“STAND TALL, REACH HIGH, AND DREAM BIG.”
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COMMITMENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELING AWARD

COUNSELOR OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS

USCA CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKER
“TO REACH HIGHER IS AN EFFORT AS HUMAN BEINGS TO CHAMPION EACH OTHER IN THIS JOURNEY OF LIFE.”

JULIE SCHERZINGER, PRESIDENT ELECT

“Reaching Higher” is an effort as human beings to champion each other in this journey of life. Yearly, billions of advertising dollars are spent to persuade us otherwise, that expensive cars, homes and toys are the rewards life has to offer. By nature, as school counselors we reaffirm with Nelson Mandela, “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

As School Counselors we are poised in a unique position with diverse upbringings, varied educational experienc-
es and political views, in a common cause to encourage students in their social, emotional and educational pursuits. Likewise, as colleagues we inspire innovation and creativity as we collaborate and learn from one another. This past summer at the ASCA conference I felt that spark of creativity and collaboration as I listened to and gleaned from colleagues. Those of you who know me will not be surprised that the humorous author and Broadway performer, Tim Federle was my favorite keynote speaker. I’d like to share with you some insights he says would have helped him as a student.

1. Everything that I got picked on for as a kid, is now what gets me paid. The best way to fight back when you’re bullied is to develop the things you love and try to ignore the critics. Harder than it sounds, but we should teach our kids to cope instead of to hold out for a world in which they’ll never be picked on.

2. Setbacks provide character. Tell your students: the stories we love the most have setbacks and disappointments along the way; even “happily ever afters” have quite a few wolves and witches leading up to them.

3. Be nice to the guy who washes your socks. One day that person could be in the position to hire you.

4. Reinvent yourself. Everyone is starting over each day. There is never a day when everything works out. If you don’t make the basketball team, try something else.

5. Confidence is overrated and courage is underrated. Even if people laugh at you, do it! Even if your knees are knocking and you feel insecure, DO IT!

Make this year about renewing energy and pooling resources. We are part of the greatest profession for which I’m grateful to rub shoulder with such incredible colleagues!
REACHING HIGHER
AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

As elementary counselors, we are in a unique position to help shape the lives of the young students we serve.

The First Lady’s Reach Higher initiative is an effort to have every student reach beyond high school and complete some type of formal post-secondary education. For some, that might mean training at a technical school. For others, it could mean completing 2, 4 or more years of schooling at a community college, four-year college or university. Finishing high school just isn’t enough anymore. Counselors are not only tasked with helping students recognize the importance of post-secondary education, they are also asked to help them plan and prepare for the future. Much of this preparation can begin in elementary school.

As elementary counselors, we are in a unique position to help shape the lives of the young students we serve. We are able to teach students skills that will influence their future through guidance curriculum, group and individual counseling activities. These skills are not necessarily academic in nature, rather they are soft skills, also known as employ-
ability skills. Employability skills are behavioral competencies associated with feelings, emotions, insights and an awareness related to a person’s ability to effectively interact with others, and that are necessary for success in the labor market. They are transferable from setting to setting, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, high school to college and college to career. Developing skills such as perseverance, good work ethic, positive attitude, and good communication early in life makes it much easier for students to attend and graduate from college, and land and keep a job.

It was so much fun to hear students come back after a weekend and say things like, “I saw the Y on the hill” or “my mom went to that college where Big Blue is.” College signs or pennants around the school open up conversation between student and teacher and/or student or parent. Students are excited to learn about where their teacher went to college.

It is also never too early to start saving for college. While attending a training not long ago, the instructor made the comment that the number one reason students don’t attend college is because of cost. She then went on to explain how counselors need to be educating families on FASFA and scholarships. I agree, and yes, there are scholarships available to students who are in elementary school. However, I would argue that families with students in elementary school should be encouraged to start saving for college. Most students do not know how much financial aid they will qualify for until after they have been admitted to college. By this time, it is too late. Saving for college needs to start early to help offset the costs of college after financial aid and scholarships have been taken into consideration.

New research is showing that even a small amount of money in a college savings account in the student’s name can have a big effect on college enrollment and graduation. Students of low- and moderate-income who had less than $500 in savings were three times more likely to enroll in college than students with no savings, and four times more likely to graduate. These findings suggest that college savings accounts can help students see themselves as college-bound, and students who start planning early to go to college are more likely to enroll in college. For more interesting facts about the importance of college savings accounts go to http://cfed.org/assets/pdfs/FactFile_-_Scholarly_Research_On_Childrens_Savings_Accounts.pdf.

