

**Introduction Guest (Unknown):**

Hi, welcome to BCEN and Friends podcast. Today in the first of a two-part podcast, Janie Schumaker and Brigid Flood speak with Jonny Boucher, the founder of *Hope for the Day*, who through his coffee shop, Sip of Hope, in Chicago's Logan Square, has been letting others know that it's OK not to be OK. One cup, one conversation at a time. Now over to Brigid Flood, who will get an insight from Jonny on what the phrase "It's OK not to be OK," truly means and how he and his organization, *Hope for the Day* is changing the way we deal with mental illness and suicide prevention.

**Brigid Flood:**

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

**Janie Schumaker:**

Hi, Brigid.

**Brigid Flood:**

BCEN and Friends podcast is where we hold interesting conversations about learning with a wide range of thought leaders BCEN certification holders and industry professionals. But most importantly, to create value and insight for you, our professional nurses across the emergency spectrum. We hope you find their discussions interesting, informative, sometimes funny, sometimes serious, but always valuable. So, Janie, our guest today is Jonny Boucher. Jonny is truly a cool guy with a cool purpose. At a very early age of 13 years old, he got involved in the music industry by putting on punk metal shows in order to create community spaces where people felt that they could belong and fast forward to today, Jonny is the CEO and founder of *Hope for the Day*, which is a nonprofit movement, empowering the conversation and suicide prevention in mental health education. His purpose and vision is to lead the global conversation on proactive prevention in order to create a cultural shift and how we approach mental health in our communities. What happened in 2010 was a catalyst moment. Jonny's boss and mentor, Mike Scheindlin, a music festival promoter, committed suicide. He was the ninth person Jonny personally knew to pass this way. And for Jonny this was the final straw moment and what finally pushed him to take action. *Hope for the Day* was created as a way to not only remember Mike, but for friends and family members who have died by suicide. And in addition to all the good works that *Hope for the Day* provides, we've also started *A Sip of Hope*. *A Sip of Hope* is the world's first coffee shop, where 100 percent of the proceeds support corrective suicide prevention and mental health education. His coffee shop is a perfect space for breaking that silence and having the conversation. Jonny and his team want to create a world where everyone understands, "It's OK not to be OK," and I absolutely love that line. So, Jonny, welcome. We are so thrilled to have you today.

**Jonny Boucher:**

Thanks for having me. Good morning and good day. You know?

**Brigid Flood:**

Absolutely. So, I hope I did you proud with that introduction.

**Jonny Boucher:**

It was fantastic.

**Brigid Flood:**

Great but we're going to get a little more into it and where I'd like to start is your journey. You know, your journey getting to *Hope for the Day* and your journey at the *Hope for the Day*. If we could, start there.

**Jonny Boucher:**

Yeah, absolutely. I love sharing that. I was born in Peoria, Illinois and my parents quickly moved up to the northwest Chicago suburbs, you know, at the age of one. So, I don't really remember that. But the thing that my family always really, really pushed was community and family. My mom came from northern Wisconsin. My dad came from Peoria. Both from very big families, both dysfunctional families. My parents loved to say that they put the 'fun' in dysfunctional. They had that literally when you walk in their house. But growing up, you know, my dad's family, you know, I felt was really diverse because French and Filipino was what was going on in my dad's house. My grandmother was from Manila and she met my grandfather when he was on break from war and really stirred the pot when he came back to Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, with a Filipino wife in a very, very predominant white American family.

And that was kind of the start of embracing community for the Boucher. Fast forward to me being born and raised in a very diverse community. A lot of my dad's friends were black. A lot of my mom's family were very open with their struggles and we always just felt like we had a revolving door when it came to the people that were part of our sphere of influence in our community and my parents really, really embodied this mentality that we can talk about the good things, we could talk about the bad things, and that if somebody needs help, we got to talk up about it so we can all help address those things, because both of my parents are very well versed and experienced when it comes to having friends; having many different hardships and then having to lean in and help, because that's part of what they always felt that they had to do. So, when I was 13, I wanted to really develop my own sense of community. So, I started booking punk rock shows, in the Chicago land area and what started in some friends' basements and backyards, which eventually led to Knights of Columbus halls being rented out and then going to real big venues all the way to the city of Chicago, where we were doing shows for, you know, anywhere from a thousand people to 4000 people a night.

It was just so much fun because we were bringing people together for that sense of community that music really allows us to do and we go

to a show, we connect with people we maybe have never met before but we have one thing in common: we love music.

