

Sean Stowers:

Welcome to the BCEN and Friends Podcast. This episode, Brigid and Janie are going to be talking to Jeff Patterson, the CEO and founder of **Gaggle**. **Gaggle** is a student safety technology platform that works to protect over four million students every day from cyber bullying, self-harm and other threats to their well-being. Brigid and Janie, over to the both of you and Jeff, for what I'm sure is to be an informative discussion.

Brigid Flood:

Hello and welcome to BCEN and Friends podcast. I'm Brigid Flood, director of strategy and operations at BCEN. And I'm joined by my co-host, Janie Schumaker, executive director. Hey Janie.

Janie Schumaker:

Hey Brigid.

Brigid Flood:

As always, BCEN and Friends podcast is where we have interesting conversations around learning with a range of thought leaders, BCEN certification holders and industry professionals. And most importantly, to create value and insight for you, our professional nurses working across the emergency spectrum. We hope you find your discussions interesting, informative, sometimes funny, sometimes serious, but always valuable. Janie, today we have a new and very interesting friend with us, Jack Patterson. Jack's the CEO and founder of **Gaggle**. And since the beginning of his company, starting out as a student email provider in 1998, when email was barely a thing to now being focused on and having grown significantly helping schools create safe learning environments for their students.

Janie Schumaker:

Sounds amazing, Brigid.

Brigid Flood:

Yeah, I think this is going to be a really fascinating conversation. But if you wonder why Jeff chosen the name, **Gaggle**, they'll tell you his goal was to give teachers an easy way to watch over their gaggle of students. And I love that name. But his trends are growing and risky student behavior like bullying, mental health, school violence, self-harm or inappropriate photos being shared. **Gaggle** focuses on those trends by using their cutting-edge technology to help identify those students in crisis or most at risk. Jeff's vision of student-centered schools to safely inspire creativity, ingenuity remains the driving force in Gaggle's ongoing story. So, Janie, as you can tell in this episode, we'll touch on a really serious topic, but I think it's a topic that matters to all of us, whether we're parents or grandparents, relatives, professional or friends. But a little bit about Jeff, first. Jeff's an entrepreneur at heart. If you have a chance to speak with him, he has some really interesting stories about entrepreneurship. One of my favorites, which was starting a business out of an apartment you shared with Michael Dell. So, if you have a chance, maybe we can

hear a little more about that and some things. But Jeff's always been an entrepreneur. His mother loves to tell a story about the little four-year-old Jeff starting his first rap company. But unable to find investors when he first launched the company. Jeff now enjoys not having the boss for the past two decades. And he uses this freedom to express his creativity and sense of fun, all while help saving children. And so welcome, Jeff. We are so glad you're here.

Jeff Patterson:

Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Brigid Flood:

So, let's get started. This topic is so interesting. We have a plethora of questions for you, especially around the **Gaggle** mission. Can you tell us a little bit about how you came to start, **Gaggle**?

Jeff Patterson:

So, when I started **Gaggle** yeah, I was a young man. Right, I started **Gaggle** over 20 years ago. And you don't really think about the future in the same way that we do now. And even purpose is something that you have to find your purpose in life. I guess that's existentialism in a nutshell, right? When I was... This is 1998, I was at a Texas Computer Education Association conference. I had a little booth and there was people walking by and I was selling software that helped kids make multimedia. And I happened to ask a teacher if she was using email with their students. And she said, "No, no, no, my school district would never let my kids have an email address." And back then, I was already using email to collaborate with people from around the world to create wonderful products and to meet new people. And I thought, wow, this is this powerful tool for kids and it's all about writing and reading. And so, I asked her the why questions. "Well, why wouldn't you let your kids have an email address?" And so was all about the safety and security. Who are they going to talk to? What were they going to talk about? How do we know what's safe and being a young person? I decided, well, I can solve these problems.

And so, the initial version of **Gaggle** was Hotmail, where the teachers are in control. That's right. I was that was really it. And now our mission has evolved. We're very clear. Our mission is to ensure the safety and well-being of all schools and students.

