

interaction

Multnomah Education Service District

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Reaching and teaching: *Wraparound's Micah Thomas*

By Mark Skolnick

It's a cool Tuesday in February and **Micah Thomas** will be facing a tough crowd at Prescott Elementary School in Northeast Portland. She has yet to meet her audience and doesn't know if they will be attentive. Will they be focused on her message? What kind of reception will she get?

As she introduces herself, the group squirms and talks among themselves. Yes, as any parent or teacher knows, first graders can be a demanding audience.

"Hi everyone. I am Miss Micah. I am so glad to be here with you today." Within seconds, she establishes rapport with the students. The connection is made, the audience is friendly and for the next 35 minutes that special magic occurs when an experienced teacher reaches and motivates learners.

Today's lesson is an informal and relaxed "get to know you" session, she said.

However, over the next 16 weeks, she will cover a range of sensitive topics that explore conflict resolution, self-esteem, accepting differences and positive expression of feelings and emotions. As youth engagement specialist for MESD's Wraparound Oregon: Early Childhood program, Micah provides age-appropriate prevention instruction. She is skillful at this specialized and sensitive undertaking.

"Wraparound works with intervention and I want to be the prevention piece. I want to go to schools when the kids

are young, try to give them so new information, some new ways to ask questions when they need help, how to express their feelings. A lot of younger kids, when they do have something going on in their body or in their mind, they don't know how to express it. Then it comes out as a behavioral challenge," she said.

Appreciated by Wraparound and schools

Her ability to help children gain language and social skills is highly valued by Wraparound staff. **Naomi Bledsoe**, Wraparound's public information specialist, praises Micah for her gift of working with young children.

"Micah has this natural ability to interact with students of all ages," said Naomi. "She is able to initiate conversations about important subjects such as emotions and how the body reacts to them. Micah can teach

students to understand empathy for themselves and one another through art, puppets, music and active listening."

Over the past year, Micah has provided services to multiple classes in Centennial, Portland Public and Gresham-Barlow school districts. She is now starting the series at Shaver and Prescott schools in the Parkrose School District.



Micah Thomas *Continues on page 2*

Prevention services evolve over time

Micah is an employee of the Oregon Family Support Network and is on a contract to MESD through the federally-funded Wraparound grant. She started working with MESD in 2009 with a directive to promote wellness and mental health among school children. She admits it took a while to determine the most effective way to achieve those goals. She began by working with Naomi to develop posters with positive messages for students that were displayed near school nurse offices. She added accompanying worksheets for the students but realized a more interactive strategy was needed. So she developed a flexible curriculum that built upon printed materials available to kids and families.

“Micah has this natural ability to interact with students of all ages. She is able to initiate conversations about important subjects such as emotions and how the body reacts to them.”

One reason her work has been embraced by schools is she involves their ideas and suggestions right off the bat. “I start by meeting with counselors and staff to see if our program is desirable. We don’t come into the school with a preconceived idea of their needs,” she said. Instead, she uses the eight Wraparound concepts as a starting point. Then she initiates meetings with teachers and counselors resulting in a custom-designed program that is the right fit and tone.

A passion for working with children

Micah’s talents for connecting with children were cultivated by her family, her church and her education. She attended elementary and middle school in Portland and then high school in Beaverton. College was “always an expectation” she says and eventually graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary studies.

“I’ve always had a love and passion for working with kids, whether it was through my church or in other community organizations. When I heard about Wraparound’s goals and mission, I thought that was perfect. But it took literally about a year to figure out the best way to approach the youth engagement piece,” she said.

MESD’s strong relationship with schools, especially through school nurses, has been a real plus. “We’ve been really welcomed. There hasn’t been a school that we’ve been to that hasn’t been very, very welcoming to us coming in.”

How does she measure success? “When we hear the kids use their new language skills to solve problems and to de-escalate situations, that’s success,” she said.

Back in the classroom at Prescott, she tells the children she has brought a special friend with her. His name is Mr. Bubbles and although he is shy, he is excited to meet everyone. From her bag she pulls out a cute monkey puppet and the students welcome Mr. Bubbles to the class. Using the puppet to reinforce her comments, the students are captivated as they watch the puppet’s every move.

Soon she has some of them telling stories of how they have used their words to solve problems. Then they stand up and play a quick game of follow the leader. Through lighthearted play, the point is made that anyone can be a leader and leaders deserve respect. The students are having fun but learning at the same time. 📌



Nathan Earle:

Adding stability to Arata Creek's mental health resources

By Mark Skolnick

Each morning, counselor and therapist **Nathan Earle** joins his colleagues who greet students as they arrive at Arata Creek School. These daily welcomes are followed by brief but important meetings with classroom teachers and staff who review ways Nathan can help their students. Together with Principal **Henry Ramirez**, School Nurse **Pam Pestalozzi**, psychologists **Susan Hoelzer** and **Carol Wong**, they discuss individual students who may need some attention from Nathan. It's a mobile meeting that takes place in a different classroom every morning. By the end of the week, he's made the rounds to all five classrooms at the school.

Although Nathan works at Arata Creek, he is not an MESD employee. His services are provided through a contract with Trillium Family Services. Although his paycheck comes from another organization, he is a full member of the Arata Creek team.

For Nathan, establishing and maintaining relationships with students is the key to gaining their trust. With this trust comes the opportunity to teach new social and behavioral skills. Giving students the ability to trust an adult, when they haven't been able to in the past, is the key to success, he said.

He's not in Kansas anymore

Born and raised in the midwest, Nathan graduated from Kansas University. A month after graduating he packed up and came to visit a friend in Portland. He was immediately taken with the city. "It was a real clear day and the plane flew over Mt. Hood. I'm from the midwest so it was flat...as soon as we hit ground I found that I love the culture here."



Prior to coming to Arata Creek, Nathan worked for New Avenues for Youth, East County Caring Community and for Trillium. Nathan enrolled at Portland State University's Masters of Social Work program, majoring in community-based practice. Armed with his advanced degree, he went back to Trillium.

Nathan started at Arata Creek in November and has committed to being at ACS for at least two years. In the past he said, a lack of continuity of contracted therapists was not good for kids. It is sustained contact, he said, that allows him to maximize his impact.

Henry Ramirez appreciates Nathan's commitment to the school. "Before he took the position he did give a two-year verbal commitment to the

program. Given that, he has provided stability to the program. Also, he has a lot of patience and is willing to try new things. He is currently heading up an after-school program 'circus camp.' Students ask for him and are responsive to his support. Currently, mental health support is very stable with him in his current position," commented Henry.

Nathan Earle *Continues on page 4*

The appreciation Henry shows to Nathan goes both ways: “I really like it here, Mr. Ramirez is an amazing principal, he’s a great guy and he really cares about the kids here.

A guitar that sits near his desk at ACS indicates one of Nathan’s other interests: playing for a local indie band call “*Keep Your Fork, There’s Pie.*” A talented musician who plays several instruments, Nathan’s band already has one album and is working on a second. You can check out the band on their Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Keep-Your-Fork-Theres-Pie/101711196391> Nathan is also a long distance bike rider - another reason that bike-crazy Portland fits his interests and hobbies.

A valuable asset for the students

Nathan runs six groups each week on social skills and teamwork. He helps students hone skills in anger management and how to handle a variety of situations. He tailors his approach to the needs of each classroom. “Over the last three months here I’ve been really trying to build relationships with all the kids here. That’s my primary role - being a connection for a lot of these kids outside the classroom and a support figure,” he said.

Teachers appreciate his group work because it reinforces positive behavior and besides, he says “it’s a good time for teachers to tend to other things.”

Nathan builds relationships with students

“Often it will come up in the morning that a student is having a rough time,” he said. His focus is on both intervention and prevention. A candidate for prevention services might be a student receiving therapy outside of school. Nathan is careful to not disrupt or supplant relationships that a student may have with other mental health professionals.

I don’t want to duplicate what they are receiving outside of school,” he said. To accomplish this, he understands that some kids don’t want to engage in traditional therapy. “They want to avoid the stigma of going to therapy or they have trouble trusting adults,” said Nathan.

Nathan uses a variety of informal techniques to engage students. He may invite a student to shoot baskets with him in the gym or initiate a low-key conversation about how things are going. Prevention, he says, is nice way to avoid the use of therapeutic language. “This is a good way to build relationships and bridges that develop trust,” he said.

A commitment to direct service

By providing direct services to students, Nathan is in his comfort zone. “The thing that I am particularly good at is direct service. The first job I got out of college was in direct service and I quickly realized how much I loved it. The thing about it that I love and that I’m good at is the relationship part of things. I really think therapy and motivation for change is based upon relationships - bonding and building trust with these kids. Once you can build that trust and relationships you have a lot more room to work.”

How does Nathan know that he’s established a good relationship with a student? The terms of engagement are coming from the student, not from Nathan. “I will notice that I don’t have to ask any questions. I am not quizzing kids to try to do some therapy. I am there and it just happens by virtue of the trust and relationship,” he said.

