

Bradley's Mindful Teen Program Changes Girl's Life

Lexi was an anxious kid for as long as she can remember. Oscillating between intense feelings of fear and sadness, she isolated herself from her loving family and friends.

By the time she was 11, Lexi's thoughts turned to suicide and she began cutting herself, trying her best to keep it a secret.

"I felt hopeless," Lexi, now 17, remarks as she thinks back to that painful period of her life. "I didn't know any other kids who felt like I did—and that made me feel even worse. I kept all my feelings inside."

Her desperate parents found a psychologist who diagnosed Lexi with ADHD and depression. What followed were years of more than 15 different treatments, including outpatient programs, medications, and family, home-based, and individual therapies that helped either temporarily or not at all.

Lexi slipped further into a place of personal darkness. A suicide attempt brought her to the Hasbro Children's Hospital Intensive Care Unit and then to the psychiatric unit. She had two other suicide attempts and one more psychiatric hospitalization when her care team made the lifesaving referral to the Mindful Teen Program and Karyn Horowitz, MD, at Bradley Hospital.

The first time they met, Dr. Horowitz, Bradley's Director of Outpatient Services, spoke candidly to Lexi.

"If you can commit to staying alive for 18 weeks, then we have a chance of working together to decrease your suffering and save your life."



Lexi was admitted to Bradley Hospital's Mindful Teen Program, a six-month outpatient treatment program for adolescents with extreme emotional instability, including self-harm behaviors and suicidal thoughts. The program utilizes dialectical behavior therapy for adolescents (DBT-A), a proven treatment approach that works to eliminate life-threatening behaviors by helping patients develop healthier ways to manage their emotions, relationships, and distress.

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Through DBT-A, patients and their families learn new skills to manage highly emotional and distressing situations more effectively. They apply their new skills

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to stressful situations during the treatment. This happens through individual therapy, multifamily skills group training, and 24/7 patient coaching by their therapist.

Lexi met with Dr. Horowitz weekly, and Lexi and both her parents attended the weekly multifamily skills group. The family worked together to translate the skills they were learning to their day-to-day life at home, at school, and in their interpersonal relationships. They developed a common language to address old problems in a new and more effective way.

“Through our skills groups, teens and their parents are gaining the tools they need to deal with significant emotional stress,” says Dr. Horowitz. “In learning how to manage the extreme sadness and anxiety that can lead to unsafe behavior, Lexi fully committed herself to Mindful Teen and applied her skills such that she no longer felt suicidal or engaged in self-injury.”

Lexi’s father, Tom, adds, “You can’t imagine what it’s like to be scared every second of your life, always worried for your daughter’s safety. We had been to so many specialists and were willing to try anything to help Lexi, but it wasn’t until Bradley that we found the help we needed. Bradley was a godsend for our daughter. There’s no question the hospital saved her life.”

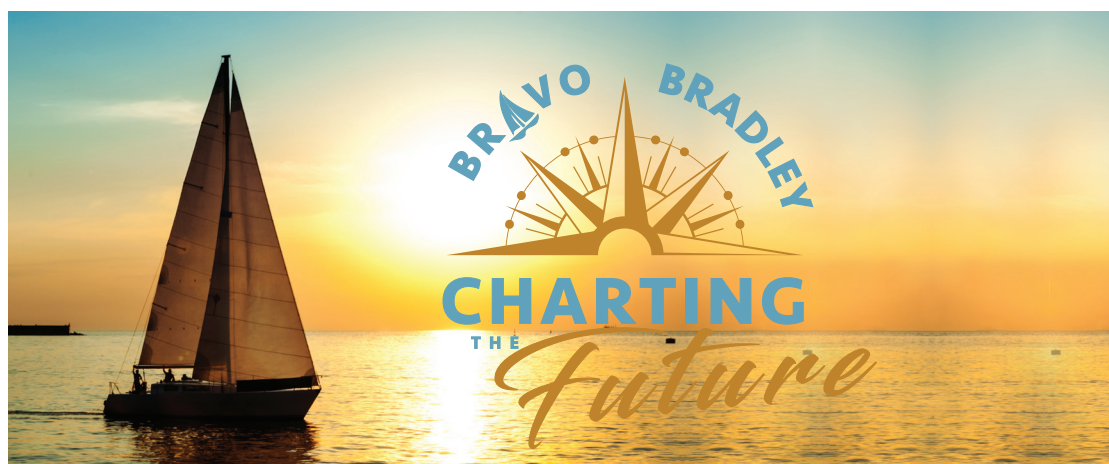
Since completing the Mindful Teen program, Lexi has continued to meet regularly with Dr. Horowitz, who describes the young woman as “thriving” as she moves closer to graduating from high school this June.

