

# Bard BRAVE Podcast

00:00 Josh: Hi everyone, and welcome back to another edition of our podcast series, and as always, I'm Josh Tyler, here with our Director of Admission, Mackie Siebens.

00:10 Mackie: Hello everyone, as Josh said, I'm Mackie Siebens and we are joined today by Rebecca who's going to talk to us a little bit about BRAVE. Do you want to introduce yourself to everybody?

00:19 Rebecca: Sure, thanks for having me. I'm always excited to talk about BRAVE. My name is Rebecca Nidorf, I am the Director and Clinical Supervisor of BRAVE.

00:29 Mackie: So, first off, what is BRAVE? We'll start there!

00:23 Rebecca: That's a good question. So BRAVE is a student-run, and I'll get a little bit into that later, crisis counseling program here at Bard College that serves the faculty, staff, and students.

00:47 Josh: Can you tell us a bit about how BRAVE initially came to be, and how it has evolved over time?

00:52 Rebecca: Sure! So, in 1991, there was a female student, she was a senior, and she went to the Dean of Students office, and said that she'd been sexually assaulted by a fellow student in her class, but the assault had happened their freshman year, and when she went to the Dean of Students office, it was six weeks to graduation. So, the Dean of Students at that time, sent the case to the student government to be adjudicated, which even saying that now sounds so crazy.

01:30 Mackie: Yeah, little bit! It was a long time ago.

01:34 Rebecca: Yeah, things were done quite differently. So, the student government decided that both students could stay the six weeks to graduation, and then graduate, but they had to stay ten feet apart from each other, and they had some classes together. So, this presented a problem. And, that decision caused an outrage amongst the student population, which was probably about half of what it is now. But they had a walkout in front of Ludlow, which is where the President's office is, and they sat on the Ludlow Lawn for three days, and kind of demanded a different approach to dealing with college campus sexual assault and relationship violence. And out of that, BRAVE was born. So what happened was for about a year, BRAVE was a bunch of students who got together, and they had a 24/7 hotline, where somebody – it was anonymous and confidential as it still is – if somebody was sexually assaulted, or had been abused in a relationship at all, they could anonymously and confidentially call BRAVE and BRAVE would support them over the phone. What they quickly learned was that there were some legal issues and some ethical issues. They had no proper training, they weren't counselors, and they were starting to kind of counsel each other. And so that was how my position came to be. It was not *me*, in 1991, but it was – I was still in college – they created a position for a licensed clinical social worker, which is what I am, and that person came on. I think there were one, two, three other directors before myself, and when I came on, which was in 2005 so 15 years ago, it was still responding to rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, relationship violence, and after about two or three years, I realized that there was kind of a need to respond to other types of calls. So, students would call when they were anxious, or if they had academic stress or family, coming from a break and have had a fight with a family member, or anxious about coming out, or just you know a host of different issues, anything that would come up for a college student. So, at that time I retailored the training, which is a 40-hour training that happens over fall break, to include all of those topics, from depression to suicidality, eating disorders, again, anything you could imagine a student calling about. Homesickness, you know, gender questioning. And so, our students now are trained in all of those areas. So, we have three components. We still have the 24/7 anonymous confidential hotline, and then we do educational outreach and programming, and that educational outreach and programming really just has to fall

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under the BRAVE umbrella: sexual health, consent, health relationships, toxic signs in relationships. We try to stick to those in terms of programming, but we'll do anything that really the campus needs. So, if something falls under the mental health umbrella, and something happens to be up that particular semester, we will try to address it in some educational outreach programming. And that educational outreach programming also breaks down into components from passive programming – posters, stall seat journals – to bigger productions, like TMI – you're probably familiar with what they do in the community, or authors or performances, and anything in between. Movies, you know, smaller meetings, dorms programs. So that's the educational outreach component. And the third component is support and advocacy, so that if a student calls – and again our services are really for faculty, students, and staff – the majority of our calls are students – so if somebody calls and they are sexually assaulted, and they want to either report to the police, report to campus, or go to the hospital to have the rape kit examination done, our counselors are trained to advocate and support them and that can look like many different things, from arranging a confidential car service for them, to accompanying them to the hospital, to going with them to an investigation, whether it be on campus or off campus, or both. And those are the three different components, and I don't think that I missed anything there. So yeah!

06:18 Mackie: Fabulous! Thank you for that run down of all the resources, and sort of the different forms that BRAVE has taken, and especially how it started. It's really interesting. Could you tell us a little bit about how many students are involved in BRAVE? You may have already mentioned this, but how many students are trained, and then any new initiatives and things that you're thinking about currently.

06:43 Rebecca: Sure! So, I have found that the sweet spot of counselors is somewhere between 11 and 27. Anything under 11 and things kind of fall apart, anything over 27, people forget accountability. That took me a few years to figure out. But now we have it down. They usually have heard about us at L&T, and then they are invited to apply and we take rolling applications throughout the year, but we get an influx around L&T. And then our interview process happens right after L&T, and that's a pretty extensive interview process. Again, over the years, I learned that I really have to do careful screening, because this work can be kind of triggering for people, so I really have to do an intense screening and the student counselors are part of that interview process. So, they do a group interview with applicants after we narrow down who we're going to look at, not even accept yet, just look at. And then they do a sort of two-on-one interview and then I do what's called a trauma screening, which is confidential and then if they're accepted, they come to the training which happens over fall break. It's all four days of fall break, four and a half days about. And that I always let them know is another assessment period, even though they've been accepted, we still look for any red flags during that time to make sure that we're not going to have counselors that are going to be triggered on the phone with someone in crisis. So, after that happens, then they have to come and do a role play, with me, and after they get through that, then they are cleared to be on call. So that's how that works.

