

Transcript

Sarah: Okay everyone, thank you for tuning in to the first episode of Season Eight of the Rough Draft Podcast! The only student-run, literary podcast on York College, where we talk about literature, culture, art, and everything in between! Thank you for joining us, my name is Sarah and I am one of the co-hosts this season.

Ben: My name is Ben, and I am going to be your main host this season.

Tara: I'm Tara, and I'm another co-host for this season. Thank you all for listening to the first episode of Season Eight. Today, Ben and Sarah will be talking to Darrell Will, the Director of Counseling Services in hopes to break down some of the cultural stigma around mental health, and also addressing the topic of suicide prevention. We understand that this might be a difficult subject for some people, and we urge you that if you can listen to it, please do. We find it very important, seeing as last week was Suicide Prevention Week. We also want to help improve the way mental health is seen culturally on and off the York campus. We hope that no matter when you listen, whether it be the day this episode airs or five years from now, you might find a new perspective. Be led to campus for your sources if you are in need of them, or know that there are people trying to break the stigma that mental illnesses hold in our culture. Thank you for listening!

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Sarah: Okay Darrell, thank you for joining us today. Can you first tell us a little bit about what you do on campus?

Darrell: Uh, sure! So, I'm the Director of Counseling Services and what I do is a number of things. Uh, first thing is even though I am the Director, I also provide direct service to students, so I am a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, which is one kind of degree—one kind of license that mental health professionals can have. And so I, again I provide direct service to students as well as, I manage the office. We have a number of college counselors that are with us, we have two full time college counselors as well as we have the Assistant Director who is just like me in that she also provides direct service to students. And then we also have a part time college counselor that helps us with regard to providing services. And I guess I would say...the kind of services are specifically mental health counseling. So we're not—we don't do career counseling or other things like that, there are other departments or other agencies...other people who do that kind of thing. So—but we specifically specialize in mental health counseling.

Ben: As far as students on campus, what are some of the biggest issues that people face when they come in for counseling?

Darrell: The top five reasons that students come in for...to access our services—the top one is for dealing with relationship problems. So that really does cover a broad amount, a broad spectrum of different things. So, for instance that would include individuals who are having problems or having challenges in their romantic relationship. It also includes individuals who are

struggling with a roommate or a suite mate, and they're having some sort of conflict or issue related to their peer relationships. And lastly that includes individuals who are having trouble with family issues. Whether that's a parent or a sibling, that can also be one of the big reasons. So our number one is relationship problems, secondly then we—the students come in for dealing with anxiety and worry. So probably no surprise to you that anxiety would be, would be a big one. Especially during this time of COVID-19, there's now a whole other layer of reasons why students are feeling anxious and kinda having levels of worry that make them want to reach out and want to start having some conversations. Other things that are a part of our top five also include...so, individuals come in for dealing with self-esteem and self-confidence, they also come in for stress management, and also students come in due to related—stress related to academics. So we don't do particularly, helping students with academics, per se, but that is one of the reasons they say to come here for counseling. Now one thing I would just mention too, quickly is...if you noticed in the top five, depression wasn't one of those, but depression is right—it is our number six. So it's right around the corner, but depending on the year, many times depression is in our top reasons for why students come in for services.

Ben: Yeah, I was gonna ask, I noticed depression wasn't one of them. That was gonna be my next question for you.

Sarah: So I think this is a pretty big week, it is suicide prevention week which brings a lot of awareness to mental health and suicide prevention. How do you personally think that mental health is portrayed in the media? Are you satisfied with how it's portrayed, or would you like to see some changes with how it's portrayed?

