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Students Need a Mental Health Toolkit NJAMHAA and AIR to Present Life-Saving Resources on National Suicide Prevention Day, September 10, 2013

MERCERVILLE (August 12, 2013) – With the school year about to start, there is much focus on supplies, schedules and other details. It could also be a time of stress and anxiety, especially for students who are entering new schools, either because they are starting college or because they are new to a district. The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) and Attitudes in Reverse® (AIR) urge parents and education professionals to keep students’ mental health as a priority focus. To help with this, NJAMHAA and AIR will present educational and treatment resources – which can literally save lives – at *Back to School: Take a Breath – and Pack a Good Mental Health Tool Kit*. September 10, 2013, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the Department of Human Services’ first floor conference room, 222 South Warren St., Trenton.

“There is no cost to attend this event. However, the importance of it is priceless because students’ lives are priceless,” said Tricia and Kurt Baker, Co-Founders of AIR. The Bakers and their daughter, Katelyn, established AIR in 2010, soon after their son/brother Kenny completed suicide following a long battle against severe depression and anxiety and the family faced discrimination over the cause of Kenny’s death. “Our mission is to prevent the tragedy of suicide and to eliminate stigma, which prevents many from seeking treatment and other support that is proven to reduce the risk of suicide,” the Bakers added.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among high school students. Nearly one in six high school students (15.8 percent nationwide) has seriously considered suicide, and one in 12 (7.8 percent) has attempted suicide one or more times during the 12 months before the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s most recent survey on youth risk behavior, which was published in June 2012. Among college students, suicide is the third leading cause of death.

Approximately half of mental health disorders develop by the age of 14 and two-thirds of cases develop by the age of 25. However, only about 40 percent receive treatment. Without treatment, the risk of substance abuse and suicide increases.

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“Clearly, students must be educated about signs of mental health disorders and suicide risk, how to get help and to not feel shame about needing help. There must be no barriers to receiving the services they need,” said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer of NJAMHAA, a statewide trade association representing 180 providers of mental healthcare, addiction treatment and various support services, such as supported education and skill-development programs.

“I am delighted that NJAMHAA gained the opportunity to partner with AIR. It’s a natural match. While AIR provides the essential education to students, NJAMHAA members provide the critical services that are proven to be effective. We look forward to demonstrating the importance of our services during our upcoming event and especially to many more students receiving life-saving services as a result,” Dr. Wentz added.

“NJAMHAA and AIR share a vital mission of saving lives. Everyone must be educated about mental health disorders and the availability and effectiveness of services. Everyone’s life literally depends on it,” said Shauna Moses, Associate Executive Director of NJAMHAA and a member of the AIR Board of Directors.

During the event, the Bakers will describe their educational presentation, which they have delivered to more than 11,000 middle and high school students in New Jersey, as well as two colleges in New York. They have standing invitations at several New Jersey schools and will present at colleges in Vermont and Georgia for the first time later this year.

A therapist from Cape Counseling Services, a NJAMHAA member in Cape May County, and a youth who received services from this agency will illustrate how the services enable youth to manage behavioral health disorders and, as a result, to achieve other goals, such as succeeding in school and building friendships.

Individuals from the Department of Human Services and the Department of Children and Family’s Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Council are also invited to speak at the event.

Online registration is available at <http://www.eventbrite.com/event/7718651695>.

Based in the Greater Trenton, New Jersey area, the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) is a statewide trade association representing nonprofit behavioral health agencies. Founded in 1951, NJAMHAA represents 180 hospital-based and freestanding providers of mental health and substance use treatment services throughout New Jersey. In aggregate, NJAMHAA members help more than 500,000 children and adults with mental health and substance use issues annually and employ approximately 98,000 members of New Jersey’s workforce. NJAMHAA’s mission is to champion opportunities that advance its members’ ability to deliver accessible, quality, efficient and effective integrated behavioral healthcare services to individuals who have mental illnesses and/or addictions, and their families. NJAMHAA is committed to recovery and wellness for all individuals. For more information about NJAMHAA, please visit www.njamhaa.org.

Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR) was established by Tricia, Kurt and Katelyn Baker of Plainsboro, NJ, in 2010, soon after their son/brother Kenny completed suicide following a long battle against severe depression and anxiety. Their mission is to save lives by educating students about mental health, related disorders and suicide prevention. In the first two years, they have presented to more than 11,000 students in middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey and New York, and they have been invited to present at other schools in New Jersey, as well as Georgia and Vermont. AIR also promotes the mental health benefits of dogs and includes dogs in their advocacy and educational program. The organization also has an AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds™ program, through which displaced dogs with the ability to serve as Emotional Support Dogs, which are more than pets, are matched with individuals who have mental illnesses or developmental disabilities, thereby saving two lives with each match. For more information about AIR, please visit www.attitudesinreverse.org.