

GUSTAVUS

Quarterly

“Youth are resilient, and they need our support.”

Khu Thao '97, CEO of Canvas Health, + other Gusties on young people's mental health

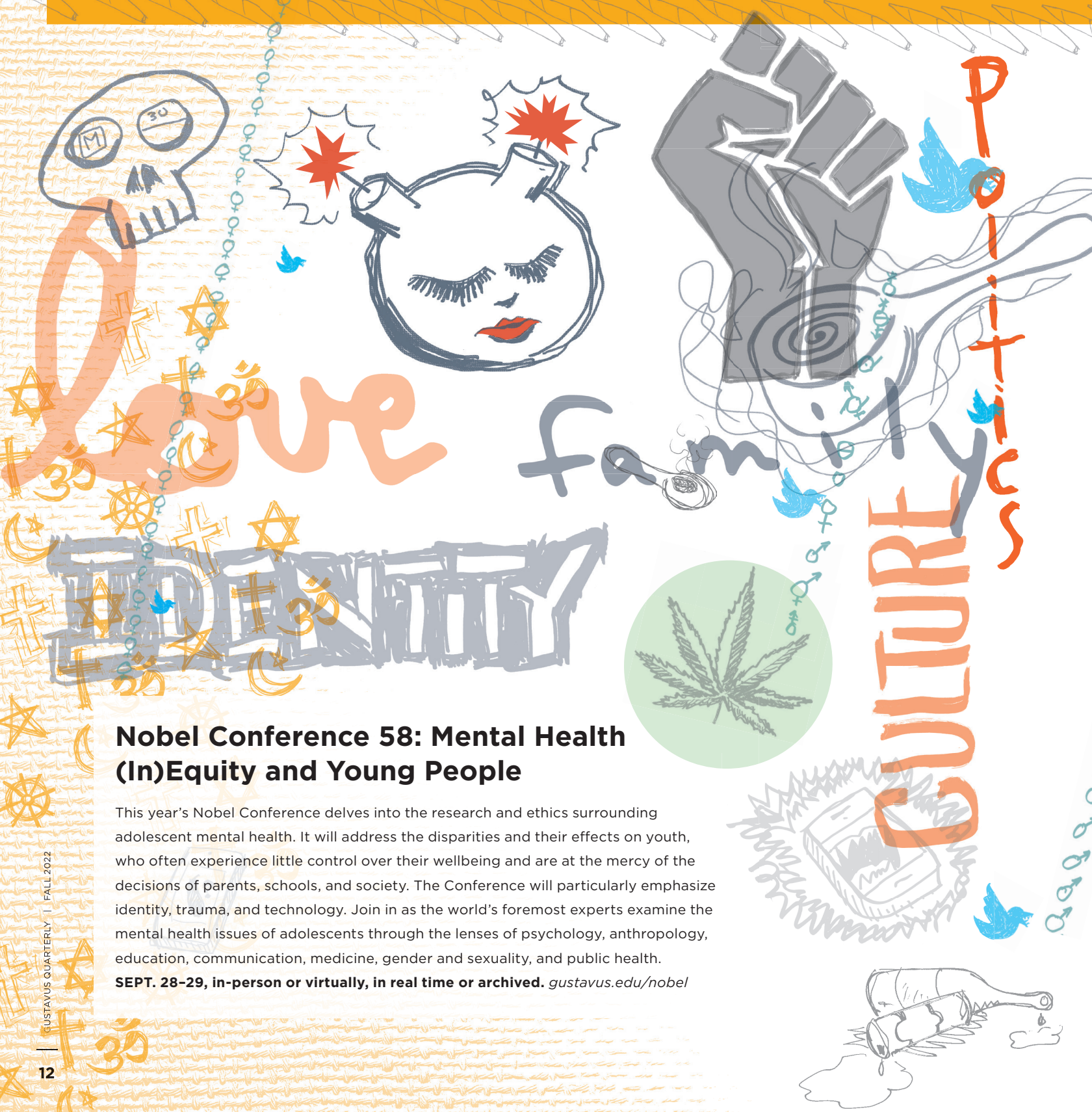
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HOW ARE OUR YOUNG



Nobel Conference 58: Mental Health (In)Equity and Young People

This year's Nobel Conference delves into the research and ethics surrounding adolescent mental health. It will address the disparities and their effects on youth, who often experience little control over their wellbeing and are at the mercy of the decisions of parents, schools, and society. The Conference will particularly emphasize identity, trauma, and technology. Join in as the world's foremost experts examine the mental health issues of adolescents through the lenses of psychology, anthropology, education, communication, medicine, gender and sexuality, and public health.

