

Political corruption, dodgy business, a family and a dog called Checkers

Stage One Creative is in the final rehearsals for its world premiere production of *Checkers*. *Checkers* has been adapted from John Marsden's novel of the same name. This acclaimed author of novels for young adults has written the story of a young girl coming to terms with who she is and the world around her. She retells the events of her life with the help of friends she has made in an Adolescent Psychiatric Unit.

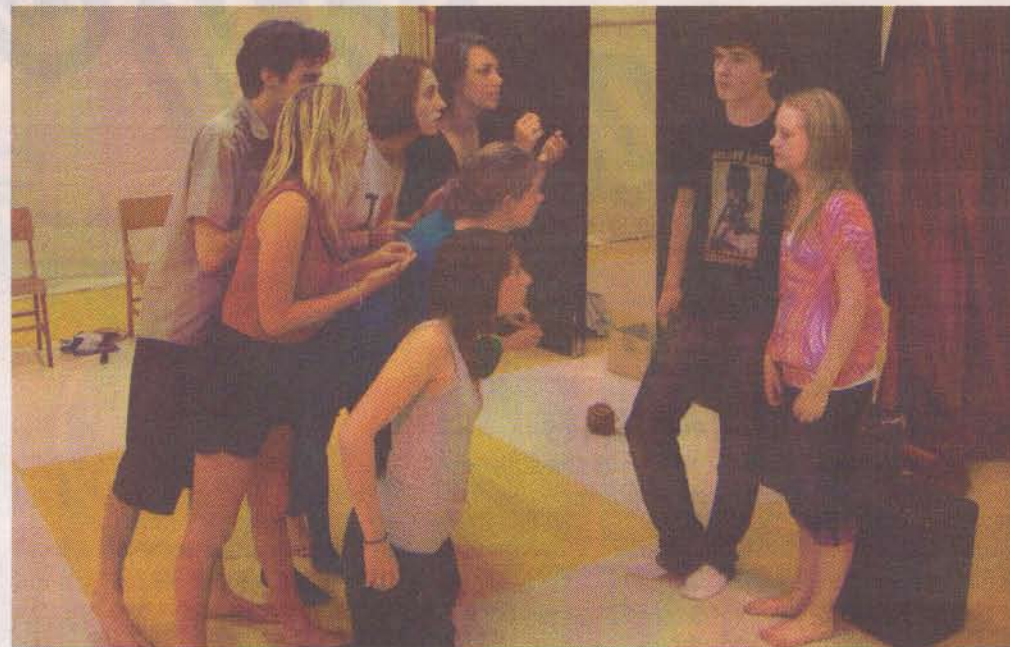
Marsden's novels deeply touch young people with their honest portrayals of the joys and dilemmas of growing up in a complex world.

Local playwright, Martin Mantle, has adapted the novel and will be directing, with the assistance of Phoenix Valore. Working with the students of Stage One, Martin created the script through a series of workshops.

Martin says, "Working with the students has ensured a play that really speaks to their peers. The play does deal with some serious issues but there are also great moments of laughter, which should make this an entertaining and engaging experience for all ages."

The play will also be touring to high schools in Armidale and Guyra. During these performances students will have the opportunity to discuss issues of mental health with experienced speakers from Beyond Empathy.

The ABS reports in 2005



Checkers performers

that 7 per cent of 0-17 year olds reported mental or behavioural problems.

The 1997 Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing showed that 27 per cent of young adults aged 18-24 years had some kind of mental disorder. Given that only 50 per cent of adults receive mental health treatment, the statistics indicate that young people face a big hurdle to have their issues dealt with effectively.

Young people and their families often have to deal with myths and stereotypes about mental illness. Fear of moral judgement and social exclusion make talking about a mental illness difficult.

Phoenix Valore says, "Beyond Empathy uses the arts to engage marginalised young people who live in situations of recurrent hardship."

"The arts are used as an enabler of change through Arts Intervention Programs (AIPs). Through involvement in the arts, young people develop skills they can use to navigate out of disadvantage and re-engage with the community."

Public performances will be held at The Old Teachers' College auditorium in December from Thursday 11 to Saturday 13. All Tickets are \$10 and will be available at the door.



Checkers performers