

CUSD Cares Podcast

ASU Counseling Center

Season 1, Episode 14– February 3, 2020

Brenda Vargas:

Hello parents. Welcome to the CUSD Cares podcast. This is Brenda Vargas. Today with us we have Carrie Monica. She is the assistant director at ASU counseling center. She's a licensed clinical social worker. Welcome, Carrie. Thank you for being here.

Carrie Monica:

Hi, thank you for having me.

Brenda Vargas:

We are very delighted that you're able to join us so that we can give some really worthwhile information to our parents, hopefully prior to stepping on your campus if they're going to come for a visit or check out all the opportunities available to their student at ASU. But we're gonna really focus today's podcast on the Counseling Center, what it offers, what it's all about, all the resources available and give parents enough information today so that they can have a little jumpstart prior to coming on campus and possibly reaching out to all of you. So let's go ahead and get started. If you could just share with us a brief overview before we get into the nitty gritty pieces. What is the Counseling Center? Who is it comprised of and what's all encompassing from A to Z? I guess this would be more of a public service announcement.

Carrie Monica:

Sure. So at ASU Counseling, we provide professional counseling, consultation outreach to the ASU community and we have a team of very talented, seasoned clinicians at the Masters and Doctoral level, who have a variety of skill sets and specialties that are really unique in terms of meeting the needs of what's happening with young adults at ASU. We, however, are just one unit of the many units at ASU, in terms of support services that students can take advantage of or have access to in order to be successful during their time with us at ASU. And I'll talk about those in a little bit.

Brenda Vargas:

I think most people think what does a large university like ASU have to offer my student, with the ins and outs of not just the academic pieces, but all the pieces outside of that academic side. And there are so many different options. I know I learn more every time I have a conversation with your or your colleagues. When we look at a first year student, I've made a decision, I'm coming to ASU, super excited and all the other feelings that come along with being a first year student. Walk us through or walk my parents through what supports are in place. Let's start with year one, what does that look like?

Carrie Monica:

Sure. So year one is probably one of the most important years for a college student for a variety of reasons. In particular the transition into young adulthood, into having to manage their life in terms of finances and wellbeing, on top of treading the social waters of a large university in addition to just being academically successful. And so as I mentioned earlier, we really like to think about ASU counseling as just one piece of the larger picture in terms of what students have asked us for support. And so what we encourage is that students, staff and faculty really help students to navigate what's available to them that may not necessarily be clinical or really mental health related at first. And so some examples are: every first year student is assigned to a first year success coach. And these first year success coaches serve as a mentor and guide if you will, to first year students, with the ability to offer them support with time management, transitioning into college, navigating the university, how to navigate relationships with your professors, and also other sort of academic resources on campus so that that first year success coach is such a fundamental support system for any student who's starting at the university.

Brenda Vargas:

And if I could interject real quick because I think it's really vitally important that a parent or and/or a caregiver understands the role of that first year success coach. It's not a student, it's actually an employee of ASU that's actually in a supportive role.

Carrie Monica:

It's both. And so the first year success coaches are upper division students who are serving in a position of what would we call student workers. It is a paid position, so they are required to and obligated to follow similar standards as other ASU employees, in terms of their role as student workers.

Brenda Vargas:

What a great lens. Oftentimes youth and young adults, listen to their peers more than they listen to adults. Right? Especially at that very crucial age. So to hear from someone that has already been trained, kind of been through it maybe a year or two ahead of them, and knows what kind of questions or struggles they may have had and or their peers. So great model that you follow that. How often or what does it look like if I'm the student as far as reaching out to that individual or that particular support as a first year student reaching out to my first year success coach.

Carrie Monica:

All first year students are assigned to a first year success coach. It is not required of the student to engage or participate in this opportunity, but is obviously highly encouraged. And so that information is provided to the student as to who that first year success coach is, their contact information. And once the student connects with the first year success coach it is really up to them to determine sort of where they're going to meet, how often they're going to meet, what are sort of the priority goals of a needs of what the student needs during their time together. And I think from there it's really just based on what the student need is. And so if they feel that they need to see the first year success coach once a week, multiple times a week or maybe or once a month, it really depends on where the first year student is at.