CREATE A COLLEGE GOING CULTURE. ASK STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE GOING TO COLLEGE.

Another thing we can do as elementary counselors to help motivate students to reach higher is to create a college-going culture. Simple things can be done to expose students to atmosphere where college is the expectation. Vocabulary such as “where are you going to college?” instead of “are you going to college?” helps create this expectation. Frequent college talk in formal or even casual conversation can help students start to internalize college as the norm. It can be as simple as talking about a college football game or connecting some type of career to the training. Activities like having a college day where students wear their favorite college gear or colors have created excitement about college at my school.

What about visiting the colleges through a virtual college road trip? For one of my guidance lessons, I created a PowerPoint of all of the colleges in Utah. This included pictures of the campus, the mascot and the college logo. Students were then taught about one unique thing that each college offered. Technical schools were also covered.
Each day, we as counselors have the opportunity to inspire students to reach higher. We do this by helping them learn what it means to be college and career ready. Whether that be through teaching a classroom lesson on problem solving skills, running a group on social skills, or even counseling with an individual on resilience, we are giving them tools to use now and in the future in order to be successful. Early introduction to a college-going culture and education on the importance of saving for college are also key components to helping students in elementary school plan and prepare. Every student should have the opportunity for postsecondary education and it is our job as counselors not only to encourage students to reach higher, but to help them achieve their dreams.
HAPPY

by Ashley Whiting

“Finding happiness really comes down to perspective and whether we are choosing to focus on the good in life or the bad.”

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” We are given certain inalienable rights and happiness is of such importance it is declared by our founding fathers. Finding happiness really comes down to perspective and whether we are choosing to focus on the good in life or the bad. Either way, we’ll find it. Turn on the news and chances are the leading stories are filled with crime, traumatic events, disasters, and corruption. Negativity is all around us and it can easily take control of us if we aren’t mindful and aware.

Thankfully, happiness and positivity seem to have gained more attention and interest recently. Dr. Martin Seligman and the University of Pennsylvania have pioneered the study of Positive Psychology and offer a Master of Applied Positive Psychology degree. Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play. Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Understanding positive emotions entails the study of contentment with the past, happiness in the present, and hope for the future. Understanding positive individual traits involves the study of strengths, such as the capacity for love and work, courage, compassion, resilience, creativity, curiosity, integrity, self-knowledge, moderation, self-control, and wisdom. Understanding positive institutions entails the study of the strengths that foster better communities, such as justice, responsibility, civility, parenting, nurturance, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose, and tolerance. (University of Pennsylvania, 2015).
Considering the challenges our students, schools, communities, and world face today, we have to make a conscious effort to combat the negativity that will inevitably come our way. We need the tools, resources, and skills to focus on positivity and happiness. There are a number of pretty simple and basic things we can do to practice self-care and make our own well-being and happiness a priority. These can also be valuable to use with students.

Increase your happiness to-do list:
- Exercise
- Help/serve others
- Keep a gratitude journal – just 3 positive things daily
- Give someone a compliment
- Create a playlist of songs that make you happy
- Practice mindfulness – meditation, yoga, affirmations, deep breathing, journal, visual imagery, simply be
- Spend time in nature
- Surround yourself with positive people
- Try new things – a new hobby, language, or instrument
- Laugh
- Smile

One of the many benefits of living in the world of technology and media that we do is the countless resources at our fingertips. Some of my happiness favorites include:
- TED Talks Playlist “What Makes You Happy?”
- Podcasts – search ‘happiness’
- Live Happy magazine and www.livehappy.com
- The Clicker Kit, billionclicks.org
- “Happy” Documentary, directed by Roko Belic
- www.projecthappiness.org
- www.pursuit-of-happiness.org
- The Happiness Project by Gretchen Rubin
- Authentic Happiness by Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph.D.
- 14,000 Things to be Happy About by Barbara Ann Kipfer
- Color Me Happy by Lacy Mucklow and Angela Porter
- 100 Ways to Happiness by Dr. Timothy J. Sharp
- Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation: A 28-Day Program by Sharon Salzberg
- The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, but Doesn’t, What Shouldn’t Make You Happy, but Does
- by Sonja Lyubomirsky