But the more that we talk about things, the more that we realize we have in common and the more that I put on shows as I was going through high school and eventually into college, the more doors I opened and the more people I was exposed from around the country and around the world and as we know, the more doors we open, the more tragedy we see, too, in those communities. And so, when I started working with my boss, Mike, we were doing predominantly Christian and adult contemporary shows, which I'm not a really religious person. I believe religion is as a very individual journey that allows us to live through. And I know some people are believers and people aren't believers. I like to build tables and chairs and allow people to have a seat at the table. So, you know, I'm a, I guess you can say what we do is the Lord's work. We work with the sinners and the saints at *Hope for the Day*, but it's because my mentality has always been community focus. And just because maybe I didn't care for some of the music that we were putting on when I was working for Mike, the sense of community in that value that it brings on the days that we don't have the concerts and we don't have the good fun events is really important because that's where we see our backbone of support comes from.

But in 2010, I was actually down in Mexico with my father working on a project, a passion project of tequila, which that we are working on and I got a phone call from my coworker, Shane, a dear friend of mine, and he said, "Hey, man, I got to talk to you," and I said, "What's up?" He's like, "I don't know how to say this other than just being honest with you. Mike jumped off his fifth-floor balcony in Chicago." And I was in poor Swale in Mexico, which is a very, very small, small town and I had all the air and the oxygen ripped from my lungs and my heart.

They believed in me in a way, in the sense of, you know, working in the music industry, where when you're putting on festivals with 40, 50 thousand people and I'm in charge of over a hundred thousand dollar marketing budget to make sure everyone gets there, you know there's empowerment there, and there's also responsibility.

And what that made me really drive towards was wanting to become like Mike one day, like really ultimately be like Mike, whether it's Michael Jordan or as Mike Scheindlin I feel. And Mike Scanlon taught me a lot in the music industry. He taught me a lot about life, and I feel like I had the opportunity to talk to him and teach him about some things in life because Mike was, he struggled, but he was open with his struggles and he didn't struggle from a mental health perspective. He struggled from a vice perspective. He had a bad relationship with alcohol, cocaine and is very promiscuous and one day, as a staff member of his, I was very honest with him that I felt like he was making some bad decisions, that eventually would catch up with him

and anytime, he changed his act for a while and he hunkered down. He got married. He had a baby.

But I didn't know all the things that I found out after Mike had took his life; what he was really battling, it's showed me as a whole, "Wow. This is a huge issue" and not just because we lost somebody, but the amount of things that he had put himself into, the amount of debt that he had put into it, it was mind boggling and knowing that he was trying to handle it all alone. It made sense then why Mike struggled and why his vices became his burdens and eventually he felt the need to leave this earth too early. But that day changed my life entirely because I couldn't do anything to help. I had to sit in Port de Swalé, Mexico. I had to let myself cry and let myself feel these feelings and go talk to my dad. And then after that, I had to try to put together a marketing meeting together to try to get a 15-million-dollar deal for this tequila company that also that same day did not go through and I thought, "Wow, how much worse could this day be?" And so, I did what anyone would do, I drank all the tequila and it was good tequila because I didn't wake up with a hangover the next day. The next day, I actually woke up very ambitious and I told my dad I wanted to leave Mexico a day early.

And he said that I he felt that I needed to go sit out on the patio and just have some time for myself. I did and I accidentally locked myself on that patio for four hours until someone was able to come back and get a key that could open up the door so I can get back safely in the house. So needless to say, I had a lot of time to think about that while also craving, you know, water and nourishment, because I had drank my weight and many others weight in that tequila the night prior to take care of some of my pain.

But I had a clear vision that I wanted to change what I was doing with my life. And I was young. I was 24 years old. I had just graduated college and I felt like I could go do whatever I want, and I challenged myself to think, "What is my footprint? What is my footprint in this world and what can I do?" And so, I got back to Chicago. I started writing on a piece paper how many people I lost to suicide and Mike is number nine on that list of 16, which is just it's like having a very bad golf swing, you know, that you never want to talk about yet, you got to do something with it to improve the situation. So, I decided that, you know, I wanted to start an organization to help people talk about these things, because the one thing that I started realizing my deep dive on how mental health had impacted me was the fact that everyone who I lost didn't want to talk about it. They masked it with certain things and so, I was like, "Well, we need to start this conversation and we need to build bridges to people to get resources."

And it automatically energized me every single day to the point where I left the music industry. I stopped doing artist management. I stopped doing concerts. I took all the money that I made, and I put in a bank account and every month I just chipped away at my bills and I didn't complain about it. I decided that day forward that I was going to

change what I was doing, what my output was, and I wanted my or a why to no longer serve others nor my own personal pocket.

I wanted to really be something that served the community, that needed to hear a message that "It's OK to not be OK," and from there, it was just how do we start the conversation? And so, 2011, when we when we became a 501C3, it was green light go, research and development; finding out where our place was because then we are part of the mental health community.

