

Powerful In Their Shoes™ Exhibit At Rider University Nov. 7th Aims to Prevent Suicide

As part of its mission to educate youths and young adults about mental health, related disorders and suicide prevention, Attitudes in Reverse® (AIR) recently launched a new campaign, In Their Shoes™, which creates a powerful, visual aspect to their mission to save lives. "Our goal is to build understanding and 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," said AIR Co-Founders Tricia and Kurt Baker.

The campaign was introduced on National Suicide Prevention Day (September 10th) during an event that AIR co-hosted with the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) and NJAMHAA. Attached to each pair of shoes is a tag printed with a statement that represents thoughts and feelings that could lead to youths' suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Examples include, "I have a good life. Why am I so miserable?"; "I drink to fit in."; "Everyone thinks I have so much to live for...except me."; and "Will I ever have a boyfriend?"

The shoes represent the 234 New Jersey youth (19 to 24 years of age) who completed suicide between 2009 and 2011 (the latest statistics available from DCF, reported in its Updated 2012 Adolescent Suicide Report). Nationally, one out of every 12 college and university students seriously consider suicide and one out of every 10 attempt in, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"The 'In Their Shoes' display is literally breathtaking," said DHS Commissioner Jennifer Velez, Esq. "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."

"Just as each Holocaust Museum visitor assumes the identity of a Holocaust victim, the powerful In their Shoes 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. Metaphorically, stopping the participants in their tracks as a result of the high impact, this is a profound way to build empathy and eliminate stigma," said Debra L. Wentz, PhD, CEO of NJAMHAA.

The Bakers worked with Rider Outreach to plan the next exhibit of In Their Shoes exhibit at Rider University on November 7, 2013 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. "The Outreach Team and Rider's Counseling Center is very excited to help host In Their Shoes with Tricia. We are looking forward to seeing the impact that this exhibit has on students and the campus as a whole. We have experienced working with Tricia in the past for pet therapy and we imagine that this event will prove to be educational and thought-provoking," said Amanda Pincus, Christina Lloyd and Shana Gelin.

"Counselors from Rider University attended our annual event in May and informed me that a number of students continue to see the counselors to talk about Kenny and his death," Tricia Baker said. "Once Kurt and I thought of the In Their Shoes campaign, it naturally occurred to us to bring the exhibit to the university."

"We will be adding to the exhibit and bringing it to many more events, in addition to our own event," Kurt Baker said. "We believe it's a profound and memorable display that reinforces our message. It will also be a compelling addition to our Coming Up for AIR™ educational program that we present to students in middle schools, high schools and colleges every chance we get."

"Mental health is an integral part of everyone's overall health and must be addressed as much as all physical aspects of health," he added. "Individuals with mental health disorders should be treated with compassion and clinical interventions to the same extent that individuals with serious physical illness are treated. We believe that by building empathy through our In Their Shoes campaign, we will make significant progress in eliminating stigma and ensuring that everyone with a mental health disorder is supported by their friends and families and is willing to seek treatment."

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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 two and a half years, they have presented Coming Up for AIR™ to more than

12,000 students in middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey, New York and Vermont, and they have been invited to present at other schools in New Jersey, as well as Georgia and Texas. AIR also includes an 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 illnesses or developmental disabilities, thereby saving two lives with each match. For more information about AIR, please visit www.attitudesinreverse.org.