“Things that used to send me to a dark place don’t anymore because I know how to handle them. Bradley Hospital saves lives more than anyone realizes.”



“It was so hard to get through the day. I used to spend so much energy trying to not be sad, which is much harder than trying to be happy,” says Lexi. “I never thought I would get to where I am today; it’s like night and day. Things that used to send me to a dark place don’t anymore because I know how to handle them. Bradley Hospital saves lives more than anyone realizes. I love the life I’m living and I love myself now. I could not have imagined those words coming out of my mouth a year ago.”

“It is incredibly meaningful to be a part of Lexi’s treatment and to see the way she and her family put in the work necessary to save her life; she’s an amazingly strong young woman,” shares Dr. Horowitz. “I am honored to be part of her journey as she creates a life worth living.”



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New Program Addresses Co-Occurring Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues

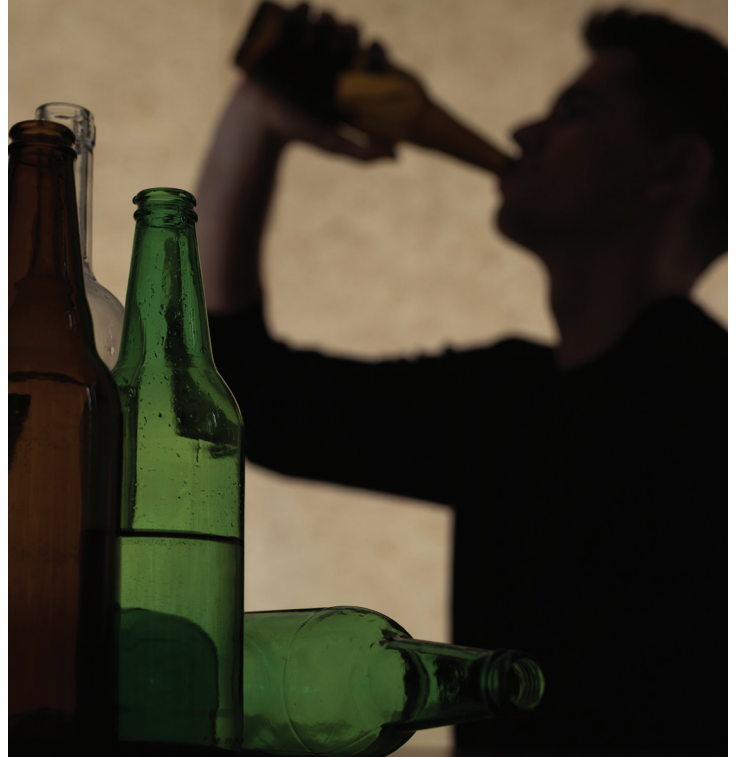
Kyle began drinking when he was 13 years old. Diagnosed with ADHD, depression, and anxiety, he struggled daily to control his emotions. He'd punch the walls in his house, throw things at his little sister, and hurl curses at his mother. When he began sneaking alcohol from his parents' liquor cabinet after school, he found a way to deal with his deep frustration and despair. He'd drink just enough to take the edge off. But some days, he drank until he passed out. Kyle's situation is not unusual.