Take the time today to do more of what makes you happy. As Mandy Hale said, “Happiness is an inside job. Don’t assign anyone else that much power over your life.”
AVA A. CHAMBERLAIN
USCA HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR
OF THE YEAR, 2015

AVA Chamberlain is the school counselor at Parowan High School where she serves students grades 7-12. There at Parowan High School she has focused on advocating for students to increase their success in passing classes, graduating from high school, and enrolling in college. Mrs. Chamberlain saw the correlation between students who were not passing their 8th grade classes to the students who were credit deficient for graduation. She implemented systemic interventions with those eighth grade students to lead to a 100% graduation rate in 2013 and 2014. Mrs. Chamberlain is passionate about leading her students to fulfilling careers and lives after their public education experiences. She has focused on getting students to apply for post-high school training in both technical schools and colleges. In Parowan’s High School Utah College Application Week, all 42 seniors participated in filling out applications for college and filled out FAFSA applications. Mrs. Chamberlain has noticed that many previous students have been accepted into college and began classes only to drop out before completing their degree. She attributes this to a lack of belief in themselves and lack of supportive advocates in their lives. She has addressed this within her program by linking students up with sports and clubs at Parowan High School. She knows that having an additional advocate will decrease the at-risk factors for those students.
Jennifer graduated from Ben Lomond High School in 1997. She then went on to receive her Bachelor’s Degree from University of Utah in 2001, in Science. She received her Master’s Degree in Education in 2005 from University of Phoenix. While going to college, Jennifer worked at the Boys and Girls Club as a Counselor from 1998-2001. She then became a Coordinator for the Boys and Girls Club until 2003. At that time, Jennifer began working for the Colors of Success program at Dee Elementary School until 2004. This was a gang prevention program where she served as a mentor and coach to designated students. She was then hired at Dee as the School Counselor the same year. During her counseling years with Ogden School District, she has worked at Gramercy Elementary School, Surpass High School (Youth in Custody), Mound Fort Junior High School, and James Madison Elementary School. Jennifer has dedicated her professional work to helping at-risk kids. Her passion has been to work with inner city families and provide them support and resources to help them be successful. She puts her heart into her job every single day. You can see this dedication has paid off through the numerous graduation invitations she receives from former students and in the letters from parents expressing their appreciation for all of her support.
Jeana James is the School Counselor at Horizon Elementary in Washington County School District. Jeana has written over 50 character education lessons on respect, responsibility, resilience, along with other topics. Her lessons are used throughout her district, elementary through high school level, including teachers and parents. She has also shared her work with many others throughout the state and beyond. Jeana is a leader, teacher, trainer, and innovator. Jeana worked at the high school level at the onset of her career, which she enjoyed, but soon found that her heart is definitely in early prevention work. Jeana loves being an elementary school counselor and honestly feels that every day is fun and incredibly fulfilling.

Jeana is a published writer. Her first book, Symbols of the Nativity, was released in October 2015. Jeana and her husband Keith are the parents of 5 great kids and live in beautiful Southern Utah. She loves anything outdoors, especially if it is with her family.
Tami Larsen is the counselor at Ben Lomand High School. During her career she has counseled at Ben Lomand High, NUAMES High School, Morgan High School, and Freemont High School. Tami Larsen is an advocate for individual students. She continually monitors and encourages individual students to set goals and achieve more. She is aware of the challenges that students face and is continually finding ways to connect with them and help them to find ways past these barriers.

Tami has created systemic change for the school by focusing on both the individual needs and the trends in data. Ms. Larsen has implemented several programs at her school that have led to increased graduation rates. She has helped their team to continually find ways to improve their program. One of these was using the advisory period and content tutoring time for credit recovery. This has led to 548.25 credits being made up. She was also instrumental in the creation of Ben Lomand’s PM school, summer school programs, and Youth Court. Last year the graduation rate increased from 81% to 83% and this year’s rates are projected to increase as well.
The Rookie of the Year award winner is Carrie Gregersen. Carrie is a Junior High counselor at Early Light Academy. She was nominated by her Assistant Director, Christine Lasher.

Mrs. Gregersen has effectively recognized and responded to the needs of individual students, as well as the needs of the school as a whole. She makes herself available to meet with students to help them with both academic and social-emotional concerns. She recognizes that each individual has a unique situation and gathers as much information as possible to create a plan that targets the specific needs of each student. She has advocated for a study skills elective to help students who need additional support. She also rotates between homeroom classes to teach lessons on leadership and social skills. We added a Math Support class and a Language Arts support class because of the recommendations of Mrs. Gregersen.