Students at Arata Creek range in age from elementary to high school and Nathan adapts his style accordingly. He works with students as young as 7 years old and as old as 17. Conflict resolution and dealing with emotions in a peaceful way is a big part of working with kids no matter what the age. “The place that I meet with each kid is different. I try to find a common ground of connection, where we can interact in a positive way. Therapy with a seven-year old is much less introspective and reflective as it is playful. I get to engage kids in learning skills for building tolerance without doing a lot of talking about it.”

“There are lots of things that kids want to talk about... things going on in their neighborhoods, in their homes. I might ask them about something specific that happened in school that I either saw or heard about. They may not be willing to talk about it in class with their teachers where it happened but they might be willing to problem solve outside of that situation,” he observed.

“He is an excellent role model for our students. He does it all in a spirit of positive communication, collaboration and good humor.”

Practicing skills through role playing is a great way for students to handle problems. Students have the opportunity to be really honest as long as its not a threat to them, he said.

“Often our talks are about what gets them angry, especially the late adolescent or high school aged kids - the self esteem component of conflict. They want to know: How do I have somebody call me names or call me out in public and not take it to a physical level? We talk a lot about that.”

School psychologist Carol Wong sums up Nathan’s value to the school in this way:

“Nathan has fully immersed himself in our program. He sees kids individually and within their families and does contracts with students for one-on-one incentive activities such as shooting hoops or taking walks outside. He participates in our classroom team meetings and mental health meeting. He supports our staff in planning and implementing behavioral interventions and social/emotional supports. He presents social skills activities in each classroom on a weekly basis. He is an excellent role model for our students. He does it all in a spirit of positive communication, collaboration and good humor. His contributions have been invaluable to our students and staff and we are glad to have him working with us.”

ASQ:

Screening and evaluation tool helps improve detection of early signs of developmental delays in children

By Janelle Emery

It's another day in the Multnomah Early Childhood Program and the MECP staff are hard at work. Supervisor **Kristi Byfield** is making arrangements to schedule the next developmental screening event and Systems Performance Review & Improvement Specialist **Julie Schweigert** is busy preparing materials for her next staff training. Meanwhile, Intake Assistant **Denise Wood** is providing parental support over the phone.

"Screening as many children as possible is our goal," said Kristi. The two screening tools they rely upon are the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) and Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ-SE).

ASQ-3 is an assessment screening tool developed to identify children, ages one month – five years, who may be at risk for developmental delays. The screening assesses five developmental areas: communication, problem-solving, personal-social, gross motor and fine motor skills.

ASQ-SE (Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional) is a more in-depth screening tool designed to address social and emotional behavior in children ages three months – five years. It is used if any developmental concerns result from an ASQ-3 screening.

The seven behavioral concerns the ASQ-SE focuses on are self-regulation, compliance, communication (expressive/receptive), adaptive functioning (eating, sleeping), autonomy/independence, affect and interaction with people. The tool helps make decisions about referrals for further assessment, monitors social-emotional development, determines support services families may need and bridges communication between parents and professionals about a child's behavior.

Due to its high degree of reliability, validity and accuracy, this screening tool is used in physician and pediatric offices throughout Oregon as well as Head Start Programs in Multnomah County.

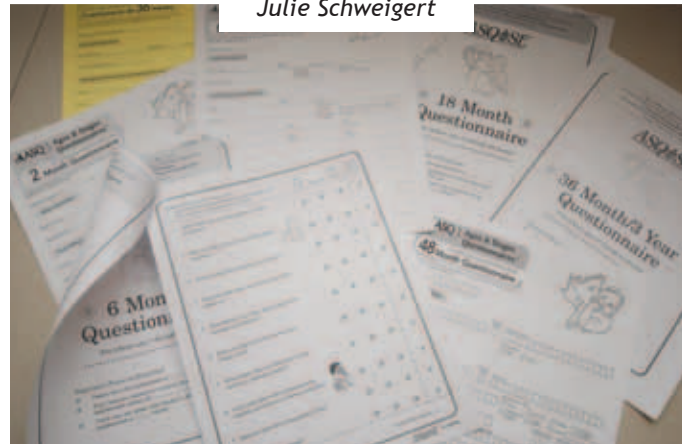
Once early signs of social or emotional difficulties are detected, referrals are then sent to MECP to schedule a developmental evaluation to determine eligibility for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education.

Referral number rise

Kristi said the referral numbers from pediatricians went up significantly at well-child visits (12, 18, 24, and 30-month doctor visits). "The ASQ screening process has greatly increased communication and partnership between EI/ECSE and the medical community."



