Low-Key, High Impact

Profile: Brian Wiley, Upper School Counselor

By Mary Ellen Collins

When Brian Wiley arrived at Shorecrest last fall, he quickly developed a reputation as one of the most accessible people on campus. "He exudes a palpable sense of approachability for students, faculty and staff," says Al Irwin, Ninth Grade Dean and Upper School Spanish teacher. "He's authentic. And he listens to understand, not to reply. People who talk to him feel heard."

In addition to offering individual mental health counseling for Upper School students, Brian has created and facilitated additional group activities to support their overall well-being. His professional interest came into focus as an undergraduate at Juniata College, where he combined psychology, sociology and elementary education into a major called Human Dynamics.



"I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do until I got a paid position in college to help kids with their homework at a community center. I was seeing kids who had a lot of trauma at home and they were just so sad, they couldn't get their work done. That was what led me in the direction of counseling. That and the fact that I saw what happened when family members and friends had mental illness that went undiagnosed. I didn't want that for myself, or anyone else."

After earning a master's degree in school and mental health counseling from the University of Pennsylvania, he embarked on a career that included positions as a family-based therapist; an addiction counselor; lead therapist at The Center for Autism; and most recently, as a member of Solebury School's counseling team.

Last year, he decided it was time for a change. "I'd gotten a taste of the independent school environment, and I liked feeling that my voice mattered. Shorecrest gave me that. When I visited, everyone was very welcoming. I met with a group of students who grilled me with questions. I'm a big Philadelphia sports fan and I'd worn some of my gear … and I liked the fact that the students felt comfortable enough to trash talk me," he says with a laugh.

His informal manner and always-open door help him connect with high schoolers. Members of the ninth grade class in particular have gravitated to Brian and his office as a welcoming respite between classes.

"We met him on the first day of school," says Ella Mathews '28. "We were trying to find a special teacher and a place we could hang out during our break in the morning. He had a very chill vibe, and his room was really chill—he doesn't turn on the overhead lights, he just has little lamps around, with couches and comfortable chairs that create a really comforting atmosphere. He's a very kind, helpful person … and when I had an issue with a few of my friends once, we had a group session with him and we got to a good place."

Brian enjoys working with this age group and says, "They're cool people. They're more independent, and some of them are actually active participants in their own mental health. I really want to help them develop the skills and tools they need to be successful."

Academic pressure is the most frequent reason that students seek him out. "Social and academic pressure have always been an issue

"Life is so much bigger than academics. I want every student to feel comfortable talking to me about anything."

— Brian Wiley

***Photos: (Top)** Brian Wiley chats with a group of students in the Class of 2028. **(Bottom)** Brian and the Upper School Administrative team working collaboratively.*

[but] it's very complicated and more complex now," he says. "Their own voices amplify the voices they hear around them. I hear 'It will look good on my resumé' a lot, and I tell them not to do something for that reason, but because they're passionate about it."

Myra Simpson, Shorecrest's Director of College Counseling, appreciates Brian's attentiveness to the students' overall well-being. "The teenage years can be very challenging … and he's really making sure the students are tending to their mental health. We have a science teacher who offers guided meditation and relaxation techniques during exam times; and Brian encourages the kids to take advantage of that."

His new initiatives include peer-led discussions on topics suggested by the students, where they can have a safe place to talk about their experiences. The group topics have included "Life as a Black Student at a Predominantly White School" and "Life as an LGBTQ student at Shorecrest."

As faculty advisor for the Mental Health Matters Club, he helped bring in Daryl Bellamy, an international motivational speaker who talks to students about going from "fearful to fearless." He's also helping Damarion Feaster '26, create a mentorship program for students of color in the Lower School.

"We want to create a community of color for them," says Damarion. "It's called the Guiding Lights Club, and we have enough Upper School volunteers to mentor the other students one-on-one." Damarion also participated in the peer-led group for black students, and says, "For me, personally, Brian is another man of color on campus for me to talk to. He's there for everyone."



Brian is committed to be a trusted person on campus who offers a willing ear, sound advice, and an occasional reality check to anyone who needs it. "Life is so much bigger than academics," he says. "I want every student to feel comfortable talking to me about anything." And that's an invaluable resource for anyone who walks through his open door.