Mrs. Gregersen also coordinates lunchtime career speakers for all of the students, exposing them to a variety of careers and helping them recognize the training that is needed. She does a great job educating students and parents about college programs and scholarships. Because of her extensive knowledge of college requirements and scholarships opportunities, many students who have advanced through Early Light and go to high school come back to talk with her about how to best achieve their goals for college admission. Mrs. Gregersen frequently sends resources to other schools and helps other counselors assemble data for their Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program reviews. It is obvious that she is selfless in her efforts to help no only Early Light students, but other school counselors and their students as well. She truly goes above and beyond to show our students that she cares about them and believes in their success. She provides the support that our students need to be successful in school and in life. She consistently goes above and beyond what is expected of her. Congratulations Carrie! We are so happy to have you as our Rookie of the Year!
Representative Patrice Arent earned degrees from University of Utah and Cornell Law School. She has served the citizens of Utah for over 15 years as a senator and representative. She has a great record on the hill of working to better Utah. A variety of topics include Clean Air Acts, the Safe Haven Law and most recently HB 198, Strengthening College and Career Readiness. She has supported Utah School Counselors for many years. As most of you know, HB 198 provides professional development opportunities specific for school counselors and what we do every day to help students reach their potential. She has publically spoken to the need for more resources, including school counselors, to help students.

For years, the Utah School Counselor Association board has discussed the need for an award to honor those people who support school counselors. Representative Patrice Arent is the first recipient of the Commitment to School Counselors Award. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of school counselors.  

By Holly Todd
Fernando Montano is the director of the Equity and Inclusion Center at Snow College, in Ephraim, Utah. Fernando works closely with every student he encounters. He truly knows each student at a personal level. Fernando is passionate about his work and provides support to local high school students for visiting the campus and the Multicultural Center at Snow College. As student attend Snow College, Fernando is a support to many students from several backgrounds. He helps them network and navigate their new environment, offers study support, and allows each student to be themselves. Fernando coordinates Latinos in Education to local high schools to serve as translators during our parent/teacher conferences. He will visit schools with his students to serve on panel discussions in support of college and career readiness. He has aided in the making of videos which features Latinos in higher education that will serve as supports to students and schools promoting college and career readiness for diverse populations. Fernando focuses his attention on the importance of an equitable learning environment for all students.
HUMA N RIGHTS AWARDS

MISTY SUAREZ
ADMINISTRATOR RECIPIENT

Misty Suarez is the Student Services Director of the Salt Lake City School District. She has demonstrated a 26-year commitment to advancing the rights of young people through her involvement working in the juvenile justice system and, in education, as a Youth-in-Custody teacher, a middle and high school assistant principal, a district compliance officer/assistant, and, now, as a district administrator. Misty focuses her attention on the importance of an equitable learning environment for all students. Her career-long contribution to social justice issues includes her active participation and leadership on the Salt Lake County’s Equity Leadership committee, which works to ensure all students are treated fairly throughout the county. She provides district leadership to the UTMSS Implementation, Suicide Prevention and crisis teams. She is on the Children’s Advisory Council, the Family School Collaboration committee, and chair of the state Student Services Director’s committee. Misty has expanded collaborative services with Valley Behavioral Health to provide therapeutic services to students in 23 schools and supports and updates district administrators on student issues by providing a monthly professional development offered through her “Digging Deeper” presentations. Misty understands the role and importance of school counselors, is a great support of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program, and a friend of school counselors and school counseling issues.

HOLLY BELL
SCHOOL COUNSELOR RECIPIENT

Holly Bell is recognized for the Human Rights Award for her advocacy efforts with respect to LGBTQ protections and rights for students in her school and across the state. She has worked with the School Improvement Network and GLSEN to produce resource materials for educators that provide strategies to promote respect for LGBTQ students in schools. She has sponsored a Gay/Straight Alliance at West Jordan High School. She has presented at several professional conferences, including the Wasatch Front Counselor Fair and USOE’s summer conference on topics related to supports for LGBTQ students, including the most recent conference when she brought to light supports specifically for transgender students (a group often discriminated against even within the LGBTQ community).

