



Migrants, Treatment, Sex, Juuling & Fitness

Stories and images on the health of South Florida's young and old



Photo by Miami Montage staff

MIAMI MONTAGE 2018: (front row, from left) Chloe-Amelie Aikman, Nyah Hardmon, Isaac Grossman, Steven Lee, Ian Krupkin, (middle) Nicole Schwyn, Allesandra Inzinna, Taisa Strouse, Kennedy McKinney, Nuha Islam, Alexandra Sansone, Carolina Niebla, Mariam Vela, Brianna Naderpour, Olivia Solomon, (back) Ruben Escobar, Zachary Letson, Devin Dubon, John Folsom, Joseph Fernandez

University of Miami PEACE SULLIVAN/ JAMES ANSIN HIGH SCHOOL WORKSHOP IN JOURNALISM AND NEW MEDIA

Miami Montage is reported and produced by high school students attending the Peace Sullivan/James Ansin High School Workshop in Journalism and New Media, hosted by the School of Communication at the University of Miami.

Major Support

Peace Sullivan; Ansin Family Foundation (James Ansin)

Contributors

Jeanne Bellamy Scholarship in Print Journalism Fund at The Miami Foundation; John T. Bills Scholarship in Journalism Fund at The Miami Foundation; Mupalia Wakhisi Scholarship Fund

Other Support

Dow Jones News Fund; the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, University of Miami School of Communication; Miami New Times

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Special Thanks

University of Miami; Gregory Shepherd, dean of the University of Miami School of Communication; Reiter and Associates, LLC, Robin Reiter-Faragalli, principal; Tomas Ortiz; Tonya Sautier; Austin Thaler; Gabriel Brackman; Jackie Corea; Tod Landess; Elena Fajardo, Patti and Allan Herbert Wellness Center; Frances Freire; Luis Herrera; Associated Printing Productions, Inc.

WSVN 7 News

Lily Pardo, public service coordinator

In Memoriam

Miami Montage is published in perpetual memory of Mupalia Wakhisi



ON THE COVER: In this photo by Taisa Strouse, a volunteer case worker counsels a young boy who was with his parents at an immigrant know-your-rights presentation in rural Indiantown. Immigrants got free health care advice and legal counsel.

WHERE HIP IS COOL: Sabrina Herrera, the president of Health Information Project at the Maritime Science and Technology Academy, says peer-to-peer teaching is essential for teen mental health.

Photo by
Joseph
Fernandez

Curriculum reboot

Local students teach one another about mental well-being

BY NYAH HARDMON

Cypress Bay High School

Growing up, high school senior Sabrina Herrera was constantly told not to discuss mental health issues, especially not in public.

"In my family, my parents never talked about that sort of thing," Herrera said. "If I would have told them I'm depressed they would have been like, 'No, you're not.' Just complete denial."

Now, as the incoming president of Maritime and Science Technology Academy's (MAST) Health Information Program (HIP), Herrera teaches mental health issues to hundreds of students. The program uses peer health educators to guide freshmen and sophomores on taboo health subjects, with a special focus on mental well-being.

Because of budget cuts, staff shortages and changing graduation requirements, health education is no longer required at high schools in Miami-Dade County. HIP fills this gap by replacing health education with a high school club equipped with older teen role models, paving the way for better decision-making and open discussions about complex psychological topics.

"All parents want to help their children, but they don't understand how

to communicate," said Herrera, 17. "We understand what it's like to be in [the student's] position because we were just there going through the same thing. There's no way parents remember exactly what it was like at this age."

HIP is in 56 Miami-Dade County high schools and has worked with more than 150,000 students. Club advisers give student leaders the liberty to run discussions and educate peers about topics from nutrition to depression with minimal adult interference.

"We're not giving them elaborate definitions that they could find in a psychology textbook," Herrera said. "We're explaining it in a way we know they can understand because we understand it ourselves."

Peers such as rising MAST senior Gabrielle Yamar put up posters with positive messages and provide students a website of health case resources.

"I think what makes [HIP] so effective is that we are constantly told to not talk about depression or bulimia, and HIP throws that out the window by providing kids with so much new information on subjects that they know so little about," Yamar said.

Anxiety and stress are two topics that HIP instructors focused on this year because of their prevalence. Addressing issues at an early stage, mentors provide ways to combat mental struggles and stop them from worsening.

"In ninth grade, you're entering what's like a new world for the first time," Yamar said. "Advanced classes and extracurriculars make

you overstress and overcompensate, so we teach them how to cope with this. If you have a healthy mind and build mental strength, you can avoid a lot of poor decisions."

Herrera is familiar with the process — on both ends.

"I was always the shoulder to cry on but would never cry on someone else's. Other health classes would tell me to talk to my parents, but sometimes parents don't want to admit there's a problem. HIP helped me get through my depression by giving me someone to talk to."

Rising MAST senior and incoming HIP Vice President Diego Garcia believes delving into mental health challenges the perception that mental conditions are less important than physical ones at an early age.