SEPT. 28-29, in-person or virtually, in real time or archived. gustavus.edu/nobel

PEOPLE?

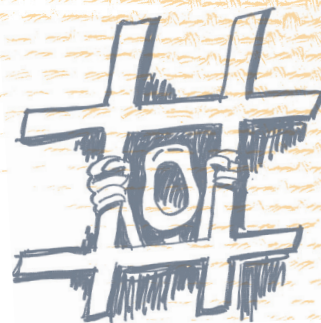


“That first semester of the pandemic? I’d be lying if I didn’t say it was my lowest point.”

—Brittany Berge ’22

“We lost a lot of relatives. Once every two months, on average. That took a toll on my mom.”

—Cha Lee Yang ’22



They are not all right. In December 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General warned that the mental health of adolescents was in crisis. “Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real and widespread,” said Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. “Even before the pandemic, an alarming number of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide—and rates have increased over the past decade.”

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC EXACERBATED THIS, dramatically altering all of our experiences at home, school, and in the community. For young people, this meant disruption and disconnect in relation to in-person schooling, in-person socialization with peers and mentors, access to health care and social services, and security in food, housing, and health of caregivers. The pandemic also drove an uptick in an already unprecedented and pervasive use of technology, including that double-edged sword of connection and comparison: social media.

Those most heavily affected? Those most vulnerable to begin with. That includes youth with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ youth, low-income youth, homeless youth, and youth in rural areas, immigrant households, and child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The compound effect on the mental health of adolescents has been devastating. The percentage of teens reporting “persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness” jumped from 26 percent to 37 percent between 2009 and 2019. In 2021, it was 44 percent.

Growing up is hard. Growing up right now is even harder, particularly for young people on the margins. Here are voices of some of the Gusties working to understand, support, and uplift those between the ages of 16 and 22, as well as voices of recent grads. How we respond to their needs as a college, a state, and a society says a lot about how we see our future. Let us respond as we would have them respond—with grace, care, and courage.

ALLOWING SPACE



“My social interaction was through TikTok. It was the only time I could see people my age, and laugh.”

—Christen Gibson '23



Khu Thao in the backyard of her suburban Twin Cities home.



"I was at my house with my siblings and my mom and the WiFi sucked. It was hard to pay attention."

—Wyatt Quering '22

love

Our kids are resilient, says **Khu Thao '97**, the new CEO of Canvas Health. Still, we need to continue to provide them with the support they need while giving them space to live their complexity.

INTERVIEWED BY SARAH ASP OLSON

Editor's Note: Thao has a doctorate in psychology from Minnesota School of Professional Psychology, a master's degree in social work from the University of Minnesota, and executive leadership certification from University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business. She is a recipient of a Bush Fellowship and a Title VI-E Welfare Fellowship. We spoke to her in June.

QUARTERLY: From your perspective as a practitioner and a parent to two adolescents—how are the kids?

THAO: I would say the kids are resilient, but the kids need support to continue to be resilient and to thrive. Our kids have had to go through COVID, social unrest, war, and lots of other social changes and challenges. They survived and they thrived. Our kids are resilient, but we need to continue to provide them with the support that they need in the evolving environment that they live in.

Why is it so important for children and adolescents to receive culturally sensitive and appropriate mental health services?

It makes such a big difference, not just to the child, but for the entire family. For providers, before you can even start helping the child, you have to help the parents or guardians feel comfortable with who you are. If they don't feel like their therapist or provider understands them, or has the capacity to invite diversity and differences, they're not going to come for services, and seeking and accepting services is one of the biggest barriers in healthcare.

As a person of color who is also a therapist, that's been the biggest factor to success with clients, being able to be open to diversity, being flexible to different cultures. That openness opens so many doors.



