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Behavioral Health Providers and Young Clients to Illustrate the Value of Life-Saving Education and Services

NJAMHAA and AIR to Hold an Event on National Suicide Prevention Day, September 10, 2013

MERCERVILLE (August 22, 2013) – The crisis of suicide is continuing in New Jersey and across the nation, as evidenced by several tragedies that occurred in just the past few weeks, let alone previous months and years. “This devastating trend clearly indicates a critical need for education and action to save young people’s lives,” said Shauna Moses, Associate Executive Director of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) and a Board member for Attitudes in Reverse® (AIR). “Both NJAMHAA and AIR are determined to eliminate stigma and other barriers so that everyone who experiences mental health challenges can receive the help they need – help that has been proven many times to be highly effective. The first step is gaining education, which AIR provides. The next step is seeking services, which NJAMHAA members deliver,” Moses said. To build awareness and illustrate the effectiveness of these educational, clinical and other resources, NJAMHAA and AIR will present *Back to School: Take a Breath – and Pack a Good Mental Health Tool Kit*, on 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.

“Since we lost our son Kenny to suicide and faced discrimination over the cause of his death, we immediately launched our mission to educate students and school faculty and staff about the connection between suicide risk and mental health disorders,” said Tricia and Kurt Baker, Co-Founders of AIR. “We reinforce the fact that these disorders are real, biological illnesses that are treatable and should not be a reason to feel embarrassed. We also emphasize that mental health disorders must be addressed just as broken bones, heart conditions and many other health issues are addressed: as promptly as possible, without fear or shame on the part of individuals with the disorders and without stigma or discrimination from health professionals, educators or anyone else.”

These presentations are clearly having an impact, as illustrated by comments from students, such as the following: “Thank you for making me aware of the possibility that I could have a mental illness. After the AIR presentation, I got help and I got diagnosed with depression and a social anxiety disorder. So, thank you again for giving the presentation, ultimately helping me to make the decision to get help and save my life.”

More

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According to the New Jersey Department of Children and Families' (DCF's) *Updated 2012 Adolescent Suicide Report*, 234 New Jersey residents, of whom 162 were between 19 and 24 years of age, completed suicide between 2009 and 2011. In 2010, the rate of completed suicides among New Jersey's 10- to 24-year-olds was 5.3 per 100,000 and in 2011, the rate in this age group was 4.2 per 100,000. The rate of suicide attempts were 46 per 100,000 youths resulting in hospitalization and 49 per 100,000 youths resulting in emergency department treatment. DCF's report, which also outlines the state's suicide prevention efforts and resources, is available from <http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/news/reportsnewsletters/dcfreportsnewsletters/>.

New Jersey has had the lowest numbers of adolescent suicides compared to other states for more than a decade, DCF reported. However, "even one suicide is too many and these tragedies could be prevented," according to Moses. "Every person must be educated about mental health, related disorders and suicide prevention; this is what AIR provides. Every person also needs unimpeded access to the full continuum of behavioral health treatment and support services. NJAMHAA educates government leaders and the general public about the importance and effectiveness of these services, which our members provide throughout the state."

Event Highlights

- *Opening Remarks* – The Honorable Jennifer Velez, Esq., Commissioner, Department of Human Services
- *The connection among bullying, mental health disorders and suicide; Teacher mandated training, resources and best practices for prevention, intervention and postvention (the importance of crisis plans and being prepared just in case the worse happens* – Michelle Ann Rish-Scott, PhD, MSW, Chair of the Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Council and Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Monmouth University
- *Coming Up for AIR: Description of AIR's educational program and insights into its positive impact on students, as well as school faculty and staff* – AIR Co-Founders Tricia and Kurt Baker; several AIR Board members, who are also behavioral health providers and advocates; and a teacher who has had AIR present multiple times to her high school students
- *First-Hand Proof that Services Help Save and Enhance Lives* – Descriptions of services provided and personal success stories shared directly by youth who received these services

Online registration is available at <http://www.eventbrite.com/event/7718651695>. There is no fee for attending this event.

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.