Brenda Vargas:

It's nice that there's that flexibility where they can determine how much support they need, they might need a little encouragement. I think that parents that are listening understand that this is an available resource for them. So especially someone that has not even set foot on your campus yet. Right?

Carrie Monica:

Correct.

Brenda Vargas:

So I know there are other resources on campus and just what that looks like as far as what people might not be used to. Probably coming from our schools or any of the schools in our area and what resources your office through the Counseling Center is able to connect them to.

Carrie Monica:

In terms of the professional counseling components, outreach and consultation, the Counseling Center also serves as a liaison to the community for students when they are looking to access something else outside of the university. That perhaps is meeting their needs in a different way that we're just not able to. And so this could be through psychiatric services or medication management, perhaps a student who is coming from out of state and had a medical provider that they were getting medication through and they want to reestablish that here in Arizona, the Counseling Center can certainly help them with figuring out how to find somebody where in terms of location and convenience. and also kind of helping them with identifying what insurance options these providers accept in order to accept them as a new patient. At the Counseling Center, we want to make sure that cost is not a barrier to students. We want to make sure that all students have access to the support that they need when they need it. And so in order to do that, we've designed a system where there is a walk in method, same day appointments for either just walk-in situations or crisis situations. And those can just be times where a student's just having something difficult going on and they just need to talk through it with somebody. And perhaps just through talking through it, they've had their needs met and they may not need to come back. So, there's the walk-in method, same day access, which is really important. We also have individual consultation appointments where a student meets with one of our clinicians to simply just talk about what exactly is the student needing at the time. What are some of their challenges, difficulties, what is causing some distress or discomfort their life. And through that individual consultation appointment, they come up with sort of a plan. Is it that they just need to be connected to other resources in the community? Like I just mentioned earlier? Is it that they just need to be connected to sort of some resources on campus that they just weren't aware of? Or is this really something going on with the student where they could benefit from more ongoing grief counseling with one of our clinicians. So the connecting to on-campus resources is something that's really common for a lot of students in such a large university is just not knowing where those resources are or that they even exist. And that happens out in the community as well.

Brenda Vargas:

They're so possibly overwhelmed with just the day to day navigating, right? Even probably just getting from location A to location B on campus. It might not be their priority or something that they're even considering. So I'm glad that there is a drop-in consultative opportunity for them to get a different lens from someone that obviously has experience and knowledge of the services at ASU to determine is this something that is beyond the day to day and or connecting them with a resource or if it's more as needed.

Carrie Monica:

Some of the primary reasons why students are coming through our doors are for stress, relationships and depression anxiety. And so oftentimes those factors may just really contribute to other things in

their life that aren't necessarily clinical in nature. So this could be, is stress related to just needing to establish an exercise, a workout routine? Is it needing to come up with a better plan for getting a good night's sleep? Perhaps nutrition. And that's where other resources on the campus are just such a great fit for that, through our wellness team and Sun Devil fitness. We have a team of health educators who are out in the ASU community providing presentations and trainings on all those topics for students. And so the opportunities to get extra support in terms of learning more about how to just be healthier and happier, we call it build your best you. And so other opportunities for support are through Student Academic Support Program, which is a tutoring service that's offered to students. And so for those students who perhaps are just having difficulty with managing and adapting to the academic rigor in certain subjects, it could be the student who maybe struggled in elementary school, high school, middle school with perhaps a learning disability. This is a great resource for those students to go to, to get extra academic support outside of office hours with their professor. There's also the disability resource center, that is specific for students who have to qualify for either a physical or learning disability. There's a variety of accommodations that the DRC offers to students who are in need of that extra support based on their disability.

