

Mark Masselli (00:04)

You know about the youth mental health crisis, and you probably understand there's a big need for mental health professionals. Is there a way to help solve both problems through an innovative joint effort?

Marie Groark (00:16)

What they found was that when you have a Youth Corps member in your school especially, you saw, improved attendance, fewer behavioral incidents, and increased student awareness of mental health and help seeking behavior.

Margaret Flinter (00:33)

The Youth Mental Health Corps says that its approach is working. We'll learn about it from two of the funders. Marie Groark, the managing director of the Schultz Family Foundation, and Alise Marshall, the Senior Global Lead for Public Affairs at Pinterest

Alise Marshall (00:48)

It is difficult for young people to trust, educators, parents, when you are, in adolescent hood and navigating yourself, and the world around you. Having someone trusted in your life who has been there, very recently, can make a very big difference.

Margaret (01:07)

This is Conversations on Healthcare.

Mark (01:21)

Marie and Alise, welcome to Conversations on Healthcare.

Marie (01:26)

Great to be here today.

Alise (01:28)

Great to be with you.

Mark (01:30)

That's great. You, well, let's begin with the overview of the problem. The US Department of Health and Human Services reports, one in three high school students report persistent feelings of hopelessness. About 122 million people live in what's called mental health professional shortage areas, and the country needs over 6,000 mental health practitioners. Marie, I'm wondering if you could give our audience, your foundation's perspective on the severity of these issues.

Marie (01:57)

Yeah. At the Schultz Family Foundation, we believe in creating opportunity accessible to all. And we really focus on young people and their transition from adolescents to adulthood. And our work often focuses on those young people that aren't necessarily going right from high school to college to career, but those that might take a more circuitous path, to economic mobility and prosperity. And about three years ago, when we started talking to our grantees just coming out of COVID, one of the things that we found was that many of our grantees who had training programs or mentorship programs or other types of supports for young people we're having a hard time delivering their services because of the mental health challenges the young people they serve were facing. And we started to realize that if you care about young adults in this country, and you wanna support them in their, education aspirations, in their career aspirations, it all goes through mental health. We can't ignore the mental health challenges facing our young people, if we really care about them and their future. And so it was at that time, we realized we needed to do something about this. Our co-chair, Sherry Schultz, really came up with the idea of, wait a minute, is it possible to pair national service with youth mental health? And so it was in this brainchild that we started to think maybe there was a way that we could address some of the issues. You noted at the top about mental health provider deserts, the fact that so few young people are able to access the kind of care that they need. the fact that more young people need alternative pathways, to graduate into a career, and that we could actually expand the, availability of services for young people while also giving o other young people a chance to explore and attain new career, new careers. And so that's where, how the Youth Mental Health Corps was born.

Margaret (03:53)

Well, Alise, we know that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 10- to 14-year-olds. so about a year ago, you and the others launched the Youth Mental Health Corps in response to this reality. Tell us today, how does the Corps actually work?

Alise (04:09)

Yeah. So today, the Youth Mental Health Corps leverages the power of national service and AmeriCorps, and really bringing in young people themselves. So 18- to 25-year-olds, bringing them into schools and local community-based organizations and community-based health clinics to serve as youth mental health navigators for young people and their families and caregivers in local communities. At Pinterest, we recognize the importance of meeting young people where they are. While we are an online destination for so many young people, gen Z, representing our fastest growing demographic of users, of our over half billion users around the world, we also recognize the importance of collective action and partnering up with, folks like the Schultz Family Foundation and other state and local leaders to really tackle this crisis head on. a few years ago when the US surgeon General Vivek Murphy, really called attention to the youth mental health crisis, some data came out showing that resources were really lacking, where young people spent the majority of their time in schools, in local communities. so when we were identifying solutions and ways that we could be a part, of, of, you know, helping to address this crisis, we knew that we would have to respond by making sure that we were keeping our online community of young people safe on our platform, but also extending that impact to show up in the communities, where young people were in need of critical support and care. so we launched the Youth Mental Health Corps, and today we've got over 300 Youth Mental Health Corps members, who are serving as mental health navigators in schools and community-based orgs.

Mark (05:58)

Well, that's, that's so great, Margaret. We were so happy to have the Surgeon General on. That's right. such a clarion call, in this particular area. Alise, I wanna follow up. The Corps allows a participant to enter a mental health career path through one of three certification pathways. I wonder if you could just fill us in on each one of those pathways.