Brigid Flood:

You know Jeff, it's fascinating. Just to even hear about how e-mail evolved because, you know, it's crazy what email is today. But since your focus is now about children and their safety. Can you tell us a little bit about what your organization has found out about these young people's behavior? Well, maybe some of the data points about these student issue you can tell us about.

Jeff Patterson:

Sure. So, we help protect about four and a half million students across the United States. I give you some statistics from this last school year

to give an idea of what we're seeing. So, we saw over 63,000 student references to depression, cutting and suicide.

And so, what's going on with our kids is they're very anxious and depressed. Right? And they don't know how to deal with these things. Right? Of those, 63,000, over 5,000 were emergency situations that we would say were references to actually suicide.

So that's how many of the most serious ones that we see in our students. You know, like students throughout time, young people don't understand the future. They think next week is the future.

So, they don't know how to sort of think about consequences and think about how things will change to how things will get better. And so, they some have a tendency to sort of overprocess, if you will.

They share what's going on with maybe a few of their friends, but those friends often don't know when they should bring things to adults. Right? They're so concerned about their friends and keeping their privacy and protecting their friendship that, you know, they might not they might be aware of a friend who's planning to kill themselves or to do it, commit a school shooting. And they won't tell anybody even though they know it's wrong. And then probably just to give you some context, when I talk about the depression and suicide ideation among our youth, every year we have this country, this is pre-COVID, over 6,000 students a year, 6,000 youth committed suicide. And that's students from the age twenty-four all the way down to the age of seven. And it's frightening to think that a seven-year-old would find a reason to take their own life and then be able to do so. But it happens. And the more frightening statistic for me is that over 3,000 students a day are attempting suicide. And we know that before someone successfully commits suicide, they attempted once or twice. And so, I've really seen this. This is really a tidal wave of youth suicide that was headed towards us as a culture even before COVID. Right. And I'm sure we'll talk about COVID later, but that that is not going to make things better.

Brigid Flood:

Yeah, those statistics are fascinating and kind of eye opening, actually. And I'm so glad there's an organization like yourself that's really kind of watching and safeguarding what these students are sharing.

Janie Schumaker:

Jeff, this is really some pretty sobering statistics that you just gave us. And, you know, as nurses, we certainly do learn a lot about suicide and suicidal ideation. And are certainly our priority when we discover this with what with a patient or somebody who comes into our care is to keep them, is to keep them safe. And you need to think about 6,000 of our youth successfully committing suicide annually in the United States is just really awful. So, I'm glad we're talking to you about this today. I think it occurs to me to ask you out of those, you know, 3,000

attempts that are going on and the 6,000 who are unfortunately successful, can you tell us about a time where with your organization, you've been able to intervene and change an outcome for a student?

Jeff Patterson:

I'd be glad to. To give you some statistics around that we constantly call lives saved a **Gaggle**. So, of those, you know, 5,000 suicide notes and ideation we found of those there were 927 this last school year that we thought were so clear with such a direct plan and a timeline and the means to kill themselves. And we call those a life saved. We're told by some of our school districts that the number is much, much higher than that because we don't hear about most of the outcomes. We might report something around a student who, you know, we only see the cutting. But there was a clear suicide plan that the parents in the school didn't know about. But here's really one of the powerful stories that that we had.

We had we worked at the school district up in Wisconsin that really cares about protecting all their students. And they've been partying with **Gaggle** for a number of years. One morning they had a high school girl who logged into her school, provided e-mail account. It happened to be g-mail. And she sent an email to her friend that said, "If you get this message, this is goodbye. You should go on living. I just can't." It went on to say, "I look down on you from heaven and I will strike down all of your bad boyfriends". So, we're sitting behind the school's digital tools, their email, their drive files, whatever the kids are creating and communicating on. Our system flags things that look suspicious. And we have people who work 24 hours a day to review those suspicious items. Our safety rep recognized this as a real threat. So, we called the school immediately. The school called the home thinking the girl was at home, but they also sent a resource officer out into the school building. When the officer went into the girl's bathroom, the officer found her hanging there in the school bathroom. And we're really proud of the fact that they saved her. And we're told it was within a minute of her passing away. So that's really one of the dramatic stories. They're not always that dramatic, but there are lots that are that dramatic. And so, it's real.