She is an advocate for the LGBTQ community at large and often seeks out professional development to further support and understanding for the LGBTQ community. A most recent example of this was her attendance at the Reimagining Inclusive Religious Spaces: Gender and Sexualities conference.
Ed Napia is Special Projects Manager at the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake. Napia was born into the Māori Ngapuhi iwi (tribe) in New Zealand. As a teenager he moved to Hawaii, then later to Utah to attend the University of Utah, where he pursued a PhD in Education. During his time at the University, Napia had the opportunity to work with American Indian tribes in Utah. He became close with one Ute family and was ultimately adopted into the tribe. Napia lives with his adopted brother, Radford Cuch, an artist from the Northern Ute tribe.

Ed community involvement includes the Martin Luther King Human Rights Commission, Utah Prevention Advisory Council, Department of Human Services Tribal and Indian Issues Committee, Title VII/Indian Education, Community Faces of Utah, Utah Women and Girls Health Coalition, Utah Leaders for Health, and Salt Lake, Summit, and Tooele Counties Hospital Preparedness Coalition.

The Urban Indian Center is a Title V Urban Indian Clinic providing health referrals, health education, and behavioral health services to the approximately 19,000 American Indians that live along the Wasatch Front. Grants from the State of Utah, the federal government, and other funders allow the Center to reach Utah's seven tribal/reservation communities and urban areas with prevention education, technical assistance, and trainings.
There are few people in life you’ll encounter who have come from so little to accomplish so much. Despite the deck being stacked firmly against him as a baby, Marlon grew into a man who became a champion both on and off the field of play, and during that time he evolved into a powerful inspirational speaker. He is a five-time Paralympic medalist, the first amputee in history to ever run 100m in under 11 seconds, a two-time ESPY Award winner, winner of the U.S. Olympic Spirit Award and he has been recognized by the United Nations as a ‘Role Model of the 21st Century’. He is the founder of ‘Marlon Shirley’s Champions in Life’, a mentoring program for other homeless and foster children, and he has shared his story across the country and around the world.

Marlon’s birth mother was the victim of an abusive relationship, was forced into prostitution and was intentionally impregnated by her pimp as a means of controlling her. Marlon’s earliest years were spent on the run, constantly on the move as his mother looked for a way out. But it never came. Eventually they wound up in Las Vegas. At three years old Marlon was literally picked up from the streets by DCSF and sent to live in an orphanage. At five years old, negligent care at a foster home led to a horrific lawn mower accident that severed Marlon’s left foot. He spent the next four years in and out of foster care, enduring physical and mental abuse along the way. Finally, at age nine, he was adopted into the loving home of the Shirley family in Northern, UT.

At long last, with stability and love in his life, the unbreakable spirit within Marlon began to flourish. His extraordinary athletic talent was discovered at a track meet that he almost didn’t attend, during which he unknowingly broke the Paralympic high jump World Record by an astounding four inches. At that time, Marlon had never heard of the Paralympics.
In the amazingly decorated athletic career that followed, Marlon competed in three Paralympic Games winning five medals (two gold, two silver and one bronze), setting and breaking world records time and time again.

Since then, Marlon has shared his emotional and inspiring story at hundreds of schools and corporations across the country. He continues to donate his time to orphans and foster children in need of a helping hand. If you Google his name, you will see countless interviews with big-time news anchors, like Bryant Gumbel. You will see that he was featured in a billboard ad for the Foundation for a Better Life. You will see many videos and articles about him that inspire.

During his speech at our USCA conference, Marlon emphasized how important it is to be an advocate for the students, but also for yourself. He said that one of the keys in his success was goal-setting and self-advocacy. It’s a great reminder to counselors about the two sides of that coin. We are used to advocating for students, but we need to employ those skills to make sure people know what we are doing as well.

Marlon believes you should continually redefine yourself and determine what it is you want to give to society. Decide what you stand for and work towards that goal. He was a true inspiration and has an amazingly positive attitude. His speech was well worth the wait!

WHEN YOU TACKLE A CHALLENGE THAT YOU CANNOT EVEN FATHOM TACKLING, WHEN YOU ACCOMPLISH THAT, THE AMOUNT OF INTEGRITY AND THE WILL AND THE HEART THAT YOU’LL GET FROM THAT EXPERIENCE IS WHAT WILL SET YOU UP FOR YOUR LIFE.

MARLON SHIRLEY