Drug Story Theater Expands Innovative Addiction Prevention Program For Students To More Than 60 Cities And Towns Across Massachusetts

$250,000 investment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA will fund expansion of nonprofit peer education program to reduce rate of addiction among children and teens

BOSTON, April 12, 2018 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Thousands of middle and high school students across the Commonwealth will get to experience an innovative peer-to-peer education program led by local teens in recovery, thanks to a new partnership between Drug Story Theater (DST), a nonprofit organization dedicated to treatment and prevention of adolescent addiction, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts ("Blue Cross"). In a recent Blue Cross opinion survey, Massachusetts residents rated the opioid crisis as the number one issue facing the state, with a majority of respondents reporting that they know someone who is addicted.

Founded in Brockton and Plymouth in 2014, DST is a unique peer education program that teaches improvisational theater to teens in recovery. The teens develop theatrical pieces about their journeys through addiction and recovery and perform them for students, to educate them on how addiction starts and why adolescents are especially vulnerable. Cast members have performed for more than 30,000 students, primarily on the South Shore.

As DST's largest private investor to date, Blue Cross will provide funding and in-kind donations totaling $250,000 to increase the number of school districts reached each year from 17 to 60. The expansion will help bring performances to more than 16,000 students each year.

"Our performances explore the science of the adolescent brain and why it's at greatest risk for lifelong addiction," said Dr. Joseph Shrand, founder of Drug Story Theater. "We ask the students in the audience to take pre- and post-show brain-science quizzes, and the results have shown a significant shift in perception about the addictive powers of drugs and alcohol, with a reduction of substance use 30 days after seeing a performance. We know it works, but until now, we didn't have the resources to bring the program to all the school districts that are inquiring about it."

"The recent poll we conducted found that 1 in 4 people in Massachusetts know someone who died of an opioid overdose," said Andrew Dreyfus, president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. "That's a powerful reminder that we still have a great deal of work to do to counter the rise in opioid use and related deaths. Nearly 90 percent of survey respondents supported adding education about opioid and prescription painkiller addiction to school curriculums. We believe the DST peer education model is an effective way to educate young people and stem the tide of addiction and we're thrilled to help bring the program to thousands more students across the Commonwealth."

Dr. Shrand's research finds that teen addiction education programs are significantly more effective when delivered by peers rather than adults.

"This crisis cuts across every part of our state, every socioeconomic and education level," added Dr. Shrand. "We need to engage students at that crucial middle school age, to explain the brain chemistry behind addiction and hopefully give them the tools they need to make good choices. We also are challenging stigma, teaching the audience that addiction is not about morality but about mortality."

For information on upcoming Drug Story Theater performances, visit https://drugstorytheater.org/.

About Drug Story Theater

Drug Story Theater (DST) takes teens in the early stages of recovery from drugs and alcohol, teaches them improvisational

theater, and helps them craft their own unique stories into a play about their seduction of, addiction to and recovery from drugs and alcohol. They then perform their play to middle, high school and college audiences so "the treatment of one becomes the prevention of many." Incorporating brain science with slides in between scenes, DST teaches how young people get addicted and how the adolescent brain is neurologically wired for addiction. Drug Story Theater, Inc. is a registered 501c3 nonprofit. Like us on Facebook at Drug Story Theater or visit us at www.drugstorytheater.org.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We're the trusted health plan for more than 25,000Massachusetts employers and are committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our 2.8 million members first, we're rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

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