



Attitudes in Reverse®
PO Box 3127
Princeton, NJ 08543
www.air.ngo

Co-Founders Tricia and Kurt Baker
609-945-3200
tricia@air.ngo
kurt@air.ngo

There's a New Dog in School
Attitudes In Reverse® Therapy Dogs Foster Discussions
about Mental Health and Help Saves Lives

April 11 is Dog Therapy Appreciation Day; April 30 is National Therapy Animal Day

PRINCETON, NJ, March 27, 2023 – During a mental health education program presented by Tricia Baker, Co-founder and Program Director, Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®), a young woman was in tears, but she refused to talk to a counselor. Within just a few minutes of interacting with a dog, she stopped crying and willingly left the auditorium with a counselor. This is one of many examples of the powerful impact of therapy dogs. “Everything we do is about kids and dogs. AIR has captured that magic in all its programs and is saving lives as a result,” Tricia said. To increase awareness of AIR and raise funds to educate many more people about mental health, AIR will host its first online dog walk, *33 Miles for AIR*, throughout April to coincide with Dog Therapy Appreciation Day (April 11) and National Therapy Animal Day (April 30).

Another reason April was chosen for this event and why the total number of miles selected for each participant is 33 is that Tricia’s son Kenny would have been 33 years old this April. Tricia, her husband Kurtis and their daughter Katelyn established AIR soon after losing Kenny to suicide in 2009 after his long battle against severe depression and anxiety. The Bakers developed mental health education programs tailored for different age groups from kindergarten through college age. Immediately after each presentation, all students are invited to pet the dogs, and up to 33% of them ask for help to address mental and emotional health challenges.

“Petting dogs releases oxytocin, the relationship hormone, as well as serotonin and dopamine, which are feel-good brain chemicals. Petting dogs also lowers the levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, for both people and dogs,” Tricia explained.

“Talking about how even animals show their emotions was a way for students to validate their own emotions. Meeting a real therapy dog and allowing to pet him was a first for many of our students,” said an elementary school teacher about AIR’s Miki & Friends: Exploring Emotions through the Eyes of Dogs program. Another teacher commented, “This was the perfect way to help our kids feel a sense of ‘normalcy’ at school.”

More

There's a New Dog in School/Page 2 of 2

AIR has educated more than 150,000 students since 2010 and launched the AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds™ School-Based Therapy Dog program in 2019. To date, Tricia, who is also a Certified Professional Dog Trainer – Knowledge Assessed, has trained school employees in seven school districts and their dogs, and certified them to be AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds Therapy Dog teams at the schools. “The teams are available every day at the schools to help students, as well as faculty and staff, when they’re having difficult times. The dogs are making a difference. They help students want to go to school because they know the dogs make them smile,” Tricia said.

When a crisis happens at one of the schools with AIR Therapy Dog teams, all of that school district’s teams go to the school to provide animal-assisted crisis support intervention.

For information on how you and your dog can become an AIR Dog team or if you are a supervisor interested in having therapy dog teams trained for your school facility, please visit www.air.ngo or contact Tricia at tricia@air.ngo.

Registration Is Open for AIR’s Virtual Dog Walk

Participants can register [here](#) for \$10, create fundraisers and track their mileage online for the virtual dog walk that will be held throughout April.

"We are very excited about this event as it is something that AIR has not done before. We are hoping it gets many more people involved and we are very grateful for our wonderful supporters, both ongoing and new. We want to celebrate our canine companions and all they offer to us and the appreciation we have for them," Tricia said.

###

Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®) was established by Tricia, Kurt and Katelyn Baker of Plainsboro, NJ, in 2010, soon after their son/brother Kenny died by 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. Since January 2010, they have presented to more than 150,000 students in elementary, middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Missouri, Texas and Arizona. AIR includes the AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds™ program, bringing dogs into schools to help students de-stress and engage in the conversation about mental health. In addition, AIR offers a lunch-and-learn program for businesses. For more information about AIR, please visit www.air.ngo or call 609-945-3200.

###