

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 7, 2009



MEDIA CONTACTS:

Greg Taylor, Magellan of AZ, (w) 602-652-5810; (m) 602-670-6292; GATaylor@magellanhealth.com

Ramiro Camarillo, Magellan of AZ, (w) 602-797-8282; (m) 602-284-9683; rcamarillo@magellanhealth.com

Nancy Newton, Cramer-Krasselt PR, (w) 602-417-0684; (m) 602-697-7785; nnewton@c-k.com

MAGELLAN OF ARIZONA HOSTS FESTIVAL LED BY YOUTH TO EMPOWER YOUTH

MY Fest '09 Raises Awareness about Behavioral/Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Foster Care

WHAT: MY Fest '09 is an entertaining, educational and empowering event to inspire youth to make positive life choices. The free event is being hosted by Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment – also known as MY LIFE. It's a leadership team of 22 young people (between the ages of 13 to 23) who have had experiences with mental health issues, substance abuse and the foster care system.

WHY: The goal of MY Fest '09 is to empower young people to plan and lead a meaningful community-wide event that impacts the well-being of their neighbors, according to Shawn Thiele-Sacks, chief of Children's Services for Magellan of Arizona. "We're hoping to reduce the stigma around mental illness and substance abuse issues and raise awareness about available resources."

In addition to educating youth about healthy life choices and community services at MY Fest '09, MY LIFE helps identify issues and solutions to improve the system of care and shares its valuable insight with Magellan of Arizona to enhance its programs and services.

WHO: This year's festival will feature more than 80-youth-based organizations, along with music, art and entertainment. Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman also will attend.

Among the sponsors supporting Magellan Health Services, in a special alliance with the Arizona Department of Health Services, are the Phoenix Suns, Chick-Fil-A, Mental Health Awareness Coalition, Runaway Phoenix, The Shallow Type, Pima Prevention Partners-FreeMind, Break Street Promotions, Ear Candy Productions, Stand & Serve, Art Awakenings, Quality Care Network, Mentally Ill Kids in Distress, Bridging the Gap, and Jewish Family and Children's Services.

This year's event is expected to draw more than 4,000 attendees, nearly triple the number of youth who attended MY Fest '08.

"Based on feedback collected by Magellan of Arizona, it's clear that MY LIFE and MY Fest are making a difference," said Thiele-Sacks. In fact, 90 percent of the youth surveyed by Magellan of Arizona agreed that participating in MY LIFE and MY FEST '08 gave their lives new purpose and direction.

Echoing this sentiment is 15-year-old Hayley Winterberg of Phoenix. At a young age, she was exposed to mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, and homelessness. She eventually got help and today she is a MY LIFE founding member and co-chairperson.

"As a result (of MY LIFE), I have changed my life, my surroundings, and I continually strive to help other teens do the same," she said. "I know that I am not crazy...I am just me."

Winterberg looks forward to sharing her life experiences at My Fest '09 to connect with other young people and help them change their lives for the better.

WHEN: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 11

WHERE: Tempe Beach Park at Tempe Town Lake (near Mill Avenue and Rio Salado Parkway)

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