These initiatives are funded by counties through the Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63) and administered by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities.
Directing Change at a Glance

The Directing Change Program & Film Contest encourages students and youth to learn about the topics of suicide prevention and mental health in a non-textbook kind of way: a film contest. Young people across California are invited to Direct Change by creating 60-second films addressing either suicide prevention or mental health. Through exposure to the submission guidelines and judging forms, youth participants, school staff and judges are exposed to suicide prevention, warning signs, how to appropriately respond to someone in distress, as well as how to stand up for others who are experiencing a mental health challenge.

Participation in Directing Change opens the door to introduce prevention programs to the school. Every school that engages with the contest receives an Ending the Silence presentation from the National Alliance on Mental Illness and one of several donated suicide prevention programs. In addition, students and schools are provided with access to a variety of educational resources on these topics throughout the school year.

The short films that are created are then used by schools, youth programs, county behavioral health agencies and community-based organizations across the state to support awareness activities. Finally, the program recruits and trains a large number of volunteer judges each year that are exposed to appropriate messaging about these topics through the judging process.
Short Term Outcomes

More youth have knowledge of warning signs of suicide, mental health challenges, and how to appropriately respond to a person in emotional distress (e.g. asking a trusted adult for help, not keeping suicide a secret).

More youth have a voice to speak up about suicide prevention and mental health and become advocates for these topics in their schools or communities.

Increased early identification and intervention by those in a position to help (e.g. teachers, parents, staff, peers).

More schools implement prevention programs, staff trainings, and have protocols in place for helping students at risk for suicide or in emotional distress.

More community members and members of the media and entertainment industry are aware of appropriate messaging for suicide prevention and mental health.
The Need for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention for California’s Young People

Approximately 1 in 5 youth ages 13 to 18 experiences a mental health challenge in a given year. When young people feel alone in dealing with mental health challenges, they may be afraid to talk about it, and not get the help they need. Despite the high rates of mental health needs among children and youth, 4 out of 5 children, ages six to seventeen, who have mental health needs, do not receive any services. Research shows that early identification and treatment of mental health disorders can minimize the long-term effect on a person’s life. The good news is that early and effective mental health treatment can prevent violence and crime in youth. Untreated mental health issues in children and adolescents can lead to adverse and sometimes tragic long-term consequences. Some of these consequences include academic failure, truancy, dropping out of school, behavior problems, substance abuse, school violence, health problems and, even worse, suicide.

Studies show that although about half of teens who are thinking about suicide tell a friend, less than 25% of those friends tell an adult. Youth need to know how to respond appropriately to a friend in need. Although suicide deaths among youth are relatively low when compared to other age groups, rates of youth suicide attempts, and even more so thoughts of suicide ideation among youth are reported to be high among youth and young adults. According to the California Health Kids Survey 2011, 19% of freshman and 17% of juniors in high school had seriously considered suicide in the previous 12 months. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth between ten and nineteen years of age.

Directing Change In Numbers:

- **4,000** Students around California that have participated in Directing Change
- **1600** Short films created by youth for youth
- **308** High schools have participated in Directing Change
- **980** Students reached through donated NAMI Ending the Silence school-based presentations in the 2013/14 school year.
- **65,000** and counting... Number of times films have been viewed online.
- **511** Judges that have been trained; drawn from fields in which their level of understanding regarding appropriate messaging for suicide prevention and mental health would have the greatest potential for impact.

*Innumerable* the number of minds touched by watching the films.
Directing Change: A Program Disguised as a Film Contest

“The students become exceptionally knowledgeable about mental illness and suicide prevention by the end of meeting all of the film requirements because they are applying what they learn to what they are doing.”

- Don Collins, Torrey Pines High School
Directing Change: A Program Disguised as a Film Contest

Directing Change is a way to engage youth in topics that are often swept under the rug. Whereas the program provides some students with a voice to share and process personal experiences, in many instances it touches students who otherwise may never have been exposed to these topics; students who created films as part of a class project, or wanted to enter the contest. Anyone can read about the signs of suicide or mental illness but to actually take these issues and form a statement about them, be respectful, and think deeply about impacting the opinion of others requires a level of involvement that has lasting impact. Survey data from advisors indicate that over the course of making their films students develop an enormous sense of empathy and awareness overall, opening them up to have conversations about these topics. Directing Change is an innovative medium to influence and educate peers and future parents, teachers and community members who are knowledgeable about the warning signs of suicide, aware of the importance of mental health and know how to appropriately respond to a person in distress.

Directing Change educates students through the process of applying submission guidelines to making a short film about mental health or suicide prevention. The actual learning curriculum is embedded in the submission guidelines and further enhanced with additional resources made available to students and teachers. The suicide prevention curriculum is based on Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention recommendations developed by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (www.sprc.org) and the Framework for Successful Messaging from the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.

