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First Lady Mary Pat Christie Announces Nominees for September Online New Jersey Heroes Poll

Wednesday, September 16, 2015

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Attitudes in Reverse, Common Ground Grief Center and The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide Honored for Work on Mental Health Issues and Awareness Efforts

Trenton, NJ – Recognizing their commitment to mental health awareness and suicide prevention, First Lady Mary Pat Christie and the New Jersey Heroes Foundation have selected three deserving individuals as nominees for the September Online New Jersey Heroes poll. Tricia Baker of Attitudes in Reverse of Princeton; Lynn Snyder of Common Ground Grief Center in Manasquan and Maureen Underwood of The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, Inc. in Freehold are being honored for their efforts to raise understanding of mental health issues and its impact on those affected and their loved ones.

"We know that one in five individuals will experience mental illness during their lifetime," said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. "The work that Tricia, Lynn and Maureen are doing in our communities on this issue is making a real difference to ensure that those affected seek treatment programs that will lead to their recovery and path to a productive life. Each of this month's candidates clearly demonstrates the true qualities of a New Jersey Hero."

Beginning today, September 16th through September 30th, the public will have an opportunity to choose the September New Jersey Hero by visiting <http://newjerseyheroes.org/index/poll/> to cast their selection. Voters can cast their ballots once per day until the poll ends at 10:00 am on September 30th. The September New Jersey Hero will be announced later that afternoon via press release.

Last month, there were more than 36,000 votes cast overall for August's New Jersey Heroes candidates.

September's New Jersey Heroes online nominees are:

Tricia Baker – Attitudes in Reverse – Princeton (Mercer)

Attitudes In Reverse (AIR)'s mission is to improve the quality of life for people living with mental health issues, and to end youth suicide, through education and therapy dogs. After the diagnosis and death of her son, Kenny, Tricia Baker's family knew that change needed to happen. Thus, the Coming Up For AIR™ educational program was born. In five years, Attitudes In Reserve, a 100% volunteer driven organization, has educated more than 20,000 students in NJ, NY, and VT. They teach young people the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders, and let them know that no one should ever be embarrassed or afraid to seek treatment. Certified therapy dogs visit schools and students are encouraged to pet the dogs, as petting releases de-stressing brain chemicals. Seeing the healing benefit provided by therapy dogs, Tricia launched the AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds™ program. Tricia and a team of trained volunteers find dogs in need of homes and place them as emotional support dogs with people who have mental health challenges. AIR also has the IN THEIR SHOES™ traveling exhibit, which is comprised of 232 pairs of shoes, each pair representing NJ youth who lost hope and ended their lives by suicide. Each pair carries a tag with a thought that a young person might be struggling with in silence. The mission of this exhibit, which is very popular on college campuses and mental health conferences, is two-fold: First, to let people know that there are others who share the same struggles. Second, to increase understanding, empathy and kindness among those who have no idea how hard life can be living with a mental health disorder. Learn more at: <http://www.attitudesinreverse.org/>.

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Lynn Snyder – Common Ground Grief Center – Manasquan (Monmouth)

Lynn M. Snyder is the Founder and Executive Director of Common Ground Grief Center in Manasquan, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing on-going peer support groups for children and teenagers, ages 6-18, who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling or friend. Ms. Snyder, a licensed professional counselor, who specializes in the field of children's bereavement, saw a need in her community for grief support services focused directly on the needs of children and teens. In 2009, with a dream and passion to provide a nurturing and caring place where children, with similar experiences of loss, could come together to share their stories and begin to heal, Common Ground Grief Center was born. Since then, the Center has supported hundreds of children and their families who have been able to find the comfort and support they need to continue their journey through grief. The Center offers many creative outlets toward the healthy expression of feelings. In addition to the talking circle room where participants are free to openly talk about the loss of their loved ones, the house is also equipped with additional rooms to allow young children the opportunity to express their feelings through arts and crafts, sand play, puppetry, music, gross motor activity, and a full scale play hospital room. Common Ground Grief Center's program is run by a group of over 40 volunteers who facilitate the Center's 10 existing support groups. The Center provides services free of cost to all families, and is supported entirely by private donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and various fundraising efforts. Learn more at: <http://www.commongroundgriefcenter.org/>.



Maureen Underwood, The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, Inc.



Maureen Underwood, a licensed clinical social worker, has dedicated her life to dealing with issues that no one really likes to talk about, such as youth suicide. While serving on the New Jersey Governor's Advisory Council for Youth Suicide Prevention, Maureen met Scott Fritz, who had recently formed an organization called The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, Inc. (SPTS) with his friend Don Quigley after both losing teenaged children to suicide. The mission of SPTS is to reduce the number of youth suicides by raising public awareness of the problem through the development and implementation of educational training programs. SPTS successfully lobbied to have legislation passed in New Jersey requiring all educators to have at least two hours of suicide awareness and prevention training in 2006. In order to provide resources necessary to fulfill this mandate, Maureen

Underwood came on as Clinical Director of SPTS and developed an online suicide awareness course designed specifically for school staff and educators. To date, over 100,000 users nationally have taken advantage of this free training. Underwood also developed an on line video; *"Not My Kid...What Every Parent Should Know."* This video has been viewed online over 15,000 times and SPTS has distributed over 12,000 free DVDs across the country.

Underwood was instrumental in writing and publishing *Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program*, an Evidence-Based whole-school program. *Lifelines* trainings have been provided to nearly 5,000 educators in 35 states. Learn more at: <http://www.sptsusa.org/>.

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