



Hogg Foundation
for Mental Health



Episode 138: What Happened To You, Part I (Transcript)

Ike Evans:

Into the Fold is part of the Texas Podcast Network. The Conversations Changing the World, brought to you by the University of Texas at Austin. The opinions expressed in this podcast represent the views of the hosts and guests and not of the University of Texas at Austin. Hello and welcome to Into the Fold, the Mental Health Podcast. I'm your host, Ike Evans. And today, we are delighted to bring you Episode 138: Back to School (with Trauma.) But first, some mental health headlines. We are pleased to announce the new recipients of our Pathways for Success grants. 20 organizations received \$50,000 apiece to develop supportive relationships with young people, work to bolster youth resiliency, and equip them with life skills and tools necessary to live independently as adults. If you want to know who the awardees are, visit our website at hogg.utexas.edu. In other Hogg news, Queen Maxima of the Netherlands recently paid a visit to our grant partner, Bastrop County Cares, during her recent tour of the US.

She spoke with young people and members of the community about initiatives that support children, young people, and their families, helping them to become more resilient in the face of mental health issues. We'll be having more to say about this extraordinary event in the days to come. So keep up with the podcast and our website for more. Finally, a state telemedicine program allows Texas children to see therapists at schools. The Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine, or TCHAT program, now provides more than 3000 schools across Texas access to mental health services through telehealth. This is according to a recent story by KUT. TCHAT was created by the Texas Child Mental Health Consortium and utilizes 12 higher education health institutions across the state to provide psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, and licensed professional counselors, for telehealth appointments.

So don't be left out of the loop, subscribe to mental health headlines on the Hogg Foundation website. Get the latest mental health news right in your inbox. This episode comes at a very interesting time on the calendar. September is not only National Recovery Month, but September 15th was also the beginning of National Hispanic Heritage Month. Yes, it spans September and October. And it has been close to five months since the horrific mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. And school safety will be a top priority for the upcoming Texas legislative session kicking off in January. Tragedies like Uvalde

are always a chance to revisit what we mean by safety and where mental health fits into that.

And lest we forget, the worst of the COVID pandemic may be over for most kids, but let's be real, more than 10 and a half million children worldwide have lost one or both parents or caregivers during the coronavirus pandemic. Nearly double previous estimates, according to data released last week by JAMA Pediatrics. Brian Lopez is a reporter for Texas Tribune. He recently wrote a story with the headline "I'm scared that it might happen again": Uvalde parents send their kids back to school. Brian, so glad that you could join us.

Brian Lopez: Thanks for having me.

Ike Evans: How would you describe the overall mood in Uvalde, just based on what you were able to glean in your reporting?

Brian Lopez: I would describe it as anxious, mainly because of the events that have transpired over the last couple of months. It's only been three months since that May 24th shooting, which left 21 dead and 19 children. So the family I kind of spent time with, from 6:00 AM till like 9:00 AM, it was a feeling. You put on a brave face, the parents. You don't want to expose them into that fear, that anxiety, that the parents are feeling. And so, I think that's how I would describe it. Anxiety. I remember, after the kids ran into the school bus, the mom almost broke down. They had to make the hard decision that the only option was to go back to the district. They didn't have the resources to try and move or pay for private education, to feel a little bit safer. So they're putting their best hopes and their prayers in that nothing, like what happened in May 25th, will happen again, in Uvalde.

Ike Evans: And so, what sorts of things are parents, teachers, and administrators doing to help kids cope?

Brian Lopez: So the first thing is, with parents, the main thing I saw, it was being comforting, parents being brave, and not showing off their fear or their anxiety of sending them back to school. So that's what parents are doing. I spoke to some that bought bulletproof backpacks. I spoke to a family that they bought their 10 year old their first phone. They weren't even thinking of doing that till they were like 15. And you have some others, a majority of parents, taking their kids to therapy and seeing someone to talk to. From the school perspective, they were a little let down. Parents were a little let down on security. There was only one campus that was really fully fenced with an unscalable fence. And people knew that the district wasn't going to be able to finish it for that day one. And so, they feel let down that that happened.

