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Contact: Abby Stigler  
Communications Director  
214-526-4076 x 302  
abby@juniorplayers.org

### **Junior Players Receives Texas Bar Foundation Grant**

Funds will ensure continuation of inaugural youth focused Shakespeare in Prison program in Texas

DALLAS, TX, May 12, 2025 – Junior Players is proud to announce it has received a \$20,000 grant from the Texas Bar Foundation to continue its groundbreaking Shakespeare in the Prison program, *Shakespeare with Henry*. This program began in 2023 as a partnership between Junior Players and The Henry Wade Juvenile Justice Center and was the first of its kind in Texas.

Through this program, incarcerated youth work alongside professional Junior Players teaching artists to learn, and eventually perform, excerpts from one of Shakespeare's prolific works. *Shakespeare with Henry* draws inspiration from the dozens of pilot programs that have taken place all over the world in the last decade and have illustrated the long-lasting effects of exposure to Shakespeare in incarcerated youth. These effects include self-efficacy, improved empathy, and a stronger sense of community and participation in Shakespeare in Prison programs has shown reduced recidivism rates, sometimes by more than half.

Throughout this program, Junior Players intends to develop a passion for learning within our participants, especially those who are at high risk of not completing or continuing their education, as well as develop literacy skills (reading, writing, and oral communication), including those participants who are classified as learning disabled and/or developmentally challenged. Junior Players will also support Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and grow transferrable life skills like responsible decision making, social awareness, relationship skills, self-awareness, and self-management.

In order to prepare for each iteration of this program, Junior Players hires and trains highly qualified local teaching artists, who all undergo extensive background checks and training protocols. Through these trainings, Junior Players emphasizes the importance of SEL and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles. We acknowledge that BIPOC members of our community are unfairly targeted and as a result of a biased system, more likely to end up in detention facilities. Partnering with facilities like Henry Wade for programs like this one provides resources to our promise-filled youth. Through this program, Junior Players teaching artists will be able to relate the universal human themes contained in Shakespeare's works to our participants, including their past experiences and choices, their present situation, and their future possibility.

This project would not be possible without help from the Texas Bar Foundation. Since its inception in 1965, the Texas Bar Foundation has awarded more than \$29 million in grants to law-related programs. Supported by members of the State Bar of Texas, the Texas Bar Foundation is the nation's largest charitably-funded bar foundation. The Texas Bar Foundation is the largest charitably funded bar foundation in the nation.

Since 1955, Junior Players has been empowering young voices by providing high-quality arts programming to North Texas children and youth at no cost to our participants. Over its existence, Junior Players has striven to meet the changing needs of the community. From 1955 to 1989, Junior Players presented traditional children's theater productions performed entirely by children and teenagers. In 1989, the Board of Directors changed the focus of Junior Players activities, deciding that, Junior Players can best serve the youth of Dallas by providing free programming accessible to all the children of North Texas. Junior Players, therefore, exclusively provides free arts education programs in local recreation and cultural centers, housing projects, elementary and middle schools, and through social service agencies serving youth at risk.

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