Alise (06:19)

Yeah. So one of them is serving as a sort of peer navigator, community peer navigator. So actually, you know, certifying young people to be those community ambassadors, and actually get training and additional skills, through a range of pathways at the state and local level. So whether that's partnering, with local, communities, healthcare systems, or working with local community college systems, to get that sort of peer-to-peer navigator, apprenticeship, skill set. And, the other way that we're, sort of powering up, communities is through, the Mental Health First Aid training. So this is an evidence-based training, that's been out there for some years Yes. And has a pretty solid evidence base, to it. The Surgeon General and others have pointed to, to this, as being one of those, one of those sort of best practices, that schools and community-based organizations can, begin implementing, immediately. and then the other one is a community health worker model. This has, been one of those models that has taken off. we've, been working with an organization, west Ed, to actually look at, case studies to understand what is working in communities where we have launched the Youth Mental Health Corps. And one of the states that has that community health worker model is Minnesota. So you'll learn more about that when, when we release those case studies later on in the year.

Margaret (07:44)

Well, and Marie, maybe I can just follow up. I, I understand the Corps also offers resources to help students navigate social challenges online. Something the former Surgeon General was also also very engaged in such as harassment and bullying and bias. How do they do this? What does this look like? And is there research, behind their approach? Or is it a try test, see how things work?

Marie (08:08)

Yeah, this is a great question and I'm, I feel like I'm gonna start, but then I think I'll also hand it over to Alise, because Pinterest has been such a leader in this space. But one of the things that we have found is we've gone out to visit with, Youth Mental Health Corps members, is they talk about the impact that social media is having on their experiences as early as, elementary school. So, you know, a lot of young people are, have unfettered access to technology, and they begin to feel those effects. This idea of what's happening online, showing up for them at school, the anxiety, that comes along with that. And really a dearth of resources available inside of schools to help young people have conversations about what's happening online, to be able to recognize, to not be shameful about that or feel shame about that, but to have a safe place to talk about it. And then to build skills, to help them navigate that, personal skills and then real skills just in terms of, you know, how you set your

social media settings, to protect yourself. The other thing that we've heard is that there aren't a lot of resources in schools to have the conversations, and that we even have Youth Mental Health Corps members who are, have thought to themselves like, wait a minute. I have a series of sort of, skills that I use, and is there any way for me to adapt those for, for our young people? And while we appreciate the ambition of those Youth Mental Health Corps members, we also feel very strongly that we wanna supply them with the training that they need to be able to have those really critical and important conversations with young people in middle and high schools. And so that's where Pinterest has really helped us understand, what the right curriculum and approach is for that digital wellness conversation. And I don't know, Alise, if you wanna fill in a little bit there?

Alise (10:04)

Yeah, sure thing. So we have been, sort of championing digital wellbeing, in the industry for the last several years. Our CEO, it starts at the very top with our CEO Bill Ready, who has sort of made it table stakes for us, to keep young people, safe online, really all of our users safe online, but recognizing, the importance of safeguarding our youngest users, on this platform, but also, extending that to call for the rest of the industry. So last year, or a couple of years ago, we launched something called, the inspired Internet Pledge, with Boston Children's Hospital Dig, digital Wellness Lab. this is a research institution that, gathers experts and practitioners and leaders who are all looking at this intersection of, well, young youth wellbeing and digital wellbeing, especially with the advent of social media and technology. We recognize that innovation is not gonna be slowing down. and it's gonna be incumbent upon us both in, on the industry side to, create the right types of guardrails and policies and practices to keep young people safe on the platform, but also to ensure we're arming young people and educators and parents and caregivers, with all of the resources and supports that they need, to, to navigate, the online ecosystem safely. for a long time, Pinterest has been really popular for, for moms, for teachers. It's sort of the ultimate resource hub where you can come and get tips and best practices. so we hope to make a lot of that, that material available on, on Pinterest very soon. and we're partnering with lots of other organizations in this space, like Common Sense Media among others.

Mark (11:53)

Alise, you just mentioned you wanted to keep people safe on the, on the platform. Pinterest, of course, is a social media service and you're helping to fund this effort. Is, is there any contradiction of sorts and how do, how do you view, this relationship?