The mental health curriculum was developed in partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness California (www.namica.org) and messaging that is part of Each Mind Matters: California’s Mental Health Movement (www.eachmindmatters.org).

Key Educational Messages

Suicide Prevention:
- Warning signs of suicide
- How to appropriately respond to a person in emotional distress (e.g. not keeping it a secret if a friend is thinking about suicide; talking to a trusted adult.)
- Available resources to seek help
All students that submit a film are exposed to one or both sets of key educational messages outlined above, depending on the category they submit in. These students (as well as the teachers that assist them in the process of making their film) are better prepared to recognize the warning signs for suicide, seek help for themselves, other people, and their future peers, co-workers and family members. Learning is enhanced by utilizing additional educational tools, either on the Directing Change website, other online resources, or by bringing in guest speakers on the topic. Students are further empowered when they have an opportunity to speak to their local legislatures about these topics, recognized by their county behavioral health agency for their achievements, or simply thanked by peers for bringing these topics out in the open.

One of the most important catalysts for lasting impact is when their films are used as tools to educate their peers. Peer-to-peer student mental health programs have gained popularity because peers can connect and communicate with other students in ways that faculty, staff, and administrators cannot (i.e., similar life stages, common language, and understanding the social environment). Every year a group of Directing Change participants emerge as student advocates with a commitment to these topics and change— for example by speaking out on these issues or by advocating for and starting programs at their school or in their community.

Directing Change encourages schools to review and update their suicide prevention protocols on campus prior to implementing the program. Ideally the program is complimented by the implementation of additional prevention programs, including staff and faculty training or class room presentations. Together these structures and processes can result in several positive changes for short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes that may include improved knowledge and attitudes; positive behavior changes on the part of students, faculty, staff; and, ultimately, improved student mental health.
Directing Change in High Schools

One in 10 students in the K-12 educational system has a mental illness serious enough to impair how they function at home, school, and with their peers. While communities as a whole should work to promote mental health and prevent suicide, the school setting is a point of focus for prevention for several reasons, including: student mental health can affect academic performance, maintaining a safe school environment is part of a school’s overall mission, and the negative impact a suicide death in a school community has on student mental health and school climate.

Over the past three years, 4,000 high school students have participated in Directing Change, representing 308 high schools.

- In 2013, 142 schools participated.
- In 2014, 112 schools participated. Of these 66 were new schools. 46 had also participated in 2013.
- In 2015, 112 schools participated. Of these 57 schools were new schools. 55 had also participated in either 2013 or 2014.
- In 2016, 91 schools participated. Of these 54 schools were new schools. 36 had also participated in either 2013, 2014 or 2015.
California Department of Education (CDE)

The California Department of Education (CDE) encourages all schools and districts to participate in Directing Change. In 2014, Tom Torlakson, California Superintendent of Public Instruction, issued a letter boards to establish suicide prevention policies in schools. He also participated in the Directing Change award ceremony as a guest speaker.

Student Mental Health Initiative (SMHI)

The Directing Change team worked closely with the statewide Student Mental Health Initiative (SMHI) on the original model of the program. K-12 SMH initiatives are based on a statewide framework of prevention and early intervention strategies delivered in each of the 11 regions that encouraged schools and their communities to implement programs and services that meet local needs. CCSEA and the Regional Lead County Offices of Education conducted a range of activities with the goals of increasing cross-system collaboration; implementing school-based demonstration programs; providing education and training for education personnel, parents/caregivers, and community partners; and providing technical assistance for school-based program development. The Directing Change team worked close with regional coordinators to promote the program and link schools with prevention programs.

In addition,

Directing Change could not be possible without the strong support of county behavioral health agencies, community-based organizations, schools, districts, county offices of education, after school programs, youth programs, our prevention program partners, and many others.
...I can speak with absolute certainty that the topic of mental health is SO critical to our youth. I personally know that many of our students struggle with these challenges or directly know someone who does. The knowledge base that they build from participating in the contest might be THE reason they seek help, provide a helpful, sensitive, and nonjudgemental approach to someone who could use help today or in the future. The facts that we learn through the pre-production process will always stick with us. For example, my students and I were stunned to know that many people wait over 6 years to seek help for mental health issues- and we started to compare that to other conditions like a broken arm... we were blown away! I think the real “change” that is going to come from this contest is going to be happening for the rest of our students’ lives as they will certainly encounter these life challenges and will be able to approach them from an empathetic, mature, and resource-focused perspective.