Brenda Vargas:

But the tutoring that's available is offered for anyone and everyone that needs the extra support because so many students get to college and realize, right. Hearing the content for the first time is, is not enough. I would assume that through the tutoring center there's study groups and opportunities through either graduate assistants and or students that obviously are maybe a little farther along in their program of study that are providing those kinds of supportive measures.

Carrie Monica:

Yes, absolutely. So the academic support services are provided by students, whether at Doctoral or Masters level and for all disciplines across the board that students would need support in.

Brenda Vargas:

I'm so glad that those resources are available for students. Sometimes I think if a student finds themselves in a situation where they need extra supports and maybe they had not needed that support in high school, it's definitely a different space for them to be in. And even just accept the fact that they need that additional support and seeking it out, having, that available to them by their peers. Right. We know they're more accepting when it comes from someone in their peer group.

Carrie Monica:

Absolutely. I do presentations all the time with students related to mental health and how to improve their mental health. And I often ask, do you all know where the counseling office is or who doesn't know where the counseling office is and a few students will raise their hand. And so we don't assume that every student knows where to get help. Similar to high school in the work that I'm doing with high school students is when I ask all the freshmen in the room to raise their hand and say, do you know where the school counselor's office is? And they say no. And I say sophomores, juniors and seniors, you know, wrap your arms around these freshmen and help guide them and find that one helping adult on campus that can, that can help them.

Brenda Vargas:

And I know we mentioned this, we've had multiple conversations, Carrie, as to the percentage of students that actually know and use a counseling office in comparison to the number of students that actually are enrolled. What does that look like? I think it's very eyeopening.

Carrie Monica:

The Counseling Center really sees a very small percentage of the actual university student body. And so it's about 6,000 students that we see per year compared to the 70,000 plus students that are spread across all four campuses. And so going back to my earlier comment, is that student well being and their academic success is really a university responsibility. It's the responsibility of all departments and units in the university, not just counseling. And we really try to ensure that we're collaborating with leaders in other colleges and units in terms of helping students and what's happening with them in terms of needs and how to help them with being academically successful.

Brenda Vargas:

Well, I've been on your campus now several times as we have met and I've had to peruse and navigate the campus and I certainly can see visibly, how the university has made it a top priority to educate students and staff about student well being and just taking good care of themselves. Right? There are physical things that we can see and look for, but we forget that there is an emotional side. I know some people refer to it as brain health so looking at the whole individual, so I can certainly see that there are reminders all throughout campus, and I'll call them those public service type of announcements, type of reminders all throughout campus for students to see and or pointing them into direction of what resources are available. We know this generation of students' currency is through technology and so we have to meet them where they're at. I think just from what I could gather, ASU is certainly taking that very seriously.

Carrie Monica:

Absolutely. And one of our initiatives at the university is Devils for Devils. And that is a student led effort about how to improve the social emotional well being of students in the ASU community through a variety of different ways. But one of the things we've learned from that initiative and being in such a large environment is that we need to think more creatively about how do we reach students. You know, if we're scheduling trainings, they're not coming directly to us. We need to figure out other unique ways about how we can reach out to them. And so I think a technology component is really important on something we're working on when that's really what they're most connected to at times.

Brenda Vargas:

So I'm going to jump into an area that I think we can't dismiss as a parent myself, I think of that jump and leap to college and university life. And we send them off with all the best of intentions and we could remind them a thousand times about certain things. However, we've reached the realization I think really quickly as a parent of a second year student in college that they're 18, they're an adult or at least trying their best to become an adult. And as a parent, we're no longer that decision maker. I know that this is a complicated question; as the Counseling Center, where are the practices as far as now your student is 18, maybe you have a concern. Maybe this concern has definitely reached a level that it's a serious concern, not just something that it's beyond a bad day. What can I as a parent or caregiver or even an aunt or uncle or someone that cares about a student that is attending ASU, do what's available and where should I start?