But from the school district, they're trying to put more security cameras. There are state troopers on campuses. More presence on these campuses. And hopefully, that will both keep the kids safe in the classrooms and give a little

peace of mind to parents. The school district has also contracted several mental health online services, one that's provided from the state and another in the private sector, where kids can check in and talk about how they're feeling, what maybe they're going through at home. And then, it'll be confidential, unless somebody needs to intervene. And they're also looking at providing more of those counseling services for students and being a little bit more open about mental health needs and the social emotional needs of students, something that a lot of people in the community didn't think about before this tragedy. So there's going to be a push toward, not only securing campuses, but also making sure each child feels like they're taking care of their emotional and mental health needs.

Ike Evans: Okay. And did your reporting uncover any evidence of a disconnect between the district or state level discourse on school safety and what people are feeling on the ground?

Brian Lopez: For sure. I think when talking to parents and friends of parents and parents that are really involved in this right now, the one thing that the majority of people asking for is to raise that age limit, the minimum age limit somebody can buy an assault type rifle. Right now, it's 18. They wanted to see it to raise until at least 21. And that's something that lawmakers aren't ready yet to do, more specifically, Republican lawmakers aren't ready to do or have given an inch that that could be coming. If you're going to put this on a priority list, I think that's close to number one, as to where parents are. And that's not somewhere where the state is meeting them. At the district level, they want to see more accountability.

They fired the district police chief, Pete Arredondo. While they did that, they felt like it was too late. It came exactly three months after the shooting happened. And they're upset that a lot of the district police are still being employed under the district. They want to see that accountability be spread out to anyone and any officer, any person that was in that building that could have done something to stop all those children from dying. One of the things going around is "there's no guarantee that X amount of lives would've been saved had somebody earlier," but they didn't try.

Ike Evans: So Uvalde is a predominantly Latino community. How is that shaping people's experience of the shooting's aftermath, or at least how they're able to, I guess, make meaning from it?

Brian Lopez: For sure. I think it's, like you said, it's a very predominantly Latino community, but at the same time, there's a big gun culture in Uvalde. And that includes the Latino community. I've met people on both sides of that discourse. Some of them are big hunters. Some of them use them for protection, because they're working down near the border and they feel like they need that protection down there. So it really just depends on who you ask and where their politics are. I will say, there is a lot of community members saying, "We are predominantly Latino, but our elected leaders don't reflect that population." So

if anything, I think, based on my conversations with the community members, is that this is going to have a civic awakening, political awakening, however you want to call it, where people are going to be more involved in what the school board does, what the city council does, what the county commissioners do, and community members thinking about running for office, learning the different kind of public meeting codes.

So you're really seeing is this community coming together and trying to figure out in which ways they can make change. They know, at the end of the day, some of it will come down to them, what they want to see, it'll be up to them to reflect it. So we'll see what happens from here on, but I will say, there's a big interest right now in that community of going out to vote, learning who their leaders are, and what they do, and figuring out what they can do, what their power is.

Ike Evans: Okay. Brian, we really do appreciate you finding the time to talk to us. We're trying to recast the whole conversation on school safety, so we really do appreciate it.

Brian Lopez: Awesome. Well, thank you so much. And we'll be in touch.

Ike Evans: Okay. Communities In Schools of Laredo is a grant partner of the Hogg Foundation. In 2021, they received a Communities for Children grant from the Hogg Foundation. The 2021-22 school year was a challenging one, to say the least, with kids still dealing with the aftermath of COVID. Our guests, Sandy Salinas and Rosie Guzman, both with CIS Laredo are here with us to share what they have learned. Sandra and Rosie, thanks for joining us.

Sandy Salinas: Thank you for having us.

Ike Evans: Uvalde is about two hours away from Laredo. What was the reaction in your community to that awful tragedy? And how has it affected your work?

