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Attitudes In Reverse® Celebrates Great Strides in its Mission to Save Lives

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY (June 24, 2014) –Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR) recently held its third annual Ice Cream Social to celebrate its accomplishments from the previous year and gear up its 100-percent volunteer team for the upcoming year.

“We’re a small team with a lot of passion and determination,” said Tricia and Kurt Baker, Co-founders of AIR. “We could not thank our Board members and other volunteers enough for all they do, and we could not have achieved these successes without their hard work and dedication.”

The Bakers, along with their daughter Katelyn, established AIR in 2010 soon after their son/brother Kenny completed suicide following a long battle against severe depression and anxiety. Examples of the impact they have had from 2013 to the present include:

- Presented the *Coming Up for AIR™* educational program about mental health, related disorders and suicide prevention to more than 4,000 students in middle and high schools, colleges and universities, bringing the total to more than 14,000 in New Jersey, New York and Vermont since they began in 2011. Presentations are delivered to groups ranging from individual classes of 10 to 20 students to auditoriums filled with 300 to 400 students. Following many of the presentations, students have spoken with teachers and guidance counselors about their struggles with mental health disorders and suicidal thoughts and they have been promptly connected to services.

In some cases, students have sought help on their own, as indicated by this comment sent to the Bakers by a local high school student: “Thank you for making me aware of the possibility that I could have a mental illness. After the AIR presentation at my high school, I began to look into mental illnesses. This past September, I got help and got a diagnosis of depression and social anxiety disorder. So, thank you again for giving the presentation that ultimately saved my life.”

- Expanded the *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 health disorders or developmental disabilities, thereby saving two lives with each match. Two additional dogs were recently matched and one is currently being trained to be a service dog for one of AIR’s volunteers.
- Launched the *In Their Shoes™* campaign, a display of 234 pairs of shoes representing the 234 youth in New Jersey, aged 10 to 24, who took their lives between 2009 and 2011. “Our goal is to build understanding and

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empathy for teens and young adults. Most mental health disorders develop in this age group. They also have a high risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, especially if they don't receive mental health treatment," according to the Bakers.

"The 'In Their Shoes' display is literally breathtaking," said Jennifer Velez, Esq., Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services. "The power of seeing all those empty shoes stops you in your tracks and sends a poignant message that serves as an invaluable tool in the efforts to prevent suicide. The Bakers are a remarkable family and deserve immense credit for their decision to turn personal tragedy into an initiative to raise awareness."

- Honored by several organizations, most notably in New Jersey, the Mental Health Association in New Jersey with a *Golden Bell Leadership Award* earlier this month and the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies (NJAMHAA) with the *Inspiring and Innovative Partners Award* in April. "The Bakers' innovation is evident in their strategic use of dogs to engage students in conversations during their educational presentations and adults during exhibits at numerous community events throughout the year, including AIR's own annual event," said Shauna Moses, Associate Executive Director of NJAMHAA and member of AIR's Board of Trustees.

On a national scale, Tricia Baker was recognized as a L'Oreal Woman of Worth for the impact she has achieved through AIR. "It's my award, but it's really everyone's award," she said.

Looking ahead, the Bakers aim to present *Coming Up for AIR* and *In Their Shoes* to more students, especially in middle schools, since 50 percent of mental health disorders develop by the age of 14; identify more dogs to become AIR Dogs; and continue to build on its successful Annual Miki & Friends 5K Walk & Run for AIR event, which is held on the third Saturday in May in Mercer County Park, East Picnic Area, West Windsor, NJ.

To learn more about AIR, gain updates on the annual event and to get involved, please visit www.attitudesinreverse.org.