Alise (12:09)

No, I think the two have to work hand in hand, right? Like, we have been, you know, sort of trying to think about what are the ways in which we can show up first as an industry leader. and then again, how can we encourage other industry leaders through things like the inspired internet pledge to follow suit? one of the things that we've done is to protect the privacy of young people on our platform setting, all under 16-year-old, profiles to private by default. and, you know, and pro providing additional resources and guides to parents, of young people on our platform with additional supports and resources as well. so the two have to work hand in hand, especially given how ubiquitous, technology is a part of our lives now. young people are, are using technology for everything. And so even communicating with some of their educators, right? Like you ask, the average student, how are they communicating with their educator, you know, in their classroom. A lot of them are using technology to do so. and so we think that, you know, it's really important that we not bury our heads in the sand on this, but that we think about how are we supporting and arming the next generation, but also holding up our commitment as industry leaders first.

Mark (13:25)

And is this more about creating best practices versus doing it by legislation? It's trying to, be a role model for other social media groups?

Alise (13:36)

Well, I think you need both, right? I think we've, we, we are definitely engaged in both. so obviously, like I've mentioned at the outset, it takes collective action, right? So we are talking with policy makers at all levels, but also engaging folks in the philanthropic sector, like the Schultz Family Foundation, that's been a great partner in this work with us, and others. It, it's gonna take a myriad of approaches and sectors to really address the full scale of the crisis.

Margaret (14:05)

Well, Alise, if I can, AmeriCorps and the Schultz Family Foundation joined with your company, to start Youth Mental Health Corps. I guess one of the questions is, why a need for a private company to get engaged? And

what motivated your involvement? Was this already on your radar, as something that you thought needed to happen?

Alise (14:24)

Well, again, I think we were really moved. We felt a very, you know, being the fact that so many young people come to Pinterest and, and hearing from young people that, you know, being, being on Pinterest makes them feel, both safe makes them feel seen, right? Being able to find themselves in their communities on our platform, and find an, you know, inspiration, for their lives. We felt a great responsibility to respond to some of what the, the data was bearing out, in things like the youth risk behavior survey study that the CDC comes out with every couple of years showing that rates of anxiety, feelings of social isolation and depression were on the rise, particularly coming out of, you know, a historic pandemic that we were all navigating. so, you know, us being a, you know, large, company with a large, presence and influence in the lives of young people, we felt definitely a responsibility to ensure that we were responding to what that data was showing us, and that we weren't doing, trying to address the full scale of this crisis that we know is deeply complex and intersecting on our own, that it would take a collective effort to do, to do so accordingly.

Marie (15:37)

I just wanna echo what Alise said about the power of the multi-sector partnerships, given the challenge that lies before us, this isn't a challenge that just a, a philanthropy can solve, or even a, a public sector system. it requires all of us working together and bringing the assets and expertise that each of us have to the table, and then crafting innovative solutions to address this challenge. One of the best parts about, I'd say the Youth Mental Health Corps is the range of partners involved in it. whether it's the college systems at the state level, the state service commissions, governor's offices, schools, community-based organizations, as well as partners like, Pinterest, the Schultz Family Foundation, pivotal Ventures, there's so many of us gathered around the table, Starbucks. And as I think about that, oftentimes when you have many people gathered around a table, the partnership can become unwieldy. You spend more time managing your partners than you actually do working on the issue. I'd say in this case, that's actually not happening. And the reason for that is the clarity that we have in terms of the mission and the values that we bring to this, the challenges facing our young people. We're in an emergency situation, and we have to let go of things that drive our individual behavior, and we have to be collectively focused on what's best for the young people. And again, that's the most special partnership part of this partnership is that's exactly what's happening nationally and in the states that are involved.

Mark (17:12)

Margaret, we couldn't agree with her more in terms of the collectively, focused activity. Certainly we're in a couple hundred school-based health centers with clinicians, and we know the value of this. So thank you so much, Marie. Let me follow up with you though, because this initiative builds on the success in learning from public health, AmeriCorps program, a \$200 million partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We know about that program. but I'm wondering if you could just fill our audience in.