Janie Schumaker:

Wow. That is, that's really an amazing story. And I certainly hope that the young lady is doing better at this point in time. And, you know, Jeff, I think that as parents and grandparents or relatives of children or even just friends or family members, you know, I think we're all trying to pay attention to our kids, and we think we're on top of things. I think I think kids are often times really good at hiding some of these feelings and anxiousness and depression that you mentioned. You don't always know what's on their mind. So, I'm wondering Jeff, do you have any tips for those of us that may be close to kids or certainly those of us that are working in the nursing profession? What are some signs that you should really look for that we may be missing as we're interacting with these kids?

Jeff Patterson:

So, I think that the number one behavior that we're that we're seeing across the country that sort of indicates what's going on, our kids is cutting.

And, you know, I think we oftentimes as adults show, hey, we don't understand a why would you cut yourself? I can't I can't stand the sight of any blood, let alone my own blood. So, it's almost inconceivable to us. And so, we picture this as a very serious cutting. And it's not like that. It's more like scratches and small marks. Right. Kids will take a paperclip or a staple or the pencil that the eraser is no longer in and use the tip and they'll just scratch themselves. So, there's small, subtle marks, scratch marks, and they would be on the wrists really maybe even up further near your elbow. Right. So, they can hide it with, you know, long sleeves or maybe on the inside of their thighs. And they're doing this just to release relief, tension. And so, I would just be really cognizant and watchful for those scratch marks. And I think if you're a health care professional or really even any adults in their life, explain this, that you're there for them and you can be judgment free. And this is where I think nurses really come in handy because, you know, as parents, we can't help it but we're always trying to direct our kids and even judge our kids and try to get them to be better versions of themselves. And that can be overwhelming for us, for kids. But as a health care professional, you're there for them and their health and well-being and just communicate that, "Hey, this is a judgment free places are there anything going on with you that I could help with or I can just listen to" You can even say, "Do you feel like you're getting along well with your peers?" Right. "How are you getting along with your parents?" Right. Asking those questions and making it sort of a place where you're curious and maybe even starting with friends, "How are your friends doing? Are your friends doing well in the pandemic, or are they anxious and depressed?"

Sometimes it's easier for them to talk about their friends than themselves.

Janie Scumaker:

Thanks Jeff, those are some really great suggestions. I'm not sure I would think to look in those places that you mentioned were those small scratch marks are, but it sounds like there's really be a big clue as to what may be going on with older adolescents that are sitting in from of us. So, thank you for that great tip. Yeah. I think people all take something from that.

Brigid Flood:

Yeah, and I really like that also, Jeff. You know, your comments on how we talk to them, because I know you started out saying they don't often share what's going on in their world and they don't really know how to make sense of it other than what's happening now. And that's probably going to be the same going forward. And so that idea of asking them how their friends are doing is probably a great way to

start and in a non-threatening way to them. So, that's perfect advice. And I know you mentioned the pandemic, and I do think that, you know, it has changed the way students are going to school and parents are now becoming teachers.

So, what has your team found with it? Are there new challenges that are facing these kids going to school this way? And are there any other things we should be looking out for or talking to our children about?