Kristi Byfield (l) and Julie Schweigert



ASQ was developed by Diane Bricker, Ph.D., Jane Squires, Ph.D. and co-author Elizabeth Twombly, M.S. of the Early Intervention Program, Center of Human Development, University of Oregon.

The ASQ process is convenient and has its benefits. "The questionnaires are written in simple, straight-forward language, that's easy for parents to complete," says Julie.

For Kristi, it is beneficial that everything a parent needs to test their child comes with the kit. "A parent can test a child at home with the ASQ's suggested activities, without needing to go out and purchase expensive materials. It's cost-effective," adds Kristi.

ASQs are designed to be completed by parents or caregivers/teachers who have spent at least 20 hours with the child. The ASQ can be used to confirm or dispel developmental concerns or can also be used on an on-going basis to monitor a child's developmental progress over time.

The ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE training kit materials include a user's guide, master set of questionnaires, CDs and ideas on in-home follow-up activities to improve a child's developmental skills.

Although the kit comes with necessary materials, there were no staff training materials included. Therefore Julie put together all the necessary training materials which include a power-point presentation, handouts and master binder that she leaves for staff reference.



E² Foundation News:

Migrant Education Program

Last year, the E2 Foundation funded three Terra Nova grants submitted by MESD's Migrant Education Program to fund a portion of the Migrant Summer School program (see photos below). The goals of this program were to provide high-quality opportunities for migrant students to gain ground on their academic achievement during the summer months; and to accurately identify and recruit eligible migrant students to increase numbers served. Nearly 100 new students entered the Migrant Education Program. With the use of Terra Nova funds, and other E2 Foundation donated funds, the Migrant Education Program was able to increase their federal funding by over 300%. This year they will not need additional funding to run their summer activities.

Willamette Week Give Guide

For the first time ever, Friends of Outdoor School was thrilled to be featured in the Willamette Week's Give Guide 2010. From hundreds of applicants, the E2 Foundation was chosen to be one of 79 local nonprofits included in the Give Guide. Over one hundred donors gave nearly \$9,000 to help send kids to Outdoor School. Wow! These donations will leverage donations from Metro to send two classes of sixth graders to Outdoor School in the fall.

ASQ *Continued from page 5*

Training at MESD and in the community


Trainings provided by MECP have included groups anywhere from six to 50 employees at a time. The trainings allow staff to learn how to calculate a child's age, how to fill out the ASQ questionnaires and how to score and interpret the results. Is the child doing fine? If not, what are the next steps that need to take place?

For most accurate results, it's best to have a parent complete an ASQ at home with their child and to have one completed by a teacher or caregiver. "Comparing questionnaire results is important. It can give you a lot of information about the child because the child may act different at home than they do at school or daycare" said Julie.

Kristi stresses the importance of parental involvement. "Parents need to work with people with whom they feel most comfortable. Relationships are already established with their child's teacher. By training staff, we empower them so they can turn around and train parents. Using the ASQ is changing our statistics. The no-shows and cancellation numbers are getting better as a result. Raising a parent's comfort level and empowering them is giving us the chance to screen children who may not have been screened."

Kristi and Julie are thankful for the team with which they work. "Nancy Anderson (Director, Special Education Services) encourages her staff to break down barriers and take the initiative and I appreciate that about her. It's never, 'we don't do that here'" said Kristi. "She encourages us to have passion in what we do. There's nobody more dedicated to serving families than Nancy."

Julie adds: "With Nancy, it's a proactive approach and a problem-solving approach rather than a crisis-reaction. I think that her way of thinking definitely trickles down to all of her staff."

MESD staff should know that anyone can make a referral; a parent, doctor, child care provider or teacher. Says Julie: "We definitely want the parent on-board and aware of the referral. Please go to the referral forms at the website address below or call Thompson directly at (503) 262-4100." 

www.mesd.k12.or.us/se/sped/EC/Referrals.shtml

IKEA may use MESD's approach as a model

According to **Julie Schweigert**, MECP has influenced the way IKEA interacts with early childhood education providers: "We now have a partnership with IKEA because of Nancy. She came to me the first week of my new position to assign me to go to IKEA and do training for the positive parenting-class. It's a community partnership project that has grown because Nancy was open. Most recently, Sonya Hamner (Customer Service Manager, IKEA) asked me to research all Early Childhood Intervention program contact people in every city where IKEA is across the country. IKEA is responsible for all of the advertising, a full page ad in Metro Parent as well as positive parenting brochures. All of this came about because a parent recommended IKEA do a positive parenting class."

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