Sandy Salinas: Our hearts were completely shattered for the students and families of Uvalde, because it really felt like it was too close to home. You hear about these school shootings, mass shootings, in other cities and states, but you're talking about a few hours away and a Hispanic community just like ours. So we were very deeply saddened and our hearts were filled with compassion and filled with prayers for the community, for the city, for the parents, and definitely, the staff, for everybody involved. Like I said, I still think about it and I could not imagine what it was like for the students to go back this school year.

It does change you. It does change you, in the sense that you feel like "Are we safe?" And in actuality, it's not just at school, because now, it's happening in churches. It's happening in grocery stores, on the highway, crossing the street. But because of what happened in Uvalde, I think we're just trying to just be very careful. Our site coordinators have been attending safety trainings on campus,

through the district, and we're having additional training, just for our staff, this coming week. So it's just kind of giving us just a sense of assurance that we know that our campus police and securities are doing the best that they can.

Rosie Guzman: What happened in Uvalde did strike close to home, because of the proximity of the city, our community. And we got to see the reaction in our coordinators, our place at the campuses, how, especially at the elementary level, the enrollment has been affected. Because parents are scared. It's having to go through the decision, whether we keep them homeschool, we send them to school, look what's happening in our schools, in our community. So definitely, our coordinators have seen that at the campuses, where the enrollment, specifically at the elementary level, has been low. One, because we, for the past two years, we've been through COVID. And then, now, because of what happened at Uvalde, kids are afraid. Kids are afraid to go to school. Kids are afraid to be out in public, because of what could happen next.

Ike Evans: So our listeners would love to know more about the two of you, your work for CIS, and what it is that you hope to accomplish for Laredo ISD.

Rosie Guzman: Well, my name's Rosie Guzman. I've been part of Communities In Schools of Laredo for almost eight years. I started out in the field in the high school level and the middle school. Again, doing my work from the heart, helping out the parents, helping out the students, and removing barriers for students and families, so they could reach that goal of graduation and helping out. I've always said it, I'm a provider. I like to provide for families, for students. And this is the perfect field to do it, because you get to be there as kind of like a first responder for families that are at the schools. When they need help with food, when they need help with clothing, we're their first responders. We're the ones that are ready to jump in to provide those necessities, that are typically not given to students in school.

Ike Evans: Okay. And Sandy?

Sandy Salinas: Again, my name is Sandra Salinas, but I do go by Sandy. And I have been with Communities in School since 1994. I'm celebrating 28 years this year. I did start as a, back then, we were case workers. And I started out at the field and I did case work for about nine years. And then, I moved to this main office as quality assurance specialist for about five years. And then, after that, I moved on to the role of a program coordinator, which, now, my title is director of program services. So that's the beauty about Rosie and I, that we have that experience as site coordinator, so we understand the field work. And we are able to provide that support to our site coordinators. Like Rosie said, this is a job of being first responders on campus, but we're also first responders for our staff.

We are here to support them. We are here to guide them, so that we ensure that they do provide our case management model on the campuses and that they implement the program with fidelity on campus. So our job is to really maintain those relationships with, not just our students and families and

campuses, but also with our site coordinators and community. Our job basically, or the mission of Communities in Schools rather, is it's rather long. It is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school, so that they can succeed in life. But basically, in a nutshell, that means that we do whatever it takes to keep kids in school. Right now, these past couple of years after COVID and now with Ulvade, the need is great on campuses. I know I'm going to jump into the other question, as far as how COVID has affected us or the loss of caregivers. When COVID hit, everything closed.

But our site coordinators, our program didn't close. Just like many other CIS campuses, we were still in the front lines, even though we went virtual. Our staff was in the front lines, assisting families. We were able to contact families through phone, virtually, ensuring that our students were connecting, that they didn't lack the technology. We had many families that were affected, that either they were COVID positive. We were ensuring that they had their basic necessities, delivering to their home food, personal hygiene items. There were families who had to leave their work to care for their kids. They had to leave their jobs. So how were they paying for services? Their light bill, providing food on the table? There was a lot of struggle.

