SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM Annual Report 2022-2023 School Year

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## Letter from Aspen Hope Center's School Program Manager

Dear Friends,

As we were completing this report, my mind wandered back to August of 2022. Prior to the start of the 2022-2023 school year, I interviewed teachers, school administrators and community partners to inquire about the ongoing effects of the public health crisis that gripped our world. We were coming out of a period of extreme uncertainty and isolation. The crisis had a profound impact on our school communities.

While there were many unique perspectives on the impact of COVID-19, many educators identified a common concern: Students needed to re-learn how to be students. Many students did not have the mental stamina to sit through in-person classes, and educators noticed that many students lacked interpersonal skills to navigate social situations. These interviews led me to believe that our work in schools would now be more important than ever. Our school team had the unique opportunity to provide support to students and families in real time as they grappled with the challenges of re-entering a group learning environment.

The 2022-2023 school year brought an unprecedented number of referrals, and the words from our community educators rang true. We also saw that students were able to advocate for themselves, and they actively sought support. The increased demand led to creative interventions. Our school-based clinicians collaborated with administrators, counselors and teachers to provide classroom and group support. We provided professional development to educators and parents, and we continued to work one-on-one with the most at-risk students in our valley.

This report speaks to the power of collaboration, advocacy and connection. We are grateful for the support of our community partners, and we honor the courage and resilience that lies within the students and families we serve.

Lily Jarkin

#### **About our Program Manager**



Originally from Aspen, Colorado, Lily is a Spanish bilingual licensed clinical social worker. Lily received her masters in social work from the University of Denver with a dual focus in clinical social work and organizational development. In 2011, Lily returned to the Roaring Fork Valley to be the first school-based clinician for Aspen Hope Center. Lily's work with women, children, and families has spanned a variety of settings including outpatient mental health care, child protection services, crisis intervention, school-based mental health services and women's health with a focus on maternal mental health. Lily loves working in the school setting and has developed a trauma-informed classroom training to support teachers and administrators.

## **About our Program Director**



Sarah graduated with her Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health from Adams State University and is a Licensed Addiction Counselor. Over the past 20 years, Sarah has worked in residential and day treatment programs treating youth with co-occurring disorders, child protection services and adult protection in Eagle and Pitkin counties, and was the director of a school-based family resource center. Sarah graduated from Basalt High School and is grateful to be able to provide clinical mental health support services to children and families in the Roaring Fork Valley.