08:26 Mackie: Okay!

08:27 Rebecca: Did that answer that?

08:28 Josh: Absolutely.

08:28 Mackie: That did, yeah, that definitely answered the question. And you mentioned a little bit that you can connect students to different resources, if they need to travel, sending out confidential ways for them to move around, or having someone with them, what other offices are involved with BRAVE, of course the campus is aware of it, but are there communications that happen between other offices that you work with closely?

08:52 Rebecca: That's a really good question and there's a portion of our training that's dedicated to the offices that we overlap with and interface with. So that would be Security, which in order to reach a BRAVE counselor, you have to call the Security dispatch, at the 758-7777 number, and ask to speak to the BRAVE counselor. As an aside I will say that we sometimes get a little bit tripped up there because students will call and say may I speak to a counselor, and Security dispatch sometimes gets a little confused about whether that means a therapist from the counseling office, or a BRAVE counselor, and if somebody's looking for an anonymous phone call, they really have to specify that they want a BRAVE counselor, otherwise dispatch will take identifying information. So once that happens, dispatch calls the person who's on call, on the BRAVE phone, and the BRAVE counselor has ten minutes to get somewhere that's private and confidential to call the caller back. So, Security, Health Services, because we also give out Plan B to students who either cannot get off campus, don't have the resources, or Health Services is closed. If that criteria are met, then we give it to them for free, no questions asked. So, Health Services, Dean of Students office and ResLife, sometimes we do safety transfers if someone's in an abusive relationship or being stalked or harassed, we'll do a safety transfer that happens with the Dean of Students office and ResLife, and someone will be moved to a private room that's at an undisclosed location. Oh, counseling center, we interface with the counseling center. Currently, this kind of answers the question you asked before about, we're currently starting a sexual assault support group. We're going to – I believe – it's not a done deal yet, but I think that the social work intern is going to be involved in that with the BRAVE counselors, which seems like a really nice learning ground for them, so I hope that that works out. Whether the intern joins or not, that group is happening, and that's starting in a couple weeks. So, other offices. I think that that's every office. Oh, and the Psychology office, department, I should say. So, if you join BRAVE, which I always tell to our first year students, that our Psychology Department here is very research based, and so if somebody wants to get a clinical experience, or a direct care experience, BRAVE is really the only way on our campus to have that experience, and so the Psychology Department has asked me to come in and talk to their students about that. And we don't only accept psychology students, but it is a nice fit, if that's something you're thinking about doing. That said, I have art majors, photography majors, opera majors, you know, it runs the gamut.

11:46 Josh: That's great, and you mentioning the resources that we have on campus, the other resources and how you work with those offices, would BRAVE ever work with resources outside, in the local community? Or would that go through the other offices that you mentioned?

12:00 Rebecca: Another really good question! So, I also want to add EMS before I forget, we obviously interface with them. So, we have been – actually, we got an award from the Gray Smith House in Poughkeepsie –

12:12 Mackie: Oh cool.

12:13 Rebecca: Do you know the Gray Smith House?

12:14 Mackie: Yeah!

12:14 Rebecca: Yeah, so they're a domestic violence agency and they have a shelter. We've had students work with them, and partner with them over the years, and they gave us a really lovely award, and a lovely banquet, and it was a proud moment. BRAVE's kind of my baby, so it was a proud moment. And in the community, we also work sometimes work in Kingston with the LGBTQ Center there. I'm trying to think, Family of – it's called Family of Woodstock, but the location is in Kingston, and we have done some work with them, and some of our students have actually graduated and because of that connection, have gone right into jobs there, which is great.

12:55 Mackie: That's great.

12:55 Josh: Fantastic.

12:56 Rebecca: I just actually talked to one this week, which was really nice, who just graduated.

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15:59 Mackie: Nice, fabulous. Anything else that you think we've missed, that you might want to mention?

13:05 Rebecca: Let's see, I think just one other thing is that there's a couple of annual things that we do, which I like to mention, just because they're open to the campus and I think that they're, some of them are really useful for people, and one of them, even though it's advertised, there's sort of this quiet component, but I think that it's very useful for people. We do an annual Take Back the Night event, which started in the 70s, and it's really to stop college campus sexual assault, and that is a walk through campus, a candle-lit walk, and then it culminates in what's called a speak out, which happens in Bard Hall, and it's actually a really beautiful setting. It's all candle-lit and dark, and it invites people to tell any story that they would like to tell about how sexual assault has touched their life. It doesn't even have to be a direct story, it could be a friend or a relative or in some way it's touched their life. And it's just a really supportive, nice evening, where people get to just sort of be in community with stories that they can all relate to and identify with. So, it's a really sort of beautiful, supportive, kind of quiet evening. And that happens in April, they'll be advertising for that, and then the other thing is we do an annual self-defense workshop, with a trainer that everybody just loves. She comes from SUNY New Paltz, but I've tried many different ones over the years and I've had her come three years ago and students just raved about her so now we're making it an annual thing.

14:36 Mackie: Great!

14:36 Josh: That's great! Excellent.

14:38 Mackie: Well thank you so much for taking the time, I think this was really helpful. And as always, if anyone listening has questions, we can certainly connect you, the listener, to Rebecca if you have more specific questions, but if you have anything else that's on the mind, you can reach out to us at [admission@bard.edu](mailto:admission@bard.edu), and we'll get back to you with answers!

14:58 Josh: And we look forward to next time! Thanks a lot!