

Native teens star in play about AIDS

by Isabel Cordova

National Indian AIDS Media Consortium

MINNEAPOLIS — Talking about AIDS and risk prevention with youth can be very difficult.

In spite of all the obstacles in this area, a group of Native teen-agers have decided to take on the challenge. As a way to reach out to Indian youth, the Minnesota American Indians AIDS Task Force has begun touring an adaptation of the play, "Star in the Sky," originally commissioned by White Earth Reservation AIDS Education.

"Stars in the Sky" describes what happens to students in school when a rumor spreads that one of them has AIDS.

The actors and actresses have been preparing all summer on the play. Their training is three-fold. As part of their dramatic training, the teens participated in an intense week of workshops with Spiderwoman Theater personnel, rigorous rehearsals with the play's director, Maggie Kazel, and visited other Twin City theaters and productions.

The second part of their preparation was peer education training and support through discussion and through talking circles. Intensive AIDS education included conversations with Carole Lafavor, Ojibwa woman liv-

AIDS

ing with AIDS, and finally, they received spiritual support from spiritual advisor, Jim Clairmont.

The play has been a strenuous and educational experience for the cast in a variety of ways. Most of the actors said that their confidence has increased significantly, that they have learned to appreciate individual differences,

work out conflicts and how to build trust among the cast members.

A 16-year-old member of the cast said she was learning more about her culture and that "knowing about your heritage is important because it gives you a sense of pride."

Talking circles and the use of sage are both traditions they have learned more about and practiced more since beginning work on the play.

A great deal of effort has been put into breaking harmful stereotypes, ignorance and discrimination.

"It was my first experience with

gays or lesbians," said a cast member.

The teens said they expected that a person with AIDS would look different or sick, but realized this to be false after meeting with Lafavor. She helped them all realize that AIDS is "real."

The cast is preparing for their scheduled appearance at the National Indian Education Association Conference in San Diego this month.

Those who want more information on the play may call the Minnesota American Indian AIDS Task Force, (612) 870-1723.