Jeff Patterson:

So, I think with the initial faces the pandemic, some of the mental health issues sort of at least on the surface, relax. But my sense is they are growing and they're going to really get serious this fall because the kids will think there's almost no hope in sight. And honestly, my take on the situation is that most schools are not going to be going back to in-person until next fall. I hate saying that, but I think that's where we're at. So, as a parent, I have some pieces of advice. Right. So, the first piece of advice is to recognize that our students are not going to learn as much this year and not to blame the teacher, the administrators, they're doing the absolute best they can. They've been told, "Hey, look at that rock over there. I need you to make it fly. But you can't put wings on it or anything mechanical and you can't pick it up. But figure out how to make it all work." They can't make it work. Our kids are simply not going to learn as much this year as they have in the past. And we as adults and parents have to accept that. And I like to think of this as a gap year. Right. Except it is a gap year and that there are going to be other benefits and things that our kids can get out of this. Things like they might grow and learn. I'm trying to get my daughters to take a programming class. Right. They're resisting so far, but I think I'm wearing them down.

And then I think letting go of some of that, recognizing that they've lost so much. Right. No sports, no school, no prom, no graduation, no birthday parties. In some cases, no friends. I know some parents that are isolating their kids. You know we have to realize that they've lost so much. We need to focus on their mental health and well-being. That's the only thing that matters this year is making sure that our kids are safe and can grow up to be healthy adults and happy adults with meaningful lives.

Brigid Flood:

I love the idea of a gap year. Gap years didn't exist when I graduated from college but I love the whole concept of a gap year of take this moment to investigate and explore what's of interest to you, are creative to you, or learn a new skill like programming and I think if parents go in with that thought that year becomes very valuable and might be one of their best memories.

Jeff Patterson:

Let me share just a few other things about the kids, because this is this is the most important thing I really have to share. I think as adults,

we need to share with them the struggles we're going to have this fall when we get locked inside the house and the weather turns bad. They need to hear that we're open and honest about this. You know, you're going to be worried about you and your health. So, as nurses, you know, show them that the safety protocols at your work so they know that you're safe. They're worried about your state, your health, their health, their grandparent's health. Right. You need to share with them even if you're in a good financial state situation. Share that with them because they have friends whose parents are losing their job.

So, your kids are going to be worried about so many things. Give them ways to express it and give them the knowledge of where they're safe.

Brigid Flood:

It's also great advice because I think as adults, we tend to share those thoughts with each other. But it certainly makes sense to share it with your children because they are always worried about you and you have the least amount of control over it. So that's fabulous advice, actually. Anything else before we move to one of our favorite parts of this conversation, which is a rapid fire questions? Any other advice you'd like to share?

Jeff Patterson:

No. I think I'm ready. I think I'm ready for Rapid Fire.

Brigid Flood:

OK, here we go. What was one, at least one of the most meaningful moments you've had since founding **Gaggle**?

Jeff Patterson:

So, if I can do two, that's even better. So, one of my most meaningful moments, we were at a trade show in Philadelphia. It was a big trade show called Iffy and **Gaggle** threw a party for 3,000 teachers. We closed up two blocks. It was a superhero themed party. We had Thor and Wonder Woman and Batman and a couple others wandered around the party taking pictures with people. Right. We had different silly activities, right, where, you know, people could participate like superheroes. And then at the end of the night, we had this band called The Spazmatics play and The Spazmatics, they dressed like *Revenge of the Nerds* and do all the 80s cover songs and just, you know, 3,000 people just cheering on this band and being able to give people who are unsung heroes a great memory. That's something I loved. And then similar within the company, we do a couple of events a year. In one year, we did karaoke battles on a real stage and I get to see some of our employees who are kind of shy and again, those unsung heroes that just got on stage and sing their song and just seeing their fellow employees just sort of cheer for them and them to be a star that I loved.

Brigid Flood:

It is gold, actually. Do you actually sing karaoke?

Jeff Patterson:

Oh, so when I grew up and my family sang Happy Birthday, cats ran out of the house, and at one point I was in events, you know, we had a little bar and, you know, we're doing karaoke and Serena Williams came in with some friends and she was singing with everybody and everybody had a great time except for me. And I was just so disappointed that I took singing lessons just so I could learn to do karaoke. And I did sing. I did sing on that day at the office.

Brigid Flood:

That's great. Great answer to that first Rapid Fire question. Janie.