Now kids were home 24 hours a day and providing for two kids. Or we had families that had 8, 9, 10 kids. So we ensured that we responded to every need of our students, so that the impact that COVID had on families, at least, we were trying to provide for their basic needs. As far as loss, I want to say that we had about maybe 15 students who lost a loved one. Many of our students live with grandparents. So some of them lost a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, a sibling. Even our staff. We had one of our site coordinators, who lost her dad. We had another one who lost her mom. And I, myself, lost a sister-in-law during COVID, because of COVID. So it's been a struggle. It's been a struggle, but CIS always responds to the call.

Ike Evans: Okay, great. And so, this is your opportunity to talk specifically about your Communities for Children grant. I just would love to know, what are some of the major successes from your first year?

Sandy Salinas: Okay. Well, we had many successes. Several of the activities that were happening on campuses and services, we wouldn't be able to do it, if it weren't for the Hogg Foundation Communities for Children grant. One, we helped with improving attendance on campus. CIS, as a whole, we focus on several areas and that's improving attendance, academics, and behavior. And in behavior, we're not just talking about kids misbehaving. We're talking about the social, emotional wellbeing of kids. So through this grant, we were able to expand our services, in regards to what we were taking into the schools. We're working with five schools, two middle schools that feed into two high schools. And then, there's an early college. Our staff had to get creative on how to do things differently. How can they help their campuses improve in attendance? How can

they improve in academics? How can they improve as far as the social, emotional wellbeing of children?

Well, let me tell you. We worked a lot with mental health. When COVID hit, we were dealing with a lot, just like all communities, because this was global. But we partnered with an agency in the community that provides therapy for the community. But basically, we wanted to ensure that our kids were okay. Kids were coming back from being virtual, being at home. We don't know what was happening behind the camera. Kids who were already in difficult situations, we don't know what was happening back then. As students started to make their way back to school, many of them still struggling, not wanting to come to school, but we went ahead and we partnered with an agency, that's called PILLAR, which stands for People with Ideas of Love, Liberty, and Respect.

And basically, they have licensed professional counselors who do therapy with students, with just community. So we established this partnership, where we would refer students and communities and schools. Through the Hogg Foundation, we would be able to pay for therapy for students. This past school year, we referred 91 students for therapy, where CIS, through the Hogg Foundation, pays for up to seven sessions. And that's just to start them off.

And sometimes that might be all it takes, but we've had students who, after their seven sessions, a reassessment is done. And then, the therapist determines whether the student is needing a little bit more of therapy. Because we know that when students have suffered trauma, there is no timeline on the healing process.

Ike Evans: And I just want to know what you two hope to accomplish this year with either your grant or just in general?

Sandy Salinas: This grant couldn't come at a better time. So we are in our second year. And what we hope to accomplish is, of course, continuing our services, continuing our activities in our schools, working very closely with administration, because of, even now with what happened in Uvalde, we've had several site coordinators approach us, in regards to there's a lot of students who now have anxiety. Because they don't want to come to school. The first two weeks were extremely challenging. So our staff is also going through mental health first training, identifying those behaviors, so that we can continue in reaching out to more students who need our help.

We're looking forward to continuing this partnership with PILLAR, so that the students can receive therapy for their trauma, their issues that they've had to deal with for, many of them, for years, that hopefully that they start their healing process through therapy. We look forward to adding more schools. When I first started back in 1994, we were in only about 12 schools. This year, we're celebrating 32 years and we are at 39 schools and five school districts, servicing over 3,400 students. So we look forward to adding more schools, serving more students who need CIS, because to us, there should be no reason

why kids don't come to school. So the more students we reach, we feel that our impact is more successful, not only for the students, but the campuses as well.

Ike Evans: Okay. Rosie, do you have anything to add to that?

Rosie Guzman: Keep working with the five schools from Hogg. And maybe, why not dream big and get the grant going for all our campuses for the next two years? And proof of that, it's the work they've done in the coordinators in these five schools and how much they have been able to help the families and the students in these campuses. And when there's a will, there's a way. And if we were able to do big things in these five schools, if Hogg is able to provide more money to cover our 38 schools, why not dream big and keep pushing for that, to reach that goal where we could cover all the schools through Hogg Foundation?

