

Be Better

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Shipt. He called Shipt; they said cancel the order. He called the customer, an elderly woman, who was confused. Ian bought the groceries with his own money, and delivered them anyway.

There's a heartwarming photo in the Miskelley family album, of Ian and his older sister, Chelsea, in a pool from when they were toddlers. It looks like the bigger Chelsea was holding Ian up. Years later, Chelsea let her parents in on a secret: Ian was, in fact, was holding her up.

At Michigan, one swimmer re-joined the team because of Ian's support and encouragement. Another once was feeling sick, and Ian sat down next to him. "Why are you here?" the teammate asked. "Because no one else is," Ian said.

"He made us better for knowing him," Ian's uncle, Brian Miskelley, said at Ian's funeral, Sept. 12, 2020. "That was Ian's greatest superpower. With power comes great responsibility.

"So, be better. Make his memory matter."

And that's exactly what the Miskelleys, Jill, Chelsea and father, Steve, are doing, with the Ian Miskelley Be Better Wellness Center, which opened in a small office in Holland in June 2021, started offering support groups in September 2021, began consultations in December 2021, and launched its first mental-health education series last month — with the help of community partnerships, including local Grand Haven-based Mosaic Counseling; more than \$150,000, via private donations, state grants and a successful inaugural charity golf outing; and an on-staff doctor of psychology, Dr. Michael Brashears, whose wife, Aimee, committed suicide 13 years ago. There are longer-term visions of building a large facility that will offer in-house care, 24 hours a day.

Ian Miskelley committed suicide Sept. 7, 2020, two weeks before his 20th birthday, early in his junior year at Michigan. After years of receiving some of the best available care, both through private insurance and at the University of Michigan, he still suffered what Steve calls a "negative outcome," and what Brashears calls a "psychiatric heart attack."

There have to be better ways to treat mental illness, in addition to traditional but too-often infrequent therapy sessions and outside the often-tough-to-crack boundaries of insurance, the Miskelleys believe. That's where Be Better comes in.

"The difference is, we're going to try to connect people with care, if we don't provide it, and then stay alongside them," said Brashears, formerly executive director for Ottawa County Community Mental Health. "We don't go away.

"Time and relationships matter. That's the difference."

Help, right now

Ian Miskelley was open about his struggles with depression from a very young age, even as he was rising in the youth swimming ranks — he began swimming at 7, qualified for the state swim meet at 9, won his first state meet at 10, qualified for U.S. Junior Nationals at 14, and attended a select camp at the U.S. Olympic



Chris duMond / Special to The Detroit News

Steve and Jill Miskelley review documents together in the Be Better office in Holland. The Miskelleys lost their son, Ian, to suicide.



Family photo

Ian Miskelley snapped a photo of himself while snorkeling on a vacation in Hawaii. He is remembered as someone not shy to help others.

Training Center at 15, all stepping stones toward landing a scholarship at his dream school, Michigan.

And he let his parents in on the mental-health battle, as much as he felt comfortable that day, though that often left them with more questions than answers.

"It would've been nice for me. If I had a question, 'we can get you an appointment in three weeks ... and that's gonna be another \$150,'" Jill Miskelley said. "I just want an answer that's not WebMD. There are a lot of parts missing, gaps."

Said Steve Miskelley: "That's exactly the point. Be better. Make it better. We're not trying to fix the system. At this point, we're going around the system. ... This would be supplemental."

That's the whole point, said the Miskelleys and Brashears, who initially was Steve Miskelley's personal therapist, before he decided to join the family's Be Better crusade. There's obviously a place in mental health care for therapy visits and psychiatrists, but those visits can range from once a week (therapists) to once every three months (psychiatrist), and what happens in between, when the struggles don't cease when the face-to-face sessions stop?

Be Better offers consultations with Brashears within 24 hours, which is key, as immediacy can be pivotal in short- and long-term care. He can then start the path toward securing therapy — no easy task these days, given the backlog in the pandemic era; the Mosaic partnership is huge in providing therapy based on when

you need it, not on when they can get you in — but Be Better's work doesn't end there. Be Better aims to maintain a presence in a patient's care for as long as they need, often through support groups, virtual or in-person.

Those support groups can include family members, who too often are excluded from the traditional therapy process either because of insurance restrictions or a therapist or psychiatrist's belief in confidentiality, and they can include patients who are going through similar struggles.

"Ian told us, 'My friends get it for a while, and my teammates get it for a while,' but you can burn them out," Steve Miskelley said. "What he really needed was a group of people like him, everybody struggling with the same thing, where you don't feel alone and you feel like you can actually open up."

"In general," Jill Miskelley said, "he didn't have anything like that."

