

sponsor spotlight

Story by **Jacki Donaldson**
 Photos by **Ashley Raphael**, Wildlings Photography



U ARE HEARD

MAKING LIFE EASIER FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Young people are struggling now more than ever before. According to Marc Lehman, a therapist from Simsbury, CT, and a specialist in working with teens and young adults in high school and college, about 60% of college students are dealing with anxiety, about 35% with depression, and about 7% with consistent thoughts of suicide. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for college students. Ten years ago, it ranked at #12. “That number is shocking,” said Marc, founder of U Are Heard, an online platform for on-demand coaching and emotional support.

Marc and his team of clinicians are helping young individuals during a season of increased mental health concerns and not nearly enough providers to meet the growing demand. Here, Marc shares how U Are Heard is reaching students through available, effective, and easy services.

Why does U Are Heard work?

We provide support in a way that is familiar to our target age group of 14 to 23. I took the mode of therapy and decided to deliver it the way this demographic communicates — on their phones. As a result, they enjoy the service rather than being annoyed about going to an office. U Are Heard makes counseling a support rather than a pain.

Put yourself in these kids’ shoes. If you are not doing well, the last thing you want to do is trudge over to a counseling center. But let’s say you get the energy to do



it, and then you learn that you can’t see someone for three weeks. That might be the last time you make the effort. We remove the barriers. We provide professional support and bring it right to them. They don’t have to work at it. They can sit in a private setting on their phone, laptop, or computer. They can go to class at 9, see us at 10, and then head to their next class. Kids really like the service, no one needs to know what they are doing, and it works. I wish I had this service when I was in school.

The average ratio of the number of students per counselor at a university is 1,737 to 1. Are we seeing a mental health crisis for young people?

Absolutely. I have been practicing for more than 20 years, and I’ve never seen anything like this. We try to stay ahead of the hiring curve and are always looking for quality clinicians. We want to always be in a place where we don’t have to say we are full.



Tell us about your team.

I am one of three clinicians in our group who do intakes. An intake is the initial session we do to get a sense of what’s going on for the student and how we can be helpful. Another dozen clinicians do both counseling and coaching. We can meet a wide variety of needs with multiple techniques and styles. For most people, we have one or several clinicians who would be a good match.

How do you help students?

What makes us unique is that we focus on the match. You are only going to do good work with someone you connect with. We do not go out of our way to throw out labels and diagnoses; rather, we look at what’s going on now and see how we can benefit the student. We try to meet everyone where they are and give them rafts to stay afloat and tips and tricks for coping in a healthy manner. Students, on average, see us for the length of a semester. Most of the time, they start weekly with us.

Do you only see students?

No. Although we do a lot of work with students transitioning from high school to college, our doors are always open for young people in crisis.

You are licensed in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Do you serve young people outside of these states?

Yes, in the states and countries where we are not licensed, we switch from counseling to a coaching role. Our format gives us versatility and a much greater reach.

How can parents tell if their kids are struggling?

Every person is different, but the typical sign is that your student is sliding. Consider the concept of change — change in eating and sleeping, weight, and behavior. If your kiddo is usually always out with friends and spending time with family and then suddenly is behind closed doors, I would raise an eyebrow. You don’t have to conclude that your child is depressed or suicidal, but something is likely going on. We are trained to look from a holistic perspective. A lot of times, kids talk to us about things they’ve never told their parents. We can help them bring those things to mom and dad.

What if kids are not living at home and parents can’t see them sliding?

I understand this from a personal perspective. My daughter lives two and a half hours away, and my son is 10 hours away. The key is communication. When I hear parents say they talked to their kids for the first time in a month or that they got their kids on the phone, but they wanted to get off quickly, I see a red flag. My advice for keeping the communication flowing is to practice a non-judgmental response and then guide. If your kid says, “I had 13 beers last night, and your first reaction is one of shock and dismay, they are probably not going to tell you anything more. Try to hold your response and collect information: “What was that like? Did you get sick? Were other people drinking? Did you feel out of control?” Having a conversation will open things up.





Marc, Jen, Alyssa, and Harrison Lehman

What do you most want parents to know?

When you go on the college tours, ask yourself this question: If my child had a mental health issue on this campus, what would happen? On most campuses, the answer is that finding regular services that my student would find engaging is hard. We want parents to reach out to us. I named this business U Are Heard for a reason. I want kids and families to be heard. We specialize in this age bracket. We don't treat young children, geriatrics, or middle-aged adults. We treat young

adults, and as a result, we are continually learning because things change, especially in the last couple of years.

I also want parents to know that I am here for them as a resource to help them navigate and make life easier. Going away for school or leaving home for the first time is one of the most difficult transitions a young adult will experience, and it can take a toll. Stress is abundant, anxiety is common, and depression can easily set in if you're not communicating about it.

U Are Heard
(860) 214-7583
info@uareheard.com
www.uareheard.com