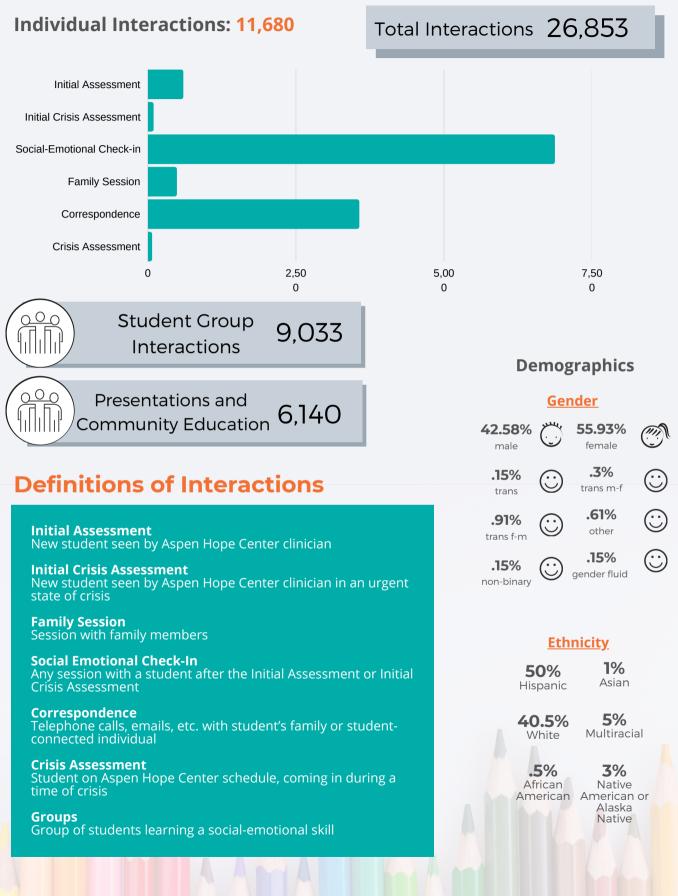
#### **About our Executive Director**



Michelle was one of the first five staff members who helped create Aspen Hope Center in 2010. She received her graduate degree in Clinical Psychology with a subspecialty in neuropsychology from Western Carolina University in 1999. She has worked as a crisis clinician in various inner city and rural emergency departments, has conducted psychological evaluations for prison inmates, served as Juvenile Coordinator and then Executive Director of the Rape Crisis Center in Beaufort, South Carolina and was part of the administration team, when she served as the Corporate Compliance Officer at Fairbanks Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana.

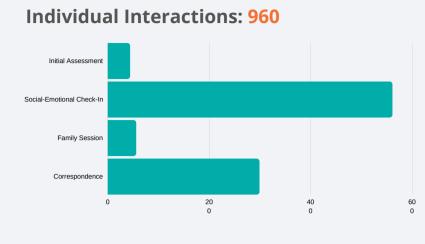
Michelle also has a passion for teaching and has instructed at Indiana University for nine years in the Department of Psychology, as well as locally at Colorado Mountain College. She is trained in Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), bio-feedback and the administration of neuropsychological testing and interpretation.

## At a Glance: Aspen Hope Center School-Based Program



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## **Statistics for Glenwood Springs Elementary School**

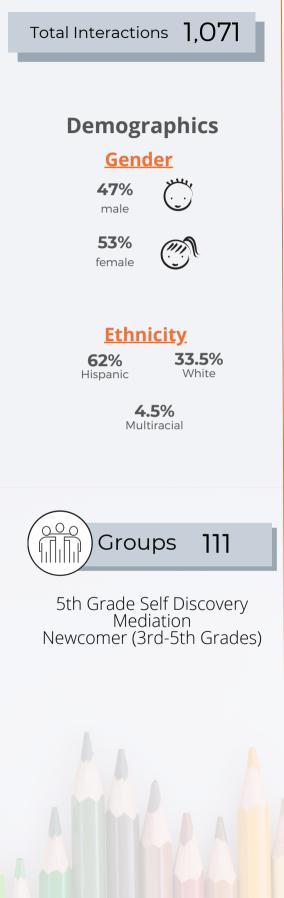


## Bridget Derkash, LPC

Bridget worked in collaboration with the Social Emotional Team at Glenwood Springs Elementary School to provide targeted therapeutic interventions to students. Bridget's primary focus was on tier-three interventions, providing individual counseling sessions to students and support to families. In this role, Bridget collaborated with parents, teachers and school staff to support students in a variety of contexts. Bridget believes that building partnerships with families is fundamental to supporting youth. Bridget brought a variety of therapeutic interventions to her work with students to address emotional regulation, flexibility, response inhibition, anger management, grief and loss, family transitions, social skills and much more.

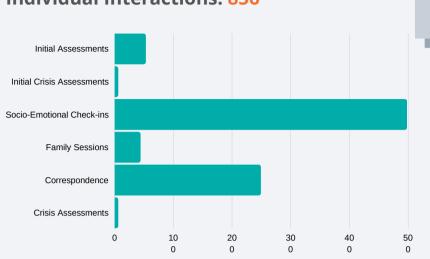
Bridget served a diverse range of students by working twice a week with Mayda Torres, a bilingual interpreter for the Hope Center. In this capacity, Bridget and Mayda were able to work cross-culturally to support students through both individual and group work. Bridget and Mayda implemented Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups (STRONG), an evidence-informed, school-based intervention for immigrant and refugee youth. STRONG aims to build resilience and address psychological distress associated with the newcomer experience from a culturally contextualized lens.

