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Attitudes In Reverse® and its Spokesdog Miki in the Running for Two Awards

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY (March 20, 2018) – Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR™), a Princeton-based nonprofit dedicated to preventing suicide through mental-health education, was selected as a finalist by the Child Mind Institute to receive a Change Maker Award. AIR's spokesdog Miki is in the running to receive the American Humane Hero Dog Awards in the Therapy Dog category.

Change Maker Award

"Since 2011, AIR has spoken with more than 63,000 middle and high school and college students about mental health and suicide prevention. Soon after every presentation, between 2% and 6% of students speak up about their struggles and they get help they need. They also created a powerful In Their Shoes exhibit that augments this educational program. It builds empathy and understanding by sharing thoughts that go through the minds of individuals who are struggling. AIR has a small core group of volunteers and are having a profound impact on countless people," wrote Shauna Moses, AIR Board Member and Vice President, Public Affairs and Member Services, New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies in her nomination.

"Just as important, AIR educates that no one should be criticized because they have a biological-based brain illness. All people, no matter what their differences, should be treated with respect and kindness," wrote Patricia Betz-Schiff, AIR Board Member and Clinical Scientist at Merck & Co., Inc. in her nomination. "When-ever possible, AIR therapy dogs are also invited to accompany their handlers to the school visits. The groups are all volunteers, with a shared passion and mission, to start a conversation about good mental health. The compassion and warmth shared with our audiences and the feedback received has been enthusiastic and well received at schools, universities and health care facilities."

Online voting for the Change Maker Award is taking place at <https://childmind.org/campaign/2018-change-maker-awards/> through March 23, 2018.

A Little Dog with a BIG Mission and BIG Impact

"In September 2008, Miki, the Pomeranian came into my life when he was 6 months old. He was in the middle of the 'pom [Pomeranian] uglies' not wanted by anyone. Little did I realize this dog would save my life and the lives of so many others," said Tricia Baker, AIR's Co-Founder and Program Director.

At that time, my family was struggling with helping my son Kenny, who was fighting suicidal ideation. Sadly, Kenny did not have much time with Miki and died May 19, 2009. Kenny's memory was met with discrimination because of how he died. As a family, we responded and created Attitudes In Reverse®, or AIR™. Miki's training as a therapy dog began and he tested and passed in the spring of 2011," Baker said.

Miki's therapy work is focused on youth mental health and suicide prevention and includes de-stressing students and helping AIR educate students about good mental health; visiting students devastated by the loss of a friend to suicide; inspiring AIR's annual awareness event, Miki & Friends 5K Walk & Run for AIR (to be held May 19, 2018 at Mercer County Park, East Picnic Area), which celebrates how dogs are good for our mental health; visiting Youth Mental Health First Aid classes, which Baker and her husband/AIR Co-Founder Kurt offer; visiting many local behavioral health hospitals; and assisting in preparing dogs to become certified therapy dogs by serving as a Bone-A-Fide Test Dog.

Rebecca McLelland-Crawley, EdD, a teacher at Community Middle School in Plainsboro, had this to say about Miki. "I teach where student stress levels are reaching historically high levels. Miki has played an invaluable role in helping students lower stress. Miki is a blessing to all who meet him. The reach of Miki's work went beyond the walls of our school and has helped the community engage in difficult conversations about mental health." Dr. McLelland-Crawley is an AIR volunteer and was selected to receive an Ambassador Award from the Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma.

Miki has been an active member of AIR since it was established in 2010. He helps students feel comfortable opening up about their difficulties during and after AIR's educational presentations. He also participates at conferences and community events where AIR exhibits to build awareness about mental health and its mission and programs. Miki's role and impact in AIR led to his national recognition as the Top Therapy Dog by the American Kennel Club in 2011.

Online voting for the American Humane Hero Dog Awards is taking place through April 25, 2018. Miki can be voted for at <http://herodogawards.org/dog/miki/>.

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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 2011, they have presented to more than 63,000 students in middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Missouri, Texas and Arizona. AIR also offers Youth Mental Health First Aid instruction and 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 trains and certifies Emotional Support Animals and offers a lunch-and-learn program for businesses. For more information about AIR™, please visit www.attitudesinreverse.org or call 609-945-3200.