Nor did she, given the lack of family involvement in his therapy. Often, over the years, Jill and Steve Miskelley would have to rely on Ian for answers. And, while he was more open than many, he still was a kid who'd much rather play "Call of Duty" than rehash his 55 minutes of therapy or fill the worksheet a therapist had given him.

"I also felt completely alone," she said. "There was treatment, maybe every four weeks. (In the meantime), this person and this person's family have to live."

"It's damn difficult," Steve Miskelley said in an interview in the Be Better offices earlier this

punching Wade in the head and face nine times. He gets kicked in the back, stomped on and punched in the face again.

"All you hear Tyler saying is 'I'm not resisting, I'm putting my hands up,' and he keeps asking 'Why are you hitting me?'" over and over again," King said.

Warren Police Commissioner Bill Dwyer told WJBK-TV (Channel 2) in June that the department's use-of-force policy had been violated and an officer was suspended. Dwyer declined to comment on the lawsuit Wednesday but said there's "no question in my mind" that Wade was resisting officers.

Six officers are named in the lawsuit, listed only by their last names and their badge numbers.

In the body camera footage, one officer can be heard saying "all right" repeatedly as he attempts to handcuff Wade.

"The force that was used against him was unnecessary. It was excessive and it was unreasonable," King said.

Wade had a concussion, his

braces were knocked out, blood vessels in his eye were ruptured and he has permanent scarring, headaches and blurred vision, his attorney said. Several of the injuries, including those to his mouth and eye, may require surgery in the future, King said.

"I don't remember that much about the situation because it was like, I blacked out during that moment when it happened," Wade said. "It's been kind of hard for me to remember things in general after the situation happened."

Wade was taken to a hospital after the arrest and more body camera footage shows an officer at the scene questioned by an emergency medical technician. The EMT asked an officer how Wade received the injuries to his face; the officer responded: "We did have to put him to the ground because he was resisting. ... His face may or may not have scraped the ground."

Wade had no criminal history at the time of the incident. The teenager pleaded no contest to receiving stolen property and flee-



Chris duMond, / Special to The Detroit News

The Miskelleys are proud of what they've started, having helped more than 40 families in the Holland area.

year, wearing a ring on his right middle finger that has Ian's fingerprint. "If your kid had a heart condition, you'd be sitting there with them. You would have a thousand questions and the doctors would be answering all of them. Why not here?"

Brashears estimates therapists need three or four hours a week (in addition to the hour of in-person therapy) to properly work a case, which would limit you to 10 or 15 patients. The problem is, for therapists in private practice, you need dozens of clients a week to make a living. And for publicly funded options, there can be a lack of motivation to fully invest in a patient because they are paid regardless whether the patient shows up. The community facilities also typically lean toward treating only the most extreme cases — schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, hallucinations, etc. — given there's been a significant decline in available beds at state-run facilities over the last several years.

Be Better's three main objectives, for now in the program's infancy, are consultation, education and support groups.

"I don't want to say we're the alternative," Brashears said. "It's more like walking alongside families, individuals, the community as a whole. ... Think of AA or NA ... you can find one (a group). That's not the case with mental health care. You can't just find a group anywhere, or just find a person to talk to. Eventually, what we're saying is long-term, it'd be nice to have that experience where it's not just call a hotline or a suicide line. Oh, I can call this group."

Pressure to perform

Be Better is most focused on helping youths and young adults, with a specific emphasis on student-athletes, given the Miskelleys' personal connection. A big part of the effort there is a four-part education series, developed with the help of a state grant, that helps define mental illness, and, most importantly, provides answers and options. The series was launched last month at Holland's Our Lady of the Lake, where Ian's funeral was held. The goal is to get it into all area middle schools, high schools and colleges. The series also is being tailored toward athletes, with the Miskelleys hopeful to start working with Hope College, where Chelsea ran

cross country and track, as well as local swim clubs. Mental illness and wellness have become significant topics of conversation among athletes. At least five Division I athletes committed suicide in a two-month span earlier this year.

There are many theories for the spike in suicides, some citing the COVID-19 pandemic and the isolation that came with it. Suicides actually decreased during the early days of the pandemic, though they rose among young people ages 10-14, 15-24 and 25-34, particularly young men, according to stats from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Steve Miskelley also cites the pressures put upon athletes, who stress over succeeding on the playing field, but also the academics to be eligible to be on the playing field. Social media doesn't help, nor do cellphones, many agree. And not enough coaches, teams or university athletic departments are properly equipped to provide all the necessary help.

"And their philosophy," said Steve Miskelley, speaking in general of coaches while making sure to point out UM's staff was supportive of Ian before his death and since, "oftentimes is, 'Well, if you don't do it, I've got 10 more people waiting for your spot,' and there's that pressure."