My classes and I have grown tremendously throughout the experience of working with Directing Change and I believe this contest is likely one of the most valuable parts of our class, if not their high school career...
Directing Change in Higher Education

In the last decade, colleges and universities have also been playing an increasingly important role in addressing the mental health needs of youth, with a substantial increase in the number of students seeking help for serious mental health problems at college and university campus counseling centers. The 2011 National Survey of Counseling Center Directors found that 37 percent of counseling center clients in colleges and universities had significant mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, alcohol abuse, and eating disorders—a sharp increase from 16 percent in 2000 (Gallagher, 2010). In addition, 20% of students completing the CalMHSA Student Mental Health Campus-Wide Survey (2013) met or exceeded the cut-off for probable mental health problems during the 30 days prior to completing the survey; 25–35 percent of students reported their academic performance was negatively affected by anxiety or depression.

This year, Directing Change expanded participation to all higher education students in California. Directing Change in higher education settings serves to augment existing statewide efforts overseen by community colleges, University of California and California State campuses to promote student mental health and reduce suicide. Past efforts funded by CalMHSA have included offering suicide prevention trainings such as ASIST, safeTALK, and QPR. The online suicide prevention training (Kognito) was offered at all 112 community college campuses. The “red folder” initiative resulted in each UC campus producing a quick reference guide to mental health resources. RAND findings showed the increased collaboration and partnerships that resulted in breaking down of silos as a result of the higher education SMH initiatives.

Over the past three years Directing Change has partnered with the University of California System, and this year also collaborated with community colleges, California State Universities and Private Universities. In 2014 and 2015, 100 UC students participated in Directing Change, representing 9 UC campus locations. In 2016, a total of 16 submissions were received from 5 community colleges and 8 UC/State/Private Universities, representing 34 student participants.

- In 2014, 53 UC students participated
- In 2015, 47 UC students participated
- In 2016:
  - 10 UC students participated
  - 11 community college students participated
  - 2 Cal state students participated
  - 11 Private University students participated

Youth and Young Adults

In 2016 Directing Change opened participation to youth and young adults who could submit in partnership with a college, university, community-based organization, club or other agency. In 2016, 24 submissions were received from 66 youth and young adults, representing 22 organizations. A few examples of youth and community-based-organizations that participated include:

- BAYAT
- City of Indio Teen Center
- Clovis North Educational Center
- Deaf Community Services
- Lake County Friday Night Live
- Nicholas Academic Center
- Operation SafeHouse
- Placer County Youth Commission
- Recovery Learning Center
- Redwood Voice
- Safe House of the Desert
- Tri - City Mental Health Services
- Victor Community Support Services
- VYVA Inc.
- Youth Empowerment Centers Program- Fresno
"Through the Lens of Culture"

In 2016, The Directing Change Program added an additional category to the contest - Through the Lens of Culture. By submitting a film in the Through the Lens of Culture category young film makers were encouraged to explore the topics of suicide prevention and mental health through the lens of a particular culture. For this category, all of the submission requirements that are part of the Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Matters categories still applied, but with an additional level of complexity and creativity focused on culture. All films were required to include captioning. The contest received 41 film submissions in the Through the Lens of Culture Category and 1st to 5th place winners were chosen by a panel of judges representing diverse communities. Submitted films addressed suicide prevention and mental health through a wide range of cultural perspectives and in multiple languages including Spanish and Sign Language. All films can be viewed and downloaded by visiting: http://www.directingchange.org/2016-winners/#Diverse
The additional category was supported by the Culture to Culture Foundation (www.culturetoculture.org/). The Culture to Culture Foundation is a nonprofit, community-based organization dedicated to promoting mental health and emotional wellness within the San Francisco Bay Area's growing Asian-American community. Through various programs, projects, and events, Culture to Culture is working to improve the mental health of Asian-American community members in the Bay Area.

Over the past two years, Culture to Culture Foundation has sponsored two mental health essay contests for high school students and received 369 submissions from over 80 high schools in the Bay Area, helping to change the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of young people around mental health issues. As a partner, the Culture to Culture Foundation promoted the Directing Change Program and Film Contest to schools, districts, and young people in the Bay Area. Directing Change provided electronic and hard copies of promotional materials and participated in planning meetings via phone with the Culture to Culture Foundation throughout the year.

"As first-generation college students, Amanda Deda and Alejandra Vaca envisioned the creation of a short film that would express some of the barriers they faced when accessing mental health services. They hope that this film will deliver a culturally relevant perspective to those facing similar experiences, and will encourage these individuals to seek support through the healing power of community."
Prevention Programs and Schools

“The contest was great. Within the video program I partnered with our school's Public Service Academy and we created an entire broadcast on the topic of stopping stigma. The broadcast was seen by almost the entire school and some classrooms had follow-up discussions on the topic.”

