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Looking Back on Looking In

New Book Celebrates 40th Anniversary of Looking In Theatre

(HARTFORD, CT: December 7, 2018) In the past four decades, Looking In Theatre (LIT) has performed for over half a million people on themes ranging from self-harm and suicide to eating disorders and drug abuse. In 2017, the State Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities presented the student theater group with its Katharine Hepburn Award for using the arts as a platform for social justice.

Now a new book on the history and impact of LIT, *Looking In*, has been published and will be launched in the Hartford History Center (HHC) at Hartford Public Library (HPL), 500 Main Street, Hartford, CT on Thursday, December 27, from 5:30 – 7:30 pm (snow date: Saturday, December 29, 2-4 pm).

HPL's CEO Bridget Quinn-Carey said, "the Hartford Public Library is not only a place to share free resources with our community but to also share stories that inspire our community through many forms, including arts and culture. The Hartford History Center in particular makes the stories of our local history come to life. The *Looking In* book launch not only features a local author and director but a four-decades-old community of student theater makers that made and continue to make a significant impact on the Greater Hartford community."

Looking In was written by Jonathan Gillman, who has directed LIT for over 30 year and has witnessed the positive effect the group has had on countless lives. He said the book is "a reflection that bears witness to the students and the difficulties they've gone through, as well as their hard work, courage, honesty, vulnerability and how actors can tap into their power to look fearlessly at their own lives, to change them, and to share with others, inspiring students in every audience to make better decisions and to change their own lives."

LIT is a program of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and the Capital Region Education Council (CREC). Students are accepted into the program following region-wide auditions and then must undergo over 100 hours of training, not only in acting, but also in the subject matter of the plays they will be performing. That subject matter is always topical, hard-hitting and told from a teen's perspective. Shows are followed by a question and answer session between audience members and the student actors, who respond not as themselves but as the characters they played in the performance.

LIT primarily performs for other students. Performances for pre-teens focus on topics such as bullying, respect for diversity and acceptance of others. The group delves in more mature subjects for older

students, such as unhealthy romantic relationships, stereotyping, bigotry and self-image. LIT also presents shows for churches, youth counselors and other groups.

Hard work, acting skill and professional guidance have certainly played their part in LIT's success, but many feel that honesty is the key ingredient in the group's powerful effect on audiences, such as reporter Ed Wierzbicki. In a 2017 profile of LIT in *American Theater* magazine, Wierzbicki wrote, "The young actors are focused, gutsy, and authentic. There's no pretense or frills to the storytelling, and the action feels raw. It's simple storytelling, no b.s."

The December 27 book launch of *Looking In* at Hartford Public Library is free and open to the public. Copies of the book will be available for sale. Light refreshments will be served.

ABOUT HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY

Now celebrating its 125th year, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st Century. With seven locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. Please visit www.hpplct.org.

About the Hartford History Center

The Hartford History Center at Hartford Public Library is the museum and archive for the library. It holds a growing multi-media compilation of more than 500,000 books, maps, photographs, works of art, digital assets and municipal records that uniquely convey the 300-plus years of community life in Connecticut's capital city. Officially named in 1945, the archives and special collections of Hartford Public Library date back to the 17th century.

ABOUT CREC

The **Capitol Region Education Council** was established in 1966. Working with and for its member districts, CREC has developed a wide array of cost-effective and high-quality programs and services to meet the educational needs of children and adults in the region. CREC brings nearly five decades of experience in education, regional collaboration, and operations to provide innovative strategies and products that address the changing needs of school districts and their students, corporations, non-profits, and individual professions. CREC regularly serves 36 towns in Greater Hartford, offering more than 120 programs to more than 150,000 students annually. CREC manages more than 35 facilities throughout the area, including 17 interdistrict magnet schools. More information about CREC and CREC's award-winning schools is available at www.crec.org.