Nobody has the perfect solution for stopping suicide, which was the third-leading cause of death among people ages 15-19 in 2020, according to the CDC. That's because mental health care isn't a one-size-fits-all model, or at least it shouldn't be, Brashears said.

If there's one positive in the athletic world, it's that more world-class athletes are opening up about their struggles, including gymnastics' Simone Biles, swimming's Michael Phelps and tennis' Naomi Osaka, among many others. This year, Tigers outfielder Austin Meadows acknowledged his struggles with mental health.

"It's OK to admit you need help," said Tim Schoonveld, Hope College's athletic director, who is working with Be Better on rolling out the education series for the Division III school's nearly 600 student-athletes. "I would never say we have the market cornered and know exactly what we're doing. We're really just trying to provide options for our coaches,

our athletes and really our campus to be able to get the support we need.

"I wish I knew and could say, 'Hey, this is exactly how to do it.'"

It wasn't that long ago — we're talking years, not decades — when mental illness wasn't something many discussed openly. Ian was an exception long before the stigma of mental illness was starting to fade. When he was being recruited to swim at several big universities, the Miskelleys were open about his struggles, and his need for care, in meeting with prospective coaches. One big school, which they wouldn't name, said, yeah, maybe they could get him a therapist or a tutor. That was a quick no. So he went to Michigan, where care was far better than most.

And it's gotten even better in Ann Arbor since Ian's death. Caroline McGee, a rower at Michigan and good friend of Ian's, helped launch Intercollegiate Athlete Network (IAN), a student-athlete-run, peer-to-peer support group. Michigan swimming also launched the Ian Miskelley Hope Scholarship, which has raised more than \$200,000.

Ian's memory will long remain on multiple fronts, including literally on the Miskelleys — each of whom got tattoos of the Be Better turtle logo (Ian loved turtles), Steve over his heart, and Jill (who quit teaching to run Be Better) and Chelsea (who's part of the Be Better board of directors) on their inner forearms — even if life was short, and difficult.

The Miskelleys are proud of what they've started, having helped more than 40 families in the Holland area, and excited about where they're going — even if, more than two years after Ian's death, there still are days where it's hard to walk into the Be Better office, which is adorned with pictures of Ian, many of him smiling when smiling was so hard to do. You never get over suicide, Brashears said. Life is forever different.

"There are bits and pieces of Ian's story," said Jill Miskelley, "that we just didn't even know. He wasn't telling everybody whatever the whole story was. Not everybody was on the same page."

Said Steve Miskelley: "It's amazing how many people just need to hear somebody cares."

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Lawsuit

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know the car was stolen. At one point, the vehicle stalled on West Woodward Heights Boulevard and North Chrysler Drive in Hazel Park.

"The officer approaches, points the gun at Tyler, orders him to raise his hands and you'll see Tyler doing exactly that. He has his hands raised," said King, who is with the Cochran Firm in Detroit. "When he tries to turn the car off, the officer slaps his hands and tells him again not to move so Tyler did exactly that, didn't move."

Officers pulled Wade from the driver's seat through the passenger side door and onto the ground.

"Once he's on the ground was when the beating starts," King said during a Wednesday interview with The Detroit News at his law office in downtown Detroit.

The video shows an officer

King said Wade is lucky they have footage so it isn't his word against the officers'.

"Fortunately, in this event and in this matter, we have body cam, and the body cam showed exactly what happened," King said. "To see a grown man attack a child like that is troubling."

An investigation of the incident by the Warren Police Department's internal affairs division resulted in the "lengthy suspension" of one officer involved, Dwyer has said.

Wednesday was the first time Tyler Wade and his mother, Bianca Wade, had watched the entire footage, which was displayed during a press conference at the Detroit law office. Tyler Wade said he has been traumatized and is now afraid of police.

"I don't like leaving the house anymore," Wade said. "I still haven't recovered. I don't know if I'll ever recover, honestly."

A bystander recorded the arrest from across the street, and the footage was widely circulated on social media in the weeks fol-

lowing the arrest. Bianca Wade didn't learn about what happened to her son until she was sent the bystander's video later that day.

"This was my first time seeing it up close, and it's hard to watch because this is your baby," she said.

Months after the incident, the Wade family said they have received no apology from the Warren Police Department.

The Cochran Firm has received dozens of calls since the incident from Detroit residents who live near Warren and claim the Warren Police Department makes them feel uncomfortable, King said.

"I think some type of training is necessary in that area, to say the least," he said. "I would have expected an apology at this point in time, but it may be too late. We feel like we are well within our rights to make these claims against the Warren Police Department."

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Associated Press contributed.