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**Students and faculty contribute to success of mental health crises training films**

*Summary: Theatre students and faculty portray mental health workers and people struggling with mental health crises*

(March 27, 2009)-Charged with delivering cutting-edge, career-specific information to mental health crisis practitioners, Craig Gagnon, crisis response manager with Region IV South Mental Health Initiative and Liberty Sleiter, program supervisor for Stevens County Social Services, found a way to do so using ingenuity and creativity...and local talent. They enlisted Morris theatre students and faculty to portray mental health workers and people struggling with mental health crises in training films.

A collaboration between Region IV's Adult Mental Health Initiative, funded through the Department of Human Services (DHS), and Stevens County Social Services, which received a DHS grant for children's mental health, the training films present new crises intervention skills and techniques. Both programs, for adults and children, support mental health professionals and practitioners in developing community-based mental healthcare delivery systems to meet specific needs of area communities.

States Gagnon: "Very little new crises training has been developed since the 70s and 80s, and no training materials were designed for rural Minnesota. The new videos provide a consistent example of new techniques to every viewer. They have been very successful."

Gagnon and Slieter, program manager for the children's crises team, wrote the scripts that the actors received during the recording sessions. In one vignette, Rodney Fair '09, Chicago, played the role of crisis worker while Michael Spaulding '12, Nerstrand, played a young person under duress.

Fair states: "The most challenging part was to memorize lines right on set. If I messed up, I had to cover while on camera. Hopefully, this experience will help me get acting jobs after graduation. Emotionally, the experience brought on a lot of pressure. Even though I was acting, my character, the counselor, was solely responsible for helping the person in his time of crisis."

Ten vignettes resulted in two training videos. States Gagnon: "We had high expectations and the students did an excellent job with minimal coaching on my part. They were extremely professional and adaptable. As faculty consultant, Siobhan Bremer, assistant professor of theatre, did a great job of directing. She was essential to the production."

Bremer, too, was pleased: "The students memorized quickly and did a fabulous job acting. I was proud." Actors who participated in the project were Fair, Spaulding, Anthony Albright '11, Browns Valley, Lizza Sunde '12, Merrill, Wisconsin, Hayley Saccoman '10, Buffalo, Nick James Parker '08, Louisville, Kentucky, Tim Schmidt '10, Buffalo, and Bremer.

The Region IV South Mental Health Initiative is one of fifteen statewide projects involved in redesigning and implementing improved systems for delivering mental health services. It serves Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, and

Traverse counties. While the films were created primarily for these counties, they are available to other programs. Most recently, a North Dakota community “creating a crises program from scratch” requested copies of the films.

Photo: Rodney Fair '09, Chicago, and Michael Spaulding '12, Nerstrand, in a scene from the training film

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