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### **Attitudes In Reverse® Gears Up to Save More Students' Lives by Educating Them about Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY (July 30, 2014) –Between 2010 and 2012, suicides were completed by 233 youth (ages 10 to 24) in New Jersey; this is almost the same number of youth who took their lives between 2009 and 2011, according to the New Jersey Department of Children and Families' two recent Youth Suicide Reports. Although these numbers are lower than the national statistics, they are still tragic and they can be reduced – and possibly eliminated – through education about mental health disorders and suicide prevention.

“We understand that these are not easy topics to discuss. However, they must be discussed. Students' lives depend on it. We are determined and able to meet this need,” said Tricia Baker, Co-Founder of Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR), a local nonprofit organization dedicated to helping save the lives of youth and young adults. “We focus on this age group and take a proactive approach because 50 percent of mental health disorders develop by the age of 14 and three-quarters develop by age 24. Youth and young adults have their whole lives ahead of them and mental health disorders do not need to change that.”

“Just as people need to learn the signs and risks of diabetes and other physical diseases, they also need to know how to recognize signs of mental health disorders and seek treatment immediately to manage an illness if they have one,” added Co-Founder Kurt Baker. “We emphasize that mental health disorders are real illnesses. They are biologically based, just like heart disease, stroke and all other illnesses, and there is no reason to feel embarrassed or for anyone to criticize someone who has a mental health disorder.”

“Without prompt attention, mental health disorders can lead to self-medication with drugs and alcohol and suicidal thoughts and actions. However, with understanding and an accepting attitude, these desperate relief-seeking behaviors and their tragic consequences can be avoided,” the Bakers stressed.

The Bakers established Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR) in 2010, soon after they lost their son Kenny to suicide, following his long battle against severe depression and anxiety. To date, they have delivered their interactive *Coming Up for AIR™* presentation – which contains the facts about mental health disorders and suicide, and personal experiences with mental health disorders and suicide, as well as successful treatment – to more than 14,000 students in middle and high schools, colleges and universities. **The presentation is an effective addition to the state-required, Junior-year health curriculum.**

**More**

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The program has had a significant impact. For example, a student from the West Windsor-Plainsboro School District stated, "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."

AIR is equally focused on building empathy among youth for their peers to further encourage all students to seek help when needed. To achieve this goal, they created an *In Their Shoes™* exhibit, which they incorporate into their *Coming Up for AIR™* presentations. "This powerful display literally draws individuals not only into the shoes, but also into the minds of youth who struggle with mental health disorders and suicidal thoughts. This is a profound way to build empathy and eliminate stigma," said Debra L. Wentz, PhD, Chief Executive Officer, New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies.

For more details, visit [www.attitudesinreverse.org](http://www.attitudesinreverse.org), click on the Programs tab and select "Coming Up For AIR" and "In Their Shoes," or contact Co-Founder Tricia Baker at 609-945-3200, ext. 2222, or [tricia@attitudesinreverse.org](mailto:tricia@attitudesinreverse.org).

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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 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 three years, they have delivered their *Coming Up for AIR™* presentation to more than 14,000 students in middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey, New York and Vermont. AIR also includes 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. For more information about AIR, please visit [www.attitudesinreverse.org](http://www.attitudesinreverse.org).