Ike Evans: Communities in Schools of Laredo, recipients of a Communities for Children grant from the Hogg Foundation, we are talking about the emotional burdens on kids, on teachers, and parents, who are just trying to go back to school. Sandy and Rosie, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today.

Sandy Salinas: Thank you for having us, Ike. And thank you to the Hogg Foundation Communities for Children.

Ike Evans: In 2020, during the height of the pandemic, we really wanted to get a sense of the emotional devastation in some of the communities hardest hit. Among those was El Paso, where we happened to have a wonderful grant partner, Children's Grief Center, doing its part to mitigate the harm. We invited their director, Laura Olague, to discuss the dynamics of children's grief process and how it differs from adults. Here's a listen.

Laura Olague: As adults, we wonder, "do kids grieve the same as adults?" Or some people have the notion that children's grief is less significant somehow, that, "Oh, they'll forget when they grow up. They'll all be fine." But what we don't realize as adults is that we know that children grieve. One, they do grieve differently. They grieve developmentally. So what that means is that, say, a child experiences a death, a loss, when they are six years old. They really don't comprehend the permanence of that. Their little brain's not quite developed enough to understand that that person isn't coming back.

So as they get older in a new developmental place, they have a better understanding, "Oh, my dad's not coming back." Before they thought, "Well, when dad comes back from work, he's going to take me to the park." But when he gets to that older place, where the brain has a little more development, they have a better cognitive understanding. Well, they begin to figure out dad isn't coming back. As they get into the next developmental phase, they start having new experiences, where that parent would be there. So say, for our COVID kids, "School's going to start and I'm going to be on the football team. And oh, if my

dad had been there, had been here, he would get to go watch me practice and even try out and be on that team. Oh gosh, I miss my dad."

Ike Evans:

A link to the full episode is in the show description, so check it out. Before we close, one big announcement. Hogg Foundation has extended the deadline for its New Voices Showcase for Youth. For young people, ages 16 to 24, they now have until September 30th, not a lot of time, to submit a short video that answers the prompt, "What would be different about the world, if it cared about your mental health?" The submission deadline is September 30th, but you must also register with our grant application system, known as Fluxx, by September 26th. Teachers, counselors, other adults who work with young people, anyone within the sound of my voice, please pass along this opportunity. You can find more information on our website by visiting hogg.utexas.edu.

And now, time for some closing thoughts. I am a product of public schools and my sympathies for public education run deep. It's hard for me not to draw parallels between declining public school enrollments, widening inequality, and deeper democratic decline. And whichever of those you focus on, I doubt it's doing wonders for anyone's mental health either. Public schools are the canaries in the coal mine, whether the toxic air is gun violence or pandemic preparedness, racial segregation, or public disinvestment in general. And that was before 2022, before the emergence of an actual movement to ban books in schools, before the growth, even of attempts to tarnish mental health programs in schools, as fronts for critical race theory or political indoctrination. Public schools are bearing the brunt of the worst of us, it seems. And children's mental health is among the casualties of this being allowed to go on.

And then, there is the issue of safety. It's a word you might hear a lot during the next legislative session. Maybe some candidates will make it part of their campaign rhetoric, heading into November. And after what happened in Uvalde, it's no wonder it's on people's minds, but there's a different way of looking at safety, one exemplified every day in the work of our grantees. It's the safety you get when you care about people enough to make investments in their education, in their physical health, their infrastructure, and yes, their mental health. It's the safety you get when leaders are able to rise to the occasion and incentivize planning for the long term over getting situational and political advantage in the short term.

It's the kind of safety you get when we put our hearts and minds to the task of healing the loneliness, alienation, and radicalization, that will only lead to more Uvaldes and make us less safe. And that does it for this episode. We're glad that you could join us. If you have comments on anything or would just like to share, reach out to us at intothefold@austin.utexas.edu. Production assistance by Anna Harris, Darrell Wiggins, and Kate Rooney. Music by Odyssey. Please leave us a review and subscribe to us on the podcast app of your choice. You can find us on Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Spotify, TuneIn, among numerous others. Thanks for joining us.