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**RESEARCH PROVES FIRST STAGE THEATER ACADEMY HAS
POSITIVE IMPACT ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

MILWAUKEE, WIS. (August 14, 2009) – First Stage Children’s Theater hired Reinders Research to conduct an independent evaluation of a random sample of 265 Theater Academy participants ages nine to 19. The life skills that students gain from their participation in First Stage’s Academy Programming were assessed through the lens of emotional intelligence (EQ) by testing changes in students EQ levels before and after program participation.

Popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman, EQ is a leading indicator of personal and professional success. The term “emotional intelligence” describes the ability, capacity or skill to identify and assess the emotions of one’s self and others. Researchers have linked EQ and success in life such as steady, fulfilling careers, healthy marriages, positive relationships, good parenting and good physical health. They have also discovered that EQ is neither pre-determined at birth nor static throughout an individual’s lifetime.

The results of this evaluation illustrate that participation in the First Stage Theater Academy has a positive impact on EQ. Comparisons of pre- and post-test scores revealed that roughly two out of three students (61 percent) experienced growth in their overall EQ scores. On average, students increased their EQ scores by eight points, on a 160 point scale, within two to four weeks in the program. This growth is significant, moving them from “above average” to scores nearing the “skilled” EQ level.

These students, whose EQ grew throughout the program, made consistent advancements across three broad categories. The categories include Knowing Yourself, through self discovery and building self confidence; Choosing Yourself, through intentional decisive action

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and motivation; and Giving Yourself, in teamwork, cooperation and the act of creation. Point gains were also especially notable in the areas of navigating emotions, increasing empathy and exercising optimism.

Compared to a control group of students from the Shorewood, Wis. school system, First Stage students had significantly higher post-test scores; at the end of their first year, beginner Academy students scored an average of 14 points higher than their control group peers.

Results of this evaluation also revealed that the Academy brings the most significant gains to students at the lowest end of the EQ spectrum, who are most in need of this type of skill-building programming. This group is strongly represented by beginner students and those receiving financial assistance. These students' scores were elevated from "vulnerable/challenged" to "average/functional." This reinforces the importance of raising scholarship funds and verifies First Stage's belief that the Theater Academy program has the most positive impact on underserved youth.

A small segment of students experienced no change in EQ; however, this group shared common characteristics. Compared to other students these students had attended Academy longer, resulting in notably higher entering EQ scores. The students in this group also had the highest percentage of "above average" and "expert" EQ pre-test scores. It is likely that these students entered the Academy with well-formed levels of EQ.

In addition to this study, a sample of 200 Academy alumni participated in an online EQ survey in order to help identify the longer-term impact of Academy participation. Results from this qualitative survey showed that young adults still use skills learned in the Academy to handle a wide variety of challenging situations. Alumni most commonly drew upon their abilities to identify their own emotions, exercise consequential thinking, optimism and empathy and to pursue noble goals.

Through classes, exercises, and environment, the Theater Academy encourages introspection and self-learning in a "safe place." Students are continually encouraged to make

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decisions, solve problems, lead/mentor, interact with others, and play roles from the skills and wisdom they continue to gain. Students draw on the foundation of emotional learning to expand their own skills while continually encouraging others, thereby reinforcing the Academy environment.

With time and practice, students develop ever-greater empathy - seeing their own connection with the larger world around them. Students accept the challenge to make positive changes in their own worlds that serve to benefit the whole. By placing life skills into an EQ framework, First Stage can continue to enrich the Academy's psycho-social-educational impact on its students.

First Stage Children's Theater is Milwaukee's premier, professional family theater. Founded in 1987, the mission of the company is to touch hearts and transform lives by creating exceptional theater experiences for young people and families through professional theater productions, theater academy training and dynamic in-school education programs. First Stage is a member of the Theater Wisconsin and Milwaukee Arts Partners, and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF).

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