Origins of an Advocate

After graduating from Gustavus with majors in criminal justice and psychology, and leadership in the Asian Culture Club, Thao worked at a nonprofit serving adolescent girls in the Hmong community. It was there she discovered a passion for social services, particularly for youth on the margins. One of the factors that's driven Thao as a social worker, clinician, and executive is the desire to break down barriers around mental health and the social services she came up against while first working in communities of color.

The nonprofit Canvas Health began more than 50 years ago in Oakdale as a place to provide mental health services for vulnerable residents in that community. It has since grown to include eight locations plus direct care in clients' homes, schools, and communities. Today it offers a comprehensive menu of case management and therapy services to children, adolescents, and adults. It also provides school-based mental health services to students across the Twin Cities. The goal: help children, adolescents, adults, and families cope with mental illness, substance use, unstable housing, trauma, and abuse, bringing hope, healing, and recovery.

How can parents, caregivers, and policy makers support kids' mental health?

Human beings are very complex; and that's a little bit different from being complicated. When something is complicated, it means that you don't understand it. If it's complicated, with time, you can understand it, and then it's no longer complicated. But when something is complex, it means that there are many things woven together. It's this tangled ball of yarn. Adolescence is a complex time. The best way that I can describe the support adolescents need is "allow space"—for discovery, for some of this complexity to work itself out.

And, we have to listen. That's the

biggest thing—just listen. Ask them what part of that big, old, tangled ball of yarn they want to start with.

Do you feel hopeful about the future for our kids?

Even though we've gone through a lot, even though young people today have experienced things that we've never imagined and have never experienced before, there is just so much positivity with our adolescents. I need people to understand that this is our future, and they are so bright and resilient. And with some help and some support, and by listening to them, they will take us to places we've never imagined.

The Numbers

(some are from pre-COVID-19)

2.5 million

youth in the United States have severe depression (2022)

14.5%

of youth who identified as more than one race identify as depressed (2022)

60%

of youth with severe depression do not receive any mental health treatment (2022)

4.62%

of Minnesota's youth had a substance use disorder in 2019, (up from 3.86% in 2018)

39%

of college students nationally reported symptoms of depression in the previous two weeks (before COVID-19; up from 25 percent in 2015)

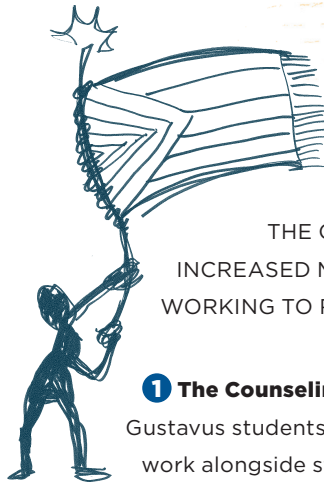
80%

of college students nationally felt their emotional or mental difficulties negatively impacted their academic performance (before COVID-19, up from 68 percent in 2015)

75%

of lifetime cases of mental health illness begin by age 24 (2020)

Data from KFF, Mental Health America, and The Healthy Minds Study



5 Ways Gustavus Supports Current Student Mental Health

THE COLLEGE IS PAYING ATTENTION TO THE INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF CURRENT STUDENTS, WORKING TO REDUCE STIGMA AND OTHER ACCESS BARRIERS.

- 1 The Counseling Center** is a free, confidential service for all Gustavus students. The center's seven professional counselors work alongside students to resolve personal, relational, social, and academic difficulties. There are counselors who specialize in serving students of color.
- 2 Peer Assistants** help their fellow students with stress management, chemical and mental health, relationships, and nutrition and fitness. They hold office hours for questions and conversations during the week as well as educational programs, awareness campaigns, and social activities.
- 3 Across campus, organizations engage in dialogue** about mental health with events open to the community. For instance, Queer and Questioning welcomes students to support each other as they explore their gender and sexuality. Mosaic Dialog works with students of color and a therapist to explore and discuss their unique, challenging experiences and concerns. Using a culturally-affirming lens, both help students find the resources they need to support their specific mental health needs.
- 4 For students experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression, Live to Learn** is a free, self-guided online tool for identifying mental health issues and managing them in their lives.
- 5 Gusties will tell you that Gustavus is a community that cares.** Students, faculty, and staff work hard to cultivate a culture where students are comfortable discussing their mental health and feel a sense of belonging.



