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FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA HONORS WRITEGIRL FOR EMPOWERING TEEN GIRLS

Los Angeles nonprofit receives National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award

(LOS ANGELES, CA) In the face of high dropout rates and minimal arts education in Los Angeles public schools, WriteGirl was nationally recognized by the White House for providing teen girls with exceptional out-of-school programming in writing, communication, and literacy skills.

WriteGirl, a local creative writing and mentoring organization for underserved girls in Los Angeles, was honored with the 2013 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, the highest honor such programs can receive in the United States. Executive Director and Founder Keren Taylor and WriteGirl participant Jacqueline Uy, age 16, received the award from First Lady Michelle Obama in the East Room of the White House last Friday. WriteGirl was the only youth program in the state of California to receive the award.



Chosen from a pool of more than 350 nominations and 50 finalists, WriteGirl was recognized for using engagement in the arts and the humanities to increase academic achievement, graduation rates, and college enrollment, as well as improve literacy and language abilities, communication and performance skills, and cultural awareness. For 12 consecutive years, WriteGirl has maintained a 100 percent success rate in guiding high school seniors in their Core Mentoring Program to not only graduate from high school but enroll in college, a stark contrast to the 50 percent dropout rate at Los Angeles public high schools.

“Studies have shown that students who are highly involved in the arts stay in school longer than those who are less involved,” said Mrs. Obama in her speech at the ceremony. “Arts education also leads to better scores in reading and math. And it makes students much more motivated and engaged, period, in school. They come to school more, they set higher goals for themselves, and they have a reason to achieve them because they’re determined to succeed because they’re passionate about something.”

WriteGirl pairs professional women writers with teen girls for weekly one-on-one mentoring, writing workshops, public readings, and publishing opportunities. WriteGirl partners with arts and civic institutions each month for full-day creative writing workshops for hundreds of girls and women, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Autry Museum, the GRAMMY Museum, and Walt Disney Concert Hall. WriteGirl also provides one-on-one guidance for seniors to help them prepare for college. Dr. Allison Deegan, who serves as WriteGirl's Associate Director, said, "We have an intensive approach to helping girls get to college. This past year, our staff and volunteer mentors guided our girls to complete more than a hundred college applications."

Only 11 percent of California’s public schools are meeting state goals for arts instruction (artsed411.org). Students with four years of arts or music in high school average 100 points better on their SAT scores than students with one-half year or less (Americans for the Arts).

"WriteGirl offers a replicable model for moving the needle on improving education for Los Angeles youth," said WriteGirl Founder and Executive Director Keren Taylor. "When you involve personal creativity in learning, when you focus on assets, you help teens grow confident and engaged in shaping their own future."

About WriteGirl

WriteGirl is a creative writing and mentoring organization in Los Angeles that helps teen girls discover and express their creative voices. WriteGirl has two main programs: the Core Mentoring Program, in which at-risk teen girls are matched with professional women writers for one-on-one mentoring, genre-specific workshops, public readings, publications and college and scholarship application assistance; and the In-Schools Program, where volunteer mentors lead weekly workshops to improve literacy and communication skills at schools in critically at-risk neighborhoods.

WriteGirl enrolls more than 350 underserved teen girls (ages 13-18) from the metropolitan Los Angeles region. In a city where the dropout rate hovers around 50 percent, WriteGirl has maintained a 12-year record of guiding 100 percent of girls in their Core Mentoring Program to not only graduate from high school but also enroll in college. WriteGirl publications have collectively won over 60 national and international book awards. WriteGirl was honored as the 2010-2011 California Nonprofit of the Year. For more information, visit www.writegirl.org.

About the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards

The National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award is the nation’s highest honor for after-school arts and humanities programs. The awards recognize and support outstanding programs that lay new pathways to creativity, expression, and achievement outside of the regular school

day. These programs excite and engage a range of students, cultivating imagination, collaboration, discipline and academic success, with demonstrable results. They also provide safe harbors after-school, weekends and evenings for children and youth in some of our country's most at-risk urban and rural settings.

About the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities

Created in 1982 by Executive Order, the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH) is an advisory committee to the White House on cultural issues. The PCAH works directly with the Administration and the three primary cultural agencies—National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)—as well as other federal partners and the private sector, to address policy questions in the arts and humanities, to initiate and support key programs in those disciplines, and to recognize excellence in the field. Its core areas of focus are arts and humanities education, cultural exchange, and community revitalization. Mrs. Michelle Obama, like other first ladies before her, serves as honorary chairman of the committee, which is composed of both private and public members. For more information, visit: www.pcah.gov.



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