Darrell: Well over the years I have seen it trending in the right direction. So generally speaking, media and their presentation of mental health issues, I would critique it and say we need some improvement in how they represent mental health issues. And whether we're talking on news broadcasts or also...its representation in movies and other things, I'll just say we are moving in the right direction, from my viewpoint, about media getting better at its presentation of, of mental health. But obviously it can still use some tweaking and it can still use some more fine tuning of representing mental health in a better light. One thing that I would like to speak to is the thing I do appreciate is there are...there has been so many individuals—movie stars, sports stars, athletes—that the media has done, you know, studies on, and done interviews with, and so...in the past five years, we've seen just a collective increase in these stories from people that most people look up to, or have respect for, and these individuals disclosing about their own mental health issues...depression being one of the top ones that a lot of these individuals have talked about. And I'm just gonna go through and name just a few of those, for instance we have Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian ever in the history of the Olympics, has won more gold medals than anyone in history, who had come forth back in 2015 but also now in 2020...he's become a pretty outspoken individual to talk about his own challenges with depression, with mental health. So I really appreciate his...kind of leading the cause to represent real reality of "hey, even people that most people would think," "oh they probably have no problems," have shown up and are like, "oh, no, we've got problems ourselves." So there's a list of about thirty different movie stars and athletes and pros that have come forward and now their stories are represented in a lot of media formats, which ultimately...I'm very thankful for

that. And I think any of us could find, in any person's general interest group, you could probably find one or two people that need that and they've got their own story about how they struggled with depression or some other kind of mental health issue.

Ben: Yeah, just yesterday Dak Prescott, the quarterback for the Cowboys, came out and talked about some of his own struggles with mental health and talked a little bit about his brother who took his life I think back in...April? Are there any examples in media you think should be followed or are good role models as far as...you said it was trending in the right direction, are there examples you think should be followed?

Darrell: Well, specifically, I guess I would say any of the interviews and the representation that Michael Phelps has done...there's also a comedian, "Gary Gulman", who in the past year, he—his newest set is called "The Depresh"—you can find that on HBO, and it's an entire set dedicated to his struggle with depression. And of course he brings in his humor and whatnot, but he does a really great job of just having a real conversation and again bringing more acknowledgment and awareness to this in a format that, you know, a lot of format do appreciate and like. We also have the Rock, which is Dwayne Johnson, and his discussion about his own struggle with depression. Katy Perry...we have Ellen Degeneres...um, Lady Gaga. There's just so many people that have kind of taken on their own small cause in regard to helping to give that mass attention. So I appreciate all of those individuals and their willingness, whether it's on their Twitter feeds or on other forms, to helping provide that information.

Sarah: So I think we touched on this already, but in your opinion are you more believing that it's better for people to have open discussions about this subject, and having that open conversation with other people about the struggles that might be...um, coming with mental health?

Darrell: Yeah. I actually, I really fully support that level of openness and having those conversations just because every time somebody adds a story to that, it's just one more way for...for college students and for everyone to hear a real person talking about real struggles and I think that overall, it's absolutely more beneficial than not to have those conversations taking place.

Ben: What resources are available for specifically, um, students both on and off campus?

Darrell: Specifically on campus, to start, what...we do have individual counseling sessions. So if a student were to call in to our office, what they're going to do is go through a bit of an intake process, and they're gonna get to work with one of the counselors. And that will include, pragmatically, it's a...normally a 45-15 minute either Zoom or phone session, of course confidential. It's all confidential, but they can have those confidential conversations with a counselor in order to, um, address whatever issue it is that they're struggling with. So and—oh, we also have groups that we offer, so...there is...students can join one of our groups that might address a particular issue that they're struggling with. And that, then, allows for more of a collective conversation amongst a number of individuals who all are sharing in having a same issue or pretty much a general...generally in the same problem that they're having. And then

being able again to have conversations in regards to that... When we look to the community, so there's a lot of local agencies that are in our communities which ultimately provide services, so that is also a great connection for people who are not York College students but who are just generally speaking in the community...one of the best ways for that to happen, too, is for people to simply do a Google search and just say "therapists in my area" or "mental health counselors in my area," and what'll happen is, there's a Google search, there's a website through Psychology Today...which as you all know is a magazine, but they have done the most fantastic job of providing a therapist locator, so it's a system for you...you know you plug in your area, and then it brings up the profiles of all of the individuals and agencies in your area, and it helps you to kind of read about the particular therapists or counselor so you can already try to get a feel for whether you believe this would be a good fit. And I guess I would speak to that, just as a general understanding about mental health counseling...obviously everyone has a unique personality. And that includes for the counselors as well. So sometimes, when a person meets a counselor for the first time, they might...they might not jive real well. And that is okay, it just means that the person needs to try a different therapist or a different counselor and not stop until they find somebody that they really...there's a really good chemistry, you know, there's a really good connection there. And that's—so that is, that is a very typical process. Somebody reaches out, you use one of these great resources to connect, and if for some reason it doesn't entirely feel like the fit is really good, then I just really wanna encourage people to not stop there, but to try again with a different counselor and...because you are very likely to find somebody where the fit is gonna work really well.

