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Gamm's Innovative Drama Therapy Program Grows with Demand for Mental Health Services

WARWICK, RI (January 4, 2022) - The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre (The Gamm) has established an innovative, **in-house drama therapy program offering an alternative form of mental health support to schools and the community.** The launch of a pilot program, coinciding with the theater's 2021-22 artistic season, was accelerated by an increased need for mental health services during the second year of the global pandemic. The program comprises grant-funded residencies and community partnerships, as well as private-pay sessions with **Susie Schutt, The Gamm's director of education and drama therapist.**

The Gamm's education department began integrating embodied social emotional learning with its regular school programming in spring 2020, during the first COVID-19 surge. Working both in-school and virtually with grades K-12, **Gamm teaching artists found drama therapy techniques to be particularly effective for students processing feelings of isolation, loss, and grief associated with the pandemic.** Using theater techniques to address a range of issues, from behavioral concerns in children to anxiety in adults, drama therapy takes a psychodynamic, skill-based approach to responding to life's many challenges, Schutt explained.

"Theater encourages sharing through the creative process, so it's especially helpful for anyone who struggles with verbally processing emotions. Students were often sharing personal stories during our regular drama classes. Drama therapy holds space for these stories and offers my students the skills to work through challenging situations and emotions in the classroom," Schutt said, adding **"Art is so often brought into healthcare settings. Why not bring healthcare into the arts?"**

Last spring, Schutt received her master's in mental health counseling and drama therapy from **Lesley University** in Cambridge, Mass. **Believed to be the first professional theater in the country with a full-time drama therapist on staff,** The Gamm is in a unique position to expand its offerings to schools and to private clients seeking an active, experiential approach to mental health care, said **Gamm Managing Director Amy Gravell.**

"We are so fortunate to be able to offer this highly effective form of mental healthcare to students, our theater staff, and the community at large," Gravell said. "Delivering drama therapy in schools by way of our education department and also in our theater space makes so much sense. We are excited to see how it grows and where it leads."

Gamm Drama Therapy Program initiatives underway and in development include:

- A collaboration with **Samuel Slater Middle School in Pawtucket**, merging the school's talk therapy based social work practices with drama therapy techniques aimed at anger and stress management, as well as improved social skills
- Drama therapy for children, youth, and adults at The Gamm, in partnership with **Thrive Behavioral Health of Warwick**
- **Private-pay drama therapy sessions** for all ages at The Gamm
- Drama therapy based **Gamm Studio classes** for adults
- **Training for Gamm teaching artists** in the best practices of trauma-informed classroom management
- **Professional development for K-12 teachers**, integrating drama therapy with Rhode Island Department of Education mandated social emotional learning curriculum
- The inclusion of **trauma-informed content advisories and intimacy direction** for Gamm productions

For an overview of The Gamm's drama therapy offerings, go to gammtheatre.org/dramatherapy. To learn more about drama therapy, visit the **North American Drama Therapist Association** website at nadta.org/what-is-drama-therapy.html

ABOUT SUSIE SCHUTT

Susie Schutt, MA, P-RDT, is The Gamm's director of education and drama therapist. As a Gamm teaching artist since 2010, she has worked extensively in K-12 classrooms, and in partnership with public libraries and social service programs throughout Rhode Island. Schutt is also a clinician and drama therapist for Thrive Behavioral Health in Warwick, R.I. She works as an intimacy director for local theater companies and serves on the board of Warwick Center for the Arts. Schutt has a master's in mental health counseling and drama therapy from Lesley University, and a bachelor's in sociology and social inequality from the University of Michigan.

ABOUT THE GAMM THEATRE

Founded in 1984, the non-profit Gamm Theatre is proud to tell stories that entertain, provoke, and engage seriously with the most important issues of our time. The Gamm further serves the public with educational programming that enriches the cultural and civic life of our community. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Tony Estrella and Managing Director Amy Gravell, The Gamm is a regionally recognized, award-winning theater and a proud member of New England Area Theatre (NEAT), a bargaining unit of the Actors' Equity Association.

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