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BRIDGING THE GAP: A WRITING WORKSHOP *WOMEN'S WORDS FROM PRISON;* SPECIAL FILM EVENT AT FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL'S CINEMA PARADISO

(Fort Lauderdale, FL), July 16, 2007 – The Broward County premiere of the fascinating and heartfelt documentary film *Bridging the Gap: A Writing Workshop* will take place on July 24, 2007, at 7pm at Cinema Paradiso.

Bridging the Gap: A Writing Workshop takes viewers into the *Inside Out* program offered by ArtSpring, Inc. at Broward Correctional Institution and into the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP), an award-winning intervention program for young girls detained in county juvenile detention centers.

Bridging the Gap highlights the extraordinary literary talents of women who have been removed from society and, for the most part, long forgotten. Through the words of female inmates, incarcerated in a South Florida maximum-security institution, audiences attending the premiere of *Bridging the Gap* will come away with a new understanding of the lost hopes and dreams of these women, and how, as is so often the case with females in prison, violence against them and substance abuse led to their incarceration.

After the film, several community activists and volunteers will give voice to essays written by the inmates themselves. Following the reading will be a discussion with special guests Leslie Neal, founder and artistic director of ArtSpring, Inc., the organization responsible for creating the *Inside Out* program; Vicki Lopez Lukis, the independent project coordinator for *Bridging the Gap*, the statewide expansion director for the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP), Inc. and a community volunteer working with women in prison and ex-offenders; community activist and radio host Queen Brown; federal ex-offender and BGAP community volunteer Brenda Valencia Aldana; state ex-offender and *Inside Out* alumna Marcia Frazier; and La Vonne Canfield, adjunct professor, New World School of Arts, among others.

ADMISSION: FREE for students 18 or under. \$8 general admission; \$7 seniors; \$5 FLIFF members.

LOCATION: Cinema Paradiso, 503 SE 6 St. downtown Fort Lauderdale, on the south bank of the New River just East of Broward County Courthouse.

PARKING: Free after 6pm at meters and the Courthouse Parking Garage.

For more information about the *Bridging the Gap* program, please see below. For more information regarding the event, please visit www.FLIFF.com or call 954-525-3456, ext 101.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Bridging the Gap represents a unique partnership among the Florida Departments of Corrections and Juvenile Justice; ArtSpring, Inc., an arts organization whose mission is to support self-growth and effective life skills through art-making for underserved and institutionalized women and girls; community volunteer Vicki Lopez Lukis; and the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP), an award-winning intervention program for girls detained in juvenile detention centers.

The objective of this project is to publish an anthology of the writings of the women inmates that can be shared with the GAP girls. ArtSpring engaged its advanced *Inside Out* program participants, who had been in the program at least five years at both Homestead Correctional Institution, located in Florida City, and Broward Correctional Institution, located in Pembroke Pines, in a specially designed creative writing program that addressed, through personal narrative essays, answers to questions that were posed by the GAP girls, including the realities of being incarcerated.

Bridging the Gap is intended to educate female juvenile offenders on the issues related to the criminal mistakes made by female adult inmates who are serving long, and in most cases, life sentences for their crimes. During the 12-week workshop, the women wrote about their regrets and losses, such as the sacrifice of families and freedom, since their incarceration. The tragic consequences of these real-world experiences are expected to help at-risk youths reject unhealthy relationships, substance abuse and the temptation to become involved in future criminal activity.

The resulting anthology will be distributed free of charge to girls in the Miami-Dade, Southwest Florida, Orange and Palm Beach Regional Juvenile Detention Centers, and will be used to develop an intervention/prevention curriculum for girls at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

The documentary was commissioned by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community programs that effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. This effort was coordinated by Joy Moore, produced by Dean Lynes and filmed by Henry Felt.