Sara: Going off of that, I have question for you. Do you think the internet is changing how we approach mental health counseling, like applications on your phone, for example Better Help, or any counseling services apps, like...uh, I don't know if you're familiar or aware of these. Do you think that's more of a positive that someone could access counseling whenever they need it?

Darrell: So, in regards to counseling service apps...yeah, I believe that there is definitely a place for that, and it's just one more resource that allows people to potentially pretty easily connect with somebody in order to start having a conversation. The best counseling services apps, they will...they have like, criteria. So they are going to introduce and have a beginning conversation and if they believe that the issues that are being talked about need to be directed either to somebody in person or, or to somebody that would be more specialized in that area, those good app companies help to make those decisions so that they're really connecting people with the most qualified individuals they could work with. So...I think it's a great, a great resource—it many times isn't just the end, what a person ends up doing, normally its kind of a starting place before they might get connected with somebody else. Yeah, I personally think, uh...for most of those apps, they're doing a good job of helping to provide initial conversations to get some conversations taking place.

Ben: More towards this suicide prevention topic, what kinds of things should people look out for in their friends or family members that might indicate there could be a problem?

Darrell: Okay. Yeah, great question. Uh—a few things related to looking for...like with depression or particularly suicide prevention is this. So if we were to notice a significant change

in the mood of one of our friends or one of the people that we know, and we were for instance—maybe they were pretty extroverted and pretty engaging, and then you notice that they have stopped engaging and they have become, you know, silent, and that's going on for at least two weeks. We use a general bracket of approximately...two weeks is a good measurement to say, if someone is still dealing with something after two weeks, then they're probably needing definite help. Okay? Because everyone gets down, by the way. Like, everyone has moments where they're either really feeling down or they're just kinda feeling stressed, but the catch is if it lasts for longer than two weeks, then is when that's definitely a warning sign. So if you were to notice a friend that seems to be really disengaged, and it's going on for a few weeks, then that's when you can know that this person probably needs help or needs more help. Other things particularly related to suicide is if someone starts saying things like, "you know, it's okay if I don't wake up tomorrow." Any kind of references to not really being interested in being around in the following day. And so...they might joke about it, and I'm always gonna suggest that generally speaking, if someone is joking about that, following it up with a question to say "yeah, you're not feeling too good about wanting to wake up tomorrow?" Those are great signs to say, this person is not in a good place and could benefit from talking with somebody. Uh, other things include if for some reason, this is of course...we're getting into the real brutal...kind of more of an extreme situation. So if somebody starts giving away their personal property, if somebody starts saying "Hey friends, you can have this, you can have that!" and you start seeing them giving away things that are pretty valuable, that is a very serious warning sign that a person is considering ending their life. The one thing about individuals that can be feeling suicidal is, you...you never can do harm by asking them point-blank if they're thinking of ending their life. Most of us naturally would be inclined to think "I wouldn't wanna bring that up, if I see somebody who seems like they're not doing well, and they said that they're depressed and they had suggested that they might be not liking life much," uh, it is okay to ask directly, "hey, are you thinking about ending your life? What's happening for you?" Just bringing up or asking directly about that, it doesn't make a person prone to ending their life, and that's what most people can think. "Don't bring it up or you might lead them to ending their life," and that's not true whatsoever. If you feel like something's going on there, it's okay to ask and say, "are you thinking of ending your life?" and of course then if they say yes, then it's like "okay, so like...I care about you, lets get you connected with someone who can really help," and then that's what you do.

Ben: What kind of things in your experience can someone do for a friend who maybe doesn't wanna go to counseling but is having those thoughts and feelings?

