



Attitudes in Reverse®

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Attitudes In Reverse® Honors Erin Popolo, Community Student Advocate, as *Partner in Hope*

PRINCETON, NJ, October 6, 2022 – Suicidal thoughts and attempts among adolescents nearly doubled since 2008 and resulted in suicide becoming the second leading cause of death among individuals 10 to 34 years of age, according to research published in 2018 and 2019. The risk of suicide attempts is nearly twice as high among students who experienced bullying, either in person or online. Since losing her daughter Emily to suicide, which was precipitated by being bullied, Erin Popolo of South Brunswick has been on a mission to change this tragic situation. She will be honored as a *Partner in Hope* by Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®) during the organization's sixth annual Taste of Hope event on October 12, 2022 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal, Princeton, New Jersey.

"All I want to do is to help people to not be in my shoes," Popolo said. "I cried when Tricia [Baker, Co-founder of AIR] told me she wanted to honor me. It means the world to me because it reiterates how important everyone's story is. To be honored as a partner in AIR's mission is amazing. I never thought I'd be honored just for sharing my story."

"We were so touched by what Erin wrote against the school's inappropriate response to Emily's death by not acknowledging her at the graduation that year," Tricia Baker said, referring to a letter that Erin wrote to the South Brunswick Board of Education and was published by a local newspaper, *The Sentinel*, and numerous online news sources, such as centraljersey.com and the *Patch*. "It particularly resonated with us because we had the same experience after our son died by suicide," added AIR Co-founder Kurt Baker. "We are proud to honor Erin and so grateful to have her as part of our organization."

"With AIR, I feel I'm supporting other parents who lost their child the way I did. I feel strongly about getting into schools and getting the message out," said Popolo, who has been presenting at schools with Tricia since September 2021. "Students thank me for sharing my story. So, I feel I'm making a difference."

"Emily was bullied horrifically, so my focus is on teaching kids to be kind to each other. I do share that Emily died by suicide. Kids have to realize the impact of their actions," Popolo said. She shares her story with middle- and high-school students during AIR's Mental Health is in the AIR ToolkitSM program, which primarily focuses on how to improve mental health.

Popolo will be honored along with Larry Bailin, President and CEO, Single Throw Marketing, and Ricardo Almeida, Founder, Ricardo Almeida Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy, *Champions of Hope*, during AIR's 6th Annual Taste of Hope event on October 12, 2022.

AIR is grateful for the sponsors of this year's event: *AIR Sponsor* – Connell Company; *Faith Sponsor* – Princeton Brain & Spine, Silas Baker, Jr., Stark & Stark Attorneys at Law /J. Robert Bratman, Esq., Structure Tone Inc. and Szaferman Lakind Attorneys at Law; *Dignity Sponsors* – Alan Brackup, BeTheLi9ht Foundation, CareOne, Pay Day, Ray Catena Mercedes-Benz of Edison, Sally Boy's, Sharp Home Appliances and Single Throw Marketing; *Love Sponsors* – Aetna Better Health of NJ, Antares Event Planning & Consulting, LLC, Certified Wealth Management & Investment, Hackensack Meridian Carrier Clinic, Hinkle, Prior & Fischer Attorneys at Law, Intrepid Commercial Realty, JAG-ONE Physical Therapy, KHL&D Attorneys at Law, Lakeland Bank, Leary, Bride Mergner and Bongiovanni, PA, RABJJ Academy, Smart Marketer, The Milana Family Foundation, Inc., and Vito and Marlene Sisti; *Half-Day Class Presentation Sponsors* – Renzi Legal Resources and White Lightning Investments.

Participating restaurants and dessert, wine and spirit vendors are Antimo's Italian Kitchen, Applebee's of Lawrenceville, Carella's Chocolates, CATB Liquor Imports, Crown of India, De Lorenzo's Tomato Pies, Iron & Ivy at Princeton Marriott at Forrestal, Joe Canal's of Lawrenceville, Local Greek, McCaffrey's Food Market & Bakery, Outback Steakhouse of Hamilton, P.F. Chang's, Public Wine, Beer & Spirits, Plush Vodka, Seasons 52, Senor Sangria, Sourland Mountain Spirits, Starbucks and Texas Roadhouse.

To register to attend the Taste of Hope event or make a donation, please visit www.toh.ngo.

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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 150,000 students in elementary, 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 MindsSM 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.air.ngo or call 609-945-3200.

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