"Provide a safe space to give someone a chance to talk about what's going on."

—Laura Russell-Reyna '11, mental health services director, Amongst Wildflowers Creative



"This is a systemic issue because for a lot of adults, this topic is still taboo."

—Sarah Vanyo '17, psychotherapist, River Ridge Recovery

RAISING PEACE



“We have to ask each other, ‘How do we build opportunities for deeper connections?’”

— Kerrie Urosevich '91



“Having American friends on the rugby team was really helpful.”

—Jackie Len Patterson '24

Kerrie Urosevich '93 co-founded Ceeds of Peace, an organization focused on building peacebuilding leaders. For all of us, that means fostering our capacity for courage, compassion, and connection—among other life skills.

BY EMMA MYHRE '19

She stands at the podium in Christ Chapel during the 2022 MAYDAY! Peace Conference. Before her are the many Gustavus young people who have suffered through an isolating global pandemic, the filmed murders of unarmed Black people by police, the onslaught of information (and misinformation) via social media, the destabilization of American and foreign governments, and a widening gulf between economic have and have-nots.

Kerrie Urosevich '91 asks these questions: “Imagine the most peaceful and just family,” she says. “How do they communicate? How do they spend time together? How do they have fun together? What about a school? A community?”

This is Step One to a peaceful existence: Imagine that it can be better and that you have a role to play.

Urosevich is affiliate faculty at the Matsunaga Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution at the University of Hawai'i, and a systems and policy builder with Hawai'i's Early Childhood Action Strategy. She co-founded the non-profit Ceeds of Peace, dedicated to fostering individual and community-wide peacebuilding through workshops, community events, and other activities. It is based in Honolulu, Hawai'i. Co-founder Maya Soetoro is also a professor at the Matsunaga Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution at the University of

Hawai'i, and a consultant for the Obama Foundation, founded by her brother, Barack Obama.

As a systems and policy builder, diplomat, and peace and conflict resolution academic, Urosevich knows peace is an impactful practice, not an abstract idea. “Peace is not a state of being,” she says. And it is not simply the absence of suffering (which is not simple). “Peace is an action, and it's intentional.” Intentionally acting toward peace is essential for improving mental health, individually and in our communities.

Peacebuilding, then, is a set of actionable skills to help alleviate the suffering in one's self and others—ways people can work together to create better, healthier, stronger communities. Skills in peace improve everything from an individual's understanding of themselves to global policy.

Like most peacebuilders, Urosevich champions localized solutions to macro issues, like the youth mental health crisis. “We know part of what drives the youth mental health crisis is a feeling of isolation, of otherness, and of helplessness,” Urosevich says. “Connection is an essential seed of peacebuilding. We have to create space to name it, normalize it, and give it time and space.”

Through Ceeds of Peace and as professors and educators, Urosevich and



“The biggest lesson was finding joy and comfort within myself.”

—Sophia Martin '23

Kerrie Urosevich
in the Edwards
Atrium of
Anderson Hall.

Soetoro teach courses on negotiation skills, conflict resolution, and the history of peace movements. Twelve years ago, they were inspired to start Ceeds of Peace by their college students. Many said they wished they had learned conflict resolution and peacebuilding practices sooner.

Urosevich and Soetoro knew how essential these skills were for local communities to tackle large-scale issues, from inclusivity in schools to domestic abuse to land use issues. But to be effective, they determined they had to work with the adults in their communities who were modeling behavior for younger people. “Students go to school and learn, ‘Do not hit,’



and learn to respond to anger in more positive ways,” Urosevich says. “But if they go home and are witnesses to violence or are victims of it from the adults in their lives, what do children do with that?” Urosevich says behavior like this ripples into the rest of our society and our systems.

Most of their workshops guide participants of all ages through the steps to create or build the community they envision—a family, workplace, or school system. This process has jump-started wraparound services and social/emotional development programs in Hawai‘i elementary schools and across the globe. Recently, there’s been a sharp increase in male attendance.

The tools Ceeds of Peace uses

“Systems are built by people, so they can be changed by people. You want systems that work for the people who are going to use them.”