"Mental health is probably the most important module that we teach," Garcia said. "When we talk about mental health, we are very keen on hitting every point. If you miss a point, you can mess up a kid's life. For example, if you don't talk about how depression can come in different forms, that it's not just some quiet kid in a corner, then they could never get the help they need."

During the summer, Garcia and Herrera work with other board members to prepare new peers, all of whom must complete an eight-hour workshop to learn the curriculum and classroom management.

Kristen Cope, one of the program's first peers, worked alongside founder and CEO Risa Berrin, who started the organization after identifying a lack of health education in her community. Unlike other curricula, HIP integrated a topic that was rarely addressed in academic settings: mental health.

When Cope joined as a Miami Palmetto Senior High sophomore, HIP was in only one other high school, Gulliver.

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HIP Throughout the Years

In the past nine years, the Health Information Project (HIP) has grown from a two-school experiment to a comprehensive program covering 56 Miami-Dade County high schools, and peer instructing 33,000 ninth and tenth graders.

Over HIP's history, the program has reached several key milestones in health education.

150K

Youth worked with

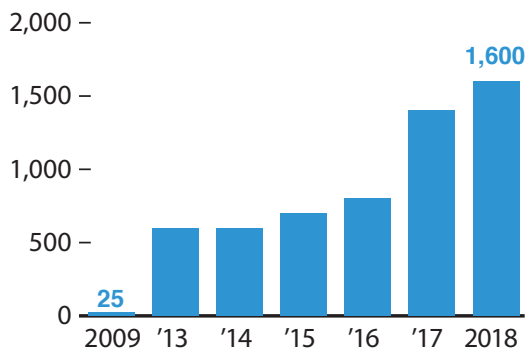
120K

High schoolers worked with

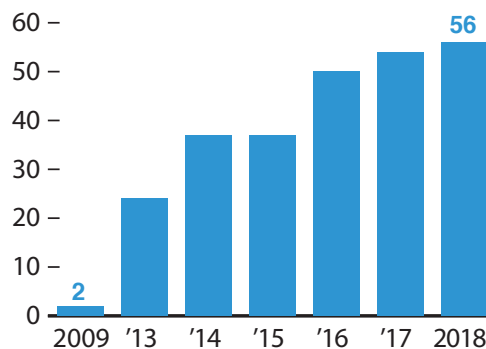
23

Sponsors

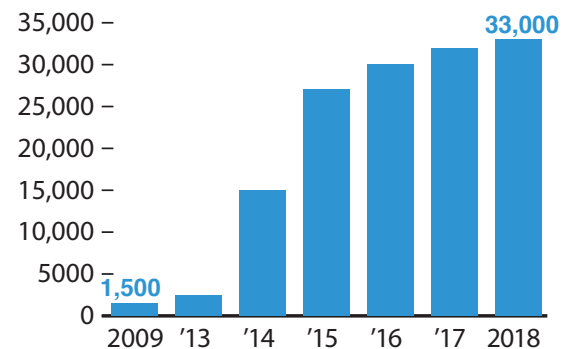
Peer Health Educators



Participating Schools



9th and 10th Graders Instructed



Source: behip.org

Credit: Nyah Hardmon

"We started anonymous Q and A's throughout the school that instructors could answer during sessions for those who were more shy," Cope said. "It allowed kids to recognize that they were allowed to talk about this stuff and let them know how to get help if they needed it."

At MAST, HIP launched in 2016, after the suicide of freshman Zach Gustinger. The program was brought in the next year to cope with the death and educate students on handling psychological problems.

"I think that his death was a main reason HIP was brought to our school because administration saw how heartbroken the kids were, and there was no one to help them," Herrera said. "The effects of bringing in HIP were almost immediate. It helped them understand what happened and how to prevent it."

Cope said she'd like to see HIP spread to other schools across the state and nation. In fact, she helped brainstorm HIP in A Box, a concept that makes the health curriculum so detailed it could be put in a box and shipped anywhere.

Child psychologist Sarah Ravin believes programs like HIP should spread to more schools across South Florida, especially in classrooms with young students.

"Mental health should be taught at an earlier age than adolescence, preschool even," Ravin said. "Kids who get help early for mental health issues are much more likely to recover versus people who wait years and years before getting help."

Pediatric psychologist Amanda Strunin agreed.

"Teens want to feel heard, and bottling emotions in can lead to more serious health consequences," Strunin said. "Research shows

that peer group discussions and programs led by teens and focused on relevant issues like body positivity and self-esteem have a positive effect on well being."

As much as HIP has provided a positive health outlet for students across Miami-Dade

County, the program still faces challenges.

Age differences and immaturity can become a hindrance to the process.

"It's frustrating because I just want to shake them and tell them that this is for you, we're doing this all for you," Herrera said. "But I know that won't help anything. That's what a teacher would do. So I just smile, continue the lesson and hope they see the point eventually."



Teen health up in smoke

Juuling runs rampant in South Florida

BY CAROLINA NIEBLA

Maritime & Science Technology Academy

Sammi Lawrence remembers going into the bathroom with her friends and seeing them pull out their Juuls. They offered her a hit that triggered an uncontrollable cough, the smoke burning her throat.

Little did she know she would soon be addicted to that burn.

