The Risk of Our “High Achieving” Culture

This interview was conducted with YES’ Chief Operating Officer, David Downing.

What is unique about our community and its behavioral health challenges?
We have many high performing schools, some of which are nationally recognized, and this shaped a culture in which local youth are valued based on their educational performance. The challenge in this culture is that there is a competitive drive to be exceptionally successful without the consideration of whether that success is realistically achievable for the young person.

Have you seen that change over the years?
I have absolutely seen a change over time. The number of students in AP or IB classes, the expectations of perfection, resume building with extracurricular activities, and the belief that in order to be successful you need these things, has all increased drastically and has been a big, significant culture shift.

Why do you think it has shifted?
The 2002 No Child Left Behind law has been a big, significant culture shift. The number of students in AP or IB classes, how many go on to college. The schools are also responding to their community, which wants their children to be successful, and be able to get into the best colleges, so schools create a curriculum and school environment to provide those opportunities.

Who do you think perpetuates these messages?
The anxiety parents experience, if their children are not doing certain things at certain levels, drives parents to over-manage their kids. That anxiety tremendously affects the youth themselves, who go on to adopt these same fears and competitive nature.

How is YES responding?
We are one of the leading agencies doing collective impact work with Eastside Pathways, engaging with our school partners and other local organizations working to solve this problem together. Our leadership in piloting the Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Services, or SBIRT, the universal mental health screening program in middle schools, is an effective step towards helping identify mental health issues early. All while simultaneously increasing clinical support within school environments.

We offer Youth Mental Health First Aid Trainings to empower adults in our community and educate them on how to identify and respond to youth mental health and substance use issues. This year we’re excited to introduce the next step in this initiative, which is training youth to provide peer-to-peer mental health support.

These expectations have also affected parental assumptions of what it means to be successful, and parents have become more anxious about doing the right thing for their children. It’s easy to fall for a narrative that it has to be college A and not college B or C, and if college A isn’t attained then it means failure. We hear it from our young clients all the time that the nation’s top colleges are promoted as the only route to success.

Is there hope for positive change?
I think there’s hope in the sense that people are starting to recognize what is going on with young people today and the factors that have helped establish this negative culture. There are now many more people questioning these ideals and are concerned for our young people. I see more acknowledgement that social-emotional and mental health issues are relevant and valid, and people want there to be foundational change. School systems are also putting in a lot of work to have trauma-informed spaces and are investing more money into having professional mental health support within schools. But there’s still much more work to be done.
MENTAL HEALTH

YES’ Psychiatric Care Integration Allows for a Collaborative Approach

As a way to become a more comprehensive behavioral health agency and serve the community better, in 2015 YES expanded services by integrating psychiatric care. By pairing psychiatric treatment with mental health and substance use services, YES has provided over 400 young clients with the best possible care and the best chance for long-term recovery.

“When you work in typical psychiatric care, insurance usually wants you to only see the client for a limited time, like once a month or so. It is hard to get to know people once a month. But if you have access to their counselor who has been working with a child or family for months or years, there’s just so much more information that makes your decisions as a psychiatrist more informed,” explains YES psychiatrist Dr. Tina Lee.

Providing psychiatric care within a behavioral health agency offers clinicians the opportunity to work together with the client as a collaborative care team. They use their various strengths and trainings to approach the client from different perspectives, ultimately providing the client with a broader set of tools to support their mental health.

YES psychiatrist Dr. Ellika McGuire recently treated a client who was previously prescribed a powerful antipsychotic medication. YES’ integrated treatment approach allowed Dr. McGuire to work together with the client’s YES therapist to better understand what the client was struggling with, which included intellectual disabilities. She learned that the client would use their imagination to escape from frightening or uncomfortable situations, which was different from experiencing a severe psychotic episode. Dr. McGuire was able to help the client decrease their medication and manage their fears and discomfort primarily through therapy.

In 2020, YES will continue providing more opportunities for collaboration and increase psychiatric service hours. As private insurance and Medicaid reimbursements only cover a portion of these services, thanks to our donors we’re able to continue to expand our integrated care services.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Tina Lee

Dr. Tina Lee was born and raised in Seattle, WA. Motivated by a lifelong curiosity about how people develop their identity and self-understanding, she went to medical school at Northwestern University in Chicago, IL, returning to the PNW in 2005 to complete training in Psychiatry and Child & Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Washington and the Seattle Children’s Hospital. Dr. Lee took her first job in Sitka, AK, working for SEARHC, an Alaskan Native health care organization, where she was drawn by their strong collaborative mental health team.