Janie Schumaker:

Jeff, I would love to know, so we're just so glad that you did this podcast with us. This is one of our more serious topics, but so very important. And I'm just wondering if you what's your one goal that you hope to achieve by doing this podcast with us?

Jeff Patterson:

Janie, why aren't you as nice as Brigid? I got the answer, give nearly two answers as one. You're just not being nice to me.

Janie Schumaker:

All right. You have two of them then.

Jeff Patterson:

Thank you. So, look, I have two goals, right? I think the primary goal that I hope to achieve is that message to parents. Right. Think of this as a gap year, focus on your students' mental health and wellbeing. That is my number one goal. Secondly for my company Gaggle. Look, we're protecting four and a half million students.

There are 55 million students in the United States. And I know for every 100,00 students how many suicides, how many bullying incidents, how many other things that we would uncover. I would like to reach more schools so we can help more students.

Janie Schumaker:

Yeah. Those are both really great. Really great goals. I would love to see you reach more students as well, especially after listening to what you've been telling us about the data you uncover. Sounds like your technology is super important.

My last Rapid Fire question for you, Jeff. We always like to ask, tell us about your favorite book when it has changed you or helped shape you into the person that you are today. What book would you recommend from your perspective?

Jeff Patterson:

So, there's a book I read six months ago. I read it once, then reread it a second time and took notes. And I took the author's master class

online, so, it's from the FBI's lead hostage negotiator, Chris Voss. It's called *Never Split the Difference* and one of Chris' statement is "Even a hostage negotiator deserves to be heard and understood, maybe not sympathized with, but understood." And so, it's all about how to basically show up better and in everything in life as a negotiation in how you listen to other people. Right, and there's some great techniques around hearing and labeling and accusation audits, all these things that I've learned to incorporate into my interactions with my coworkers and with my family and my kids so that I can I can understand them better and that is really changed how I'm showing up to everybody.

Janie Schumaker:

Wow, that's incredible. We are getting just the best reading lists from these podcasts. Brigid, I just love this. And Jeff, this sounds like an amazing book. I don't see how any of us could not benefit from some of those practices you just talked about. Sounds amazing.

Jeff Patterson:

But it's such a fun book, too, because here, the stories are interspersed along here. And so, it's an easy read because, you know, it's not a teacher. Well, it's a teaching book. Those stories really make it come alive for the individual.

Janie Schumaker:

Yeah, I love a book that illustrates your stories. That's always so much easier to read. We'll have to check that out. Jeff, I want to ask you, if our audience would like to follow you, learn more about you, where can they find you online or are you on social media and we can follow you there?

Jeff Patterson:

So, our Web site is Gaggle.net. You know, that's Gaggle, like a gaggle of geese. You can find us on Twitter and follow us on Twitter. You can follow us on LinkedIn. And if you mention this, you got to reach out to me and connect on LinkedIn. Just mentioned this podcast, and I'll go ahead and accept. You mention that a note and, you know, I try to post things on LinkedIn several times a week, and a lot of what I try to do is to help other people. Right. So, I'll post open jobs because I know there's so many people who've been laid off and, you know, quite honestly are losing hope. And so, I want to give people some hope by sharing what jobs I'm aware of that are out there.

Janie Schumaker:

Excellent. Thank you so much.

Brigid Flood:

That's great, Jeff. I think I'm going to do the LinkedIn right after this episode. I really want to thank you for taking this time, Jeff, for joining this episode of BCEN and Friends.

It's been a while a serious topic, really invaluable information that you shared. So, a big thanks.

Jeff Patterson:

You're welcome.

Brigid Flood:

Can't thank you enough. And so, for everyone else, we hope you'll continue to tune in as we go on with this series and bring you new and impactful content and perspectives. And as always, if you have a suggestion for an episode, please, please email us at BCEN@BCEN.org.

I'm Brigid Flood here with Janie Shoemaker and on behalf of the entire BCEN team, we thank you. We celebrate you for all that you're doing as professional nurses across the emergency spectrum and until next time.