"It's for sure an addiction. I've tried and tried to stop but it's not possible," said the 17-year-old high school senior at Coral Glades High School.

An alternative way of smoking, the highly addictive e-cigarette, 'Juul,' has become widely used by teenagers since its release in 2015.

Teens under 18, prohibited by law from buying and using Juuls, have started inhaling from this nicotine and chemical-filled smoke device without being aware of the potential health risks.

The high amounts of nicotine in the Juul products compared to cigarettes are causing teens as young as 11 to become highly addicted.

"It takes me about three days to get through a Juul pod," said Lawrence, referring to the cartridge that holds the vape juice containing nicotine.

In one week, she goes through about two pods — or the equivalent of smoking more than two packs of cigarettes a week.

"The Juul is the product in our store that contains the highest amount of nicotine," said Elena Carmona, who works at Vape and Smoke shop in Coral Gables. The high amounts of nicotine in the Juul make the chances of addiction much greater.

Each Juul device kit costs about \$35 and a pack of four pods is about \$16.

Lawrence has Juuled for a year, with her addiction developing only three months after she started.

"I think a lot of kids do it because everyone's using it right now," she said. "It's all about getting onto the trend."

According to the advocacy group Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, more than 2.1 million teens were using e-cigarettes last year, and an estimated 3 million are using today, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

In addition, Tobacco Free Florida reports that Florida high school students used e-cigarettes at nearly four times the rate of conventional cigarettes—15.7 percent compared with 4.2 percent.

A six-minute video by Juulers Against Juul and posted on the ABC News website included interviews with teen Juulers such as Jack Solomon, a 15-year-old Juuler at Scarsdale High School in New York.

"I think that kids leaving school desperately needing pods happens a lot," Solomon said in the video. "And it shouldn't



Photo by Steven Lee

A CLOUDY FUTURE: Smoke shop worker Elena Carmona demonstrates a vape pen for customers.

happen, but kids are very addicted to these e-cigarettes and need this stuff to be satisfied."

According to a 2018 Surgeon General Report, "E-cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults," Juuls contain many harmful ingredients besides nicotine, including diacetyl, a chemical linked to serious lung disease, heavy metals like lead, and microscopic particles that can get deep into your lungs.

"We are strongly against minors vaping. The rates are increasing and it is becoming extremely accessible to them," said Lindsey Rosegger, development manager at the American Lung Association in Tampa. "People also don't realize how bad it is to put this smoke into your lungs; in the future, it can cause popcorn lungs."

The e-cigarettes are easy to hide from parents because they are small and closely resemble a USB drive. As a result, students use them between classes or in bathrooms.

"Every school in this country is dealing with this issue," said David Pugh, Christopher Columbus High School principal. "It is a national epidemic from elementary to high school."

Schools have also begun hosting presentations on Juuling.

"We had a guest speaker come in," Pugh said. "He showed slides of sores on the lips, tongue, and mouth. It's almost like a meth addict when their gums start to recede."

Marketing agencies have begun targeting teens and they have been successful.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that 56 percent of high school students are exposed to retail ads on e-cigarettes, 43 percent to internet ads, 38 percent to TV and movie ads, and 35 percent to newspaper and magazine ads.

Juul pods have a variety of flavors such as fruit medley and cool mint that make using their product more appealing. In a new study by Truth Initiative, the nation's largest non-

profit anti-tobacco public health organization, 63 percent of Juul users were not aware the product contained nicotine.

Many users under 18 ask adults to buy Juuls and pods for them, while others attempt to buy from places known not to ID.

"On a regular basis, I get about four to five underage kids during my shift trying to purchase Juul pods," Carmona said. "Today alone, I had five kids come in before 10:30 a.m."

Lawrence had an easy time buying hers.

"I got my Juul by just walking into a smoke shop and buying the Juul," she said. "I was only 16, and they did not question me. I continue to go to that shop to buy pods and have never been asked for an ID."

According to Harvard Medical School, of 51 percent of e-cigarette brands tested, 92 percent carried at least one cancer-causing chemical. And, according to the Surgeon General, nicotine exposure during adolescence and young adulthood can cause addiction and stymie brain development.

"A teenager [who] starts their experience with smoking with a Juul is insane," Carmona said. "One pod of a Juul is a pack of cigarettes, and they're smoking that on a daily basis. How much are they gonna need when they're older?"

According to Science News for Students, smokers under 18 who start smoking for the first time with the Juul are more likely to start smoking cigarettes later on.

Juuling has become an issue that the Florida Constitution Revision Commission is in the process of banning vaping in public due to the effects of its second hand smoke.

Despite knowing the health risks, Lawrence continues to smoke.

"I am aware of the health ramifications that come from Juuling," she said. "I think about it all the time. But I know I am not going to be doing it my entire life, so I am not really concerned about it. I know it's bad, but everyone does it."

Binging on benzos

South Florida seniors grow more dependent on addictive drugs

BY KENNEDY MCKINNEY

The Bolles School

Ten years ago, Cheryl walked into her doctor's office 10 years ago hoping to cure her anxiety and depression. Instead, she left with what would soon become an unexpected addiction.