She returned to the Seattle/Bellevue area in 2010, first working with Evidence Based Treatment Centers of Seattle then transitioning to Echo Glen Children’s Center in Snoqualmie, WA through Dec 2019. Dr. Lee began working at YES in May 2019 and has found returning to community mental health very rewarding.

“I continue to be impressed with YES and their dedication to improving youth mental health. I especially appreciate their commitment to developing a team approach to mental health, with robust collaboration between their psychiatrists, therapists, school-based counselors, case managers and other community services. It is a really unique and enjoyable place for me to work,” said Dr. Lee.
**REGISTER TODAY!**

Join us at YES’ 2020 Invest in Youth Breakfast

**Wednesday, March 18, 2020**
**7:30–8:45 a.m.**
The Meydenbauer Convention Center, Bellevue

Our annual YES Invest in Youth Breakfast brings together 1,200+ community members with a passion for helping children and youth who are struggling with mental health and substance use issues. The Breakfast will feature heartfelt stories from YES youth clients, volunteers, mental health professionals and special keynote speaker and suicide prevention advocate, Kevin Hines.

Kevin Hines is an award-winning global speaker, best-selling author, documentary filmmaker, and suicide prevention and mental health advocate who has reached millions with his story of an unlikely survival and his strong will to live. Two years after he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, he attempted to take his life by jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge. Kevin now travels the world sharing his story of hope, healing, and recovery.

The breakfast is free to attend, but guests are encouraged to make a suggested $200 donation. Together we aim to raise $800,000 to ensure that all children and youth in need of care can receive mental health and substance use counseling and treatment, regardless of their ability to pay.

Register by March 4th to attend at www.youtheastsideservices.org/breakfast

---

**A BIG THANKS TO OUR 2020 INVEST IN YOUTH BREAKFAST SPONSORS!**

These sponsors help extend a lifeline to struggling children, youth and families in East King County by underwriting the cost of care for the mental health and substance use services.

**TITLE SPONSORS:**
- Costco Wholesale
- Microsoft

**PRESENTING SPONSOR:**
- Nintendo of America, Inc.

**MAJOR SPONSORS:**
- Allegro Pediatrics
- Overlake Medical Center & Clinics
- Symetra Financial

**KEY SPONSORS:**
- Amazon
- BECU
- Firstline Systems Inc.
- India Association of Western Washington
- Stifel RMG Group

---

**CLIENT SUCCESS STORY**

Grace’s Fortunate Meeting

One of Grace’s first memories as a little girl was a constant curiosity about the alcohol that played such an important role within her family. At five years old, she snuck her first sip of beer, by seventh grade when her parents divorced, alcohol became the only familiar constant in her life.

By sophomore year of high school, alcohol was no longer enough for Grace and she turned to other substances, any substances, to find a sense of familiarity. That was also when she met Suzanne Peterson, a YES school-based Behavioral Health Support Specialist, but while Suzanne made an impactful impression, Grace decided to become sober on her own. Almost a year later she relapsed, and lost all hope for recovery. She stopped making plans for college because she didn’t think she’d live past high school.

“If I wasn’t lucky enough to have that first experience with Suzanne, I would have never thought there was a way out of my addiction,” Grace said.

To hear the rest of Grace’s story join her and our other client speakers, at our upcoming 2020 Invest in Youth Breakfast.

---

**HOPE IS AN EVERLASTING LEGACY**

You can provide a brighter future to children and youth struggling with mental health and substance use issues with a gift to YES in your will.

There are several ways to include YES in your estate planning visit youtheastsideservices.org/legacy
Carmen Halstrom, co-chair of the YES Invest in Youth Breakfast, believes in the power of inviting your friends to breakfast.

“We all have the responsibility to make the world a better place. Every little thing makes a difference,” she said.

Like so many who attend our annual breakfast, Carmen finds that the stories clients share on stage resonate with her own story. She started attending the breakfast years ago to hear those stories and have the chance to give generously so that all East King County families could have access to counseling and treatment services that were so helpful for her own family.

“Carmen is the type to ask ‘what else can I do?’ It’s been so exciting to watch her go from being a guest and donor to co-chairs the event two years in a row. She’s an incredible partner to local kids!” said CEO Patti Skelton-McGougan.

One of the ways Carmen makes an impact and has fun in the process is by serving as a table captain for the YES Invest in Youth Breakfast.

“I love YES and by hosting a table, I get to share that joy with my friends. For many of us, it’s turned into a tradition and an annual way to support local youth” said Carmen.

You can experience this joy and make a bigger impact too! Table Captain opportunities for whole and half tables are still available for the March 18, 2020 event. So, invite your friends to breakfast and register to be a table captain at: www.youtheastsideservices.org/breakfast/