School Advisor
Prevention Programs and Schools

The Directing Change Program & Film Contest addresses mental health and suicide prevention at various points in the school prevention continuum, but also in the community at large with engagement of judges, use of films, and recognition of participants. The film contest is the foundation of the Directing Change program, which serves as a vehicle to draw schools and community members in to address the subject of mental health and suicide prevention.

Although available resources, information and research exist to support schools undertaking mental health and suicide prevention efforts, the reality is many schools are still lacking comprehensive prevention strategies. This under-utilization can be attributed to multiple factors. For one, schools throughout the country are in a constant struggle to balance education time and standards with other programming. In addition, the cost associated with implementing prevention programs can also present a barrier for schools to examine and implement suicide prevention strategies. One reason schools may hesitate to engage in suicide prevention in particular is simply out of lack of information or fear. It is a commonly held myth even today, that talking about suicide can cause it to happen. However, research studies and best practices in suicide prevention and public health suggest that addressing suicide prevention responsibly and openly is the most effective strategy to prevent suicide deaths and attempts.

The Directing Change Program hopes to remove these barriers by introducing the subject of and start conversations about mental health and suicide prevention, offer background information and resources to schools, and provide technical assistance to bridge gaps and further prevention efforts on campuses.

Every participating school is encouraged to review their suicide prevention protocols, offered a free suicide prevention or mental health program, and is connected to a variety of educational resources on these topics.

- **153** schools received a hard copy of SAMHSA’s "Suicide Prevention: A Toolkit for Schools".
- **83** schools have received donated suicide prevention programs from one of the partner organizations.
- In addition, over **980** students were reached through donated NAMI Ending the Silence school-based presentations in the 2013/14 school year.
The Directing Change Student Program & Film Contest addresses mental health and suicide prevention at various points in the school prevention continuum.

The selection of programs above is not a conclusive list and are listed because they have partnered with Directing Change by promoting the program, donating prevention programs or offering other educational resources.
Suicide Prevention Programs

In 2012, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) released the report titled, “Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools”. The toolkit lays a framework for schools to follow to easily understand the entire spectrum of suicide prevention in the school setting. Based upon the “Preventing Suicide” toolkit, there are a variety of components involved with comprehensive suicide prevention including two priority protocols that schools should have in place: helping students at possible risk of suicide, and responding to a suicide death in the school community. Additional components of comprehensive suicide prevention include education and training for staff, parents, and students as well as screening for suicide ideation and mental health concerns. The Directing Change program is working to help schools understand the importance of suicide prevention in schools, the full spectrum of suicide prevention in the school setting, and then assist with implementing or furthering suicide prevention efforts on campuses across the state.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

- AFSP has a strong presence throughout California. With three regional coordinators, AFSP’s efforts span the entire state with multiple outreach events including “Out of the Darkness” walks to raise awareness about suicide prevention. For the past three years AFSP has donated their More Than Sad curriculum to Directing Change, and promoted the program through their networks.

- Program Information: More Than Sad: Teen Depression is a high school curriculum featuring a 26-minute film and discussion guide that can be integrated during one class period. The program seeks to increase the knowledge of the warning signs of youth suicide, so that educators and youth are better prepared to identify and refer students who may be at risk. (www.AFSP.org)

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)

- Based out of Minnesota, the SAVE organization is working to expand to California. Each year, SAVE runs a statewide suicide prevention film contest and has offered valuable support to Directing Change and was the original inspiration for the program.

- Program Information: “LEADS: Linking Education and Awareness of Depression and Suicide” was developed with input from students and teachers, and is an interactive three day curriculum used in a health class setting for high school students. Throughout the lessons, students discuss symptoms of depression, risk and protective factors for suicide and learn to identify warning signs of suicide. (www.SAVE.org)
The Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program (YRSPP)

- Website: www.yellowribbon.org

- Based out of Colorado, the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program has strong chapters in San Diego as well as Fresno. The Yellow Ribbon program is also utilized by schools throughout the state, and in conjunction with other mental health and suicide prevention efforts.

- Program Information: Toolkits donated by YRSPP to the Directing Change Program includes two curriculums: one for staff and one for students, as well as information on community engagement.
  - “Be-A-Link”: Be A Link! is a two-hour adult gatekeeper training program that provides participants with knowledge to help them identify youth at risk for suicide and refer them to appropriate help resources.
  - “Ask 4 Help”: Ask 4 Help! is a one-hour high school based curriculum that provides students with knowledge that may increase help-seeking for themselves or on behalf of others.

The Trevor Project

- Website: www.thetrevorproject.org

- The Trevor Project is focused on suicide prevention for LGBTQ youth and young adults. Currently, the Trevor Project has a strong presence in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Additionally, the Trevor Project received a federal grant to provide their “Lifesaver” program to five counties in Northern California (Marin, Placer, Shasta, Humboldt, Mendocino).

