

A Voice for Mental and Behavioral Health: Leadership Profile of Joseph Pyle, President of The Scattergood Foundation

Melissa Fernandez 29 November 2015

"You get a cold and you don't hesitate to take a sick day. But people don't call out of work depressed."

In this statement, Joseph Pyle, president of the Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation in Philadelphia, perfectly captures one of the greatest challenges to public health that has multiple cascading societal effects. Americans have a hesitation to openly and honestly voice their concerns about their mental and behavioral health.

At a time where some of the most hotly contested public debates center around issues such as gun control, prison overcrowding and state-supported welfare programs, it seems as though access to routine and preventive mental health resources would be a part of the mainstream dialogue on healthcare but despite the incontrovertible need, it's still not a topic that most people are comfortable discussing as readily as they may be willing to talk about

their diabetes or heart conditions. Mr. Pyle relates this back to the stigma of mental health disorders, highlighting the need for large-scale initiatives aimed toward normalizing mental health as a part of overall wellness and providing education and services to those most in need.

As a special-education teacher, Joseph Pyle began his career with a calling to provide direct service to vulnerable populations. What ultimately drew him to mental health was recognizing that as an educator, he lacked the tools to most appropriately understand the unique psychological and emotional needs of his students, thus sparking his return to school where he received a degree in psychology.

Joseph Pyle held several clinical positions after receiving his degree in school psychology, including clinical director of adolescent services at MeadowWood Hospital and psycho-educational specialist at Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic. Over time, he transitioned from clinical work to administrative and philanthropic work on behalf of organizations advocating for behavioral health awareness and services. Realizing the need for greater resources and the potential for focused advocacy in an often neglected facet of public health, the Scattergood Foundation was born.

Under Mr. Pyle's leadership, the Scattergood Foundation has been phenomenally successful in supporting programs that bring awareness to mental and behavioral

health as a means to impact larger societal change. Two such initiatives that he has been especially proud of during his tenure are the commandeering of a full-time behavioral health reporter on WHYY, Maiken Scott, and the funding of Active Minds, a program spanning across college campuses to bring mental health education to students.

Mr. Pyle credits Maiken Scott's capacity as WHYY's Scattergood Foundation Behavioral Health reporter with bringing a tremendous amount of awareness to mental health issues, in addition to serving as an example of Scattergood's commitment to educating journalists to make sure they get the story right, helping to alleviate some of the stigmatized aspects of behavioral healthcare. Active Minds was the brainchild of University of Pennsylvania graduate Alison Malmon whose brother's tragic suicide inspired her desire to bring mental health resources to students previously suffering in silence. With Scattergood's support, this program is active on 400 campuses across the country. The success of these initiatives makes Mr. Pyle optimistic about the future of mental healthcare and reducing the stigma and prejudice for those seeking mental and behavioral health services.

When asked what makes Philadelphia especially noteworthy for its commitment to normalizing the dialogue on mental and behavioral health, Mr. Pyle talks about the many projects being spearheaded around the city, especially those related to the growing acceptance of

the role that adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and chronic and toxic stress play in overall mental wellness. Naming some of the nationally recognized work currently being done at Philadelphia institutions including Drexel University School of Public Health, Public Health Management Corporation and Children's Hospital, among others, Mr. Pyle refers to Philadelphia as a hub for mental healthcare. To that end, he goes on to say that, "If we want to be a healthy city, the next great city, if we are not connecting people's emotional health to physical health then we will never meet that challenge."

When speaking of his leadership style, Mr. Pyle's humble nature was very apparent, as emphasized through his statement that "good leaders step back and allow others to step forward." Mr. Pyle explained that with several years of leadership experience, his priority is to give opportunities to others to showcase their potential. He is especially passionate about involving students, as demonstrated through many of Scattergood's funding projects and believes that we as a country need to invest in young people in order to drive innovation in mental health and other issues of great social concern. This backseat approach to leadership in turn inspires others to become leaders, enabling organizations like Scattergood to have a larger footprint and effect greater scale change.

Throughout the brief but candid interview, it was very clear that while stigmas remain surrounding behavioral and mental health, hope lies within the passion of leaders

and advocates like Joseph Pyle. Leadership plays a tremendous role in an organization's ability to stay on course and promote the next generation of innovators to fulfill its mission. Through his work at the helm of the Scattergood Foundation, not only is Mr. Pyle helping to maximize talent and support for behavioral health advocacy, he is also providing some of society's most vulnerable people with an invaluable and much needed resource... a voice.