Marie (17:44)

Yeah. So this work comes out of, quite a lot of innovation that's happening around national service. so it includes some work that the Schultz Family Foundation pioneered in several states that work to connect the National Service Year with an actual career, and a credential so that a young person serving for the year could go on to get a, family wage supporting job, a credential that has, value in the marketplace after their term of service. And then to really think about where you can serve, and make a difference tied to public health. And so that is where Public Health AmeriCorps, came from. And that was in the wake of COVID and recognizing, the capacity challenges in community-based organizations and pairing that up, pairing those types of organizations up with an AmeriCorps member. So the, to expand the, potential impact of those organizations. And so, that program force multiplier exactly. Wildly successful, and we're excited to have that as a, as a one of the inputs to the Youth Mental Health Corps.

Margaret (18:57)

Well, that's fantastic. and I have a feeling one of the conversations around the table, with all your partners has to be about the outcomes, that you're seeing. And so we would really welcome, whether you have the outcomes already or you have a design to collect the outcomes. what are you seeing in terms of impact? And, and I guess that would be in two directions, the impact on the, the young people that the volunteers are working with, and of course, the impact themselves on their lives as they master these skills and, and do this work.

Marie (19:29)

Yeah, I really appreciate that question. That's been an important part of our design, and I think we really wanna measure that in an ongoing basis, both in terms of sharing the impact, with our stakeholder community, but also continuing to refine the design in a way that we, have growth in our impact year over year. So in terms of the impact on those serving, we have done a pre and post survey, and we'll do another survey six months from now to really understand what was the value add of the experience for the actual Youth Mental Health Corps members. So we don't yet have that data. I think the second of the three surveys is in the field right now. So more to come on that point. But the other thing we did was, we could, we, worked with West Ed Alise mentioned this earlier, and we asked them if they could, at the, at this, during this first year, very early on, could they do a set of case studies, one in each of our four states that were with us in this, in this pilot year. And that's Texas, Colorado, Minnesota, and Michigan, and dig in at a site and really start to understand what the impact is of having a Youth Mental Health Corps member at that site. And they went to different sites. they went to a middle school in Colorado. They went to a community health center in, Minnesota, in a very small town, in northern Minnesota. and then they went to a, into a organization, I, I wanna say Grand Rapids, Michigan. And what they found very early, we'll have the full report ready, later this summer was, but what they found was that when you have a Youth Corps member in your school especially, you saw, improved attendance, fewer behavioral incidents, and increased student awareness of mental health and help seeking behavior. So again, oftentimes the issues facing our young people is social isolation and feeling they're the only ones that are experiencing this. And teaching young people the power of seeking help, having conversations with others, we know is very powerful. So we're excited about those, early findings and much more to come.

Mark (21:45)

Well, that's so great, Margaret. One of the programs you set up here is the Weitzman, institute really focusing on implementation improvement science. So we can't help but applaud you, for really digging deep, into this area and, and coming up with some, results and showing what, what works. But Marie, I really am excited about the, one of the goals. We talked about this at the beginning, that there's this enormous shortfall of, of talent coming into the pipeline. And I'm wondering, your year into the program, I'm wondering what you're seeing the, of that pipeline now. I know it's early stage, but I think it's a great model, and one that, really speaks to the larger national problem that we're facing in terms of the shortfall.

Marie (22:30)

And you are better, more expert at this, than even we are. But I think one of the challenges of the behavioral health workforce is that the workforce design itself wasn't allowing for a continuum of professionals to match the continue continuum of mental health experiences or challenges a young person was facing. And so what we've seen is, as part of just even building out a Youth Mental Health Corps, states are really thinking about how do we rethink our strategy around behavioral health? How do we begin to offer credentials and career pathways that recognize that yes, we need psychologists and psychiatrists and, masters in social work, to deal with more acute cases, but we also need other times for young people to intervene, to begin to have conversations or direct them to resources, even when, as a preventative measure, before they even get to those more acute cases. And I feel like, again, Alise has just been an evangelist on this point, is really understanding of the Youth Mental Health Corps as prevention, as much as actually addressing acute need now. And I don't know if you wanna add anything to that, Alise?