- Program Information: Lifesavers
  - LifeSavers Training is a three-day suicide and crisis prevention program that trains high school and college-aged young people to listen to peers compassionately and confidentially using specialized techniques designed to help them make healthier decisions.
Mental Health Screening

- Website: www.mentalhealthscreening.org
- Mental Health Screening offers a comprehensive suicide prevention to schools which includes screening. The SOS program described below is currently being utilized by the San Diego County School Based suicide prevention grant.
- Program Information: Signs of Suicide (SOS)
  - SOS Signs of Suicide is a secondary school-based suicide prevention program that includes screening and education. Students are screened for depression and suicide risk and referred for professional help as indicated.

Kognito: At Risk in PK-12

- Website: http://www.kognito.com/products/pk12
- At-Risk is a series of online professional development modules designed for use by individuals, schools, districts, and statewide agencies. A uniquely effective and engaging learning experience, At-Risk increases educators' skills and willingness to intervene with students in distress. For administrators, At-Risk includes tools and template to ensure that the program is easy to disseminate and measure success at all levels
  - At Risk is offered at no cost to all educators in California through a grant from the California Department of Education. Information on how to access the program is listed on the Directing Change website.
Mental Health Programs

Student mental health programs can range from universal to highly targeted programs. Universal programs are designed to increase awareness of and sensitivity to mental health issues in students—for example, by supporting students coping with stress and encouraging student help-seeking behaviors. Universal primary prevention programs are designed to increase awareness of and sensitivity to mental health issues in students—for example, by supporting students coping with stress and encouraging student help-seeking behaviors. More-targeted programs are designed to provide staff or faculty skills to identify and respond to specific mental health issues or populations.

National Alliance on Mental Illness

- Website: www.NAMICA.org

NAMI California and its 71 local affiliates are dedicated to educating families, professionals and the public about mental illness and to eradicate stigma. For the past two years NAMI CA has supporting Directing change by enriching the program with educational resources about mental health and by providing content and oversight for the Ending the Silence category, which was inspired by one of their signature programs, Ending the Silence. Every school that participates in Directing Change is offered an Ending the Silence presentation. In addition, students and staff are connected to a wide range of NAMI resources on the Directing Change website and newsletter.

- **NAMI on Campus:** A peer-run mental health organization to support fellow students, raise mental health awareness, educate the campus community, and promote and advocate for services.
  - http://www.nami.org/namioncampus

- **Ending the Silence Program:** Ending the Silence (ETS) is a mental health education and stigma reduction program designed specifically for high school and young adult audiences provided by the National Alliance on Mental Illness California (NAMI). During a one-hour presentation delivered during a class period, the trained two-person team provides education on mental health and personal testimony from a young person living well with a mental health condition.
  (https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Ending-the-Silence)

Youth Mental Health First Aid

- Website: http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/

- Program Information: Youth Mental Health First Aid is designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who is experiencing a mental health or addictions challenge or is in crisis. Youth Mental Health First Aid is primarily designed for adults who regularly interact with young people. The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, substance use, disorders in which psychosis may occur, disruptive behavior disorders (including AD/HD), and eating disorders.
“Many of us are aware of the stigma around mental health issues. The work of mental health professionals is clearly important but our strength actually comes when kids and families know the signs and symptoms too. They are the eyes on the ground- to be in the million places we can't be. Positively changing the mental health of our communities is a team effort. Programs like Directing Change not only educate through the distribution of these films but it also shows each participant and school that they, too, can do something to help. The icing on the cake is that the project lets students use their creative skills and other interests as a tool to share this important message- I think that's pretty incredible! Every participant should be applauded for spending the time to learn and invest in their own community.”

-Judge
Training Community Members, News Media and Entertainment Industry in Appropriate Messaging

In addition to engaging youth and educators in suicide prevention and mental health awareness, Directing Change seeks to engage community members, representatives of the news media and entertainment, as well as those in the mental health and suicide prevention fields as judges. Through training and applying the knowledge learned during the training to the judging of their film judges become familiar with appropriate messaging for suicide prevention and mental health.

 Judges take part in the first round of judging to select regional winning films in each category. The first place winning high school film submissions from each region, in each category moves on to a second, statewide round of judging. The statewide judging panel reviews and scores the films to determine the first, second, and third place statewide high school winners.
“Without having judged the films, I would not have known about the importance of safe messaging. In the future, I will definitely adhere to the recommendations suggested by the guidelines.”