Substance abuse and mental illness frequently go hand in hand. In Rhode Island, 70 to 80 percent of youth who abuse substances have a co-occurring mental health issue. The state also has one of the highest teen substance abuse rates in the country. Growing research suggests that frequent alcohol and drug use during adolescence produces lasting changes in the brain, putting our youth at an increased risk for addiction for the rest of their lives. We are in the midst of an epidemic.

A new intensive outpatient program at Bradley Hospital is committed to addressing both issues simultaneously. The Co-Occurring Disorders Program (CDP) provides integrated care to adolescents who struggle with a wide variety of mental health and substance use issues. A combination of therapies (including motivational enhancement and cognitive behavioral therapies) is typically combined with a tailored medication regimen to meet the individual needs of patients.

**70%
to 80%** of youth who abuse substances also have a co-occurring mental health issue

"The pain of dealing with both substance abuse and mental illness can be unimaginable—for both the children and their terrified families," says Bradley Hospital's Chief Medical Director, Henry Sachs, MD. "Prior to this new



program, Bradley would handle the mental health issues while trying to connect families with other agencies to deal with the substance abuse. The ability to coordinate all care at Bradley Hospital closed a critical gap in services."

For three hours a day, three days a week after school, patients receive comprehensive care that includes at least two individual therapy sessions, one family session, and multiple group therapy sessions, as well as a weekly physician consultation. Other program components include school consultation, case management, psychoeducational programming, and health promotion. Depending on each teenager's success in achieving his or her treatment goals, the program length varies from five to eight weeks.

"Families are relieved to learn Bradley Hospital now provides integrated care for both illnesses," says Robert Miranda Jr., PhD, Clinical Director of CDP. "So far, the adolescents in our care are highly engaged and are showing dramatic reductions in their substance use. This program is having a lifesaving impact."

iFriend Teaches Valuable Social Skills

It's painful to even contemplate. Your child comes home alone every day after school. He's never had a play date or even been invited to a birthday party. You know that, lonely beyond measure, he's experiencing more than social awkwardness. As a parent, your child's social isolation leaves you feeling helpless.

iFriend is an outpatient group therapy program at Bradley Hospital, designed to enhance social skills in children ages 8 to 11. The 10-week program focuses on emotion regulation, reading social cues, and improving conversation and play skills, while providing opportunities to practice for children and their parents.

"A significant portion of group participants are in regular classroom settings at their schools, and many of the children who benefit from the iFriend program are also on the autism spectrum," says Beverly Rich, a clinical nurse specialist at Bradley Hospital, who leads a group for parents of iFriend participants. "Many times, for children who suffer from autism, making eye contact, regulating emotion, and learning how to participate in a conversation without dominating doesn't come naturally. This group is a safe place to learn and practice these skills."

"I was able to see my son feel proud of his successes, rather than feeling sad about his failures. We have a common language now we can use to communicate."

— Grateful parent

Children receiving additional support in or outside the classroom can qualify for the program.



"The parent group is a unique aspect of this program," explains group leader and Bradley staff psychologist Caley Arzamarski, PhD. "Parents are taught the same skills to reinforce their child's skills across home and community. Practicing how to engage with peers outside of group is just as important as learning the skills in group." Beverly adds, "We also teach parents mindfulness so they can learn how to regulate their own emotions and help their children to better understand and regulate theirs."

Meeting other children and parents who are experiencing similar challenges also helps normalize their struggles. Families, teachers, and clinicians often begin to see positive changes in the children's social skills, sense of belonging, and self-confidence after just several weeks of the iFriend program.

"Even for those children who were hesitant initially, we often hear these kids asking earnestly if the program can continue after our last session. We hope this group brings a sense of relief and hope to children and families, while showing them they can learn skills to better engage with others," says Dr. Arzamarski.



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