"Thank you so much for your time, your dedication and your love. As a mom, your support and care for my son's well being has meant the world to me. What a blessing that he has you and so many great people in his support group at GSES!" -GSES Parent



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## **Statistics for Glenwood Springs Middle School**



#### Individual Interactions: 856

### Amelia Dotzenrod, MSW

Amelia worked closely with Glenwood Springs Middle School (GSMS) leadership to provide both targeted, tier-three therapeutic interventions and an array of tier-two small group interventions. Small groups included Anger Management, Friendship Circles, and groups that supported students who have a trauma history.

Amelia effectively engaged parents, teachers and school staff to support her clients. Throughout the day, Amelia could be found in the hallways during passing periods and recess, and on the playground where she worked tirelessly to build relationships and support students as they increased their ability to use self-regulation skills in real time.

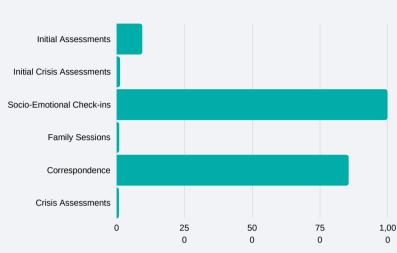
Amelia believes wholeheartedly in the strength of the family system, and she greatly enjoys supporting families while they work to navigate mental health challenges. Her passions also lie in understanding the effects of trauma, and Amelia always seeks to use a trauma-informed lens while in the field.

"Amelia is an invaluable member of our staff and mental health team at GSMS. She is effective, efficient and always collaborating." -Grace Tennant, MA, EdD, GSMS Counselor



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## **Statistics for Glenwood Springs High School**



#### Individual Interactions: 1,976

#### Courtney Dunn, MSW Rachael Bronk, LCSW

According to a Glenwood Springs High School (GSHS) counselor, "Having the Aspen Hope Center therapists here allows me to focus on all aspects of my job... and streamlines getting students connected to resources."

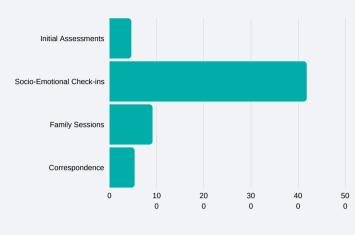
Starting in the 2021-2022 school year, Aspen Hope Center provided not one, but two seasoned therapists to support the GSHS community. Aspen Hope Center clinicians, Courtney and Rachael, established themselves as vital resources to the stability of GSHS. Aspen Hope Center removes barriers to mental health support, but this can only be effective if the school clinicians and administration can build trust. This partnership has been vital at GSHS. Courtney and Rachael pride themselves on relationships with clients, families and collaborative staff alike.

In the second year of having Aspen Hope Center at GSHS, therapists Rachael and Courtney more than doubled the number of students seen. This was due to their dedicated work, but also reflects how the clinicians were able to seamlessly and effectively integrate with the administration and counseling teams.

1.989 Total Interactions **Demographics** Gender 28% (. .) male 64% female 3% trans 3% other 2% ? other **Ethnicity** 34% 54% Hispanic White 3% 1% Native Asian or American or Pacific Alaska Islander Native 7% 1% Multiracial Unknown Groups 13 Communication and Boundaries

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## **Statistics for Sopris Elementary School**



#### Individual Interactions: 608

#### Paul Hassel, LPC

Paul provided both individual and small group interventions at Sopris Elementary School (SES). Paul co-lead two new selfregulation groups with the school counselor, Megan Rentz, that were structured around a guided mindfulness exercise, followed by reflection time for each participant. Paul and Megan were amazed at the students' genuine effort at stillness and breath, paying attention to self, and sharing their experiences. Students gained an increased sense of belonging and self-compassion when hearing that others experience similar difficulties and successes.

