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GRYD Youth Break Barriers to Write Original Play, *Love Has No Gender*

**Staged Reading Performance with Professional Actors
Saturday, December 12th at 2:00pm**

December 2, 2009, Los Angeles, CA- The award winning gang prevention program, The Unusual Suspects, in partnership with the City of Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program (GRYD), **City Council Member Richard Alarcón, 7th District**, and El Nido Family Centers, presents a staged reading of the original play *Love Has No Gender*. The play was completely conceived and written by GRYD youth in Pacoima, CA. The staged reading performance will be presented by professional actors on Saturday, December 12, 2009 at 2:00PM at Pacoima Youth and Family Center. Admission is free.

Pacoima, CA is a hotbed for gang activity and youth growing up in this area face many challenges. They are often subject to gang intimidation, coercion into joining gangs or being the victim or witness of a violent crime. According to the City's Pacoima-Foothill GRYD Zone report, youth have begun to perceive gangs as a career alternative and are being recruited at younger ages, some as young as seven and eight years old.

In an effort to curb the influence of gangs over Pacoima youth The Unusual Suspects, in partnership with El Nido Family Centers and GRYD, have been working with a group of youth ages 10-15 that are critically at risk for joining gangs or ending up in prison. Over the past nine weeks The Unusual Suspects' team of professional teaching artists and volunteer mentors has been guiding participants through an ensemble playwriting process. By developing a safe environment with each other these youth have been able to break down emotional barriers, increase their reading skills, and provide a theatrical experience for their community, which is often lacking substantial arts opportunities.

Love Has No Gender follows the story of Pamela and Claryssa, two girlfriends who are facing adversity together. Pamela struggles to gain her parents' acceptance while Claryssa copes with her mother's impending unemployment and immigration woes. In the meantime, Claryssa's brother, Juanito, strives to overcome the personal limitations that stand in the way of his dreams. Although their problems stem from family and community issues, Pamela, Claryssa, and Juanito are able to turn back to them for support. They learn through openness and honesty that it's possible for a community to grow stronger together.

The Unusual Suspects is committed to educating the public on the plight of underserved children and youth in foster care and the juvenile justice system in Los Angeles County. We fill a gap in arts education, providing a much-needed service to youth who would otherwise not have access to the arts. The Unusual Suspects was recognized at The White House in January 2008 by the President's Committee on the Arts & the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts with the *Coming Up Taller Award*, the nation's highest honor for after-school arts programming.

For more information visit The Unusual Suspects website at www.TheUnusualSuspects.org.