

### 3 QUESTIONS

**GENERATION FIRST:** Since November, nine young people, ages 15 to 25, from Northampton, Hadley and Springfield have spent hours and hours together, talking, writing, training and rehearsing for performances that draw on their experiences and beliefs. What makes this group's stories worth putting on stage?

Called the First Generation Ensemble, each of its members represent a first for their respective families as individuals who may be the first to grow up in the United States, to speak English as a first language, or to graduate from high school, for example.

The group's inaugural performances, on Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m.

and Sunday at 2 p.m., at the Rebecca M. Johnson Performing Arts Magnet School, 55 Catherine St., Springfield, will feature their original play "through the eyes of bakok," which combines theater, storytelling, movement and poetry.

Set in an airport where the nine characters are temporarily stuck, the work centers on the story of one of the group's members, Abraham Lual, a Sudanese refugee who, as one of the so-called Lost Boys of Sudan, fled his country during the Second Sudanese Civil War. "Bakok" is a word used by the Dinka tribes of southern Sudan to describe someone who must leave home and travel to another place. Along the way, the play interweaves the life journeys of its other members. Ensemble member Emily Laufer, 18, of Florence, said she is the first in her family not to know who her biological parents are and, thus, her racial identity, although she considers herself an African American. The daughter of Jody Wright and Prakash Laufer, she has four sisters, three of which are adopted like herself. She graduated this year from Northampton High School and will attend Holyoke Community College in the fall.

Earlier this week, she talked with Briefing about the Performance Project, First



**Emily Laufer of Florence is one of nine members of the First Generation Ensemble performing this weekend in its inaugural presentation of "through the eyes of bakok."**

Generation and its coming performance.

— **PHOEBE MITCHELL**

**Q: What does it mean to you to be part of the First Generation Ensemble?**

A: It opened my eyes about the need to be more aware of people and my own surrounding because of the impact I make as an individual.

The group has also given me opportunities (a job working with participants of a summer program at the Rebecca Johnson School). I think I might want to be a teacher. It's given me the opportunity to work with children, teachers and art.

**Q: As a "first generation" family representative what did you find you had in common with the other group members?**

A: At first, I didn't find anything in common with the other members—our hearts were somewhere else. But eventually I found that everybody had a really good heart. We genuinely care about each other. ...We all had an interest in the arts and we were all kids of color.

**Q: What do you hope the audience takes away from your performance?**

A: I know we're going to come out with something people have never seen before. ...It's so important for people to hear an immigrant's story, especially in the communities we're living in. It's not easy to get to America and once you're here it's not easy to cope. We're showing a different side of American, which a lot of people really don't expect.