We're not the only shop in town nor in this country but I realize that within that world of growing this organization, that I couldn't just, you know, worry about Chicago. I couldn't just worry about the state of Illinois.

Mental health is a global conversation and if we think about it, it has been in the same deep dark corner that cancer, HIV, all these other diseases that, you know, mental health sits within. They sit there until we pull them out of that closet, which allows us to really unmask the reality behind what's really going on. But for me, I just felt like if I could be a part of the puzzle, not the entire puzzle, that together we could build the puzzle for, you know, people in Chicago, people in Illinois and people across America and eventually be able to, you know, be it be a contributor to this message going on around the world. And in 2014, we started doing outreach nationwide. We started doing outreach in Europe and then we just started copying, pasting every year to where we added on Australia. We added on more regions and territory within the U.K. and in Europe. We added on places in Africa where we're going to do our work because it doesn't matter where we go, we're talking to human beings and that's the biggest thing, is that as scary as this conversation is, we're all experiencing life and mental health isn't just the bad days. It's the good days, too. And the biggest issue that I saw was that no one knows how to talk about mental health. So, we decided to empower and embark on our own education model that is clinically back and peer led. But it allows us to not just go in and wave this flag; it allows us to go in, wave this flag, put out the resources that are available in that community, show the resources that are available in this country because we all have friends and family that are all going through things. But also, then put the next step, how to have a conversation, educate people, because in a world where stigma rules everything around us, I need to, you know, let others understand that we've neglected this conversation. But here's the conversation. Here's a digestible version.

It's not if you're depressed, call this number. It's... this is what good days and bad days look like. This is what some care looks like, because then we can get to a better baseline of understanding what depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, PTSD all look like in reality, instead of just reading it from a book and coming up with our own assumptions. And that also is. Is there to say that by doing all this, we're inviting people to the table to share their experience

because that's more important than reading out of a book these days. It's how you all get through it.

**Brigid Flood:**

That's what I love about what you're doing. It's not you know, here's a phone number if you're experiencing these things, call. It is people are getting involved with each other, which I think is just truly amazing, Jonny.

**Jonny Boucher:**

Absolutely. We need people. We need people in this world. Even on the days where we're like, "Maybe I'm more introverted and extroverted," it's like, you know, we all need 'us' time. But at the same time, we all need people and people come into our lives for very, very different reasons, specific reasons. But sometimes we don't know why until years down the road, when you get a phone call from someone saying, "Hey, I'm having a rough day. Can I talk to you?" Or you're on the other side of that coin and you're having a rough day and you feel that, you know, the only person you can talk to is maybe someone who at one point time shared their experience about, you know, about being impacted and my story has two sides of it, you know, being impacted and losing people.

But then also being diagnosed with PTSD in 2018, I had to challenge myself to also face the same issues that we fight against: stigma, being a man and not feeling welcome to talk about it. I had to dismantle my own stigma and my own life to go ask for the help because I didn't serve this country, you know from a military perspective. People say that I served the country in many different ways, but I haven't stepped up to the plate like a lot of our men and women, individuals who have gone to fight for this country, who traditionally because, you know, stigma tells us what is reality. Right. That's B.S., like but we are you know, I drive into the city every day and I see this billboard that says, you know, "We are fighting against the fight against PTSD" for the military.

And it's like, well, there's many people in the world that are, you know, why they're walking around diagnosed or undiagnosed with PTSD, because that's trauma. That's not just something you get for putting on a uniform and going to fight it on the front lines for this country. There's many different things, but, I, at the same time felt like, "Well, I'm not, you know, at a place where I can say that I've done something so courageous as like serving my community. So I'm not the same," when in reality, like me being an individual who has reached, you know, has diagnosed with PTSD and maybe a veteran who has PTSD, we have something in common, but we have individually unique stories and how we got to that tragedy. And that's important, that's important that we honor that, too.

**Brigid Flood:**

Yes, I think this story is really important. I want to shift this dialogue just a little, slightly to the right or the left. I'm not sure which but, you

know, we talk about these dialogs with our friends and our family. I want to talk about the workplace and what that means in the workplace when typically, we're trying to be nice and correct and what does that dialog look like for you? What advice would you give us?

**Jonny Boucher:**

Yes. Well, you know, for the workplace, it's really important that if you are someone who is living with a mental health illness or are challenged with one, that you're open and honest with your colleagues about that so we can all be helpful in your success if you do experience something while being at work. Right. But at the same time, that also normalizes it for others who might be struggling and then from there, you're able to build better pathways and resources to, you know what H.R. and what your company, you know, provides for you versus also what's available in your community, just because, again, there's a stigma about going to H.R. and asking for help or calling EAP number, which is all B.S. We know very well because one of our many education programs is there is one that's focused on workplace mental health and what it looks like from a corporate standpoint, from a small business standpoint, too, because we are all working so hard right now, even more than ever, and pivoting and being from home. Right, like, you know, some of us might have to become teachers now for our kids when we thought there is other people in this world to do that.

