

## Candid, timely 'Outside' offers a message of hope for teens

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By Sharon Salyer

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"Outside," a play scheduled for two showings in Edmonds next week, was written for anyone who feels like an outsider.

"We found this play has helped people consider, 'How do (we) treat people who are different?' " said Andrew Lamb, artistic director of Toronto's Roseneath Theatre, which produces theater for children and their families. "Outside" is one of its original productions.

Differences can take a variety of forms, including a person's body shape, their ethnicity or their sexual orientation. The play is aimed at teens, but is open to the general public.

"The piece for me comes out with a message of kindness and being good and supportive to each other, noticing if someone is feeling a bit down," Lamb said.

The three-member cast deals candidly with issues adolescents often think about or face — such sexual orientation, homophobia, depression, bullying and suicide.

Although the topics are serious, don't make assumptions about the tone of the 60-minute play, written by Paul Dunn and directed by Lamb.

"There are a lot of jokes in the play, ones that the kids really respond to," Lamb said. "The audiences will be surprised at how much they find themselves laughing."

Each performance ends with a question-and-answer session to allow students to talk about the play's issues, to provide information on how they can get help, and to encourage them to talk to adults, Lamb said.

It tells the story of Daniel, a teen who, after experiencing homophobic bullying and text message taunts, suffers from depression and ultimately attempts suicide.

"When I watch the show, you can hear a pin drop at times, and they're not looking at their cell phones. They want to know what will happen with the teen character," Lamb said.

Teens respond to the play because they're not being talked down to and "it's a real story that they get," Lamb said.

The play first premiered in the spring of 2015, in a time of increasing attention on youth suicide, especially among gay teens. It also was when the [It Gets Better](#) campaign kicked off with its message of hope to young gays.

Since the play's inception, there have been questions about how the topics of teen suicide and depression are treated. "We were very clear that this is a character who does attempt suicide, but shows great remorse about it, and (it's) something he wished he had never tried to do," Lamb said.

Social media has changed the nature of bullying. Fake accounts can be established to send threatening or hurtful messages. "So much of the bullying is invisible," Lamb said, something past generations never had to deal with.

Local organizers decided to bring the play to Edmonds after Gillian Jones, director of programming for the Edmonds Center for the Arts, saw it performed at the [International Performing Arts for Youth](#) conference in Philadelphia last year.

The touring production also will make stops in Wenatchee, New York and Massachusetts.

Lamb said he hopes the play encourages kids to be kinder and more understanding of each other.

"You can be a great support to your peers," he said. "Sometimes teens forget that and need a reminder."

Scriber Lake High School teacher Marjie Bowker said students in her freshman English class plan to see the play.

She said she hopes one of its lessons is to show both students and adults that they should not hesitate to ask a teen if they're depressed or if they are thinking about suicide.

It's a question she's sometimes asked of her students. "There's never been a time when a kid has said, 'That's none of your business' or 'How could you ask that?'" Bowker said. "It's really an honest, caring question to ask."

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### **If you go**

"Outside," a play dealing with teen issues such as bullying, harassment, attempted suicide and the importance of caring friends, will be staged at 10 a.m. and again at noon Feb. 20 at the Edmonds Center for the Arts, 410 Fourth Ave. N, Edmonds. The performance is open to students and the general public. It is recommended for grades 7-12.

Tickets are \$8 and available at 425- 275-9595 or online at [tinyurl.com/Outsidetkx](http://tinyurl.com/Outsidetkx).

A five-minute scene sampler of the play is available at: [tinyurl.com/Outsidescenes](http://tinyurl.com/Outsidescenes)



Mina James and Youness Aladdin from the 2015 production of "Outside." The play will be produced Feb. 20 at the Edmonds Center for the Arts. (John Packman)



Kyle Shields, Mina James and Youness Aladdin in the 2015 production of "Outside," which deals with issues such as depression and the important role friends can provide for support. (Photo by John Packman)