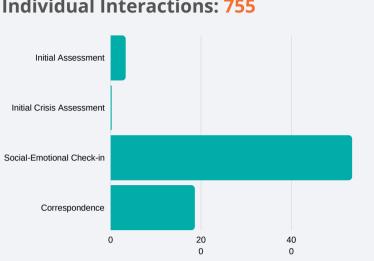
Paul recalls the particular experience of a third-grade boy stating, "When the student was referred to me, I learned of his experience of witnessing domestic violence. I decided to commit a full 15 to 16 sessions of TF-CBT to him. I have rarely progressed in this model all the way into the trauma narrative, but with this boy we got there. He showed such courage and willingness to share about his experience - after weeks and weeks of emotional regulation and cognitive coping work. His mother joined us at school to hear a reading of his trauma narrative. Afterward, she acknowledged the improvement in his mood and attitude, highlighting how helpful he had become with chores around the house. His child PTSD symptom scale (CPSS) score decreased significantly." Total Interactions 731 **Demographics** Gender 76% male 22% female 2% other **Ethnicity** 51% 22% Hispanic White 2% 2% Native Black or American or African Alaska American Native 19% Multiracial Groups 123 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Grade: Guided Mindfulness Self-Regulation

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## **Statistics for St. Stephen Catholic School**

60

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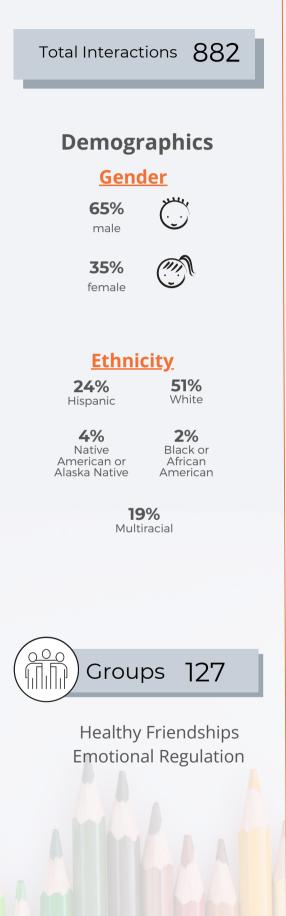
#### Individual Interactions: 755

#### Mackenzie Elder, MSW

Mackenzie worked diligently with the St. Stephen Catholic School (SSCS) staff and administration to begin the Aspen Hope Center collaboration in the 2022-2023 school year. As the school's first school-based clinician, Mackenzie was able to provide group and individual support for students and their families.

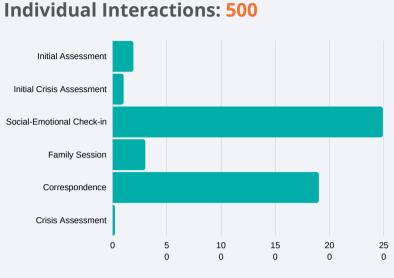
Mackenzie's focus in tier one was on building relationships with students and families while providing a space for education and sharing concerns. In this vein, parent support meetings and middle school lunches were born. The parent support meetings provided a safe space for interested parents to come into the school and discuss ongoing issues with each other and Mackenzie. At these meetings, parents were able to turn to each other for support. Middle school lunches acted in the same way for students at a much higher frequency. Once a week, the middle school lunches provided a safe space to deal with social issues occurring within the group and a safe adult in Mackenzie to monitor and support in times of difficulty. They also acted as a safe avenue for students to step into individual therapy when needed.

"Thank you so much for being such a kind and thoughtful role model for our girls. They just adore you and it brings me so much peace knowing you are always watching out for them." -SSCS Parent



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## **Statistics for Two Rivers Community School**



### Erin Quinn, LCSW

In 2022-2023, Erin focused on continuing to build relationships with students and families. Erin did this by continuously inviting parents to sessions and increasing parents' involvement in their child's counseling services and skill-building at home. Erin spent much of her time at Two Rivers Community School (TRCS) working with young adolescent females building self esteem and resiliency, and creating a positive impact in their school and community through strong interpersonal relationships. Erin assisted in client-led restorative justice conversations between students, friends and families, and witnessed great success with students asserting their needs and practicing empathy with others.

