

Contact: Ariela Friedman, (212) 404-3741, ariela.friedman@nyumc.org

NEW YORK STATE LAUNCHES NEW SUICIDE AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE RISK PREVENTION PROGRAM

NYU Child Study Center Helps Teens in Rockland and Orange Counties Take Healthy “STEPS”

NEW YORK, May 8, 2008 – The NYU Child Study Center announced today the launch of “STEPS” (Screening, Treatment, and Education to Promote Strength), a new early risk identification and prevention program for high school teens in Rockland and Orange counties. This unique and comprehensive prevention initiative, which involves students, parents and teachers, was made possible with a \$500,000 grant from New York State, spear-headed by Senator Thomas P. Morahan. The program aims to promote mental well-being and reduce the risk of suicide and school violence through education, self-help, and screening.

“Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15 to 19 year olds in the United States,” said Senator Thomas P. Morahan, who has been representing the 38th District since 1999 and serves as Chairman of the New York State Senate Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. “New York State ranks fourth in the nation on the number of suicide deaths among 10 to 24 year olds. The ‘STEPS’ initiative was created to address this critical issue by raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of teens at risk and providing important resources to address these potentially fatal problems before it’s too late.”

“Research indicates that 90 percent of adolescents who die by suicide have a mental disorder at the time of their death,” stated Harold S. Koplewicz, M.D., Founder and Director of NYU Child Study Center. “This is an alarming statistic and we are hopeful that the ‘STEPS’ program will help teens and their families by giving them access to the tools they need to reduce that risk factors such as depression, substance abuse, and anxiety and improve problem solving and stress management skills. We are grateful for Senator Morahan’s support of this unique pilot program and look forward to working with teens, families and their communities to make adolescent mental health a state and national priority.”

The “STEPS” pilot program was developed by Christopher P. Lucas, M.D., M.P.H., Associate Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the NYU School of Medicine and Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist at the NYU Child Study Center. According to Dr. Lucas, “‘STEPS’ is more comprehensive and more efficient than other ‘one size fits all’ programs in the field. It is threefold, focusing equally on screening; education of teens, parents, and teachers; and facilitating treatment.”

“STEPS” will launch in five high schools in Rockland and Orange Counties in May 2008 including James I. O’Neill, Tappan Zee, Chester Academy and Clarkstown North and South. The Institute for Prevention Science at the NYU Child Study Center will implement the program which is tailored to each individual high school’s circumstances and needs. At the core of the program are two parallel Web sites, one for parents and one for teens, which offer accurate mental health information, brief self-assessments, and engaging self-help activities. Also offered are more detailed online and school-based screenings for teens whose parents provide written consent. “STEPS” staff will advise and facilitate access to services for families of teens who have been identified through screening. “STEPS” also provides consultation and educational materials to schools so that they may integrate the STEPS program within their health curricula. Students in participating schools also have the opportunity to become involved in the implementation and evaluation of the “STEPS” program by acting as “STEPS” Fellows.

With "STEPS," the NYU Child Study Center hopes to provide an innovative educational program to improve the identification of emotional problems in teens, to make mental health screening more acceptable and efficient, and to reduce barriers so that teens can more readily access the most appropriate evidence-based treatments. The grant of \$500,000 from Senator Morahan allows the NYU Child Study Center to begin the program in Orange and Rockland County high schools. This pilot program has the potential to be expanded nationwide to provide much needed help for all of America's youth living with depression and other psychiatric disorders.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

New York University Child Study Center is the nation's leading organization for research, prevention and treatment of child and adolescent psychiatric and learning disorders. Through science-based clinical care, cutting-edge research, expert professional training, and extensive public education, the Center strives to generate new knowledge about child mental health, improve the practices of healthcare professionals who serve children, and influence child-related public health policy. Most importantly, the Center provides hope, help and care to children and their families who suffer from these disorders.

The NYU Child Study Center is committed to giving children back their childhood. To learn more, visit AboutOurKids.org.

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