Cheryl was prescribed her first Benzodiazepine. Today, she still suffers from a drug considered to be more addictive than heroin.

"I didn't think I was terribly anxious, but I figured that since they called it an anti-anxiety drug, it would be good for me, and they should know, right?" Cheryl said. "I figured I could trust my doctor to do what's best for me."

According to many healthcare professionals, this mindset is killing elderly South Florida residents such as Cheryl, who asked that her full name not be used. Some are becoming physically dependent on benzodiazepines, or benzos, which killed 1,421 Floridians in 2016, according to Pain News Network.

Xanax, the most popular benzo, has attracted many users due to its capacity to help with anxiety and panic attacks.

Howard Lerner, president of South Miami Recovery, an outpatient substance abuse center, is familiar with the risks of overprescribing.

"If grandma is sedated, she's out of everyone's hair," he said.

South Florida has one of the largest populations of elderly residents in the country. As they grow older, there is a higher demand for anxiety relief.

"It's not so much that the elderly are looking for something to abuse," Lerner said. "They are just trusting their doctor to help them. It's more innocent."

When Xanax is used long term, patients tend to develop a tolerance to the drug, leading to higher doses.

"So they come back to the doctor who, in most cases, prescribes Xanax," Lerner said. "This is a death spiral."

Because of the extreme risk of addiction, Xanax should be used for short periods of time, said Radhika Chithraki, an adult psychiatric doctor.

Users often can't see the drug's damage until something drastic happens such as seizures, falls or panic attacks. Even then, many don't think Xanax is a cause. Many doctors are now trying to find a way to safely get people off Benzos without causing more problems.

"The biggest problem is that doctors don't know how to help them get off safely or recognize symptoms," activist and former Xanax dependent Jocelyn Pederson said. "It all comes down to miseducation. They don't



Photo by Ian Krupkin

SEEKING SOLUTIONS: Howard Lerner says drugs are often used to mask underlying health issues.

realize how potent the drug is."

Lerner said that insurance companies can be a driving force in the prescribing of Xanax.

"Physicians don't have the patience for patients, and insurance can be the reason," he said. "With Medicare, doctors aren't making the money they need, so they have to make up for that by seeing as many patients as possible. The problem is that doctors don't take the time to listen to their patients and instead just prescribe medication. Time is money."

In the most recent data made available in 2013, Medicare started covering benzos and paid for nearly 40 million prescriptions. Florida, particularly Miami-Dade County, had more doctors who prescribed large amounts of benzodiazepines than anywhere else in the country.

Statewide, 144 doctors wrote at least 2,000 benzo prescriptions for Medicare patients that year. The percentage of adults in the United States who filled a benzodiazepine prescription increased by about 30 percent, from 4.1 percent of all adults in 1996 to 5.6 percent in 2013. The number of benzos in a prescription also doubled over that same time period.

Anxiety was the most frequent reason these medications were given, accounting for 56 percent of prescriptions.

As Cheryl grew tolerant of her medication, she constantly went to the doctor for more prescriptions.

"I now know it was due to tolerance withdrawal from the drugs," she said.

When she started exhibiting symptoms such as muscle tightness and panic attacks, her doctor instructed her to avoid the medication altogether. Instead, Cheryl began a detox that lasted a year and eight

months. One year in, she experienced nausea, depression, hot flashes, sensitive bladder, cognitive problems and lack of appetite.

"I was pretty much housebound other than to go once a week for a quick chiropractor visit," she said. "And even to do that, I was extremely uncomfortable physically in the car and had to wear two pairs of sunglasses to withstand the brightness outside, due to the benzo withdrawal."

Now more than a year later, she still faces sensory over-stimulation, muscle pain, bloating and dexterity problems. Worst of all, she still has anxiety.

"Xanax puts a Band-Aid on anxiety disorders," Lerner said. "Once you stop taking it, the problems will still be there."

Lerner and Pedersen stressed the need for more research on benzos. Campaigns, such as the July 11th World Benzodiazepine Awareness Day, are working to spread information about the dangers of using these drugs.

"I dropped out of doing everything," Cheryl said. "This lasted for two years. Friends stopped calling because they didn't understand. Relatives didn't understand and one family member close to me even to this day denies what has happened to me despite my repeated attempts to educate her."

"The tragic part of this is that it could have all been avoided if my doctor had warned me about this."

Tackling the brain game

Players, coaches look for ways to prevent head trauma injuries

BY ZACHARY LETSON

Gulliver Preparatory School

As football teams around South Florida schools gear up for another season, they will be doing so once again with less of a key piece of equipment: their helmets.

As research on football-related sports injuries continues to grow, one of the more groundbreaking health issues has been the effects that head injuries can have on players — even long past their playing days.

Initially acknowledged in 2009 by the NFL as a possible effect of playing football, chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, has raised eyebrows of football players and parents across the country.

“We’re always concerned with the well-being of our kids,” said Kevin Allen, national recruitment and grant coordinator at Pop Warner, the nation’s largest organization for youth football.