-Judge

Past statewide judges have included director and producer of the award winning TV series, ‘Glee’, Brad Buecker, ‘Glee’ actor Max Adler, Executive Producer of The Lord of the Rings trilogy, Mark Ordesky, singer and anti-bullying advocate Meredith O’Connor, film and TV series writer and producer known for his work on the film “According to Greta”, Michael Gilvary, filmmakers and co-writers of the film “It’s Kind of a Funny Story”, Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, and TV writer on “Law and Order: SVU”, Roger Wolfson, all-star Los Angeles Lakers professional basketball player, Metta World Peace, and many others.

The Directing Change team prepares judges through webinar-based trainings and phone conversations. The curriculum for the training is based upon the Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention and information from NAMI California. Over the past 4 years Directing Change has recruited and trained 511 judges.

- In 2013, 135 judges participated
- In 2014, 209 judges participated
- In 2015, 249 judges participated. Of these 98 were returning to the program after participating in 2013 or 2014.
- In 2016, 272 judges participated. Of these 208 were returning to the program after participating in 2013, 2014 or 2015.

“After going through this process and seeing many of the videos, I am more aware of safe message guidelines. I was not aware of the need to stay away from statistics that paint the picture that suicide is a common event and that it actually normalizes the action.”

-Judge
“Jed is one of the most creative, driven, and genuinely kind youth I have had the privilege to work with. If you ever have the opportunity to sit down and talk with him, you’ll find he is a born storyteller. Not only does he see the value of digital media and sharing stories, his real passion is to harness their power and use them as tools to, as he would say, “change the world”. Jed has such a positive energy, he has a kind word for every person he meets. The course of his life has been shaped by mental illness and he has seen real adversity because of it. Despite this, he remains a possibility model of what a youth leader can and should be. Kind, motivated, willing to learn, ambitious, and resilient. This contest is an opportunity for him to see it is possible for him to make a positive impact on those struggling with their mental health, that he is not alone in this issue, and that he really can change the world. His passion for helping people is not something learned or that can even be taught, it’s something he was born with, and something that is not validated enough. I want him to see that good things do happen to good people, and that real life super heroes exist and he is one of them.”

- Jacob Patterson, advisor, Redwood Voice
Creating Future Advocates and Leaders

Directing Change is part of Each Mind Matters: California’s Mental Health Movement. By submitting films about mental health and suicide prevention to the Directing Change Program and Film Contest, youth and young adults from around the state are volunteering to join the discussion and having their voices heard.

In 2015, two Directing Change students joined Senator Jim Beall (D-San Jose) on the State Senate floor to receive a proclamation declaring May 19th, 2015 Mental Health Matters Day in Sacramento. These events were coordinated by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, California. On the morning of the 19th, all of the Directing Change students gathered in the Governor’s Press Conference Room to meet with legislators and share their stories. Here, State Senators Jim Beall and Richard Pan (D-Sacramento) stopped by to speak to the Directing Change students, encouraging them to continue their efforts and emphasizing the importance of their work.

In addition to the inspirational words of the senators, two of the student participants spoke about the importance of addressing mental health and suicide prevention at a young age. Emma Spiekerman, an alumni participant who received statewide honors in the first year of the contest for her film “More than a Mental Illness” was one of the student speakers. Emma spoke about how the contest changed her life, causing her to switch her major from filmmaking to psychology, and participating in a variety of mental health efforts at college. After the morning session, students went to meet with their local legislators. The students seized the opportunity to speak on behalf of their peers, highlighting the importance of mental health and suicide prevention efforts that focus on the teen and college years.

In 2016, 63 youth and young adults, representing regional winning films from around the state, were invited to travel to Glendale to participate in a morning program on May 20th, 2016 which concluded with the statewide award ceremony for the Directing Change Program and Film Contest. The evening before the event youth participants and their families, school administrators, community partners, and program supporters attended an outcome reception where past participants shared their personal stories of the impact of the program on their lives.
The morning of the award program Directing Change youth participated in a question and answer session with filmmaker, director and producer, Bradley Buecker, from the hit TV shows GLEE and American Horror Story, Navajo transgender activist and advocate, Michelle Enfield, and teen pop star and anti-bullying advocate, Meredith O’Connor. Mr. Buecker took questions from the students about filmmaking, Hollywood and life and Michelle Enfield shared advice for how to use social media and art to advocate for mental health and equal rights in one’s community. Meredith O’Connor shared her personal story of overcoming bullying and answered students’ questions about her experience touring the world sharing her message of inclusiveness and tolerance.