A related event, underscoring the link between incarceration and violence against women, takes place this fall when ArtSpring and the Women's Fund of Miami-Dade County will co-present ***Any One of Us: Words from Prison***, a production originally conceived by Eve Ensler and staged and directed in Miami by Leslie Neal, on October 18, 2007, at the Gusman Center for the Performing Arts, 174 East Flagler Street, Miami. Information and ticket orders for *Any One of Us*, to benefit ArtSpring and Women's Fund, will be provided at the Cinema Paradiso event.

Leslie Neal

Founder and Artistic Director of ArtSpring

Leslie Neal has been an active member of the Miami dance community since 1981. She received a B.S.Ed. in dance from the University of Georgia and a M.F.A. in dance from Florida State University. Ms. Neal's choreography has been commissioned throughout Florida and the Southeast, and was presented at a special tribute to creative southern women at the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia in 1996. Her dance company performed at the 1996 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Conference in Charleston, South Carolina.

Ms. Neal is the founder and artistic director of ArtSpring, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)(3) arts-based public charity in Miami-Dade County, Florida, that uses art-making and creative expression as tools for promoting self-growth and effective life skills for underserved and institutionalized women and girls. In 1994, Ms. Neal initiated a multidisciplinary creative arts program at Broward Correctional Institution and since that time she has implemented other arts programs at five other correctional facilities for women and female juveniles in Florida. She also has taught at facilities for women in California and Michigan. In 1997, Ms. Neal was chosen to serve as an artist-in-residence for the National Endowment of the Arts at the Federal Correctional Institution for Women in Tallahassee, Florida.

Ms. Neal is an associate professor of dance at Florida International University, where she was a 1994 recipient of the Teaching Incentive Program, recognizing excellence in university teaching. Ms. Neal is recognized for her work as a community-based artist. She has additionally conducted research in the field of community arts and the value of the arts as tools for intervention and a positive force for social change.

Ms. Neal has been a featured speaker at several national conferences, as well as local and state panel discussions and seminars, speaking about women's issues.

Ms. Neal is published in *The Citizen Artist* by Linda Burnham and Steve Durland, *Twelve Secrets of Highly Creative Women – A Portable Memoir* by Gail McKeegin, *The Performer's Guide to the Creative Process* by Sheila Kerrigan, and *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars*, by Rachel Williams.

Vicki Lopez Lukis

Bridging the Gap Independent Project Coordinator

In 1990, Mrs. Lopez Lukis was elected to the Lee County, Florida, Board of County Commissioners. Unfortunately, her tenure as a commissioner led to a highly publicized criminal case regarding her personal relationship with her future husband, then her boyfriend, a prominent Washington D.C. lobbyist with issues before the county commission. She went to trial and was convicted of one count of mail fraud for depriving her constituents of her "honest" services by lying to a newspaper reporter about that relationship. She was sentenced to 27 months in a federal prison and self-surrendered on August 9, 1999, to FCC Coleman, a minimum-security facility in Coleman, Florida.

On November 21, 2000, President Clinton commuted her sentence. Upon release from prison, she became a full-time volunteer for women in prison and girls in detention. On December 9, 2004, Governor Jeb Bush and his Cabinet restored her civil rights in Florida.

In April 2005, Governor Bush appointed her to the Governor's Ex-Offender Task Force. The Task Force's responsibilities included identifying barriers to successful reentry and providing recommendations that would eliminate these barriers. Ms. Lopez Lukis initially served as its vice chairman until August 2006, when Governor Bush appointed her to the position of chairman.

Ms. Lopez Lukis currently serves as the Girls Advocacy Project's (GAP) statewide expansion director, in which she replicated the original Miami program in Fort Myers, Orlando and West Palm Beach. As a federal ex-offender, she remains dedicated to preventing girls from entering the adult system. She has emerged as a strong advocate for all women and girls in the justice system throughout the nation.

She graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1978 with a BBA in accounting. She is married to Sylvester Lukis, a lawyer, and has three children, Donald F. Wolfe III, Alexander and Adrian Lukis.