Carrie Monica:

That's a great question and an area for us to really talk about. And so I think the transition to college is difficult for both the parent and the student for a variety of reasons. And so one of the most important things I think that parents can do is take advantage of all the opportunities that ASU has to offer in terms of supportive programs, services, seminars, workshops that are available prior to that. Also, while your student is at ASU, there's just a tremendous amount of resources available to parents in terms of how to support your student and their academic success while at ASU. And so the other component in terms of our role is that parents, staff and faculty are welcome to call the Counseling Center at any time to consult with us about a concern they might have about a student. And so a parent can call us, perhaps they have a concern about their student's dropping grades, increased absences, maybe some comments about suicidal ideation, personality changes. We're available to do offer that consultation with parents to help them with some tools, suggestions and maybe just talking them through being really concerned.

Brenda Vargas:

Or how to have that conversation or initiate that conversation with your son or daughter.

Carrie Monica:

Absolutely. And I think that's something else that's really important to think about in terms of how do you support the social emotional well being of your student before they get to college? I think we do a really great job of academic and financial on boarding. But as a university I think we recognize we could improve in the social emotional being on boarding, but also really looking at parents to be advocate and participant in that area. And something that's really important for parents to know is that, like you said, most students are 18 at ASU so allow your student, your child to be autonomous, to learn some of the challenges and nuances of being a young adult and on their own I think is really important. So allowing that autonomy, I think also validating and listening to your child, if they are having some struggles that they discussed with you. One of the things that's also really important to think about is what sort of relationship have you established with your child where they feel comfortable talking to about difficult things. We had a situation where a student didn't want her parents to know about billing their insurance for our services. It's because she knew the reaction was going to be one that wasn't really good. And so thinking about how you as a parent can be less of a barrier perhaps in terms of your relationship with your child.

Brenda Vargas:

And it certainly changes. We all go through that they're becoming a young adult. We have to back off, but still stay present with those key questions and checking in and all those pieces and giving them their space as well. But it certainly evolves into looking a little bit different; more like a young adult/parent relationship as they become these different human beings, and learn more about themselves and who they want to be. You're with them that self-discovery because for a lot of them, they don't know yet. Right.

Carrie Monica:

Absolutely. And I think also knowing that just because you're asking for help doesn't mean you're not academically successful. It doesn't mean that you're on your way to dropping out or failing. It's actually a good thing to ask for help. And so I think often parents think when some minor thing goes wrong or if they hear a little bit of distress in their student that they need to intervene and help out. But you know,

again, there's opportunities to do that through consulting with us about when is the time to intervene, and those are usually in pretty severe cases.

Brenda Vargas:

I think because your clinicians deal with this day in and day out, sometimes we tend to, as parents, go to people that we trust and that we know that maybe are in the same boat that we're in, right? Their sons or daughters are in the same circumstance, maybe having different experiences, but we reach out to those people that we trust. And what I would encourage parents to do is reach out to the Counseling Center and speak to those clinicians that are hearing this day in and day out and having to guide parents and caregivers as to how to just have that open dialogue, how to start the conversation, what to do if the signs that they see are leading to the conclusion that it's much bigger and I need to intervene a little bit more because you guys see it, you hear it, and you're hearing from the student. And sometimes a quick five, 10 minute conversation can settle maybe a parent's anxiety and concerns and at least give them a how to.

Carrie Monica:

I think schools and school districts, Chandler Unified in particular, there's so many resources out there for parents in terms of better understanding your child's well being. There's suicide prevention workshops there is understanding your child's diagnosis. There's podcasts like this, I think parents really relying on schools and taking advantage of those resources that they have to offer, uh, for how to better support your student's social emotional well being.

Brenda Vargas:

Right. So I guess my advice giving if I can give any, is to reach out and ask, because you never know, and you never know until you ask. I tell my own children this. So it's nice that there is a place to be able to ask that's available for parents. Do you guys have available resources online if someone didn't want to call for consultation? That parent that's unsure, wants to pose a scenario or hey, I need to have XYZ conversation with my student. I typically do ABC, which I know is not best. That hasn't worked out for me before.