Then it was time for the “main event” at the historic Alex Theater in Glendale. During the program each of the winning films was screened as youth viewed their films on the “big screen”. The program opened with welcome remarks from Dr. Robin Kay, Acting Director for the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. During the ceremony Director/Screenwriter Gren Wells spoke to youth about the impact their films and stories have on the mental health movement and was then honored with the Outstanding Film About Mental Illness and Young People Award for her writing on the film “the Road Within”. Later, actor LaKeith Stanfield accepted the Outstanding Film About Suicide Prevention award for the film, “Short Term 12” that respectfully explored many issues that are too often unspoken. In addition to performing her hit single, “Just the Thing”, pop artist Meredith O’Connor presented awards for the Youth and Young Adult Category and was surprised to receive an Award of her own for 2016 MVP - Program Supporter & Student Mentor. Finally, mental health advocate Michelle Enfield encouraged youth to use their voices and passion to advocate for change while presenting awards in the Through the Lens of Culture Category.

These youths come from across the state, from every background and circumstance. More than likely, when they decide to make a film for Directing Change, they had no idea that they were about to be part of something bigger. Through the experience of meeting other youth, learning and sharing ideas with advocates and filmmakers throughout the day, and seeing their films on the big screen, they now understand they are part of a movement and that they are truly Directing Change.
“Many of our students are familiar with mental illness, bullying, and suicide; not because they've studied it but because a lot of them are either going through situations themselves or witnessed them. This project not only taught them a lot about behavioral health but I definitely saw an increase in student attendance.

This project awakened something in some of the kids that has them excited about coming to school and learning. It's exciting to see a group of kids who desperately need help and encouragement themselves excited about creating films that will help and inspire others. Thanks for the opportunity.”

(Student Educator)
A statewide program with local impact:

Directing Change is a statewide program with regional and local impact. The Directing Change team works with local county behavioral health agencies and community partners to promote the program and use the films to raise awareness efforts, and to strengthen partnerships with schools. Individualized technical assistance is offered to increase the knowledge of school-based staff about educational resources, policies and procedures, prevention programs, as well as postvention in schools and the community.

The success of Directing Change depends to a large extent on local adoption of the program. Local community-based agencies and county behavioral health agencies receive DVDs and support with using films locally, access to films from local schools, contact information for local participating schools to facilitate partnerships, access to local data and support with planning local recognition events.

For example, after Riverside County Mental Health integrated Directing Change into their local PEI efforts, they were able to encourage district wide adoption of the program and more than double submissions from one year to the next.
Regional Directing Change films are promoted with the local media. Here are a few highlights from the 2015 news coverage:

1. Today.com featured Murrieta Valley High School student Ben Finnie recognized for his film “Leap of Faith” Directing Change program and youth. The film makes a plea for those in need of help to take that step and reach out to someone.

- "There's such a negative connotation of mental illness, but it's not something a person can help and it doesn't define who they are as people," Walker said. "I think what's most successful about the program is that it starts a conversation, and that's how you get rid of the stigma."

2. PRNewswire featured the program and announcement of statewide winners at the Directing Change award ceremony and the story was picked up by an additional 208 online publications.

- "Over the past four years we have received countless stories from youth and teachers who have shared how the program has opened up conversations in the classroom, at home and among friends," Jana Sczersputowski, founder and project director for Directing Change Program & Film Contest, told TODAY.


4. The Fresno Bee recognized local Clovis East students’ film which explains why depression has no culture and encourages young people to reach out.


In 2016 films received 18 news media stories and the following publications:
San Diego Union-Tribune, Clovis Independent, California Healthline, Davis Enterprise, Orange County Register, Today.com, DKS Media Solutions’ website, Noelle Cope’s blog, Radar Online, Victorville Daily Press, Elk Grove Citizen, Redwoodvoice.com, Victor Valley News, The Laguna Beach Indy, ChicoER, CoyoteChronicle.net, plus an additional 208 online publications picked up the story through PR Newswire
1) The Elk Grove Citizen highlighted student **Ryan Santiago** from Franklin High School for his first place regional winning film, “*The Guides of Life*” which also won a first place statewide prize in the Suicide Prevention category. Ryan’s animated film is about one friend experiencing thoughts of suicide and how his two close friends try to help him through it. It encourages people to reach out to someone during those times; to not be afraid to reach out for help. “It’s about one friend experiencing thoughts of suicide and how his two close friends try to help him through it. It encourages people to reach out to someone during those times; to not be afraid to reach out for help,” said Ryan, who used Toon Boom animation software to create his piece and plans to continue with filmmaking after graduation.”

2) UC Davis student **Marielle Pastor** won a second-place award for her film “*This is Claire*”, which creatively explores how college students can help fight stigma around mental health challenges.

3) The Madera Tribune highlighted Madera South High School, Pioneer Technical Center and Minarets Charter High School students’ whose films received a second place prize and an honorable mention. “Students from Madera and Fresno counties submitted entries “to change the conversation about suicide prevention and mental health in their schools”.

