

Actors get special education for roles

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They may be a bit eccentric, perhaps even a little quirky, but they are "The Boys Next Door," four mentally challenged individuals who reside together in a group home in Providence. Each one has his own characteristics, but together they have a story to tell. They will be telling that story on the stage at Coventry High School this weekend.

The four boys are actually student actors with the Coventry High School drama production and this Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening, they are delivering their rendition of the hit play by Tom Griffin, "The Boys Next Door."

In the play, the boys depict four mentally challenged young men who have been shuffled from one group home to another for most of their lives until now. They have been placed together in a home where they are beginning to share their lives together.

The director of the production and the school's drama instructor, Myke Wilkinson, said the play is a comedy, but has many heart breaking moments. He said the boys, one of whom has severe mental retardation, another whom is a schizophrenic, another whom suffers from anxiety disorders and an obsessive compulsive disorder, and finally another whom is mildly retarded, depict what life is like for these four individuals.

He said together they go through some very real life encounters like when the state attempts to take away one of the young men's pensions because they say he is fine and able to provide for himself and also when their main group home leader presents the fact that he is completely burned out with them, his clients and his job.

“There are some real tough issues that come out in this play and that was our goal, but we are also trying to make them laugh,” Wilkinson said. “It is also very important to me that people realize that we laugh with these people, not at them. There are some real emotions that are expressed in this play, it is one of my favorites, but I know it can be touchy so I do not want it to be construed the wrong way.”

The four main characters in the play are played by Perrin Hawver, Brandon Matola, a junior, Cody Dyer, a sophomore, and Aaron Beaudoin, also a sophomore. Each of the boys have had roles in other plays put on at CHS, but said that these were one of their hardest to depict.

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Coventry production to open tonight

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They said they put in countless hours of observation in the special education classes at the school as well as watching many movies which also had well known actors playing the roles of characters with mental challenges.

Perrin said that he watched "I am Sam," and "What's Eating Gilbert Grape" repeatedly and planned on modeling his character after some of the behaviors that he learned both from students in the school and from characters in the films, but still feared that depiction of such characters may be misconstrued.

"We are not mocking these characters in any way and I know that we were all a little worried about coming across that way, but we are just trying to give our very best rendition of the characters that we

can," Dyer said.

The role of the social worker is played by Ethan Hackett, a senior at the school. There are also two newcomers to the CHS stage for this production, a parent of one of the theater department's students, Brian Lamothe, and an English teacher at the school, Kyle Pandola.

Wilkinson said these roles really called for adults and so he said that he reached out to these individuals to fill them. He also said having these adults involved in this play has been a wonderful resource for the students.

Dyer, who plays the role of Lamothe's son in the play, said having a "real life dad" play the role of his dad in the production made it that much easier to deliver that feeling.

"It was great having him [Lamothe] to work with as a mentor, but it also made it so much eas-

ier for me in my character as his son to actually be scared by him," Dyer said. "He was just so inspirational; it made us all push harder to act at his level."

Lamothe said he only took up acting as a hobby in 1994, before that, he said, he had no prior experience in the art.

"For 18 years I worked in the same job and then in 1994 I got laid off so I asked myself, 'what do you do with yourself when you've got no job?' and I simply answered 'what ever you want,'" Lamothe said. "So I took up theatre, it really was my opportunity to live out a fantasy. It is my opinion that there is no greater high in life than taking someone else's applause for your performance.

"I always said that there is no greater feeling than to know that people can come into your theatre feeling like they just had such a

lousy day and for that two hours, you made them laugh, smile or cry, what ever it was, you turned their day around," he said. "And that is the ultimate feeling."

There were a handful of other adults and others who also helped behind the scenes to get this production ready, Wilkinson said. Gene Dufault and his woodworking students at CHS made some of the set which will be seen at the show. Close to 10 other students helped with make-up, costume, lighting and set design for this production.

Opening night for the show is Thursday, but there will also be performances on Friday and Saturday evening as well. All show times are at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$7 for students and seniors and \$10 for adults and will be sold at the door. All of the performances will take place in the Coventry High School auditorium.