Erin has seen an increase in anxiety among young females. Erin addressed this challenge by supporting her clients' capacity to work through discomfort and distress. As a result, Erin's student's have learned how to function and thrive in moments that can be both stressful and joyous.

"Erin is always willing to give time and support to teachers and building leaders in need of advice, ideas, and support for students and families. She goes above and beyond in her willingness to collaborate." -Jamie Nims, TRCS Principal

500 **Total Interactions Demographics** Gender 34% male 59% female 7% other **Ethnicity** 24% Hispanic 72% White 4% Native American or Alaska Native

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## **Statistics for Yampah Mountain High School**

40

0

## Initial Assessment Initial Crisis Assessment Social-Emotional Check-in Family Session Correspondence Crisis Assessment 0 10 20 30 0 0 0

#### Individual Interactions: 696

### Kate Andraschko, MSW

Kate worked with administrators, teachers and the wellness team to provide support across the different school communities within Yampah Mountain High School (YMHS).

Groups included a FocusedKids curriculum for the teen parent program, wellness group rotations and substance use prevention groups. In addition to groups, Kate worked with students one-on one to provide ongoing therapy and brief, solution-focused support.

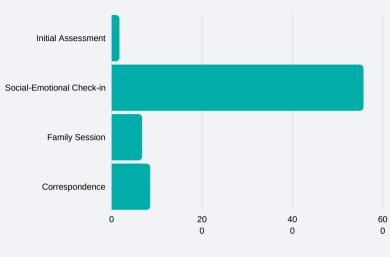
Kate takes a holistic approach and believes in personalizing the therapeutic experience to fit the needs of each individual client. Her approach focuses on looking at the strengths each client brings to the table. Kate utilizes a variety of therapeutic modalities including EMDR, MBSR, DBT, CAMS, mindfulnessbased CBT and solution-focused brief therapy.

"The collaboration with the Aspen Hope Center provides an anchor for our wellness team. The Aspen Hope Center clinician provides high-quality services to students in the school while connecting students and their families to all of the Aspen Hope Center services in the community. We are very grateful to have this invaluable community resource in our school." -Laura Carmichael Smith, LCSW -YMHS Social Worker



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## **Statistics for Riverview School**



#### Individual Interactions: 726

### **Tim Wheeler, LPC**

At Riverview School, Tim's work was centered around the Affective Needs (AN) program. The AN program focuses on building relationships in a safe and consistent environment within an academic setting. Students referred to the AN program have frequently had behavioral challenges in their previous school, and they often require more structure and time to build school-ready behaviors.

Tim worked in collaboration with Riverview teachers to build the students' capacity in the following areas: social awareness, self-awareness and emotion regulation.

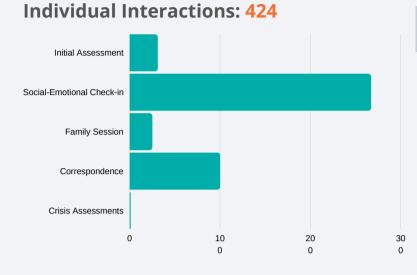
Tim's patience, kindness, and empathy allowed him to quickly build rapport with students and their families. Tim would often integrate art and music into his work with students to allow for many forms of communication and self-expression. Additionally, Tim utilized an eclectic modality of treatment, including, but not limited to, Rogerian, CBT, TF-CBT, Family Systems, Existential, Narrative, Reframing, Solution-Focused, DBT, Motivational Interviewing, Gestalt and Mindfulnessbased therapies. Total Interactions726DemographicsGender82%<br/>naleImage18%<br/>femaleImageEthnicity18%<br/>Kuhite5%<br/>African<br/>Merican

**71%** Hispanic

**6%** Multiracial

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## **Statistics for Carbondale Community School**