For Pop Warner, it’s been about limiting injuries whenever possible. The organization in 2016 became the first football program for any age group to eradicate kickoffs and punts.

“A lot of times [kickoffs and punts can cause] head or upper body injuries,” said Allen, who believes other football programs across the country are soon to follow.

When one suffers a concussion, it can lead to headaches and temporary memory loss. Concussions have been linked to CTE, which closely relates to brain degeneration.

The disease can only be diagnosed after death, but its effects during life can include short-term memory loss, depression and emotional instability. CTE can also cause suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Two of the most extreme cases of CTE caused Pro Football Hall of Fame linebacker Junior Seau and convicted murderer and former NFL player Aaron Hernandez to kill themselves.

Nationwide, the number of participants in football in 2016 and 2017 was 1.1 million, down 25,503 from the previous season, according to the annual High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations.

In an effort to limit head injuries, the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) adopted regulations to limit injuries in practice.

In 2016, the FHSAA restricted live contact practices during the preseason and spring to 40 minutes per day.

Practices during the season are limited to 30 minutes a day and 80 per week. In 2015 Florida also became the first state to require high school athletes to complete courses on concussions before they are allowed to compete in high school sports.



Photo by Isaac Grossman

SAFER, NOT SOFTER: Columbus High players follow new precautions in pre-season practice.

A 2018 study by *Brain*, a neurology journal, showed that repeated blows to the head, whether resulting in concussions or not, could result in chronic brain damage.

Despite concerns about related head injuries, football still remains the hottest high school sport in South Florida.

Christopher Columbus High School, one of the top high schools in South Florida for football, has taken numerous steps to prioritize player safety.

Head Coach Christopher Merritt serves as regional manager for USA Football, which is affiliated with Heads Up Football, a player safety program. Columbus High School was one of the first 30 high schools in the nation to become certified by the Heads Up program.

“Our program at Columbus implemented both Heads Up tackling and Tip of the Spear blocking,” Columbus High School defensive line coach Pete Marti said in an email interview.

“Both of these initiatives serve to reduce concussions by applying techniques that specifically keep the head out of the action.”

When Merritt first arrived as head coach, there were some days with three practices. Now the team does not have more than one a day.

The coach said head injuries used to be referred to as just “getting your bell rung”

and that it “showed you were tough.” But Merritt’s focus now is all about taking the player out of the game when concussions or other head injuries may arise.

“There can still be hard hits, just with safer technique,” Marti said. “Being smart and being tough are not mutually exclusive.”

Since these changes, Columbus High School has seen a drop in concussion rates.

It isn’t just the mentality of coaches and players that has changed. Medical diagnoses of head injuries have become more sophisticated as well.

“When I came [to Columbus] five years ago, there was one code [diagnosis] for a concussion,” said Merritt.

“Now there are 30.”

University of Miami running back Robert Burns has personally seen a change in hits over both his high school and college football career. And he said the changes are for the better.

Hits with the crown of the helmet were once a staple in the game. Now, not only is it something discouraged by coaches, but forbidden at the collegiate level through the “targeting” rule. The topic is a controversial one in college football.

“You hear, ‘Just let them play,’” said Burns. “[But] you’re worried about the safety of players.”

Non-conforming confusion

Doctors, parents misunderstand gender identity

BY ALEXANDRA SANSONE

Cooper City High School

Dennis Jara knew his son wouldn't be an average boy. From the time he was 2, Dempsey would proudly venture around in colorful dresses, playing with dolls and wearing pants on his head to mimic long hair.

Identifying as gender non-conforming hasn't received the most positive reactions, even with doctors. One year ago, Jara was taking his now 6-year-old son for his annual check-up. When responding to their doctor's confused stare at Dempsey's feminine clothing, Jara informed her of his son's gender non-conformity, only to be told, "It's just a phase."

"I could kind of just see in her reaction to it and the way she was talking to me, I could tell that she didn't agree with it," Jara said.

"For me, that's very discouraging that a pediatrician would say something like that without really knowing anything about it instead of asking a little more about it to understand it a little better."

The lack of information on gender identity is not uncommon among medical professionals. Details on how a doctor should address a gender non-conforming patient are minimal at best, and license renewal classes wholly omit the information.

Organizations like the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) provide guidelines for medical professionals. These guidelines, however, are not enforced for doctors in each area of medicine. Doctors must do their own research if they plan to be educated on the technicalities and sensitivities of gender identity.

After noticing and researching the feminine preferences her son Cooper expressed, along with the spiked suicide rates among LGBTQ youth, Jennifer Solomon launched a chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) in South Miami.

Within the group, she works to provide support and education to confused and concerned parents.

"I always say I would rather have a gay kid, a transgender kid, a gender non-conforming kid than a dead kid," Solomon said.

Gender identity in children manifests itself around age two. Children who express gender identity and face rejection can suffer lasting impacts.

Pediatric endocrinologist Dr. Alejandro Diaz said a lack of gender education has led some doctors to believe that gender is a choice.

"Some practitioners give wrong advice to parents about the way to handle this situation," Diaz said. "Later [this] is going to increase the risk of depression and suicidal ideation in these kids."

