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**“WALK IN OUR SHOES” MUSICAL PLAY BRINGS TO LIFE HARMFUL EFFECTS**

**OF MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA**

***Popular school-based performance launches 3rd statewide tour***

Sacramento, Calif. – The school-based performance “Walk In Our Shoes” returns to California elementary and middle school campuses this spring, shedding light on complex and often misunderstood issues related to mental health. Research shows that stigma associated with mental illness develops during the teenage years, so “Walk in Our Shoes” was created to provide students with a first-hand look at what life is like for their peers living with a mental health challenge, fusing key information with the power of storytelling to block stigmatizing beliefs before they set in.

The “Walk In Our Shoes” tour is re-launching this spring following successful tours in 2013 and 2014 that performed in 39 counties to more than 45,000 students. Research conducted after the tour showed the performance significantly increased knowledge among students and also increased their compassion for students with mental health challenges. Teachers and administrators reported a positive change in tolerance, understanding and empathy around mental illness among students.

The storyline for “Walk In Our Shoes” is tailored directly to tweens’ current beliefs about mental illness. Following the lives of four high school students, “Walk In Our Shoes” introduces their various experiences with both mental health challenges and stigma. It is performed by a touring group from B Street Theatre in Sacramento, a professional children’s theater company with more than 20 years’ experience bringing subjects to school-based audiencesincludingliterature, history, math/science, cultural studies, and character education.

The facts demonstrate the need for this innovative approach. Fifty percent of us will experience a mental health challenge in our lifetime. Research shows that half of all mental disorders start by age 14 and three-quarters start by age 24. But, an average of 6-to-8 years pass after the onset of mood disorder symptoms and 9-to-23 years for anxiety disorder symptoms before young people get help.

The tour will kick-off Feb. 29 and visit schools throughout California through April 29. Below is a list of tour stops.

**“Walk in Our Shoes” Tour Dates**

February 29 – March 4: Sacramento Region

March 7 – March 11: Rural North

March 14 – March 18: Bay Area

March 21 – March 25: Bay Area

March 28 – April 1: Central Valley

April 4 – April 8: Central Valley/Southern California

April 11 – April 29: Southern California

“Walk In Our Shoes” is part of the multi-faceted campaign aimed to reach 9- to-13 year olds throughout the state. The school-based performance is supported by an interactive website featuring real-life narratives from California youth. In addition, it includes a place to design a virtual shoe that portrays and communicates each visitor’s unique perspective, thoughts and feelings. The resource-rich site also includes tools to aid parents and teachers in discussing mental challenges with their children. To learn more, visit [www.walkinourshoes.org](http://www.walkinourshoes.org). The full site is also available in Spanish and can be found at [www.ponteenmiszapatos.org](http://ponteenmiszapatos.org/).

“Walk In Our Shoes” is part of Each Mind Matters, a comprehensive statewide effort to increase the number of people who seek early help for mental health challenges by reducing stigma and discrimination around mental illness. It is a Prevention and Early Intervention program of California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), which is funded by the voter-approved California Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63).

**About the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA)**

CalMHSA is an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Prevention and Early Intervention programs implemented by CalMHSA are funded by counties through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63). Prop. 63 provides the funding and framework needed to expand mental health services to previously underserved populations and all of California’s diverse communities.

**About Prevention and Early Intervention**

Prevention and Early Intervention initiatives are voter-approved Prop. 63-funded programs aimed at preventing suicides, reducing stigma and discrimination, and improving student mental health. These initiatives transform California’s mental health services approach by uniting California’s diverse communities to embrace mental wellness and delivering the tools individuals need before they reach the crisis point. They are implemented as a coordinated effort by California’s counties for maximum statewide impact and cost effectiveness.

The Stigma and Discrimination Reduction initiative uses a full range of Prevention and Early Intervention strategies to confront the fundamental causes of stigmatizing attitudes and discriminatory and prejudicial actions toward people with mental illness, across ages and backgrounds.

**About B Street Theater**

For more than 30 years the mission of the B Street School Tour has been to provide entertainment to children while encouraging in them a love for the theatre and a specific appreciation for the art of playwriting. B Street Theater performs 12 times per week, 38 weeks per year in schools, hospitals and public places reaching approximately 200,000 children annually. The performances are a great way to introduce children to live theatre by expressing the art of telling stories on stage.

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