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Company for Troubled Youth Earns White House Honor

by Nicole Kristal

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The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that provides theatre workshops for incarcerated and foster youth, accepted the 2007 Coming Up Taller Award from First Lady Laura Bush at the White House Jan. 28. It was one of the 15 arts and humanities programs nationwide to receive the honor from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. Laura Leigh Hughes, an actor and the Suspects founder, accepted the award with Jose Ramirez, 19, an orphan and previously incarcerated gang member from the Compton section of Los Angeles.


According to a news release, Ramirez told Bush the acting program changed his life by teaching him trust and how to resolve conflicts without violence, set goals, and work with others -- not to mention how to act and write plays. "If it weren't for The Unusual Suspects," he said, "I know I'd be dead or in prison right now."

Since completing the acting program, Ramirez has graduated from high school and begun attending community college, the release stated.

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