



Recruiting and Retaining a School Mental Health Workforce with Kristinne Stone

Claire Viscione: Welcome to “In Session” – a podcast where we speak with changemakers, working towards safe supportive learning environments within their communities. Our guests include state and local education agencies and their partners - all grant recipients from the Department of Education, using their funding to advance school-based mental health services, support mental health service professionals, and establish trauma recovery and prevention programs.

Claire Viscione: I’m Claire and this is Annie at the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. We produce “In Session” and will be facilitating the conversation today, highlighting the great work being done by one of our grantees.

Claire Viscione: On this week’s episode Kristinne Stone from the Virginia Department of Education joins us to discuss recruitment and retention of school mental health providers.

Claire Viscione: All right, well welcome Christine we're so excited to have you with us today, and just to kick things off we'd love it if you could tell us a little bit about yourself and your background and your work with the Virginia Department of Education.

Kristinne Stone: Thank you ladies it's definitely an honor and a privilege to be part of this podcast I think it's a wonderful idea to connect.

Kristinne Stone: All the grantees together and for anyone who is you know interested in this topic itself and my name is Christine stone I am.

Kristinne Stone: A school based mental health grant project manager within the Virginia Department of Education.

Kristinne Stone: And so, a little bit about myself, I was brought in, specifically to help really manage this grant and again feel very privileged in doing so because.

Kristinne Stone: Mental health within schools is really my passion that's my background, and I am by trade a licensed clinical social worker, so I'm a LCSW for any of those LCSW's out there.

Kristinne Stone: And I've worked within a partnership with schools and providing school mental health services and so when I was lucky enough to be awarded this position.

Kristinne Stone: I was very excited to really do this work because again that's that's kind of been my passion my background, working with children and families in regards to mental health, so that's a little bit about myself and.

Kristinne Stone: Just some background in regards to what VDOE is doing or utilizing with the Virginia school mental health providers recruitment and retention grant.

Kristinne Stone: We have created this very, very exciting website, please do visit, it is the Virginia career and learning Center website.

Kristinne Stone: And really the idea behind this website is to support the efforts of recruitment and retaining the school mental health professionals.

Kristinne Stone: In the Commonwealth of Virginia so it's a one stop shop it is essentially a centralized place where you can really view.

Kristinne Stone: Any open position school based mental health positions in any school division of Virginia so prior to this website, we really focus on access and.

Kristinne Stone: easy way to navigate versus if let's say you were somebody from Arizona, and you were looking to relocate to Virginia and you may not know the school division of.

Kristinne Stone: Danville city public schools or Henry County public schools and you really wanted to see what was available across the Commonwealth.

Kristinne Stone: This was a one stop shop of to see those open position school, social workers, school counselor, school psychologists.

Kristinne Stone: And what it will do is you just click on the link and it will actually direct you to the school website to apply, and then you can browse that school website to see.

Kristinne Stone: What the Community is like if this is a place that you know you want to relocate to really get a good feel of what that school division can offer you so.

Kristinne Stone: it really is a single point of access to apply and see those open positions it offers certainly a lot more than that, we have some professional development modules on the website.

Kristinne Stone: Also, a place to give you some guidance on licensing requirements information, specifically on school based mental health careers so.

Kristinne Stone: If you are an undergrad student, you're not quite sure what you want to major or focus on, you can watch little videos of.

Kristinne Stone: What day to day looks like essentially for a school counselor a school social worker and a school psychologist. Again really focusing on that recruitment and retention piece when it comes to those positions in Virginia, the folks that are really focused in providing those.

Kristinne Stone: High quality mental health services to students is those school based mental health professionals.

Kristinne Stone: And in the past, certainly, you know video he has been working towards in the Commonwealth of Virginia, has been working towards.

Kristinne Stone: Some advocacy efforts policy efforts recently the school counselor to student ratio that was just reduced to one school counselor to 325 students.

Kristinne Stone: And that was back in April of 2020 and now we even have specific ratios when it comes to those professionals to.

Kristinne Stone: So there's still definitely more work that we need to be done by you know VDOE he has shown, really.

Kristinne Stone: Just focus in regards to those advocacy efforts and also.

Kristinne Stone: The Commonwealth has shown its support in regards to really improving those student and SMHP ratios as well.

Annie Knowles: yeah Thank you Kristinne I mean this website just sounds incredible and I know you you touched on this a little bit, but.

Annie Knowles: Can you, maybe elaborate a little bit more on what brought you and you know your team to creating this website was there anything, in particular, you know, a specific need that you were trying to meet?

Kristinne Stone: I think really the team itself office of student services did a great job in.

Kristinne Stone: looking into what might be a hindrance or a boundary.

Kristinne Stone: professionals, can you know relate to this in regards to right now everyone's looking to recruit.

Kristinne Stone: And hire and things of that nature and the easiest way that you can do that is make it just kind of one place where you can find all of that information.

Kristinne Stone: So, whether, if you are already a established school counselor in Virginia and maybe you are let's say your family is relocating.

Kristinne Stone: This is a good place for you to look and specifically see okay in this we're going to move to region.

Kristinne Stone: 2 of Virginia, when we look at the school divisions and region to let me see exactly you know what's available to me, since you know my family has to relocate.

Kristinne Stone: or let's say you're a school social worker in New York and you're looking to again go to Virginia and there are different.

Kristinne Stone: kind of licensure requirements

Kristinne Stone: So again, a place where you can see what positions are available, how do I get those positions when it comes to my licensure requirements and.

Kristinne Stone: yeah it's just one place, that it can house that and then also not to focus I'm not only talking about recruitment, but also retention.

Kristinne Stone: You know, for for awesome folks that we currently have in these positions, a lot of them, of course, require recertification, CVUs, hours, so what we have provided for them to for ease again for more so ease and accessibility is.

Kristinne Stone: instead of googling you know other professional development modules or opportunities it's there for you it's free and.

Kristinne Stone: There again, high quality because they're already kind of pushed out by Virginia Department of Education.

Kristinne Stone: Within office of student services so for ease, here are some opportunities of PDS, that really meet those requirements for your hours or recertification things of that nature so again, I think the team did a really good job with.

Kristinne Stone: Kind of like a root cause analysis in regards to what is really needed.

Kristinne Stone: To to really target and hopefully get those positive outcomes that we want on what you know with the grant.

Claire Viscione: It sounds like the website has huge breadth in terms of your recruitment efforts and then depth once you do recruit professionals, they can use this as a one stop shop continuously. So given how comprehensive the website is, I'm curious to hear more about how you grew it, who was involved in the process, and how that implementation process has been going.

Kristinne Stone: That is a great question because we definitely could not have lifted this without really valuable partnerships, specifically with higher education we had.

Kristinne Stone: A really awesome and obviously still great relationship with our old dominion University in regards to really help.

Kristinne Stone: The creation of this website and currently in that was year one kind of the big project for your one.

Kristinne Stone: For the grant and year two right we create this awesome website it's great, but if no one's going to it is not going to be it doesn't help anybody essentially so year two the focus was

Kristinne Stone: how do we make sure that the core audience and those folks really.

Kristinne Stone: see this see this website so of course there are things within Virginia Department of Education, that we do in regards to communication with the school divisions all school divisions conferences that we may need to attend informing.

Kristinne Stone: You know those key folks that this website is available specifically let's say depart directors of student services things in that nature that they would see that there is great value.

Kristinne Stone: On this website and making sure that those folks really visit it and utilize it to its capacity.

Kristinne Stone: But, but also on a basic sense of this was such a learning curve, for me, ladies and you guys may know a little bit more, but just a digital marketing piece of the website so.

Kristinne Stone: All this language that I just learned this year is search engine optimization so SEO.

Kristinne Stone: And again, our partners with ODU, really helped target that just kind of social media campaigns in regards to getting the word out about this website and this resource and then also really some email marketing to those.

Kristinne Stone: Higher ED those colleges and universities that have specific master level programs in Virginia.

Kristinne Stone: To really target those master level programs and really undergraduate programs that serve school counselor school social work psychology a psychologist.

Kristinne Stone: And really target them to make sure that hey, this is an easy resource, if you have folks who are graduating or folks are interested in this profession, you know have this available.

Kristinne Stone: To you know your future you know graduating students so.

Kristinne Stone: Again i'm glad you said that, because a lot of those efforts are very new to me, and I wish I was just as tech savvy as some folks i'll definitely leave it to the experts, but we.

Kristinne Stone: This year was very interesting because we really did focus on a lot of email marketing with our.

Kristinne Stone: Higher ED partnerships our social media campaign specific to linkedin because those are you know where folks really go to kind of network, job search things in that nature and.

Kristinne Stone: And really those behind the scenes things like search engine optimization so really cool stuff that I had no clue about so.

Claire Viscione: yeah and I think that's so interesting to integrating marketing, which you know, is more of kind of like the business component, but with all of these really wonderful education based initiatives and you had mentioned linkedin.

Claire Viscione: was kind of the main platform that you were looking at so i'm curious kind of both about lessons learned in terms of like.

Claire Viscione: Maybe where your kind of marketing took place and then what you learned from working with that team, how you would advise people going forward, either in the work that you're continuing to do, or maybe people who are also new to marketing their education based initiatives.

Kristinne Stone: that's that's really good, I would also say.

Kristinne Stone: Really target those associations as well, your local state associations, like your Virginia association of school counselors.

Kristinne Stone: You know NASP National Association of school Psychologists so local, as well as national associations, what NCSSE has done for us.

Kristinne Stone: which has been great is really connect us to those national organizations and when they've attended some of our meetings and they did their presentations and things like that.

Kristinne Stone: really making a point to contact them like soon after that so it's still fresh in their mind and partnering with them to help us also advertise.

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Kristinne Stone: This resource his website for any you know potential folks who are looking for opportunities are looking for those positions you know here in Virginia and.

Kristinne Stone: So that that was you know I feel like i'd be remiss to not mention that that was huge for us too.

Kristinne Stone: it's easier to connect obviously from a state level, but we wanted to make sure that we were able to connect with those national organizations as well.

Kristinne Stone: A lesson learned when it comes to social media marketing and again i'm a little.

Kristinne Stone: Very minimalistic in the information I have, when it comes to like instagram and Twitter and things like that, so we kind of pivoted in regards to initially we're thinking social media, what is the most kind of.

Kristinne Stone: You know, popular or common things again to reach maybe more of the the younger market things in that nature is Twitter we're really like focusing on Twitter.

Kristinne Stone: Getting this information out we create a lot of you know, good content on, although we kind of hit a roadblock and we really like reassessed.

Kristinne Stone: in regards to you know Twitter is kind of everything it's a catch all for everything and things kind of live on Twitter for just a millisecond essentially.

Kristinne Stone: And so we're like Okay, this may not be the best platform for what we're trying to do, how about LinkedIn it's a little bit more professional we can repurpose the content that we created.

Kristinne Stone: And really focus it more on those professionals who are looking to network, find open positions again more of that recruitment piece so.

Kristinne Stone: I would say that was one of our lessons learned when it comes to just you know digital marketing or excuse me, social media marketing things of that nature, and I think for me from an evaluative standpoint too when it comes to digital learning is kind of hard.

Kristinne Stone: You get a little worried i'm sure other grantees feel the same way when you.

Kristinne Stone: are not getting like a concrete product almost it's hard to think about those behind the scenes things that happen.

Kristinne Stone: And so, for me just really having good communication again with our partners in regards who are more experts in that.

Kristinne Stone: To put it in layman's terms for me as a grantee of like How is this really going to impact our outcome because I'm very focused on obviously the outcomes that are set for us by the grant you know.

Kristinne Stone: Sometimes it may not be a direct correlation but a step to something else, and so, for me, being able to really answer this and you know ask those specific questions and making sure I have a full understanding of.

Kristinne Stone: Again, we have these resources just it being purposeful instead of like okay yeah that sounds great, but just for me having.

Kristinne Stone: That competence and confidence and being able to execute like yes let's move forward with this and if it's not working let's you know reevaluate and maybe pivot in a different way, so.

Annie Knowles: yeah I love what you've said particularly about how much you've learned through this process and I think it's really important for other grantees to hear that, that you know even if you think you're not as well versed in the technological sides of creating a website and it might seem scary, that's ok, you can leverage these partnerships, work with other people, learn a ton, and still create this awesome really useful resource for other people to benefit from. So thank you for that and now I'd just like to ask, in the interest of time, I'd love to hear about your plans to expand and sustain this website, you know where are you and your team planning to go from here?

Kristinne Stone: I know that that's definitely a good question. And again, the team itself did a really excellent job when they created the grant proposal in regards to sustainability and where we can.

Kristinne Stone: move forward after even grant funds kind of end that's everyone's kind of thought right, and the idea is within with this website with the.

Kristinne Stone: Virginia career and learning Center is, it would be essentially manage within our office they'll be somebody managing the website, we can continue to add we've.

Kristinne Stone: myself and other team members kind of have administrative access now to the website so we can receive that training we can add additional content.

Kristinne Stone: revise a website, if needed, very minimalistic, ladies, I definitely don't have like a web design degree or anything but just being able to add additional content to that.

Kristinne Stone: So really a lot of that maintenance and upkeep would essentially.

Kristinne Stone: be the responsibility of Virginia Department of Education and then also to that when it comes to sustainability, what we hope, and you know talking about partnerships too with.

Kristinne Stone: Our LEAs and some of those lessons learned, not to kind of go back and forth.

Kristinne Stone: With with the question, but our LEAs I really We really do encourage them to look at obviously the grant funds be responsible in managing and budgeting for for these funds.

Kristinne Stone: And what we will do what they will do afterwards, after this grant fund ends, to make sure that let's say they hired a team of five you know brand new school social workers.

Kristinne Stone: What will happen after the grant ends so really looking at their local funds, grant funds, maybe future grant funds, state funds.

Kristinne Stone: A lot of the funds that were available to them when it was you know a lot of the the pandemic relief funds things in that nature really being creative in that way.

Kristinne Stone: And to go back to lessons learned some of the things that I learned from year one that i'm trying to incorporate in year two is.

Kristinne Stone: With the partnerships with LEAs really it's usually one person who I communicated with in regards to implementing these grants strategies.

Kristinne Stone: But really that person is probably communicating with the Director of finance within their school division, the Director of Human Resources within their school division.

Kristinne Stone: So a big lesson learned, for me, was let's all come together instead of kind of playing telephone let's all come together let's figure out a way that.

Kristinne Stone: meet the needs of that specific school division, with the resources and the funding that you have because it's not just about the grand let's look at other funds that you may have.

Kristinne Stone: And then also pivoting to the human resources hey you know these are the things that we're thinking about to.

Kristinne Stone: recruit for these position is this allowable within your school division we're looking at retention bonuses, you know what is allowable what are things that are.

Kristinne Stone: within your policy within that school division so lessons learned, I felt like I was just talking to one person and that person was.

Kristinne Stone: litigating the information but it's really a group of people that really need to come together at the same time, like in now zoom like a zoom room but.

Kristinne Stone: You know just a meeting so everyone's hearing the same information so that was one of my lessons learned from year one is really initiating that partnership, not just with one person with that within the LEAs but really the team of folks that really make.

Kristinne Stone: The implementation strategies that make what they want to happen happen so.

Claire Viscione: based off what you mentioned about the teams you're working with, in closing, I'd love to hear more about your big picture takeaways when working with teams both on the website project but also within the context that we're all working towards, a common goal of advancing school mental health.

Kristinne Stone: Absolutely, you know, Virginia Department of Education, especially, especially within our office of student services.

Kristinne Stone: You know we're committed and really maximizing and helping all of our students and to this end, you know mental wellness, mental health.

Kristinne Stone: that's definitely in the forefront, and really a foundation to build a safe, welcoming and supportive school environment where really all students can thrive, hit their maximum potential.

Kristinne Stone: You know, VDEO is really committed to that and big picture wise I think everyone obviously within our office everyone that all the.

Kristinne Stone: LEAs as well as our higher education partners, see the importance of that they really, really do, or you know pre pandemic and again due to the pandemic.

Kristinne Stone: Mental health is just a priority for everyone, our students or families, the Community as a whole that serves that school division, so I will say, everyone is very passionate and on the same page in regards to the importance of that, so I think that's what.

Kristinne Stone: brings everyone together and hopefully trying to achieve having this access for high quality mental health services in the schools.

Kristinne Stone: With students because essentially someone asked me one day like Oh, you know why, would you provide this in schools i'm like well that's what the kids are.

Kristinne Stone: So you provide these mental services because that's where our kids are and that's where our youth are and that's where they are learning and it's really a captive audience, so we want to really utilize that and.

Kristinne Stone: have access for again our students, as well as our families to these services that are highly needed so.

Kristinne Stone: We really hope with the grant funds with the resources that we have we can really make a dent in solution to these issues that we're seeing within.

Kristinne Stone: Our schools and lack of professionals or just really lacked lack of folks within these

Kristinne Stone: really important and valuable professions and so with that I say that we hope that we continue to achieve more funding resources to focus on that.

Kristinne Stone: And the grant itself is wonderful it's great it's really a big piece to a puzzle, but we do have a bigger puzzle to solve in regards to school mental health services and how, how can we make sure they're accessible they're equitable and things of that nature so.

Kristinne Stone: The grant I say again, the grant has been i'm really very honored and humbled by the work that we're doing, and you know take great accountability and responsibility to make sure that.

Kristinne Stone: We are able to essentially make a dent in the problem, but sometimes I do have to tell myself a little bit to have a little patience have a little grace that.

Kristinne Stone: there's progress that is happening, but it will take multiple years and multiple layers in regards to really, really solve the problem or solve this issue, but I do think we are moving towards that and programs and resources, like the grant is a great way to do it.

Annie Knowles: Yeah and it seems like this website is a big step in the right direction so, with that Kristinne we'd just like to thank you so much for joining us today and telling us about the awesome work you're doing with the Virginia Department of Education and with this incredible website which will be linked with this podcast for all listeners to go and check out and we look forward to seeing where you go from here so thank you so much.

Kristinne Stone: Thank you so much, ladies, this is a wonderful wonderful idea, thank you for creating this and opportunities for for grantees to really vocalize on the questions and the thoughts and the comments you guys were mentioning so

Kristinne Stone: I definitely look forward to listening to the other grantees and see what they have to offer me as well here in Virginia.

Annie Knowles: "In Session" is brought to you by the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSE, at The American Institutes for Research. This podcast is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. If you'd like to learn more about NCSSE, visit safesupportivelearning.ed.gov. For all questions or feedback, you can email us at ncssle@air.org. Thanks for listening!

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