—Kerrie Urosevich ’93

in their workshops are based on the characteristics of influential peace leaders worldwide. Urosevich and Soetoro studied what qualities and skills made these peace leaders effective and compelling. They identified seven individual traits that

create peacebuilding characteristics: courage, critical thinking, compassion, conflict resolution, commitment, collaboration, and connection. Each “ceed” is a part of a network of characteristics that must be practiced together. “For example, if you practice courage without compassion, that can lead to destructive actions,” Urosevich explains.

Throughout her career, Urosevich has traveled worldwide to collaborate with leaders and implement the essential work of developing peacebuilders who will build a peaceful world. Last May, Urosevich and Soetoro traveled to Minnesota to be the keynote speakers for the annual MAYDAY! Peace Conference. Looking out at Gustavus students and the Gustavus community, they said, “Turn to your neighbor and discuss: What is your definition of peacebuilding?”

Excited whispers echoed through Christ Chapel.



Origins of a Peacebuilder

Growing up in Nebraska, Urosevich’s extended family was active in a Serbian Orthodox Church, which often mixed politics and history with spiritual practices, especially during the Yugoslav Wars in the early 1990s. “My grandpa and I clashed over who we should dislike as Serbians, and he would share about Serbian history. Like in all wars, groups of people experienced trauma at the hands of ‘others’. Hatred of those ‘others’ can pass down through generations. I loved Papo to pieces, but I couldn’t hold that thinking. I had to unlearn parts of these narratives.” On the hill, she studied Japanese and played Gustavus volleyball, where she first learned meditation and visualization techniques. In class, she studied the psychological motivation behind “othering”—defining a person with less societal power as a means to exclude and displace them from mainstream. Her fluency in Japanese led her to a job in northern Japan, where she witnessed peacebuilding at work. She then earned a master’s degree in International Policy at the Middlebury Institute for International Studies as well as a PhD in political science with a specialization in conflict resolution and systems design from the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa.





“Promote mental health awareness and provide options to get help.”

—Jennifer Wedin Given '15,
mental health practitioner at a
residential treatment facility



“Be mindful about
your social media use.
What people post is often
a carefully curated image.”

—Brendesha Tynes,
Nobel Conference Presenter



“An active body helps
stimulate an active mind
which allows us to create
positive change.”

—McKenna Patrow '18, mental health
therapist, Lakeville Behavioral Health



6 Ways to Take Care of Your Mental Health, and the Mental Health of Others

THESE ARE KERRIE UROSEVICH'S
HOW-TO TOOLS. TRY THEM TODAY.

- 1 **Find your joy.** Identify activities that make you happy or help steady yourself, then do these activities every day.
- 2 **Create reaction responses.** “Conflict just is,” Urosevich says. “It’s part of being human and it can actually be a catalyst for change.” How we respond makes all of the difference. Create a cheat sheet with responses for when you experience conflict, like, “I appreciate you sharing this with me. May I take some time to think about what you’ve said?” Instead of getting fired up during a conflict, practice deep breathing, count from 10-1 in your mind, “go to the balcony” and observe the conflict, or make notes about what you are hearing and emotionally engage later.
- 3 **Create time and space to be with others.** Our mental health is supported when we feel connected to others, especially without cell phones and distractions.
- 4 **Practice active and second-tier listening.** Active listening (nodding along, eye contact, smiling) tells a person you hear them. Second-tier listening is about facts and values—what you are being told, and the values that the other person holds. “The values tell you why the story is so important,” Urosevich says.
- 5 **Be an “upstander.”** When you see someone being mistreated, say something, get help, or gather with others to use your collective talents. “Being with a community, for a shared purpose, supports everyone’s mental health.”
- 6 **Be a champion for children.** “Every young person needs a champion,” she says. Be that champion. Reach out to your local schools, child care centers, and churches. Become a mentor through the Gustavus Mentor Program. Or simply champion a child in your own family and neighborhood. Spend time with, listen to, and celebrate them.

STUDENT AND RECENT GRADUATE VOICES in this feature are from the podcast series, *COVID Unmasked: College Edition*. Produced by students, it presents a glimpse into ways the pandemic affected Gustavus students from 2020 and 2022, touching on education, social life, mental health, and the unique experiences of people from underrepresented backgrounds. Find it on Spotify. ALUMNI VOICES are from those currently working at intersections of youth and mental health.