Alise (23:43)

Yeah. This has sort of been my biggest sticking point, having previously worked in, in education policy. One thing I know is that we tend to really focus on, you know, sort of one, once a young person is in a tier one or tier two level of crisis, then the system sort of kicks in to intervene and ensure that they've got those wraparound supports, for them and their families. But, you know, we, we sort of leave the rest of that general population to sort of figure out how to navigate to the right set of resources on their own. so we're really thinking about how do we go upstream? How do we, get to young people before they're in a period of crisis so that they understand that they understand and have access to even the language of mental health and emotional wellbeing and understand the network of resources and supports and services that are, available to them in their, in their communities. The other thing is, you know, one, one thing that the data shows us is that, it is difficult for young people to trust, educators, parents, when you are, in adolescent hood and navigating yourself, and the world around you, having someone trusted in your life who has been there, very recently, can make a very big difference. Yeah. So these young people, these youth Mental Health Corps members, we are not training them to, to supplant any role. They are, you know, obviously, not at a period of, being a licensed clinician. Sure. but we are certainly making sure that they are getting the right training and have access to those, additional supports and licensed experts, in their community to be able to route those resources to young people, in need. But, you know, having a, a young person to serve as a safe harbor, someone who has just very recently been there and

navigated the very same issues, that the teens, that they're working with are grappling with, is, can be quite transformative.

Margaret (25:42)

Well, maybe I could ask a question of either of you, who wants to comment for our audience, could you, relay a story that perhaps demonstrates the, impact of this effort? story is worth a thousand technical descriptions, of course, I think would really bring to life for us the kind of unique impact a program like this can have.

Alise (26:03)

I have, I have one.

Marie (26:05)

Yeah, go ahead, Alise.

Alise (26:07)

Marie and I, you know, we're not just taking the researchers' words for it. We're trying to get on the ground ourselves and see, what the Youth Mental Health Corps looks like in action. And I think if I, if I were to point to one, example that I think really ex, sort of, is, is the example that really demonstrates what we were getting at with the Youth Mental Health Corps. It's a young man by the name of, of Josiah, in Colorado. and he, sort of, understands the, unique experience that young people in the school where he's working. He's working in a Title one middle school, with a lot of seventh and eighth graders, who are just about to enter high school. and he understands exactly what it is they're going through and understands, the sort of lived experience of the young people that he's serving. And we had an opportunity to sit with Josiah, understand his approach, and how he sort of establishes trust with, the students that he's supporting. but we also had an opportunity to speak with the young people themselves. and one of the young, young men told us that he was struggling even just to make it into school every day, that that was, while he loved learning and loved, you know, just being, you know, being in school and engaging in the learning environment, he was dealing with lots of anxiety, and dealing with lots of, you know, just navigating the world around him and nav navigating various family dynamics, and just really struggling to make it into school each day. and had it not been for the presence of Josiah, the, the reassurance and encouragement that he was getting, and knowing that he had a trusted and safe place, in that school, that, you know, that made all the difference, for him. And so that is exactly, you know, sort of, I think the aim here, making sure that we're meeting young people where they are, that we are providing a real career path for, Josiah in this case, but also strengthening that entire learning environment for all the young people and that's really what we're trying to get at.

Mark (28:15)

Wonderful story. Margaret. I think I just, our audience is pretty knowledgeable, but I just wanna remind them that AmeriCorps is facing significant challenges to its future. it's really fighting for its survival in the courts. The federal judge has blocked some of the budget cuts, not all of the changes. I'm, I'm wondering, isn't this a great model though? AmeriCorps and the, Schultz Efforts Foundation there, private sector working for public. Isn't that a, an exemplar, model of how, private sector and government can work together, Marie?

Marie (28:53)

Definitely. I mean, we think it's an, an amazing model. we built it purposefully at the state level recognizing, obviously these challenges are local, and we want states to have the opportunity to design what the Youth Mental Health Corps looks like to meet the needs of their state. And we also recognize that credentials and career pathways, in the behavioral health space are the purview of states. And so this is a state led initiative, but as you noted, it is, braided with philanthropic, private, and public dollars. both that gives us an opportunity to innovate and scale and sustain this work. and so we, as I mentioned earlier, are, are bullish on multi-sector partnerships, and we think public sector plays as a, as a critical role, as does the philanthropic and Private sectors.

Margaret (29:42)

Well, that is very well said, and I think a good note to close on. Thank you, Marie and Alise for joining us. And thank you to our audience for being here. Just a reminder, please subscribe to our videos on YouTube, find us on Facebook and X. Please share your thoughts and comments about this program. Take care, everyone, and be well.

(30:04)

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