

Tammy Friend ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to the G.U.I.D.E. For Life podcast, exploring topics related to the personal competency skills that empower Arkansas students and teachers to Thrive at home, school, on the job, and in the community.

Tammy Friend ([00:22](#)):

Hi, I'm Tammy Friend, and today I have Hope Worsham, ESSER program director at DESE who's going to visit with us a little bit about the initiative Arkansas Thrive. Good morning, Hope.

Hope Worsham ([00:33](#)):

Good morning, Tammy. Thank you for having me today.

Tammy Friend ([00:35](#)):

Thank you. So, Arkansas Thrive has been pretty big news around the agency and among educators this summer. I've had a lot of requests for G.U.I.D.E. For Life books and awareness has really increased. Can you tell us a little bit about, maybe for starters, what Thrive stands for?

Hope Worsham ([00:53](#)):

Yes, that's right. It actually doesn't stand for anything. A lot of people want the acronym to stand for something, but it doesn't. We really just chose the name because Thrive represents what we're trying to accomplish through the initiative. And if you think about the word thrive, it's all about being productive, being active, being engaged. And so, Thrive just really represents what we want to do through this initiative, which is really empower educators, leaders, and students to be the best that they can be. To be successful, to have the supports and the people around them that will help them grow and thrive.

Tammy Friend ([01:35](#)):

Well, you're right, we do like our acronyms around here.

Hope Worsham ([01:37](#)):

We do.

Tammy Friend ([01:38](#)):

That's for sure.

Hope Worsham ([01:39](#)):

We know, particularly in light of the pandemic, that students have struggled recently with isolation, with disruptions to their environment in multiple ways, to disruptions to their home life. From parents being ill to losing family members, losing homes. I mean, the pandemic had a very large impact in multiple ways across our nation, and it affected our poverty students, it affected our students not in poverty, students of every color, of every region of the state. And so, Thrive Arkansas really... It actually started prior to the pandemic, the department was thinking about this real need for supporting students in their... Not only behavior, but mental health. And we recognized a lot of times a mental health issue will

manifest itself in behaviors. And our building leaders have not always been equipped to deal with that. And many times our systems are set up to be a punitive system.

Hope Worsham ([02:35](#)):

Traditional disciplinary systems are set up in a, "Three strikes and you're gone," kind of way. And we've used a lot of suspension in school and out of school. Schools still use corporal punishment, some of them. And we know that those methods are not effective in addressing the underlying problem. So, just because you suspend a student, it doesn't address what may be causing that behavior, what may be causing that student to act out. And so, the premise of Thrive is really to establish an entire system and it's grounded in two things. We really talk about relationships and systems. And it's an overall system of support for students where we not only look at the structures that we have in place. So, how are we actually going to tell the students what we expect from them? I know in my past, if I stepped out of line, I may just get yelled at or I may not.

Hope Worsham ([03:29](#)):

But if I was told clearly what I'm supposed to do... Even at work as an adult, when my boss tells me, "Hey, these are the parameters I want you to work within," I can work within that. And students are no different. So, we start with not only the structures... What is it we expect from students. Rather than just pretending they know or just expecting them to know how to behave, explicitly telling them, "Our expectation in this building is that you walk on the right side of the hallway, and guess what? We're going to show you how to do that and we're going to practice it and we're going to work with you on that." So, participants really start with looking at their internal structure. So, are we even setting the stage for what we want from students? And then going beyond that to the relationship side. Because what we've found is that you can set up structures all day, but if you don't have good relationships, the structures aren't going to work.

Hope Worsham ([04:21](#)):

And vice versa. You can have great relationships with kids but no structure and that doesn't work either. And so, our goal is to have our participants look at both. So, what's the culture like in your building and how do you build a positive culture around disciplined behavior and mental health? And how do you build positive systems around both of those as well? And so, we spend a bulk of our time really looking at our tier one. So, that's what do we do for all students? That whole child approach. And that also stems into our teachers. Well, we know that teacher wellness is extremely important and teachers aren't always getting the wellness checks that they need. So, we're really trying to look at both sides. Teacher health, student health, and this idea of relationships and structures. And then those kind of mesh together to build this culture of wellness, expectations. And within that, you still have discipline. You don't lose the discipline aspect.

Tammy Friend ([05:21](#)):

Exactly. Then you have an environment that is conducive to learning.

Hope Worsham ([05:26](#)):

Correct. That's what we want. Ultimately that we know from a lot of brain research that students cannot learn until their basic needs are met. And that very top part of your brain where critical thinking

happens, where all your creative thinking happens, it literally will shut down when a child is in a state of either... We call it dysregulated, but a state where they just aren't thinking clearly.