4) PR Newswire shared the outcome of the 2016 statewide award ceremony which recognized first-generation college students, Amanda Deda and Alejandra Vaca who envisioned the creation of a short film that would express some of the barriers they faced when accessing mental health services. The first place film “The Language of Healing” was submitted in the Through the Lens of Culture Mental Health Category. “They hope that this film will deliver a culturally relevant perspective to those facing similar experiences, and will encourage these individuals to seek support through the healing power of community.”

- “The newest category encouraged participants to choose suicide prevention or mental health as a focus, but with additional requirements including creating a film in a language different than English and/or with focus on how different cultures view these topics.”
Directing Change Participation by County (2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016)

Green indicates county participated.
Here is a small snapshot of how California's Behavioral Health Agencies are integrating the films into their local Prevention and Intervention Efforts. Films have been downloaded and viewed online over 65,000 times.

**San Diego County**
- Proclamation given to students, screenings at Behavioral Board and Suicide Prevention Committee

**San Bernardino County**
- Co-hosted third annual award ceremony to honor local students

**Fresno County**
- Hosted local award ceremony and screening, students recognized by Board of Supervisors

**Butte County**
- Hosted screening of local Directing Change films

**Humboldt County**
- Held red carpet screening and award ceremony honoring local students, hosted two Directing Change workshops for youth around submission guidelines, suicide prevention and mental health

**Riverside County**
- Films shown in local movie theaters

**Mission San Jose High School Alameda County**
- Students viewed films and participated in an interactive program during Mental Health Week supporting mental health wellness. In addition, students participated in a school-wide assembly where presenters included counselors and medical and law enforcement professionals.

**Alameda County**
- Students viewed films and participated in an interactive program during Mental Health Week supporting mental health wellness. In addition, students participated in a school-wide assembly where presenters included counselors and medical and law enforcement professionals.

**Calaveras County, Humboldt County, Los Angeles County, Orange County, Placer County, San Bernardino County, Siskiyou County, Solano County, Sutter Yuba Counties, and Tri-City**
- Films shown in local movie theaters

**Murrieta Valley High School Riverside County**
- Films were played on the campus' Nighthawk Daily News during Suicide Prevention Week followed by a school-wide assembly with guest speakers and a student discussion.

Here are a few examples of how schools and organizations have integrated films into classrooms and campus activities.
VYVA Inc. Solano County
Student films were screened for each class on campus as well as for administrators and board of directors.

Franklin High School San Joaquin County
Films were screened during a Mental Health Awareness Presentation reaching 2700 students. This was followed by classroom discussions centered around educational videos with the goal of understanding and recognizing stigma.

Leuzinger High School Los Angeles County
Students viewed films and received pins and ribbons with message cards during a designated Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness Day on campus. In addition, students participated in mental health and suicide prevention awareness activities with counselors.

Whitney High School Placer County
Students implemented a mental health awareness week which included a 15-minute live daily broadcast reaching all students and every segment focused on Each Mind Matters, suicide prevention and mental health while also integrating Directing Change films.

Nuview Bridge Early College High School Riverside County
Students’ films were graded by peers and presented to the entire school at a science fair type presentation and were also broadcasted in all campus classrooms.

San Francisco State University San Francisco County
Student films were utilized as part of the SF State Cares Wellness Initiative where students were encouraged to access films during “Stress Relief Day”. In addition, films were shared through “Campus Memo” and Student Affairs & Enrollment Management Listserv.

Torrey Pines High School San Diego County
Films were screened in classrooms and in school-wide assemblies during Yellow Ribbon Week where students discussed mental health and suicide prevention topics.

Redwood High School Marin County
Students collaborated with the campus wellness center where films were screened and students learned about mental health services available to them on campus.
2015 - 2016 Directing Advisory Group:

The Directing Change Program is guided by an advisory committee with experts from education and suicide prevention, as well as past student and teacher participants, to evaluate and evolve the scope of the program.

Janine Moore, Riverside County Department of Mental Health  
Alex Graham, Teacher at Canyon High School  
Diane Lampe, Student Mental Health Initiative, Prevention and Student Services-Sacramento County Office of Education  
Emma Spiekerman, Former student participant in Directing Change.  
Mike Lombardo, Interagency Facilitation for the Placer County Office of Education  
Monica Nepomuceno, California Department of Education

The following are advisory committee members for the Through the Lens of Culture category.

Chia Chia Chien, Culture to Culture Foundation  
Gigi Crowder, Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services  
Michael Helmick, Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition (REMHDCO)  
Jim Gilmer, Mental Health America of California  
Dixie Galapon, Union of Pan Asian Communities (UPAC)  
Mike Duncan, Native Dads Network  
Hendry Ton, UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities  
Zima Creason, Mental Health America of California  
Imo Momoh, San Bernardino County, Department of Behavioral Health  
Nenick Vu, Care Navigation Council