One key discrepancy within the gender



Photo by Alexandra Sansone

LOOKING PRETTY: Cooper Solomon, 7, applies a silver gloss before organizing his doll collection.

spectrum is the difference between gender and sex. The terms are often conflated, but gender refers to categorizations based on social and cultural practices, like playing sports and wearing makeup. Sex refers to the categorizations based on genitalia.

"Gender is not binary. It is a social construct. It's important for parents to understand that. Science is showing us that we are not born one or the other, there are many variations."

**Psychotherapist
Noemi Marquez said.**

For a child whose gender differs from what they were assigned at birth, procedures like hormone therapy are common, but not every child who is gender non-conforming is going to be transgender later in life. The current best practice, according to Diaz and Marquez, is to allow the child freedom of expression.

Diaz said gender training is necessary for all areas of medicine. He said the gender non-

conforming population in the United States is close to .5 percent, and recent studies have shown that 3 percent of children/adolescents consider themselves gender non-conforming.

"Studies have shown that when a child is allowed to express his/her/its gender the way they feel it, they have less anxiety...lower risk of depression and other psychological issues later in life," Diaz said.

"This condition is so common that every health professional needs to have knowledge about it." If gender nonconformity is identified early in life and the child chooses to start some type of transition, such as male to female, treatments are available.

Many parents lack knowledge of how to address variations on the gender spectrum when it comes to their children. Turning to their pediatrician should be an option but often doesn't result in acquiring accurate information.

"When you are taking that oath to serve people and to look out for the best interest of a human life, that [information on gender non-conformity] should be included in the curriculum when they study medicine," Jara said.

Maya Adam, a medical professor at Stanford University, has written a free online course addressing health across the gender spectrum. The curriculum works to help those looking to better understand and support someone they know. This course also stresses the importance of parents accepting their child.

"Kids, especially young kids, just want to be accepted by their parents," Marquez said.

"So when the adults around them are rejecting, they start to think, 'Oh, wow, something is wrong with me,' and curb their behaviors as much as they can."

Big problem, little help

Tech addictions make life difficult; finding help is even harder

BY IAN KRUPKIN

Miami Beach Senior High School

After an onset of depression, conflict with his parents and problems with his car, Isaac Veisburg resorted to online gaming to get away from his surroundings.

Originally from Miami, Veisburg moved to Washington, D.C. for college. The day before his classes started, he downloaded a video game and played for the next 42 hours.

"And then I slept," he said. "I slept through my first class Monday, and I didn't go to class the rest of the day, and the day after, or for five weeks after that."

Video game and internet addiction among young people is a growing problem in the United States, but awareness of the problem is fading. Internet addiction disorder (IAD) is characterized as online compulsive behavior marked by an inability to control the amount of time spent using technology. Addicts experience withdrawal symptoms when they are without internet access, and their disorder has work and academic consequences.

Fifty percent of teens say they "feel addicted," and 59 percent of parents believe their child is addicted, according to a poll by Common Sense Media. Despite these numbers, only four treatment centers dedicated to treating technology addictions exist in the United States even as game designers purposefully try to make their games as addictive as possible.

The addiction can quickly spiral out of control.

"After a success at my job, I allowed myself celebratory gaming for one night. That night turned into a week, that week turned into a month, that month turned into a year," said Charlie Bracke, a former internet addict.

Psychologist Albert Zbik, who treats patients with internet and video game addiction in the Miami area, sees an average of two to three clients between the ages of 13 and 20 every month.

However, other than psychologists such as Zbik, treatment options beyond individual counseling are limited. There are more and more young people who report having IAD, but the number of professionals who specialize in treatment is not equivalent. An internet search revealed only a couple specialists in the city of Miami.

"Children are finding an easy escape from stress through technology and are not learning how to cope with it in a correct way, which leads to bigger problems," said Hilarie Cash, founder of reSTART in Fall City, Washington, one of the four IAD treatment centers. This was the case for Bracke, who said, "I was intentionally gaming to get away from my sadness."



Photo by Taisa Strouse

MAKING THE LINK: Professor Clay Ewing ties gaming addiction to a need to escape from boredom.

Another important reality is that technology products are designed to deliberately incentivize users to stay plugged in as long as possible.

"There is a fine line between boredom and anxiety, and many technology companies lean toward anxiety, which can then contribute to addiction," said Clay Ewing, a game design professor at the University of Miami. Initially, the boredom in a user's life is transformed into interest in the game, which then turns into anxiety to repeatedly access the game, which finally results in addiction.

While many have raised concerns about physical and behavioral damage caused by technology use, it was only in 2004 that the first Internet Addiction Treatment Center was founded in Beijing, China. Over the next five years, the rate of patient admittance increased exponentially. The United States caught on in 2009, when reSTART was founded.

But getting treatment is expensive. Bracke spent close to \$70,000 for a year of treatment at reSTART. Recovery time is burdensome as well. Zbik recommends patients attend therapy for six sessions of 45 minutes each while reSTART uses programs that last between two and 12 months, depending on the severity of the case.

