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Press Contacts

Jennifer Salerno

855-767-4244

jsalerno@raaps.org

A 5-MINUTE ELECTRONIC SURVEY COULD SAVE YOUR CHILD'S LIFE

New Ann Arbor company licenses proven, innovative adolescent health risk assessment tool to schools, physicians, social workers nationwide

ANN ARBOR, MICH. – December 14, 2011 – Possibilities for Change is launching nationwide with a simple, 21-question electronic survey that saves young lives. Its results alert school counselors, medical practitioners and social workers to risky behavior, paving the way to conversations that change how adolescents act.

Its questions address issues such as bullying, suicide, self-harm such as cutting, depression, texting while driving, weight/eating concerns, physical activity, sexual health and substance use.

Possibilities for Change is a University of Michigan Tech Transfer venture, with technology developed by ALPAC, Inc. The company also has received funding and support from Ann Arbor SPARK. It is led by Dr. Jennifer Salerno, a nurse practitioner who directs the University of Michigan Regional Alliance for Healthy Schools' School-Based Health Center Program. Her work with adolescents spans 15+ years and led to creation of the survey, called Rapid Assessment for Adolescent Preventive Services (RAAPS).

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 75% of adolescent morbidity and mortality results from preventable, risky behaviors, particularly motor vehicle accidents, homicide, suicide and unintentional injuries.

“Most teens aren’t asked about their risk behaviors,” Salerno said. “When they are asked — in an online format — they unload. With honesty. They want to talk with an adult about their fears, concerns, and questions. In one visit, we have the possibility to change their behavior and ultimately their lives.”

More than 10,000 teens have taken the RAAPS survey. It is the only adolescent health risk assessment that electronically captures data, allowing school and health professionals to track behaviors for individuals and groups of teens. Aggregate data can indicate when widespread issues demand focused attention. It also helps organizations demonstrate their need for grant funding to address teen risk.

RAAPS is three times shorter than traditional adolescent surveys. Lengthy lists of questions, plus the perception of limited confidentiality with the pen and paper approach of other surveys, are key reasons so few adolescents are queried about their behaviors.

Salerno, whose U-M role has taken her into several school health centers as a nurse practitioner, has countless stories of how the RAAPS survey prompts life-saving conversations.

One teen noted on the RAAPS that he was “cutting” his arms. When asked about this behavior, he talked about being bullied in one particular class. Salerno went to the teacher and the guidance counselor, and the situation was addressed immediately.

Another student came in for a shot, took the RAAPS survey, and noted “serious worries.” When Salerno talked with her, she said she’d had an abortion but hadn’t told anyone. Salerno helped her create a plan of who to talk with and how to feel better about herself.

“This student was surprised to come in for a shot and take a survey. Her answers showed serious desperation. Our conversation took just 10 minutes of my time and had tremendous impact on her life,” Salerno said.

Possibilities for Change licenses its survey and the database that provides individual and aggregate analytics. Its products are HIPAA-compliant. The company also provides training in motivational interviewing, shown to be an effective strategy when talking with teens about their risk behaviors.

Its clients are located across the country. They include the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH), which is adding 30 school-based health centers to the RAAPS roster by year’s end. The move brings the number of centers using the risk survey with MDCH funding to 50.

“RAAPS is a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate risk assessment that our centers can use to identify critical risk behaviors. It leads to important conversations between health care providers and their adolescent patients about how they can reduce risk and stay healthy during these critical years,” said Carrie Tarry, Adolescent & School Health Manager at the MDCH.

Possibilities for Change is supported in its business launch by Ted Dacko, an Ann Arbor entrepreneur best known for rescuing a small, near-death company called Health Media and growing it into an enterprise so successful it was bought in 2008 by Johnson & Johnson.

“There’s no better place to invest than in our youth,” Dacko said. “If we improve their behaviors, and convince them to live well, we’ll change the health of our nation.”

Possibilities for Change is expected to create 20 mostly white-collar jobs within 5 years.

About Possibilities for Change

Possibilities for Change is the parent company of the Rapid Assessment for Adolescent Preventive Services (RAAPS) survey, the associated behavior-tracking database, and support services such as motivational interview training. Based in the University of Michigan Tech Transfer Venture Accelerator, it serves clients nationwide, providing an easy-to-use, brief online survey that teens

openly and honestly answer. Their responses lead to conversations with school counselors, medical staff, and social workers about ways to change or avoid risky behaviors. The Possibilities for Change database is the only system that provides broad structure and consistency in risk screening while also enabling health professionals to manage the risk behaviors of their entire adolescent population.