## Bridget Derkash, LPC., Kelly Cooper, LPC., Sarah Fedishen, LPC., Yolanda Gonzales, Intern

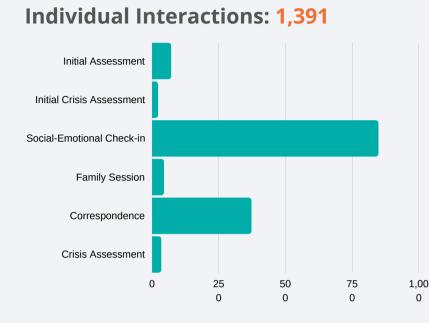
During the 2022-2023 school year, Aspen Hope Center's school-based team worked as one to provide a wide range of support for Carbondale Community School (CCS) students. Sarah Fedishen, LPC, Yolanda Gonzales, MSW, Bridget Derkash, LPC, and Kelly Cooper, LPC engaged with students across the three tiers of social-emotional support.

Sarah and Yolanda implemented the social-emotional curriculum Second Step for multiple learning centers. Second Step is an evidenced-based social-emotional learning curriculum that gives students tools to engage in selfregulation strategies inside and outside of the classroom. Through weekly instruction across the school, this program provided students with universal support. Additionally, Bridget and Kelly provided small group and one-on-one interventions to complement the skills-based learning in the classroom.

"Carbondale Community School was better able to meet students' mental health needs as a result of the expert support provided by Aspen Hope Center clinicians. In addition, students in grades 1st -6th grade received weekly social-emotional and bully prevention lessons effectively boosting their social skills and fostering informed responses to challenging situations. Sarah, Yolanda, Bridget and Kelly became integral members of our school community and provided just-in-time and ongoing support to students, parents and teachers. Their steady support and expertise established a strong foundation for mental health services at CCS." -Sam Richings-Germain, CCS Principal Total Interactions 1.824 **Demographics** Gender 45% male 39% female 16% other Ethnicity **48**% 26% White Hispanic 3% 23% Asian Unknown American Groups 1,400 **Emotion Regulation** Social-Emotional Learning

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## **Statistics for Roaring Fork High School**



# Total Interactions1,391DemographicsGender40%<br/>maleÚ60%<br/>femaleÚ

## Paula Hall, LPC

The 2022-2023 school year was Paula's third year at Roaring Fork High School. Paula worked closely with school leadership to provide timely, client-centered services for all students. Additionally, Paula oversaw the Aspen Hope Center school team data and reporting protocols, and she worked to ensure that Aspen Hope Center documentation, paperwork and reports reflected the values of our clients and families.

Paula's professional credentials include Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in Arkansas and Colorado, Distance Credentialed Counselor and Certified Brain Injury Specialist. She is also trained in EMDR, TF-CBT, Motivational Interviewing, and Solution-focused Therapy. Paula has over 15 years of experience in a variety of settings: community counseling, hospitals, residential treatment centers, schools, military installations and other private practice work.

Paula was the first call for school-based clinicians in need of a crisis consultation, and she was often the first point of contact for school administrators who needed support with possible threat assessments.

"The collaboration with the Aspen Hope Center is an essential component of RFHS's counseling department. Students benefit immensely because of the Aspen Hope Center presence, and we are able to meet student needs." -Liz Penzel, LCSW, RFHS Counselor

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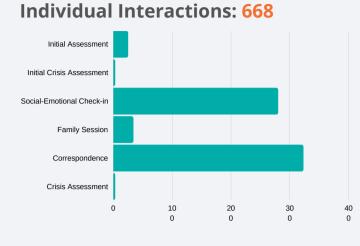
## **Ethnicity**

**30%** Hispanic

> 65% White

**5%** Multiracial

## **Statistics for Basalt Elementary School**



#### Avy Harris, MSW, SWC

Avy served both Basalt Elementary School (BES) and Basalt Middle School (BMS) students. She provided individual counseling and skill-building sessions, as well as tier-two interventions with small groups. Avy utilized a variety of therapeutic interventions in her work with students and families to support in crisis stabilization, emotional regulation, and increasing cognitive flexibility and emotional vocabulary. She worked to build resilience for students and families experiencing transition, grief, depression, anxiety, conflict and a variety of other concerns.

