Youth Speak Out on HIV/AIDS - HEAR ME Kicks Off Fourth Annual National HIV/AIDS Youth Story-Writing Contest - New Video Contest On Youtube

The HEAR ME Project (www.hearmeproject.org) kicks off its Fourth Annual HIV/AIDS Story-Writing Contest for At-Risk Youth. Hilary Duff, Harold Perrineau (Lost) & Corbin Bleu (High School Musical) Among Celebrity Judges - Morgan Freeman Honorary Chair.

New York, NY (PRWEB) September 21, 2007 -- HEAR ME is kicking off its Fourth Annual HIV/AIDS Story-Writing Contest for youth. The percentage of youth affected with HIV and AIDS continues to grow; HEAR ME's programming exists to help combat those growing figures. Over the last three years, the contest has grown as a tremendous opportunity for at-risk and urban youth, ages 14-22, to voice their thoughts and feelings on topics affecting them on a daily basis.

Honorary Chair Morgan Freeman is joined by a judging panel featuring a who's who list of Hollywood's finest professionals including Hilary Duff, Lost's Harold Perrineau, High School Musical's Corbin Bleu, Jesse L. Martin (Law & Order, Rent), LeVar Burton, Andre Braugher, Jasmine Guy, Judy Reyes (Scrubs), Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu (Director, Babel, 21 Grams), and Dr. Loretta Sweet Jemmott, Director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Health Disparities.

The writer of the winning story about HIV/AIDS will receive $2500.

The winning story of the first annual contest, "The Hard Way," was adapted and made into a short film distributed nationwide to youth-serving organizations. Another adaptation of the 2005 winner is underway, and an anthology of winning and finalists stories is slated to be published in 2008. Macy's has underwritten a comic book version of one of HEAR ME's stories, which is available this fall.

After receiving a grant from YouTube, HEAR ME is launching its first video contest, which is taking place at the same time as the annual Story-Writing contest. Applicants can submit a two-minute video about HIV/AIDS. The videos will be judged as well, and the winner of the contest will receive $1,000. Videos can be submitted on YouTube or sent on DVD to HEAR ME.

Information about the Writing and Video Contests can be found on the Hear Me Project Website (www.hearmeproject.org).

The HEAR ME contest was launched in 2004 after a spike in HIV rates among youth was reported. The HEAR ME contest motivates young people to think about their personal vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Since 2004, the number of entries has increased by 1000%. A survey of contest participants demonstrated that 92% are now more aware of their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS; and 87% said they are now more knowledgeable about HIV. "Celebrity support inspires kids to get involved and raise their own awareness and their peers," explains Dr. Jemmott, an expert in adolescent HIV/AIDS education, who serves as a key consultant and partner to the organization. Other celebrity judges from previous years have included Spike Lee, Scarlett Johansson, Forest Whitaker and Director Robert Rodriguez (Spy Kids).

The HEAR ME Project was founded by Select Media, Inc. Known for its award-winning, research-based
programs for at-risk youth, Select Media, Inc. provides schools, health departments, government agencies, and community-based organizations with curricula and films on critical health issues including HIV/AIDS, puberty, alcohol and other drugs, child sexual abuse, family violence, STDs, conflict resolution, and teen pregnancy. For further information, visit www.hearmeproject.org or www.selectmedia.org.

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