To help addicts recover, psychologists work with them to develop healthier routines. Through a "therapeutic environment where clients exercise, develop new hobbies, spend time in nature, eat healthy, sleep and are taught to function in social life, patients are able to develop a new lifestyle without technology," Cash said.

Another common method to rectify

the addiction is through Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), which targets the symptoms and disturbing emotions that come from the root problem behind the addiction. Slowly, pessimistic thoughts diminish and positive ones are reinforced.

ReSTART shows that depression, anxiety, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder need to be addressed to be able to progress through the treatment.

Zbik believes that 90 percent of the time, addiction is based on underlying childhood causes because babies tend to be given a bottle whenever they cry. Adolescents still expect that instant gratification, which is why they turn to games.

Due to continued advocacy for those affected by IAD, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders recognized and listed IAD as a "Condition For Further Study" in 2013. The World Health Organization has also added gaming disorder to the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11).

By doing this, funding for research into long-term effects and psychotherapy treatments has swelled to an all-time high. Cash said partners are continuously doing research that seems to show widespread addiction across the country.

As with many forms of addiction, perhaps the most challenging obstacle to overcome is the widespread denial of IAD as a serious disorder.

"It is the parallel to climate change," Cash said.

"Some can refuse to believe it, but the research is becoming overwhelmingly clear."



72%

of refugees who
entered the U.S.
in 2016 were
women and
children

Credit: Olivia Solomon

Information courtesy of Pew Research Center

Women in crisis

Migrant journeys are especially hard for mothers and children

BY OLIVIA SOLOMON

Palmetto High School

On July 4, 1988, Ana Perez arrived in Miami, a journey that included a year in Panama, a flight to Mexico and a 38-hour bus ride. She did all of this while pregnant and with a 3-year-old in tow. She fled her native country of Cuba with the goal of a better life in the United States.

But the road to that goal was less certain.

"Naturally, it's scary going to the unknown," Perez said. "We didn't know what was going to happen. My God, what tense moments those were." (Family names have been changed to protect their immigration status.)

Perez joined thousands of women who flee their home countries every year to escape violence, spousal abuse or persecution. An estimated 85,000 refugees legally entered the United States in 2016, 72 percent of whom were women and children.

The Trump administration's recent decision to separate families trying to cross the U.S. border has drawn sharp criticism, but the difficulties immigrant women face coming to this country are nothing new.

The journey from refugee to resident often takes a toll on women's physical and mental health. Many coming to the United States find the resources they need, but some fall through the cracks. Even once here, women are often overwhelmed by other obstacles,

requiring their health to take a back seat.

"We deal with some pretty serious traumatic cases," said immigration attorney Laura Kelley. "Cases where people have been kidnapped and one in particular where a woman was chained (in) a house for months and repeatedly raped."

Kelley, who defends immigrants all over the country in their fight to receive asylum, stressed that making it to the United States does not guarantee immediate entry.

She represented a Guatemalan woman who was detained with her female partner in the Krome Detention Center in Miami "for well over a year." One of the women suffered from mental illness because she was so severely traumatized and was transferred to Atlantic Shores, a mental health treatment center. There she was handcuffed to a bed and suffered additional physical injuries as a result.

Unfortunately, many women who encounter difficulties in their journey face denial and deportation.

"Every single case is impactful, but unfortunately, not every case is eligible for relief," Kelley said.

Those women admitted can expect their challenges to continue.

Sandra Lozano-Barry, director of the Light of the World Clinic, said many immigrants neglect health issues as they focus on things such as jobs and caring for their families.

Patients who have not received medical care on a regular basis may later discover that they have chronic illnesses, such as cancer, that could have been prevented or successfully treated if caught early.

Lozano-Barry's clinic aims to change this. Located in Broward County, it offers free

medical care for at-risk and disadvantaged residents. While the clinic has a strong policy against asking patients their legal status, it is safe to say that a large percentage of their clientele are undocumented immigrants.

"We deliberately do not ask. Our founder never believed in that. Someone's legal status has nothing to do with the medical care they should receive."

Sandra Lozano-Barry
Light of the World Clinic

For mothers, the fear of bringing a child into a new place comes with many concerns, especially when it comes to medical care.

"I prayed that my pregnancy would go smooth despite all the worries we had about leaving," Perez said.

Once in the United States, the Perez family was given temporary parole, a status that includes health insurance through Medicaid. While they were still not yet residents, Perez said that she was able to find doctors and had frequent visits to the OBGYN.

While a happy ending is not guaranteed when a woman undertakes the travails of immigration, the Perez family's story has one. Ana Perez got the care she needed, and gave birth to a healthy daughter.

"She was the first U.S. citizen of our family," she said.

A battle for the aging

South Florida seniors staying more fit than those in other states

BY JOSEPH FERNANDEZ

Christopher Columbus High School

On a typical day at the local LA Fitness in Miami, people are lifting weights, doing yoga exercises and running on a treadmill. But something is unusual about this gym — most people here are over the age of 65.

Miami has become a city where seniors stay fit and healthy. Nationally, 38.9 percent

“There are currently more seniors in the facility than the youth, and the high number of older people give this LA Fitness significantly more traffic.”

