays will be performed in high schools, middle schools and youth centers throughout Eastern Montana. The teens seek to inspire other communities through their performances.

Let's Talk Billings is designed to get people in the community more comfortable talking about mental health issues; and to provide help for those who are depressed and possibly suicidal. A website with resources for Eastern Montana residents, www.letstalkmiles.com, will be accompanied by a similar web site for Billings: www.letstalkbillings.com. Admission to the *Let's Talk Billings* performance is free and open to the public. Donations will be accepted at the door to help sustain the project.

WHERE: NOVA Center for the Performing Arts, 2317 Montana Avenue, Billings

WHEN: Friday, January 24 at 7pm

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC