

# Theater project dwells on firsts for performers

By **ELIZABETH ROMAN**  
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SPRINGFIELD- Shareef T. Ibrahim, 17, will be the first in his family to graduate from high school. He will also be the first in his family to attend college.

“There are a lot of firsts for me. Being a part of this project has given me a chance to express that,” he said.

Ibrahim is among nine young people participating in the First Generation Ensemble created by the Performance Project, a group based in Northampton and Springfield that focuses on creating theater about oppression and liberation.

Julie Lichtenberg, artistic and managing director, said the First Generation project had three main goals.

“We wanted to provide opportunities for artistic training and growth, we wanted to give young people the opportunity to have a public voice and we wanted to help them build

## IF YOU GO

**Event:** “through the eye of bakok”

**Where:** Rebecca M. Johnson School, 55 Catherine St., Springfield

**When:** Aug. 7-8, 7 p.m.; Aug. 9, 2 p.m.

**Tickets:** \$10

**For info:** Call (413) 586-4960; online [www.performanceproject.org](http://www.performanceproject.org)

leadership skills,” she said.

The First Generation Ensemble is made up of performers between the ages of 17 and 27 from Springfield, Hadley and Northampton.

The idea behind the project is to gather people who are the first in their family to attend college, speak English as their first language, graduate high school

or any number of firsts.

The group, which is co-directed by Lichtenberg, Nancy Tolson, I-SHEA and Elsa Menendez will perform “through the eye of bakok” an original play that combines theater, storytelling, movement and poetry.

“We worked with many visiting artists to help create the piece, but the voices are those of the performers,” Lichtenberg said.

The play focuses on nine characters, each on their own journey, who are stuck in an airport together, she said.

Ibrahim said working with the group for the last nine months has changed his perspective on many things.

“I am doing things now that five or six months ago I never would have seen myself doing,” he said. “I am looking at college in a different way and seeing what more doors will open up for me.”