Carrie Monica:

Yes. So our counseling website has a variety of resources on the navigation tabs that are related to some of the typical mental health issues that we're seeing or just, struggles that students are having. Information on those, how to recognize those in your student, a variety of other things that answer questions that parents are looking for. So our website is a great resource. The other great piece of information or resource on our website is the ASU community link. And so it's towards the bottom of the page. And that community link consists of a list of approved collaborators, providers that ASU has identified who have a variety of specialty areas. And so you are able to click on those areas of what particular area you're looking for help on, what type of therapists in terms of cultural needs. And so it pulls up the list based on those needs that you identify through the filter. And that is theirs to use in terms of assessing therapeutic help outside of the university.

Brenda Vargas:

That's good to know. I've been on your website and there's a lot to navigate. There's a lot of information for parents. I know for a first year parent, it could be overwhelming. Taking the time, even if it's just a few minutes and then returning at another time if it poses more questions. But regardless, knowing that

obviously during work hours there is someone available to answer questions and kind of guide you if you need some guidance on your website. As we wrap up, I think it's really important for parents to understand the simple fact that the resources are there and there's a lot out there and sometimes if we don't ask for help, we don't get the help. And we have to be good stewards as parents to say I don't know, or reach out and model that asking for help so that our students are more open to doing the same and seeking the assistance that they need even if it's just direction. Carrie, I don't know if there's anything that we didn't mention that you want to make sure that t we covered everything. I don't know if there's anything I missed.

Carrie Monica:

I think the one piece I didn't mention as part of the individual counseling consultation services, we also have a variety of groups that students are eligible for. And so this is an opportunity where students have other students that they can engage with and be in discussion with and learn from based on their common difficulties that they're dealing with. And so we have international student support groups. We have sort of handling life pressures. we have a group for students who are dealing with chronic illness or pain; art expression. A really nice menu of group counseling services that I think really meet a lot of and most of the needs of students at ASU.

Brenda Vargas:

And I know that that was just a sampling of just a few. I've been on your small group list as I peruse your website, there were so many from grief to domestic violence or healthy relationships too. Sometimes they find themselves in situations that they don't realize this is a concern until they're already waist deep in it.

Carrie Monica:

I didn't mention also we do have a sexual violence prevention department. We have student advocacy services as well. There's just so much. And so any parent who's listening to this is welcome to call me or email me if they have more questions or clarifications or just kind of want to get some suggestions on how to support their student at ASU, whether their first year at ASU or currently an ongoing. So I'm happy to give my contact information out.

Brenda Vargas:

That'd be great. And I know that as a parent we tend to have to ask a lot of questions. I think when you know the answers to those questions, if a parent calls and reaches out to get kind of the background information, it's easier for them then to know what questions to ask her student. Hopefully leading them to connect to the right places at ASU that could possibly gear them to getting the help that they need and again, parents, it doesn't have to mean there's a pressing issue or a problem. Sometime it's just awareness. We know that through educating and making everyone aware, we can certainly be more solution focused, before the problem even really arises to a huge problem.

Carrie Monica:

I couldn't agree more.

Brenda Vargas:

So I know that we could probably go on and on about all the different services offered through ASU, specifically the Counseling Center and how you connect students. I just wanted to give parents brief

enough information to get them going. Go to your website and then how to contact you, Carrie and or the Counseling Center if you don't sharing that contact information before we say farewell here.

Carrie Monica:

Sure. I do go by Carrie, but my email is Caroline.monica@asu.edu and that's C A R O, L, I N E. dot M O, N, I C, A@asu.edu. And my phone number is (480) 965-8047.

Brenda Vargas:

Well, we certainly appreciate you making the time for us and our parents. Parents, Look for more ASU series podcasts as we'll bring to you more information from our local university, which we are so incredibly lucky to have right here and nearby in our hometown. Thank you parents. Have a good one.