Hope Worsham ([05:50](#)):

And it's very true. I've heard before, "Oh, you're just not thinking clearly." And I thought, "Is that real or not? Am I just not thinking clearly?" And the brain research actually shows that that is true. When you get into a heightened state of fight or flight or you feel threatened there are parts of your brain that literally shut down and you cannot think critically at that point. And so, we really have to think about how do we provide structures for all students to learn, "Hey, I'm getting to this place where I'm about to fight or flight," and providing them with the right structures to be able to deal with that and manage that.

Tammy Friend ([06:26](#)):

Absolutely. So, this summer, I know you've been working with administrators within school districts for the training process. Can you kind of explain the training process?

Hope Worsham ([06:37](#)):

Yes. Yeah. So, we started our focus with building level administrators. And the reason we did that is because we feel like many times they're the ones dealing with all the disciplines. It all comes to them. And a lot of times, especially in Arkansas, we have a very small building. So, it may be the administrator and the counselor are the only two adults that are not physically in the classroom most of the day. And so, we knew that they needed a level of training to think about their system differently because many of them have never had an option to even think about it differently. What does a positive behavior system look like? We've lived in this punitive disciplinary system forever. And so, we knew they needed that support. We knew they needed the time out of their building to really work through the entire process. So, we started with building level administrators.

Hope Worsham ([07:25](#)):

They could bring a small team with them, so many of them had their counselor there with them or a lead person in their building with them. And we've started with a 10 day face to face training process. And so, those have happened in chunks of time. We'll continue that kind of structure of coming face to face for a few days, then they go away and they have some time to process and put into place what we've learned. And they come back and learn a little bit more, go back. And ultimately the goal is after their 10 days of face to face, they have about half a year from September until April to implement.

Hope Worsham ([08:03](#)):

And throughout that time, the Thrive team will be going on site visits, making Zoom calls, hosting virtual meetings with this group of educators. This first 100 have been an amazing group and they have jumped in full force. Some are totally revamping their system And some are just tweaking their systems. So, we have people that are at all levels of a positive behavior support system, but it really is about providing them with enough face to face training to support their learning, structured time to reflect and develop their system and then support to take that back into their building. So, it's really kind of a three-pronged approach that we're looking at with our cohorts.

Tammy Friend ([08:49](#)):

It's always nice when you are in professional learning settings to have that time built in. Speaking from a teacher perspective, it's definitely helpful to have time to marinate and then time to implement what they have learned from September to April. So, you had a hundred participants so far?

Hope Worsham ([09:06](#)):

We have 109 participants. It's about just over 90 buildings and just over 50 districts are represented right now.

Tammy Friend ([09:14](#)):

And so, when will you be rolling out another... Cohort 2?

Hope Worsham ([09:18](#)):

So, we plan to release a commissioner's memo hopefully in the next few weeks. And we're securing final locations right now that we'll release via commissioner's memo, the next two cohorts and their dates. And the application process is pretty simple. It literally asks for who wants to participate from your district, how long have they been in the district? And then we ask a few questions about capacity. Where are you in the process? Why do you want to participate? In order to get the most out of participating in Thrive, you have to be ready to make a change in your building. It's not going to be easy and it's not going to happen all in one year. But where districts are ready to make that change towards a positive system, we're seeing some pretty good success already. And we just now started school. So, participants have been very vocal about... That the training is helpful and it's helpful in not only pushing their thinking but changing their systems, and they're excited to go back and put it into place.

Tammy Friend ([10:15](#)):

It's very exciting. So, the next phase of training, that will be with teachers, is that correct?

Hope Worsham ([10:22](#)):

Well, so, we're going to continue to focus on administrators right now because we know we have approximately a thousand administrators across the state. So, we've been able to reach a hundred and we want to continue that process for the next few cohorts. But we do have a plan starting in the fall of 2023 to release some teacher training. And so, we don't for sure know what that's going to look like right now, but we do know that that is a need as well. And that will focus more on... Specifically in the classroom, what is it I do to set up a classroom that has positive behavior supports and it focuses on the needs of a whole child.

Tammy Friend ([10:57](#)):

That's exciting. Okay. So, schools that are interested, I've linked your page and the Thrive page in the show notes. There's the commissioner's memo with information as well as the webinar And some more details about the initiative. And you said the commissioner's memo for Cohort 2 will be rolling out before too long.

Hope Worsham ([11:18](#)):

It should be out by the end of... At the latest, the end of September. But we hope in the next week or two.

Tammy Friend ([11:26](#)):

Okay. Is there anything you want to add?

Hope Worsham ([11:28](#)):

No, I just really think one thing with Thrive that we are trying to accomplish as well is really looking at framing what we do through the lens of trauma informed practices and trauma informed care. And I know I wasn't very good at this as a teacher and I know it's an area that if I could go back... You always say if I could go back, I would do. But if I could go back, I would love to really take this trauma informed lens with me, in that we all experience trauma. And some kids experience more than others and every community has a level of traumatic experience in it. One of the books that we read as part of Thrive is The Deepest Well, and The Deepest Well really talks about adverse childhood experiences research. And that research was done in a very affluent community. And it showed that even within our most affluent communities, students have adverse childhood experiences and those experiences affect them all the way into adulthood.

