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Pacoima Youth Tackle Gender and Immigration

In the Original Play *Love Has No Gender*

Saturday, March 20th at 2:00pm

February 15, 2010, Los Angeles, CA- The award-winning The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company, 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 the original play *Love Has No Gender*. The play is completely conceived, written, and performed by GRYD youth in Pacoima, CA. *Love Has No Gender* will be presented for one performance only on Saturday, March 20, 2010 at 2:00PM at the Pacoima Youth and Family Center. Admission is free.

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 of her relationship with Claryssa, who is also coping with her mother's impending unemployment and immigration woes. Although their problems stem from family and community issues, Pamela and Claryssa 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.

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 are victims or witnesses 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 (and their families) that are critically at risk for joining gangs or ending up in prison. Over the past 18 months The Unusual Suspects' team of professional teaching artists and volunteer mentors have been guiding participants through an ensemble writing and rehearsal 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 lacks substantial arts opportunities.

Love Has No Gender will be performed on March 20, 2010 at 2:00pm at the Pacoima Youth and Family Center located at 11243 Glenoaks Blvd., Pacoima, CA 91331. Reservations can be made by calling 213-488-8488, x201 or via email at RSVP@theunusalsupsects.org. Admission is Free.

Born out of the ashes of the 1992 L.A. Riots, The Unusual Suspects has grown into a model mentoring program using theatre arts to reach youth in underserved and at-risk environments, including kids in foster care, violence-plagued neighborhoods, gangs and juvenile corrections facilities. The Unusual Suspects offers two consecutive 10-week (60-80 hours) playwriting and performance workshops where youth develop self-esteem, tolerance, and the communication and coping skills needed to make positive life choices.

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