**CREATING COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS ALLIANCE**

Creating Community Solutions, part of the National Dialogue on Mental Health, was initiated after the Sandy Hook tragedy. In January 2013, President Barack Obama directed Secretary Kathleen Sebelius of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Secretary Arne Duncan of the U.S. Department of Education to launch a national dialogue on mental health. Government officials from SAMHSA, an agency within HHS, understood the need to partner with the field of deliberative democracy in order to design a process that integrated multiple levels of collaboration. Dr. Carolyn Lukensmeyer of the National Institute for Civil Discourse called together the leaders of [five other deliberative democracy organizations](http://www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org/about) to spearhead   Creating Community Solutions (CCS).

Convening a truly nationwide process has been a paramount challenge for the field of deliberative democracy.  Time after time, leading organizations have demonstrated how to bring diverse citizen voices together to influence policy decisions and to support community problem-solving.  But these models have been used mainly at the local level. With CCS, the coalition was poised to use their multiple methods to produce nationwide public participation. Under the umbrella of CCS, 230 community conversations on mental health have occurred to date.

With a steering committee consisting of deliberative democracy experts, CCS was also on the fast track to developing major breakthroughs that could lead to the ability to take public participation to a truly nationwide scale. CCS knew that three-quarters of all mental health problems present themselves before the age of 24, and thus young people were an especially important target audience to be having the conversation on mental health. The challenge was finding ways to reach them. While CCS experienced success getting young people to attend the community dialogues, more innovative methods were needed to reach much larger numbers.

Research reveals that young people prefer to connect and seek support via texting than any other mode of communication. Therefore, CCS knew cell phones could be an especially useful tool to reach youth. Using discussion and polling questions from the in-person dialogues, CCS transferred them to a text-message format, and added videos and social media interactions. Suddenly, though Text, Talk, Act, young people were having a dialogue on mental health…via their cell phones. Text, Talk, Act has engaged an estimated 14,500 participants and continues to grow into what can become a nationwide movement.

**Carolyn Lukensmeyer** is Executive Director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse and is the founder and former president of AmericaSpeaks, which promotes nonpartisan initiatives to engage citizens and leaders through the development of innovative public policy tools and strategies. During her tenure, AmericaSpeaks has engaged more than 165,000 people and has hosted events across all 50 states and throughout the world. Dr. Lukensmeyer formerly served as Consultant to the White House Chief of Staff from 1993-94 and on the National Performance Review where she steered internal management and oversaw government-wide reforms. She was the Chief of Staff to Ohio Governor Richard F. Celeste from 1986-91, becoming the first woman to serve in this capacity. She earned her PhD in Organizational Behavior from Case Western Reserve University and has completed postgraduate training at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland.