

Guy Iacono - Minding Your Mind - Transcript

Tim Mullooly: Welcome back to Living With Money. This is Tim Mullooly. On today's episode, I'm joined by Guy Iacono. Guy is a licensed psychotherapist and the New Jersey regional director of Minding Your Mind. Guy, thanks for coming on the podcast, man.

Guy Iacono: Thanks a lot for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

Tim Mullooly: Before we dive into Minding Your Mind and all the work that you guys do, let's start with a brief background about you, personally. Where did you grow up? What was life like for you growing up? What did you study? Where'd you go to school? All that good stuff.

Guy Iacono: Yeah, so I was born and raised in New Jersey. I was born in Weehawken, where my grandfather was actually the mayor, and I moved down to Monmouth County when I was around four. My mom and dad moved us down to Spring Lake Heights, where I grew up and still live now. I went to Spring Lake Heights Elementary School, and then St. Rose, graduated, went to St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, where I studied sociology, philosophy, and the Italian language.

Growing up, I'd say I had a pretty ordinary childhood. My dad is a great provider. He's a third generation business owner. He's a steel contractor of Iacono Iron, so he does some nice ornamental steelwork and stuff like that. Around middle school, I started to realize that my mom was struggling with some mental health stuff and addiction, which really took a toll on our immediate nuclear family. In our extended family on both sides, we have mental health issues and some struggles with addiction, so I was introduced to mental health disorders and addiction issues at an early age, which definitely shaped who I am today, and why I do what I do now.

Tim Mullooly: I was going to say, was that a direct correlation to what you studied? You went on to get your Master's degree, right?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, yeah, so it definitely led me in this direction. When I was younger, I was really trying to understand the dynamic in my family. I didn't really have a clear picture of everything until maybe around high school. You're still kind of young, so you're trying to figure everything out.

Tim Mullooly: When you went to get your master's degree, was that in the same field as what you studied in the undergrad, as well?

Guy Iacono: It's really related. It's not exactly the same. In college, I studied sociology, which is a study of society and social issues. Then, at Monmouth University, where I earned my MSW, which is a master's in social work, it's more focused on human rights, social justice, and then I was the clinical track, so that's where I learned clinical skills and did some pretty intensive internships.

Tim Mullooly: After you got your master's degree at Monmouth, what were you doing work-wise, before joining up with Minding Your Mind?

Guy Iacono: Out of Monmouth, I worked for Meridian Health Care, which is now Hackensack Meridian. I was a MICA counselor there, so I worked with dual disorders. MICA stands for Mental Illness Chemical Addiction, so I was working with people who struggled with a mental health disorder and addiction at a PHP level of care, which is a pretty high level of care. It's all day programming for people who struggle mentally.

We would have a lot of groups. I did some case management, and I met with clients individually, so the population of people that I was working with were really struggling. It was a great learning experience, and I think I was able to do some pretty great work with a lot of people.

Tim Mullooly: I was going to say, first job right after getting your master's degree. That sounds relatively intense. Was it a really good introduction into the field of working in mental health?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, definitely. I actually interned with Meridian in my last year of grad school at IOP, intensive outpatient, so I learned a lot there. Then, after grad school, I obviously started working for the hospital system in that capacity. It was just eye opening. I definitely had experience with mental health and addiction, but definitely not in this capacity at this level, so I was really able to learn a lot and expand on my clinical skills, really take that into a private practice now, which I do on the side, outside of working for Minding Your Mind.

Tim Mullooly: As I mentioned in the beginning, you're the New Jersey regional director for Minding Your Mind. How were you first introduced to the organization, in general, and what do you do on a day-to-day basis, as the regional director for New Jersey?

Guy Iacono: I was introduced to Minding Your Mind through a good friend, and a great family from Spring Lake, the Craig family. Derek Craig, one of my friends from the area, he lost his brother to suicide some years back, and his family was involved with Minding Your Mind. One day, we were hanging out. We were actually playing a game of pickup football, and I was just explaining what I did and how I had just graduated, and I was struggling to find full-time work.

Derek brought up Minding Your Mind to me, and I researched them a little bit. I reached out and just said, "This is who I am. I'm a clinical therapist. I heard that you guys give mental health education presentations," which I think is extremely important, considering everything that we've been through, as a community, here. They got back to me, and we had some great conversations.

This was in 2013, so I was looking for full-time employment. At the time, they were only looking for a clinical presenter, which would be part-time, but I was really looking for benefits and all of that, obviously. I was also in the process of interviewing with Meridian at the time. Meridian actually offered me a full-time clinical position, which I needed anyway for my terminal license as a psychologist.

I decided to work with Meridian, and then a few years later, I reach back out to Minding Your Mind to see if I could do the presentations on the side, because I really care about educating people on mental health. When I went in there to speak with the executive director, Trish Larson, she informed me that they were actually looking for a full-time role, and it would be for the regional director of New Jersey. I just jumped at the opportunity. I feel like I learned a lot with

the hospital system, and I'm extremely grateful for that opportunity, but when Trish introduced the idea of working for Minding Your Mind, I just, I had to take it.

I knew Minding Your Mind is a great organization, and I knew some of the people that worked for them were going to be great coworkers, so I just decided to make that jump. It was definitely a very different experience from what I was doing with the hospital system, in terms of working with people on a daily basis, running several groups and all of that, but I couldn't be happier with where I am now, and the work that Minding Your Mind does.

Tim Mullooly: That's cool that it didn't work out, or the timing wasn't right, at first, but then you revisited it, and the timing seemed to be perfect that second time around.

Guy Iacono: Yeah, it was definitely just fate or destiny, if you believe in that stuff.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, definitely. You mentioned it before, too. You have a private practice on the side. What does that entail alongside Minding Your Mind?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, so I work in a private practice in Brielle, where I see clients individually a couple days a week, and I see clients ranging from adolescents/teenagers to adults with mental health disorders, ranging from anxiety, depression, PTSD, addiction recovery, as well as a couple issues, such as men's issues and sports issues, as well.

Tim Mullooly: Can you tell the listeners just a little bit of a background about Minding Your Mind as an organization? What's the overall mission of the organization, and what do you guys provide for people?

Guy Iacono: The overall mission of Minding Your Mind is to remove the stigma around mental health. Only three out of ten individuals needing treatment actually seek it, and we think that that 30% who reach out for help is extremely low, obviously. We think a major contributor of that is the stigma that exists around mental health, so people are afraid or ashamed to reach out. They don't want to admit that there's something going on, in fear of being ostracized or outcasted. Minding Your Mind does a fantastic job with our young adults, who share their life story in overcoming various mental health adversities.

We have people, around 30 and younger, who share their life experience in overcoming living with anxiety, depression, a suicide attempt, addiction recovery, PTSD, sexual assault. We really cover the gamut, in terms of mental health, and we provide these presentations to schools, whether it's middle schools, high schools, colleges, universities, community organizations, corporations, anyone who really wants to start a conversation around mental health. We'll come in and have these fantastic young adults, who share their life experience in an extremely profound, positive way. They frame their experience in a way where they're discussing reaching out for help, warning signs, really educating people, starting the conversation, but in a very optimistic and recovery based way.

Tim Mullooly: I feel like, regardless of the age of the person hearing that, like you said, those warning signs, and just the education... People don't, you don't normally get educated about that

kind of thing. You get physical education in high school and growing up, and you learn about other subjects, like math and history and stuff like that, but you never really get an education about what's going on inside of your own head sometimes, right?

Guy Iacono: Absolutely. I think people are afraid to have conversations around mental health, for many reasons. I think that's why the work that Minding Your Mind does is so important, and we've been so successful, because at first, some districts, some school districts, some organizations might be afraid to have us in, because they think that someone getting up and speaking about their mental health experience could be overwhelming, or there could be some negative outcomes, but the response afterwards is just amazing. I love seeing students, and even adults, come up afterwards to shake our young adult speakers' hands, or to thank them or ask them for hugs or advice, and it's just amazing. The impact that it has on everyday people just reinforces why I became a therapist, and why I think it's so important to speak around mental health.

Talking about, or going back to, the idea that people don't really speak about it, and how impactful it is, and how I said it was fate or destiny that I joined Minding Your Mind, there's an experience that I had at Saint Joe's, where I was in a sociology class, and my professor said, "Oh, if you attend this presentation later at the Student Center, I'll give you extra credit on your next assignment," or test, or whatever it was. I always could use extra credit-

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, of course.

Guy Iacono: So I decided to go, and it actually wound up being Jordan, who is one of our young adult speakers at Minding Your Mind. At this point, I was just a junior in college. I had no idea who or what Minding Your Mind was. I really had no idea what the presentation even was. Honestly, I just went for the extra credit, but his presentation was amazing. I had chills the entire time. I actually just go chills now.

It was amazing. He told his life experience, and since then, he's spoken in front of Obama. He's spoken in front of Congress. He's been featured on ESPN E:60. He's been on Anderson Cooper, speaking about his experience. At that time, I had no idea that I would go on to grad school, to earn my master's, to become a therapist, and to now be the regional director of Minding Your Mind, and work and give presentations alongside Jordan.

It was just such a cool experience. This last year was the first time I presented with Jordan, and I just had to tell the audience, "Hey, I sat in your seat years ago, with Jordan, and his presentation stuck with me from then until now, and now I'm presenting alongside of him." It was just such a great experience.

Tim Mullooly: It definitely is, like you said, a little bit of fate or destiny that your paths crossed at that point, but it also just speaks to the impact that even just one presentation can have. Whether you knew it or not, it might've, could've, just pointed you more in that direction, and ultimately led to where you are today, so that's pretty cool.

Guy Iacono: Oh, it was amazing, something that I'll never forget. I mean, I hear his presentation more frequently now, but I'll never forget the experience I had, sitting in that room during his presentation.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, definitely. There's a few different programs listed on the Minding Your Mind website. Can you tell the listeners about the different programs that you guys offer, and the impact that they can have?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, that's a great question. I like to say that our main program or presentation is our young adult speaker program, which I mentioned earlier, which consists of a young adult going in, giving a presentation on their life experience in overcoming some sort of mental health adversity. We give that, most frequently, to the schools, whether that's a health class or an assembly, but we also provide corporate presentations, which include a psychologist, like myself, and a young adult, so we're covering the clinical side, the warning signs, the symptoms, coping strategies, from a clinical perspective, but also lived experience and an individual's unique experience with this mental health disorder.

It's really nice. It's a two-prong presentation, and that's our Just Talk About It presentation, which we also give to faculty, staff, and parents. I like to encourage any school that has us in for a young adult speaker program to also have a Just Talk About It presentation for the parents that evening, because it's a great way to bridge a gap and create a lot of cohesion between what the students hear from a young adult talking around mental health to the parents, so that they can have these important conversations with their child about what they heard earlier that day.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, that makes sense to cover it from all different angles, to have the most impact possible.

Guy Iacono: Yeah, absolutely, and then we also offer mindfulness training, which I think is super important. Mindfulness is something that I like to practice and give to my clients when I'm working individually with them. The mindfulness trainings are four sessions, and it could be either for a teacher to incorporate it into their classroom or introduce it to students. That's also great, because it's all about living in the moment, and not allowing yourself to fall back into the past, which I like to think of like regret and depression, and then not worrying about the future, projecting, which would be anxiety, and it's really... Mindfulness is a great technique to combat both anxiety and depression.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, definitely. I feel like everyone can benefit from practicing mindfulness at some level.

Guy Iacono: Absolutely, and then we also offer documentaries, where we include either a psychologist or a young adult. We'll screen a documentary, and then hold a Q&A afterwards, with a very short recap or presentation. We really offer a lot. Like I said, I couldn't be prouder of the work that this organization does.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, absolutely. For you, personally, what's been the best part about working for an organization like Minding Your Mind?

Guy Iacono: The best part about it is, I guess, just being able to work with these young adults. When we talk about this stigma, we talk about how difficult it is for people to reach out for help. Our young adults are really doing the exact opposite of that. They're making themselves vulnerable by sharing their life experience in overcoming mental health adversity, in front of hundreds, and sometimes even thousands, of people in the audience, or going on live TV, or being in documentaries, really baring their whole story for the sake and for the well-being of others, so that others, who might be struggling, are able to relate and say, this is what I'm experiencing. I'm not alone. I'm going to reach out for help, because this person is similar enough to me that I know that I'm not alone, and I know that there's help out there.

The best thing about working for Minding Your Mind is just knowing that we're really working towards, and becoming pretty successful at, battling the stigma and seeing firsthand the response from the students, whether it's coming up to us afterwards, to thank us, ask us for questions or advice, or going directly to the guidance counselor or a principal or a trusted parent and saying, "Hey, I'm struggling with this, and I want help." Seeing firsthand the impact that we have, in terms of battling that stigma, is definitely the best. Knowing that we're opening up doors and starting conversations around something that could ultimately save lives is super important.

Tim Mullooly: Definitely. I feel like that's very rewarding on a personal level probably for you, as well. In contrast to that, I'm sure working in the field of mental health, there are some difficult days. What has been the most difficult thing about working in the field of mental health?

Guy Iacono: The most difficult thing for me, personally, in working as a therapist would probably be the concept of self-determination. That's something that I wrestle with, just because when you have someone, and you could see all the warning signs, and the writing is on the wall that they're not doing too well, and you're seeing the clear picture, and unfortunately, they're not always able to see from your lens, and you could see the direction that they're heading, and you're trying to help them as much as possible. At the end of the day, they're an individual with their agency, their freedom to do what they want and what they ultimately wind up doing, so understanding that you don't have as much control as you would want to help people, just trying to help them see what you're seeing, from a clinical lens, and trying to help them understand that maybe the direction that they're going down or these behaviors or things that they're doing are not working for them, and trying to change them, but still understanding that they're a free individual to do what they wish and what they want in that moment.

Tim Mullooly: Ultimately, it's a personal thing that that person has to go through. That makes sense. Let's talk about a Celebration of Life. What are these events, and how did they get started? Can you tell the listeners a little bit about that?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, sure, so as I mentioned before, the Craig family, who I think are just the best people. Derek, who got me involved with the organization, unfortunately, his brother took his life in 2011, Kyle. When Kyle took his life, he was at Vanderbilt University, and his friends through a benefit concert, where the band, Dispatch, who is pretty big, came out, and they performed free. All of the benefits were donated to Minding Your Mind, because of the work that they did, in terms of speaking around mental health and suicide prevention and all of that mental wellbeing.

Since 2011, we've had at least one Celebration of Life a year. As I mentioned before, Minding Your Mind started in the Villanova area, so in Pennsylvania they're really large, and they've been growing, and they've had a Celebration of Life. We've had one in New York a few years ago. This year is actually the first year that we're having it in New Jersey, which I'm extremely excited about, because obviously I work in New Jersey, and I think that we've been able to establish the organization pretty well in the two-odd years that I've been here.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, you have assembled a committee of people to get this event that you just mentioned in New Jersey for the first time put together. Can you tell the listeners specifically about the details of a Celebration of Life event in New Jersey, and what they can expect, and if they want to get involved or anything, how can that happen, and just all the details about the event coming up?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, so if it wasn't for the committee, I don't think we would be anywhere near the event that we're going to be having, or we wouldn't have the ability to raise these funds that will ultimately support the organization and allow us to provide more free mental health education presentations to these schools and organizations and corporations. We have a committee of around 20 individuals from very different backgrounds, whether it's like you working in finance-

Tim Mullooly: Right.

Guy Iacono: Shout out to Tim.

Tim Mullooly: Thanks.

Guy Iacono: Or my cousin, who's a school counselor. We have people who run yoga studios. We have lawyers. We have a lot of people that do very different things, that come from different backgrounds, but all are very passionate around mental health and passionate about spreading the word about mental well-being and removing the stigma. We've been able to sell a bunch of tickets already and raise some funds, and get some awesome donations for our raffle. I'm extremely excited for the event. I know that the committee's working hard to promote it and make it as successful as possible.

Tim Mullooly: For the listeners out there, a Celebration of Life, New Jersey event, will be held on September 26th, Thursday night, of this coming year. It's from 7:00 to 11:00 p.m. at the Spring Lake Bath & Tennis Club, here in Spring Lake, New Jersey. I'll put in the show notes a link to where you can buy tickets to the event. There's also sponsor information, or donation information for anyone who wants to donate, or any companies, small businesses, large businesses, anyone who wants to sponsor the event. Like Guy said, all of the funds will go towards putting on more of these Minding Your Mind educational programs, definitely for a really great cause.

The night itself will be super fun. Like the name implies, it's a celebration. Getting a ticket, you'll have... There's a DJ, open bar. There's a silent auction. There's going to be a lot of great items to bid on, and just it'll be a fun night in general.

Guy Iacono: Yeah, and we're going to honor a great woman, Lisa Tobia, who's been a good friend of mine since high school, who recently just lost her sister to suicide. She's been doing great work in the community around supporting others, starting these conversations in a way that's a little bit different than Minding Your Mind, on a more personal level, and just been a rock in our community since high school, when a lot of us struggled with our own mental health after the suicide cluster and stuff. Lisa's just been a rock for our community, and she's doing great work right now.

She's actually selling T-shirts that have her sister's artwork on them, and that's going to benefit Minding Your Mind. She's already raised, I think, over \$3000, and she's on her second round, her second round of orders for these shirts. Lisa's going to be receiving the Champion of Hope award. As you mentioned, the night is really, truly a celebration. It's very different from what you would envision for a mental health nonprofit fundraiser. It really is. It's going to be a great night. The Spring Lake B & T, the Bath and Tennis Club, is a fantastic venue, beautiful. I hope that we have beautiful fall weather.

We're going to have an hour-long cocktail reception outside, before we move inside for some dancing, hors d'oeuvres, and the raffle. It's going to be a lot of fun. The events that I've been to in the past have been wildly successful, and I hope that we are able to do that here in New Jersey, because I think that it would mean a lot for the community.

This community has been through a lot, and I hope that we're able to grow the programs and encourage more people to have these important conversations around mental health.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, definitely. For the listeners out there, there's only a limited amount of tickets available. There's about 300 tickets for the event, in total, and we've already started selling some tickets, so like I said, if you're interested in getting a ticket, head on over to the show notes, and you can find a link where you can buy a ticket and find out more information about the event. For you, personally, why are these events so important, I mean, not only for the funds raised for the organization, but maybe on a personal level, and just for the surrounding community, and everyone involved?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, definitely, so outside of the reason why it's so important for Minding Your Mind, so that it gives me the freedom to speak with these schools and organizations and say, "Hey, we could come provide these presentations without a charge or a cost," is really big, because then we're able to reach people, who might not have been able to hear this presentation otherwise. For me, personally, our community has been through a lot.

When I was in high school, back in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, we lost a lot of people to suicide. We had a suicide cluster, which was documented nationwide. There were research and studies done about this cluster. I personally lost some very good friends.

It's just been a lot for this community, so I feel like bringing Minding Your Mind to New Jersey, having this office in Manasquan, and having the event in Spring Lake, is really important to me, because it's something that I'm passionate about.

Everything that went on when I was younger, and the suicide cluster, led me into the mental health field, ultimately to become a therapist. Having this event for the community, I feel like, is a great reason to come out and truly celebrate life, to truly celebrate the good and bad times, everything that we've overcome, in terms of adversity personally, but then also as a community. To do it all in the name of mental health means a lot to me, and I couldn't be prouder of Minding Your Mind and the work that this committee for the Celebration of Life is doing. I hope that everyone's able to come out. We're actually going to be increasing the ticket price soon, so I would definitely encourage people to buy before we either sell out, or the tickets increase.

Tim Mullooly: Definitely. It's going to be a very important night, but also just a super fun event. Like I said, for more information, you can go to that link in the show notes. You were talking before about how these presentations are not only given just to adolescents and students, but also to faculty, and the teachers, and the parents, and adults as well. Have you seen any difference, in terms of the impact that these presentations and programs are having on kids versus adults? Do you find that it's more or less impactful, or do kids and adults react in different ways? How is the balance between kids versus adults, in terms of reception of these programs?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, I think that's a great question. Initially I thought that it would be more difficult for children, young students, to hear these presentations, but I was blown away. I gave a presentation with a young adult to a local fifth grade class, and I was just like, I don't know if this information is going to go over their head, or if they're going to be able to digest it. Minding Your Mind does a great job of tailoring the presentations, and either toning them down, or providing more detail, depending on the age of the audience, but these fifth graders asked such amazing questions around mental health.

Some of the questions, I could probably say, were even better than some of the questions we receive from older adults, which I would expect quite the opposite, but when I hear the questions coming out of the kids' mouth, it melts my heart, and it's just so amazing to hear these questions, and understand that we're starting these conversations at such an early age. It's so important to have these conversations at an early age, the same way that these fifth graders would be hearing about the stomach virus, or a flu, or any other sort of physical ailment.

When I give presentations, when I work with clients, I like to say that there shouldn't be a difference between mental health and physical health, because we're one body. It's just our overall well-being. It's our overall health. I think it's just great. I don't think that there is much of a difference between the impact that the presentations have because, to piggyback off that idea that it's one health, we're all unique in our own ways, but we're all human beings. We all need the same socialization. Everyone has mental health. It's just a range of that mental health, and how individuals are impacted or affected by things a little bit differently. Who has more resiliency or the correct coping skills, and who has some coping skills that could be a little detrimental?

It's just a matter of having these conversations and educating people. I'm personally grateful that I'm able to give presentations to parents, to students, to corporations, and faculty and staff. Everyone needs to have these conversations, no matter who you are. Mental health addiction, nothing discriminates based on age, race, gender, socioeconomic status. Anyone could struggle at any time, and it's important that everyone has these conversations.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, definitely. I thought, when I was reading about Minding Your Mind and researching questions for this interview, I thought initially in my head that it might be more difficult to talk to kids about it, but then, as I thought more about it, I feel like, and tell me if this is incorrect, but maybe it's more difficult to get adults to open up about it, because they've been... They have more experience. They're older. They have more experiences, kind of more stuck in their ways, and they were never really taught, from the get-go, how to deal with stuff like this. Have you found that that's the case sometimes?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, I mean, I think that's a great point. I would say that I have experienced that. I think that kids still have that imagination. They still have that innocent perspective or lens that they're able to see the world in, and they don't have as much like an ego, or they're not as stuck in their ways. They're not going to be as embarrassed to ask questions, because they're not really thinking immediately of, if I ask this question, what are other people going to think? It's coming from a very innocent and maybe even naïve place, because when they ask these questions, they're extremely profound questions, but I don't know if they have the capacity to analyze the way an adult would, which would prevent, or which ultimately could prevent the adult from asking that important question. Yeah, in a way, it might be a bit of a challenge to frame some of the topics that we discuss for a younger audience, but the questions that we get are mind-blowing.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, definitely. I feel like the cliché of it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks. With kids, they're learning new concepts every day. It's easier for them to be more open-minded to things like that at a younger age, as opposed to blocking it out when they're older.

Guy Iacono: Yeah, absolutely, and that's why I think it's so important for these conversations to happen as early as possible. Like I said, in my ideal world, we would be having these conversations the same time we're having conversations about having a cold or a stomach ache or whatever it is. As I mentioned, everyone experiences... Everyone has mental health. It's really a range of that mental health, and understanding that everyone could struggle at any time is important, so then, when someone is ultimately struggling, they've had some sort of education, or they have the vocabulary to express themselves, or the ability to reach out for help.

Tim Mullooly: Apart from these presentations and getting involved with organizations like Minding Your Mind, how can people in their own communities just continue to improve the landscape of mental health education and awareness?

Guy Iacono: That's a great question. I think just encouraging people to have honest and open conversations. I know, personally, in my family there was a lot of stuff that happened, whether it was my immediate family or extended family, that was swept under the rug. I think when you have that culture where you're sweeping things under the rug, or not talking about things that are going on or have gone on in the past, you could be really caught by surprise, and then you don't, like I said, have the ability to express yourself or reach out for help or have conversations around it openly and honestly that will lead to an improvement, because you're getting that help. If you don't, or can't, have the ability to admit that there's a problem, or that something's going on that needs to be improved, then you're never going to get that help, right?

Tim Mullooly: Right.

Guy Iacono: That's why they say the first step is admitting that there's something going on or admitting that there's a problem. Then, from there, you could actually work on it, but if you don't even want to admit that there's something happening, or something that needs to be improved on or looked at or asked for help, it's going to be nearly impossible to get that help. Just being open and honest, being as compassionate as possible, and understanding that everyone has mental health, and reaching out if someone, you think, is struggling, asking them directly, "Are you struggling? Is something going on? Is there a way that I could help out? I'm concerned about you."

Being honest and having very open conversations, sharing any sort of helpful resources or information, whether it's just sharing the link on Facebook, or letting people know that, if something's going on, you could always come to me. It's all about extending olive branches, and caring about the well-being of others, and yourself.

Tim Mullooly: You mentioned it earlier, that the mission, overall mission, and we've talked about it, is reducing the stigma around mental health. We might've touched on it a little bit, but why do you think this stigma is just surrounding mental health? Why do you think that reducing the stigma is ultimately the most important thing?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, I think that we see when people search and receive treatment, or seek out help when they're struggling, that their lives drastically improve, if they're working with their psychiatrist, their doctor, or their mental health therapist, right? Stigma is the ultimate barrier that prevents that from happening. If you look, just in the last decade, or 10 years, how much things have changed, like when I was in high school, I wish that Minding Your Mind was around. That's the ultimate compliment I could give Minding Your Mind, because I think if Minding Your Mind was around, and myself, and others in my grade and around my age, heard these presentations, I think we could've avoided or averted a lot of crises. Some lives could've potentially even been saved.

That's why I'm so proud and passionate of the work that we do. Ten years ago the stigma was even bigger, even larger, and that barrier was a lot more difficult to overcome. Now today we have celebrities, like Michael Phelps; Demi Lovato; Robert Downey, Jr.; CC Sabathia. I mean, we really see musicians, actors, athletes coming out, speaking around their mental health struggles, whether it's addiction or depression, or whatever it may be. That really goes a long way.

I think that Minding Your Mind does an excellent job of being like that celebrity, on a smaller scale, because when these young adults get up on stage, they're so charismatic. They have this presence about them, and they're speaking around such profound, impactful topics that it really goes... It's like it penetrates the stigma, and really knocks down a big barrier for the people in that audience. We see an immediate impact, whether, like I said earlier, it's going to the guidance department, it's going to their boss, it's coming to us and saying, "I'm struggling. How can I get help?" Each time we give a presentation, it just reinforces that notion that that stigma's there, but

we've come a long way since then, and I know that it's going to continue to improve, because that's the trend that we're... That's the way society is trending now.

Tim Mullooly: Absolutely. For you, personally, what are your goals for Minding Your Mind and for a Celebration of Life over the next year, couple years? What are some of the goals that you hope to achieve?

Guy Iacono: We've been pretty successful in New Jersey in the last two school years that I've been part of it, or the last two years that I've been working in this capacity. This last school year alone in New Jersey, we gave 400 presentations. Nationwide, between the three offices we have — New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Boston — we gave over 1500 presentations. We've covered the nation, in terms of flying our young adults to LA; Houston, Texas; Minnesota; Florida; really all over the country.

My goal would be to continue to expand the program immediately in New Jersey, but also, hopefully, leak out into New York. We gave some presentations in New York City, and even Upstate New York, last year, and I think that the program is only going to grow, because of the way, as I mentioned, society is trending, in terms of having these conversations around mental health. It's really coming into the focus.

For the program, I would love to see it just expand. I mean, it could be an ideal situation, where we have a Minding Your Mind office in every state. I think it's important that every student, every person, hear something like this, and I think that Minding Your Mind does it in such an approachable way, whether that's since we're working on donations, or we're able to provide these presentations even free of charge, the impact, and the ability of our young adults to deliver these messages, I think that we have a perfect recipe to continue to expand, and our goal is to reach as many people as possible.

For the Celebration of Life, itself, our goal is to have a wildly successful, extremely fun night, hopefully in early fall, in Monmouth County, the Bubble, New Jersey, and then hopefully have it annually. I'd love to see this event grow each year, and more and more people be introduced to Minding Your Mind in New Jersey. Hopefully, that leads to other states being introduced to Minding Your Mind, and actually just growing on a national level.

Tim Mullooly: I also saw that you coach baseball. For you, what does that mean to you, and apart from teaching the kids, obviously, baseball skills, how to throw, catch, steal a base, what other lessons do you like to try and instill to your players?

Guy Iacono: Yeah, I think that's a great question. I'm passionate about baseball. I'm a big Yankee fan. I try to watch as much as possible. I grew up playing baseball, won some championships, and a couple of personal awards, not to brag, but it's great.

I think athletics come in big time, in terms of coping skills, and just teaching life lessons, so when I had the opportunity, through my cousin, to coach baseball, I jumped at it. I think, as I mentioned earlier, it's important to introduce mental health topics to young kids as soon as possible, and I think that you could teach a lot of lessons through sports. Outside of just the

fundamental baseball skills, it's important to teach them that it's okay to fail. It's okay to strike out. I mean, so specifically, when you look at baseball, you're going to fail more times than you're going to succeed.

Something I always told the kids is that, if you get three hits in 10 at bats, over the course of your lifetime, then there's a good chance that you could wind up in the Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, whether it's the parents or societal pressures, or even pressure that the kids put on themselves, they want to hit a home run every time. If they go 3 for 5 in a game, or 1 for 3 in a game, they look at that as a failure.

We've had kids, obviously cry after a strike out and stuff. That's all okay, but just understanding that it's okay to fail. It's about getting back up. It's about learning resiliency. You don't have to win every game. You're not going to win every game. Learning to be there for their teammates and be able to pick the other person up, whether they're having a bad game, or just play the same and have the same attitude as if you were going 5 for 5, or if you went 0 for 5, right?

Tim Mullooly: Right.

Guy Iacono: I mean, being level, being able to overcome different adversity, whatever that type of adversity is, and understanding, at the end of the day, it's just a game, right? I mean, there are so many more important things that happen than baseball, knowing that it's all about having fun, establishing relationships, and if you're able to continue to play baseball, or whatever your sport is, at the next level, that you're very fortunate. Not everyone gets that opportunity, and to just enjoy it as much as possible.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, absolutely. I have to agree. One more question for you, I wrap up every interview with this. Whether it's a personal thing, or something you've learned in your career, what's one piece of advice that you've gotten throughout your life that has always just stuck with you?

Guy Iacono: That's a big question, one piece of advice. I've gotten a lot of advice. I've tried to open myself up to as many experiences as possible, whether that's doing different things or speaking to different people. I love to pick people's brains, and try to learn as much as possible. I've learned a ton of great things from my parents, and my family, but one thing that I've adopted is the Jimmy V. quote, "Don't give up. Don't ever give up." I think that that's amazing. I think that his speech is amazing.

No matter what it is, if you care for it, whether it's sports, whether it's something in academia, especially if it's your life or well-being, you don't want to give up. You want to continue to pursue what makes you happy. If you're searching for happiness, if you're searching for improved mental well-being, or improved physical health, or whatever it is, you don't give up, especially in terms, or in the context, of mental health.

If your treatment plan isn't working, if a medication doesn't work for you, if a therapist you're not really connecting with, you don't just stop. You don't just throw up your hands. You have to find someone or something that works for you, so pursue what makes you happy. Pursue what makes

you healthy. When you hit some road bumps, you just have to continue to persist and push on, and hopefully find what works for you, whatever that context is, right? It could be anything.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, absolutely. That's a great piece of advice to end on, Guy. That was all the questions I had for you today. Thanks for coming in and talking about Minding Your Mind, and talking about the Celebration of Life event.

Guy Iacono: Yeah, no, thank you for having me on. I'm really excited to be here. I'm really excited to have you on the committee, and I'm really excited for the event. I think it's going to be extremely successful. It's going to be a lot of fun, and I'm looking forward to it.

Tim Mullooly: Yeah, definitely. Again, for the listeners, I'll put in the show notes. There's a link where you can go get tickets for a Celebration of Life event, again, September 26, 2019, at the Spring Lake Bath & Tennis Club, here in New Jersey. Thanks for listening to this episode, and we'll catch you on the next one.