Hope Worsham ([12:25](#)):

And some of the most effective practices literally are sleep, diet, exercise, meaningful relationships, mindfulness and mental health. And none of those are medications. The work that we're doing is extremely important in building the system as a district. We can't medicate, we can't always diagnose every child, but what we can do is we can build a system and a structure that gives support in the basic needs and then has triggers for students who need more needs. But right now our districts are drowning in behavior concerns. And it's not that kids are any worse now than they were, it's just that we have had this kind of two to three year period of a lot of unrest and a lot of trauma on top of what kids were already experiencing. And so, it manifests itself in our classrooms.

Tammy Friend ([13:22](#)):

Yes, definitely. I'm going to link The Deepest Well on the show notes too.

Hope Worsham ([13:30](#)):

Honestly, there's two that I would suggest. And just be prepared, if anyone does read them, to cry. I am not a crier, but I cried in both books. So, one is The Deepest Well, and the other one is What Happened to You? And What Happened to You? is actually a conversational book between Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey. And it's a fabulous listen, too, but actually they're both really great audio books. And both can be accessed through your local library as well. But two great books just on the effects of trauma on the brain and kind of pushing us as educators to think differently about the way we approach student behavior. It might not be that something's wrong with that student, but something's happened to them that is affecting them and that's causing them to act the way they are.

Tammy Friend ([14:19](#)):

Yes. And I'm glad you mentioned what happened to you. I have read that one and I told I was missing out by not listening to the audio book and hearing Oprah's voice.

Hope Worsham ([14:28](#)):

It's so good. Yes.

Tammy Friend ([14:30](#)):

I might go back and take a listen as well. You mentioned thinking back when you were a teacher, that had me reflecting on my practices in the classroom and how... Man, if I had seen or addressed the situation, looked at it through that lens, of the trauma informed lens...

Hope Worsham ([14:49](#)):

And it doesn't take the consequences away. The consequence is still there. If you throw over a desk in the middle of a classroom, there's still a consequence that's tied to that. But it may be that that consequence needs to come after a 20 minute cool down period or after the child has had time to reflect. Or after that child has had time to go talk with a counselor and really think about what they've done. I mean, I heard a story recently, a principal was telling me that she used her counselor throughout her entire career as a principal. And she said she had a student one time that literally came in and the student had just cleared a desk in the classroom. I mean, just wrecked it. And for good reason, got sent to the principal's office, and she as the principal knew that there was something else going on.

Hope Worsham ([15:35](#)):

And so, rather than immediately disciplining the student, she took the student to her counselor and her counselor was able to sit with the student, talk with them, talk about their actions, calm them down. And then when the child came back into the principal's office, they actually told the principal everything and more, told on themselves.

Hope Worsham ([15:54](#)):

And they together jointly developed a discipline plan. And the principal said the child was much harsher on themselves. "They wanted me to take away their recess for a week and I thought it was appropriate for a day," or whatever it was. And I think sometimes we forget that we all... I think about myself when I get mad, typically when I have time to cool down I think back and I'm like, "That was really dumb and I behaved inappropriately and I feel sorry for it." And a lot of our kids just don't have that guidance at home. Anyone ever telling them it's okay to have feelings and it's okay to get mad, but you got to deal with it appropriately.

Tammy Friend ([16:36](#)):

And by equipping our administrators and teachers with the tools to hand off to the students, then we're making progress. Definitely.

Hope Worsham ([16:47](#)):

Definitely.

Tammy Friend ([16:48](#)):

So... Well, thank you again, Hope.

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Hope Worsham ([16:50](#)):

You're welcome.

Tammy Friend ([16:51](#)):

Thank you so much. Good luck with wrapping up the first... Cohort 1, I wish you the best. I've gotten emails, even. Excited emails, "Hey, I need a book. I need a G.U.I.D.E. For Life book." Or, "When can I apply? I saw it, but I missed the deadline," when I've been at conferences and things.

Hope Worsham ([17:11](#)):

A lot of our goal is really trying to connect work because people hear about all this stuff across the agency. I mean, we've got a lot of good work going on. We've got the G.U.I.D.E. For Life, we've got Project AWARE, BX3, lots of work across the agency. So, our goal with Thrive is really to lay that foundation so that those other programs can really kind of fill their spot and be interconnected and not feel so disconnected in what we do.

Tammy Friend ([17:37](#)):

Well, thank you.

Hope Worsham ([17:38](#)):

Thank you.

Tammy Friend ([17:38](#)):

We appreciate the work you're doing.

Hope Worsham ([17:41](#)):

Thank you very much. Have a good day.

Tammy Friend ([17:42](#)):

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