



## Prevention Program Podcast - Intro Episode:

Ashley Dallas:

Welcome to the prevention platform where our goal is to equip you with the knowledge and tools you need to prevent problems before they occur. Here at Valley Youth House, we believe that prevention is key to living a healthy and successful life. And we are excited to share our expertise with you. We hope that you find our discussions informative, engaging and relevant to your own parenting journey. So sit back, relax and let's dive into the world of prevention.

Here at Valley Youth House, we have over 80 youth serving programs that work to help young people to build foundations for future growth and independence. Each program is unique in its own way and many of them interweave components of prevention and intervention. And I think the idea of prevention is really important. So this podcast will focus on things that we can do before problems start in order to help young people really see success in their life.

When we think about prevention, there's a common story that is told. So I want you to imagine a large river with a high waterfall and there are people who are falling down the waterfall - many of them are drowning. At the bottom of the waterfall, hundreds of others are helping to save the people who are drowning. However, there's one individual who looks up and sees people falling and he runs upstream. One of the other rescuers yells, "where are you going? There are so many people here that need help." And the person replies, "I'm going upstream to find out why so many people are falling into the river." And so when we think of prevention and the work that is being done every day in our programs here at Valley Youth House, the goal of prevention programs really is to help young people before problems begin. And so we try to think about what we can do to really set up our young people, our youth, for success. And we want to get to them before they find substances, before they act out aggressively, before they resort to violence to help themselves feel better. And so the goal of our programs is really to solve problems and help them before they, before they get worse.

Here to talk about the importance of our prevention programs is Thomas Harrington, who is our president and executive director.

Tom, what does prevention mean to you?

Thomas Harrington:

For me, prevention are those activities that we can do for people, in our case, young people, to give them the tools to help them to make good decisions in their life, to prevent problems down the road. So a lot of young people are faced with choices as they grow up and they may not know what the consequences of those different choices are. And if we can help show them positive and negative ramifications of their choices and then let them decide what they want to do, I think that can help prevent a lot of problems.

Ashley Dallas:

So why do you think it is important that we offer prevention programs here at Valley Youth House?

Thomas Harrington:

So, one of the things that Cathy and I learned early on when we've had our first child, and we have two children, is that kids don't come with an owner's manual and parents, particularly young parents, may not, they don't have all the answers, they don't know what to do. And so if we can equip parents with new skills and help and assistance that can prevent a lot of problems down the road. And then as children are growing up, particularly when they're teenagers and adolescents, if we can help them deal with their emotions, you know, help them understand what's going on in their lives, maybe, you know, the opportunities to do things that could harm them in the long run. And again, the ramifications of those decisions they make. If we can help prevent problems from happening before they get into the situation where they're in trouble potentially or, or harming themselves, if we can prevent those things, it's going to help them and their families in the long run.

Ashley Dallas:

Sure. And I think there's a statewide and national effort to focus on prevention activities because really preventing those problems before they start, is a solid investment into our youth. And so I think you made a lot of really good points. A lot of times kids don't think about the long term consequences of what they're doing.

And I think that's another reason that it's so important that we offer these types of programs at Valley Youth House because you're right, sometimes kids don't have parents who are involved actively in their lives or, you know, they don't have that level of support. And so that I think is where our programs really come in and we can be there as that supportive force for these kids who may not have that.

Thomas Harrington:

Children are coming from different backgrounds and some, you know, some children are being raised by parents who have some serious mental health issues themselves or they may have some drug and alcohol issues or they may have just lost their job or maybe their, their spouse has just left - the marriage is falling apart - and there's all the stress of life that's happening to the parents. And sometimes kids can be ignored while that's happening and they're left to themselves and those children absorb all that stress and we know that living in a constant world of stress where maybe there's food insecurity or they're living in poverty, that affects the development of their brain. It has a biological impact on their body and that will have a lifelong impact on their health outcomes. So things that we can do to help these young people develop life skills, they need to deal with the emotions that they're experiencing, to have an outlet that they can talk to someone else. Any of those things are very helpful for young people as they develop.

Ashley Dallas:

And sometimes all it takes is just one positive person, one positive role model in somebody's life to truly make a difference and provide them that affirmation that they need. I'm glad you brought that up. Thank you.

Also joining us is Shani Meacham, who is our senior vice president of programs.

Shani, what does prevention mean to you?

Shani Meacham:

Well, like I think that the answer I would say is that it's pretty, there can be a variety of definitions of prevention. But ultimately, for me, when we're looking at our continuum of services that we offer here or others are offering in the community, we're looking at programs that are seeking to intervene or prevent issues prior to them becoming a need for us to deal with, with it in an intervention type of point

of view. I don't know that I think of it as, you know, this is just prevention. I think of it as Valley Youth House started 50 years ago with a shelter for young people that are experiencing homelessness. And you know, that was an important intervention for something that they were seeing. But over time as we were thinking about, you know, why are these young people experiencing homelessness? What are the root causes? And are there things that we can do prior to them experiencing homelessness to prevent them having that experience? That is where prevention for Valley Youth House and the methods that we use kind of arise. Ultimately, that's our goal. What are the root causes of something that we're seeing and what are methods that we can use to prevent those things from happening?

Ashley Dallas:

I think it's so important that we are in tune to different problems and different issues that our youth are facing today. And so I really appreciate that you kind of have that perspective.

What do you think are some of the biggest issues - you mentioned homelessness - can you think of any other issues that you see a lot of youth struggling with these days?

Shani Meacham:

Yeah, I think that we are starting to see the aftermath and impact of the pandemic on young people. And you know, not just young people, but their families, their adults, there's been economic impact, there's been financial impact on the homes, but more importantly, we're looking at the impact on folks feeling connected, loneliness, depression, mental health issues, but also traumas that are happening in the home when people were isolated from others. You know, the increases that we've seen in addictions and you know, the impacts that has on families. So I would see that we would eventually be looking at more and more programming and how do we address some of those issues. Obviously, we have prevention in trying to make young people feel connected to caring adults, for example, in our School-Based Counseling.

Ashley Dallas:

So, Shani, you had mentioned all of these issues that we're seeing young people facing. And you're absolutely right. And I think at the core of that is really helping kids develop healthy coping skills that they can use when they're struggling. And I think a lot of youth who are finding themselves in tricky situations or traumatic events, they don't necessarily have those coping skills. And you had mentioned that it's important for young people to have a trusted adult that they can kind of lean on in their time of need.

So why do you think it's so important for parents, for caregivers, for trusted adults, to have an active role in their students' lives?

Shani Meacham:

I think that it is the trajectory of the youths life and their success and their ability to, you know, achieve what they desire to do is quite reliant on having people in their lives, their parents, their caregivers, other folks that can be that guiding force, that can be that catalyst but also to, you know, show them, love and support. And so life is never easy and we know that there are some youth out there that don't have that and that has to be created elsewhere and maybe in a chosen family or otherwise. But the first goal of prevention is to do that inside of a family home and to keep families together and create spaces where everyone in that family is thriving, especially the students. So yeah, we want to support that first step and we want to support that first. And then we also will be there when other spaces are needed. To me, that's like the first place to start.

Ashley Dallas:

Thank you so much for joining us for today's episode of The Prevention Platform. Be sure to check out Valley Youth House on our website at [www.valleyyouthhouse.org](http://www.valleyyouthhouse.org). We hope to see you next time.