**Brigid Flood:**

That's right.

**Jonny Boucher:**

But it's all about being able to understand that you're hopefully working for a company who embraces the culture that allows you to talk freely and won't use it against you. But we also recognize that, sadly, that is not reality for a lot of people and that, you know, it's going to take time but we're in a place now more than ever for a time to allow that. While those conversations, especially in 2020, where, you know, if it was a movie, it would be called, "No, we're gonna talk about this," and so I feel that when we are able to have constructive conversations about what's going on and whether it's in our homes or in our workplace, we're able to open up opportunities for growth and team building if you're in an office. Just by being open with how you feel and being that one who is courageous and that's what we really aim for with our education, is that you're able to look on how you're taking care of yourself and then how you can take care of others because we got to also realize that we as human beings are stretched thin right now.

We're all going through like the digital, you know, social media death scrolls every day is to kind of like avoid maybe at work or just, you know, whatever is going on, because we're built in this digital age and it's important that we do take time for ourselves, a productive time. And that's where we really dove in with, like, self-care and what those tools look like because if those tools aren't working, then we can go to

the next step of saying, "Well, this is how you talk to a counselor or therapist," but we need to get to a baseline in society and it's so important that our workplaces really empower this conversation because it's horrible when you lose someone to suicide. But also, at the same time, when it comes to the workplace, we also have data that allows us to build a need that shows also the people that are just focusing on the PNL and how the company is doing and what the financial impact looks like if one of your staff to take the life, unfortunately.

**Brigid Flood:**

Thank you for that. So, one of the things you know, it's all about the covers having the conversation, which is important. And when I read, you know, "It's okay to not be okay," I originally read it as if I feel not being okay is normal and I'm probably going to talk about it right now not to want to talk about things that you don't feel are normal. And is that your understanding of what you mean by it's okay not to be okay?

**Jonny Boucher:**

Yeah. One hundred percent. So, we are you know, we're the ones who are like the origin of where that saying came from and it's because I wanted, you know, our theory of meeting people where they're at and how we're expecting me. You think about it, my background in marketing, I would never put, "If you're depressed, come talk to us." We need to throw that this is out there and I think it's these little things, because what we have found with "It's OK to not be OK," is that people interact with that message, so different and individually all the time and that's beautiful. It's kind of like what Dave Grohl said when Foo Fighters played Wembley Stadium for the first time, he sang out to eighty eight thousand people and they sang back for eighty eight thousand different reasons and that's the glory that we had with, "It's okay not to be OK," when we do outreach with our partners at Live Nation out of many of their concert and festival grounds. People will see our tent from far away because we are good at what we do. But it's to get them there, not to come and make a donation. It's to come have a conversation and that conversation can be about, "Wow, I'm struggling. You guys got some research." Yes, we do. "Wow. I have a friend who's struggling. You certainly have some resources." Yes, we do. One more. We have education opportunities. We're also just there to be an ear to bend because why do people show up at concerts? Right. Go get away from life. We can do that by being present but support them. So, when they hear that next song, or they hear that track that when they saw that artist, or they just are having a bad day. What was that tent, that *Hope for the Day*? They said, "It's OK to not be OK," and then they can Google it. Right. The power of technology then becomes helpful to this and that's really where we get to shine is just by simply meeting people where they're at and not we're they're expected to be, and our work proves that. That's why we are in the coffee business. We work with craft breweries all around the country. We work with different lifestyle avenues to get in front of people, to meet them where they're at because, sure, alcohol is a depressant, but my uncle drank himself to



that. He's one of the 16 people. I would rather go work with the liquor industry to talk more to people that were just like my uncle. Maybe by way of their product or something strategically like that, where we still invite them to have a conversation, but we don't punish them for maybe having alcohol be what they're leaning on right now. It's the same thing with people who maybe have eating disorders who either are on both sides of that coin. You know, like we need to understand that we can meet people where they're at and invite them to feel welcome because if not, all we're going to get is people feeling like they're a stray animal getting pushed into a corner and that is not healthy for their success if they are experiencing some mental health issues.

**Brigid Flood:**

You know, that's amazing, because I think what you're doing is meeting them where they're at, not them trying to have to find help and so, your community outreach is, I think, innovative and truly awesome. And I'm still hoping to get to the *Sip of Hope* because it's around the corner for me.

**Introduction Guest (Unknown):**

Thank you for listening to today's podcast with Jonny Boucher. It is so interesting that he found through his law, some pain and how he could truly make a difference in this unpredictable world we live in today. Join us next time where we'll speak with Jonny about how we can support one another through these trying times.