Darrell: Okay. Well, good question. When people come into Counseling, most people end up finding it to be a really good experience. So there can be that difficulty of helping the person to take that step to actually be willing to meet with a counselor. And one of the best things to do is, you can suggest that you would go with them to their first appointment. So they wouldn't be alone in there, and here in Counseling Services, we completely support if a friend...if somebody's hesitant to come to counseling and their friend is trying to get them to come to Counseling, we'll tell that person, "hey you can come in too. They don't have to be in here alone without a friend. You can come in too with them and provide that support," and that works out well when they're willing to do that. It's...a really good way to think about this is...none of us like

having problems. And if you don't like having problems, one of the hardest things in life to do is to admit you have a problem. So normally, things have to get pretty serious for people to be willing to even reach out and get serious. And it's that last step there...they don't wanna have a problem, they might just have no clue about what the benefits could be, so if you're a friend, please feel free to offer that you would join them in that first counseling session or two, so they have your support and it can sometimes make the difference to get connected with Counseling.

Ben: Is that a common thing—for people to come in with their friend on the first meeting?

Darrell: It—it doesn't happen that often, but it does happen periodically. Because there are plenty of students that, first off, they are personally initiating...they are self-referred. They have realized that they're struggling, and they find, um, that they're okay and they wanna go talk to someone. So a fair amount of our students that come in, they are self-referred, a fair amount of them are referred by a friend, but once the friend tells them, they're willing to do that one their own. And then there's a smaller portion that just, they're just really hesitant...they may have had a bad experience with counseling, with a guidance counselor or something in high school, so they have those reservations, so those are the times that we would encourage a friend to bring them over and also join the sessions, to help the friend get connected.

Ben: Alright and if you could give a message to anyone listening to this show who might be going through a rough time, what would that message sound like?

Darrell: The message would quite simply sound like this: "there is something very powerful that happens when you're not just on your phone having to try to figure things out. And though most people want to try to figure things out on their own, when you're willing to reach out and connect with one of us, if it's here at the counseling center, when you're willing to reach out and get connected with another person, I believe you will be surprised to find out how helpful it can be. One of the most predominant things that happen for those that were hesitant and then they come to counseling, is people feel very relieved, they're so happy that they came in, and they're finding that though they weren't sure it would work, they find that they're feeling some relief, and they start to feel better about whatever the particular challenge is. So that's what I would encourage you to do, don't stay alone in your struggle, please reach out and allow somebody else to become a part of the conversation with whatever the struggles are. And I believe that you will find that it is going to be very helpful and you will be so glad that you did...it's gonna kind of open up a whole other world of opportunities and resources that you just never knew were there."

Sarah: Well Darrel, thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your expertise on the subject, we know it's very important for our listeners to have heard what you have to say and we'd like to thank you so much for being here.

Darrell: Well, thank you so much for having me on your program! I appreciate it.

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Ben: Alright, that was a very interesting interview with Darrell Williams today.

Sara: yeah definitely, I think he made some great points about the culture surrounding mental illness and how it's seen in the media, definitely he feels we're leaping in the right direction and I'd have to agree with those statements. As long as we follow what he's saying, listening to the views of people who struggle, whether it be small voices or large voices like celebrities, or just somebody in your community who's dealt with this, I think maybe that's the way to break down some of the issues surrounding mental health.

Ben: Yeah, and I really liked how he talked about athletes, because usually people look to athletes as a pillar of strength, and I think athletes leading the charge in breaking down the stigma puts a strong figure at the forefront of an issue that everyone deals with.

Sarah: Yeah definitely, just seeing those people and how they're open about this, it gives a power to how we should be open about the subject also. He also made some really great points about suicide prevention and something that I've been thinking about before, but just being able to have, like, if somebody's showing any symptoms, it's okay to ask them if they feel that way. It's something that I thought you might not be able to do.

Ben: Yeah, and I like his answers to the one question, like "what kind of things should people look for?" because that's not really information that (...). So I think sharing this information can really help out a lot of people.

Sarah: Yeah, definitely. He also shared a lot of resources both on and off campus for students and anyone listening that they could find available and helpful to them.

Ben: Yeah, and just specific for students on campus...I've used counseling services myself, and it's been a very professional and very helpful environment for me and for a lot of my friends.

Sarah: Definitely. Well, we'd like to thank you all for joining us this week. Next episode that will come out will be on Netflix and the culture of streaming! Thanks for listening, everyone! This has been Sarah—

Ben: —Ben—

Tara: and Tara!