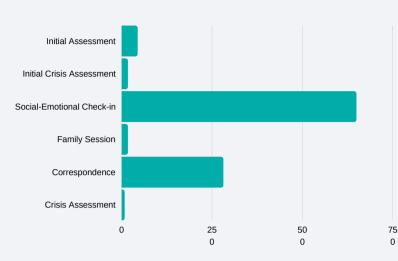
At BES, Avy facilitated several small social groups and skillbuilding groups, including lunch-bunches and socialemotional regulation groups. Avy also worked with Mayda Torres, a bilingual interpreter for the Hope Center, to offer newcomer groups. These groups were modeled after the evidence-informed STRONG curriculum (Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups) to build resilience and address psychological distress associated with the newcomer experience from a culturally contextualized lens. Throughout the year, Avy also collaborated with her team to support staff and students through several losses that impacted the Basalt community.

"Avy was wonderful with everyone at BES. Avy took the initiative to introduce herself to staff members and created strong professional relationships with all stakeholders. I think we all appreciated that Avy would advocate for herself and her needs and knew exactly how and when to jump into situations. Avy was able to build relationships with her students very quickly." -Lisa Lowsky, BES Counselor



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## **Statistics for Basalt Middle School**



## Indiviudal Interations: 1,016

#### Avy Harris, MSW, SWC Brandon Jones, MSW, SWC

Brandon played a crucial role in supporting student's emotional and psychological well-being during the 2022-2023 school year at Basalt Middle School (BMS). Students who worked with Brandon received tailored, individual attention through weekly social-emotional check-ins.

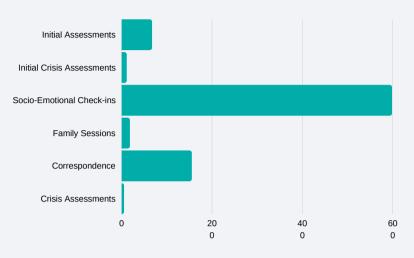
Middle school can be a difficult time, and it's safe to say that students are experiencing many new highs and lows during this crucial developmental stage. Brandon provided psychoeducation for students and their families to normalize the broad range of emotions they're experiencing, while providing a safe space to process and bravely discuss those feelings. Brandon worked with students to improve their ability to self-regulate, cope with stress, improve their moods and overcome hardship.

"Brandon was highly communicative and positive. He always wants what is best for our students and understands the system within which we are working. He advocated and spoke up when he was uncomfortable or had a differing opinion and did it in a very kind and respectful way. I truly appreciate his strength in staying true to his 'north star' no matter what." -Jen Ellsperman, BMS Principal



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## **Statistics for Basalt High School**



#### Individual Interactions: 856

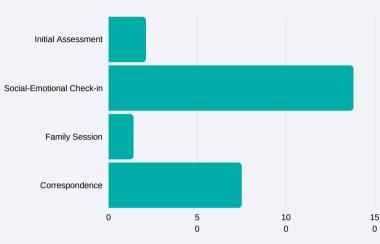
#### Katherine Romero, LSW

Kat worked closely with school counselors to provide tierthree and tier-two support to Basalt High School (BHS) students. Kat recalls working with one client in particular. "I began working with a student her freshman year. She had a history of acute anxiety, depression and eating concerns, and at the end of last year, her symptoms had gotten worse. We worked closely together the first half of this year trying different strategies and interventions. We worked to get her connected to a physician, and she was prescribed medication to treat her mood disorder. She began to respond to the different interventions and her symptoms improved. In the beginning, she had difficulties with her relationships, felt unsure about herself, and was unable to ask for help or what she needed. Currently, this student is thriving in her relationships with others, has become more open and speaks her mind, and she acts with more confidence. I am very proud of the progress she has made. Despite inevitable life stressors, she has been able to continue practicing psychological flexibility. I have enjoyed seeing her growth. She now has hope for her future."

"I really appreciate how well Kat connects with and supports our most vulnerable students. It's really helpful to hear from her and to help our staff better understand the breadth and depth of students' mental health challenges." -Peter Mueller, BMS Principal Total Interactions 909 **Demographics** Gender 25% male 72% female 2% trans 1% other **Ethnicity** 23% 73% Hispanic White 3% 1% American Multiracial Indian or Alaskan Native 53 Groups ExEd Women's Empowerment Freshman Girls

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## **Statistics for Aspen Community School**



## Individual Interactions: 248

### Lily Larkin, LCSW

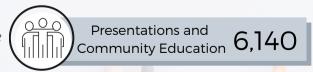
Lily Larkin worked across all levels of intervention and support at Aspen Community School (ACS) to complement the school's robust social-emotional education. Lily was able to meet with all students every week by providing a combination of classroom education, small group work, individual therapy, teacher/student mentorship groups, parent groups and family outreach. In this role, Lily enjoyed close collaboration with the ACS leadership, faculty, staff, parents/caregivers and the community at large.

Lily believes that children thrive when they have a network of adults working together to create a supportive environment. The ACS social-emotional vision is to develop kindness, compassion, empathy, tolerance and patience in all our students. Lily states, *"Our work is to share 'tools' that will help students navigate emotions and social interactions, thus increasing their capacity for kindness, compassion, empathy, tolerance and patience." By teaching and applying the socialemotional program in our daily experiences, Lily states that, "Students come to share a language and a belief that they are equipped to handle the successes and challenges of life."* 

"We are in the process of enhancing our social-emotional vision. Adding Lily to our school has provided a higher level of expertise in unpacking student challenges, training staff on topics like trauma and how to focus the brain, and launching a core mentoring program for all middle school students." -Casey White, ACS Principal



4th Grade Lunch Groups Circle of Friends 8th Grade Lunch Groups Monthly Parent Wellness Group Monthly Teacher Wellness Group All School meeting: Toolbox Presentations Teaching For Hope and Healing: Trauma-Informed Classroom Training



Yes, 5,719 and 6,140 are accurate figures and not typos. Lily had 11,859 group interactions with students, parents and community members in the 2022-2023 school year!

thank you

Our work is made possible through the steadfast efforts of Dr. Anna Cole at Roaring Fork Schools, Dr. Leigh McGown at Yampah Mountain High School, Michael Hayes at Compass for Lifelong Discovery, Jamie Nims at Two Rivers Community School and Glenda Oliver at St. Stephen Catholic School. Thank you to all of the principals, administration and school counselors for valuing mental health support in your schools. Your dedication to the youth in our community is an inspiration to us all.

We would like to thank Pathfinders, Family Resource Center of the Roaring Fork Schools, Stepping Stones, FocusedKids, River Bridge Regional Center, YouthZone, The Buddy Program, Aspen Family Connections, Mountain Family Health Center's school-based clinics and Midvalley Family Practice for being our partners in the schools and the community.

Thank you to the Basalt, Carbondale and Glenwood Springs Police Departments, and the Pitkin County Sheriff's Department for partnering with us through School Resource Officers and beyond.

We could not do our work without generous support from the Town of Basalt, Town of Carbondale, City of Glenwood Springs, Garfield, Eagle and Pitkin Counties, and the Colorado Department of Education's School Health Professionals Grant.

We are forever grateful for Michelle Muething and the Aspen Hope Center's Board of Directors who work tirelessly to keep our program running smoothly. Thank you for your dedication to our schools and our community.

The Aspen Hope Center Team would also like to extend a special thank you to Sarah Fedishen. Sarah's vision, hard work and community engagement created the school team that exists today.

LilySarkin

Lily Larkin, LCSW School Program Manager

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