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Film Contest Effective in Helping Youth to Prevent Suicide and Combat Stigma *Study Shows Positive Change Among Participants*

Sacramento, CA -- A groundbreaking California youth film contest is showing effectiveness in preventing suicide and combating mental illness, according to a recent assessment completed by the National Opinion Resource Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The report says that *Directing Change Program and Film Contest*, part of Each Mind Matters: California's Mental Health Movement, is highly effective in increasing knowledge, behavior and attitudinal outcomes related to suicide prevention and mental health.

Directing Change engages students and young adults (aged 14-25) throughout California to learn about the warning signs for suicide, the stigma associated with mental health and how to help a friend by creating short films. Through the filmmaking process, participants are engaged via all methods of the learning spectrum to see, experience, discuss and apply concepts learned about suicide prevention and mental health. These films are used in schools and communities to raise awareness and start conversations about these topics.

The NORC study compared 131 students that had participated in the *Directing Change* program with a control group of 268 students that had not participated in the program. The study also included interviews with high school and college campus youth advisors that had participated in the program.

Among the key findings from the NORC study, include:

- 60% of youth participating in the *Directing Change* program agreed or strongly agreed that people who attempt or complete a suicide show signs whereas only 40% of those in the control group agreed or strongly agreed.
- 86% of program participants indicated they learned about what to do if a friend shows warning signs of suicide.
- *Directing Change* participants are more willing to engage in conversation aimed at suicide prevention and have fewer attitudes that contribute to stigma related to mental illness. 58% of participants said they had encouraged someone going through a tough time and needing support to seek help from a trusted adult, counselor or health professional.
- 82% of those who had participated in the program had made a personal effort to learn more about mental health by visiting a website or participating in a class project within the past 12 months.

“Creative approaches to serious public health matters like suicide prevention and the stigma of mental illness are effective at not only raising awareness, but actually effecting positive change,” said Dr. Wayne Clark, Executive Director of the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) which sponsors

Directing Change. “We were particularly excited to see such a dramatic change stand the test of time since the NORC study was administered up to 6 months after the youth had made their films.”

Since its inception in 2012, more than 5,300 youth in California have participated in the *Directing Change Program and Film Contest* and have produced 2,138 films. The film submissions have generated more than 77,000 views.

The full report can be found at <http://www.directingchange.org/evaluation.pdf>

About Directing Change

The Directing Change Program & Film Contest is part of Each Mind Matters: California’s Mental Health Movement. The program offers young people the exciting opportunity to participate in the movement by creating 60-second films about suicide prevention and mental health that are used to support awareness, education and advocacy efforts on these topics. Learning objectives surrounding mental health and suicide prevention are integrated into the submission categories of the film contest, giving young people the opportunity to critically explore these topics. Program participants - whether they are making a film, acting as an adult advisor, or judging the films - are exposed to appropriate messaging about these topics, warning signs, how to appropriately respond to someone in distress, where to seek help, as well as how to stand up for others who are experiencing a mental health challenge. In addition, schools and organizations are offered free prevention programs and educational resources. For more information, visit www.directingchange.org

About the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA)

CalMHSA is a partnership of California counties working together to prevent mental illness and promote mental health by implementing Prevention and Early Intervention programs that are a critical part of the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63). The Directing Change Program & Student Film Contest is one of numerous programs that are part of comprehensive statewide efforts to prevent suicide, reduce stigma and discrimination related to mental illness, and to promote the mental health and wellness of students. For more information, visit www.calmhsa.org.

About The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago

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