Alex Guzman
personal trainer at LA Fitness

of people over the age of 65 are obese. But Miami’s obesity rate is significantly lower, with only 15.1 percent of seniors being considered overweight.

One contributing factor may be government programs, such as Silver Sneakers, along with other factors, such as culture and climate.

The Silver Sneakers Program is an initiative created in 1992 to encourage elderly people to exercise by allowing free memberships to partnered gyms through Medicare Advantage plans, a gap insurance policy with a focus on preventative wellness.

Miami has 228 Silver Sneakers partner gyms, almost as many as New York City, which has double the population of senior citizens.

The Silver Sneakers Program helps senior citizens exercise, socialize, and improve their lifestyles.

Alex Guzman said activity can stave off all manner of health problems.

“Exercise assists in keeping bones, muscles and heart strong, and with older people exercising more, complications such as arthritis, diabetes and other medical problems can easily be reduced,” he said.

Many senior citizens believe the program contributes to all elements of their wellness.

“The main benefit is the gyms are free, and that motivated me to go work out. The program has helped me physically, mentally and emotionally,” said 73-year-old Luisa Gralv, a participant in the Silver Sneakers Program.

“What’s so great about the Medicare Advantage plans for the elderly is that they are proactive instead of reactive, and that, in



Photo by Joseph Fernandez

RUNNING FOR LIFE: Juan Suarez Rivas says a workout once saved him from a fatal heart attack.

the long run, allows seniors to not have to go to the hospital and have to pay for reactive treatment,” said Greg Hartley, president of the Academy of Geriatric Physical Therapy and assistant professor of clinical physical therapy in the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine’s Department of Physical Therapy.

The Silver Sneakers program does encourage elderly people to exercise, but seniors who are not enrolled in Medicare Advantage don’t have access to the program.

“Medicare Advantage programs that do provide Silver Sneakers and other benefits tend to be much more expensive than basic Medicare, and there needs to be more accessibility for some incremental effect to happen,” said Neva Kirk-Sanchez, an associate professor in the Miller School.

Instead of using Silver Sneakers, some Miami seniors pay for preventative health measures out of their own wallets.

Maria Isabel Garcia, 59, originally from Nicaragua, started exercising with her husband Chester after she was diagnosed with skin cancer and he was diagnosed with a tumor.

Because of their proactive actions and changes in their diet, the couple have become healthier overall. Chester can now lift more than five pounds, and Maria is strong enough to swim again.

Juan Suarez Rivas, a 75-year-old Cuban, works out at the University of Miami’s wellness center, where, as an alumnus, he receives a substantial discount. Rivas said he has exercised his whole life and thinks it saved his life.

While exercising a few years ago, he felt strange and went to the doctor. It turned out

that there was a problem in the left ventricle of his heart (called the widow maker).

“If I hadn’t been exercising, I could’ve had a heart attack, and I could’ve died,” he said.

Whatever their reason for getting fit, Miami seniors are ahead of much of the country in terms of health.

“Miami is definitely a place to study in terms of what got (the city) to be so healthy,” Hartley said.

He believes that more people around the country need access to preventative programs.

“There are other places throughout the state and country that are impoverished and cannot afford Medicare Advantage. But if the government helps with accessibility, there can be some change,” said Hartley.

Kirk-Sanchez, the chair of the UM’s Department of Physical Therapy, agrees.

“Miami has a great situation, but barriers are different everywhere. It can be climate, cultural, or anything else, but the best we can do is speak to (our) communities.”



TRAINING:
Alex Guzman
in LA Fitness
where he
works as
a personal
trainer.

Photo by
Joseph
Fernandez

Practicing unsafe sex

South Florida seniors see steep rise in STDs

BY MARIAM VELA

Coral Gables Senior High School

Joan Price never quite understood why senior citizens and sex are seen as opposites.

"I fell in love when I was 67 with a man who was 64 and we were having such amazing, exhilarating sex that I didn't understand why it was such a secret," Price said.

Her experience led her to write a book called "The Ultimate Guide to Sex After Fifty," and to start encouraging senior citizens to get more comfortable talking about their sex lives.

Advocates like Price are becoming increasingly necessary. As baby boomers mature into a growing population of senior citizens, many of them are engaging in unprotected sex, which has led to a rise in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

People over 65 are now the fastest-growing age bracket for STD diagnoses in the United States. And the problem is especially pronounced in the greater Miami area.

Both Broward and Miami-Dade County have more cases of STDs among senior citizens than all of Florida's other counties combined, according to the Florida Department of Health.

Pepper Schwartz, a sociologist and sexologist at the University of Washington, attributes this STD increase to seniors' longer life spans and the introduction of dating websites and apps.

She also said medications that directly or indirectly influence sexual behavior, such as erectile dysfunction medications like Viagra for men and estrogen supplements for women are factors.

Because seniors are past reproductive age and the risk of unwanted pregnancy is no longer an issue, they mistakenly believe that using condoms is no longer necessary. This belief is so widespread that men in their 50s are six times less likely to use condoms than men in their 20s, according to a study conducted by Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

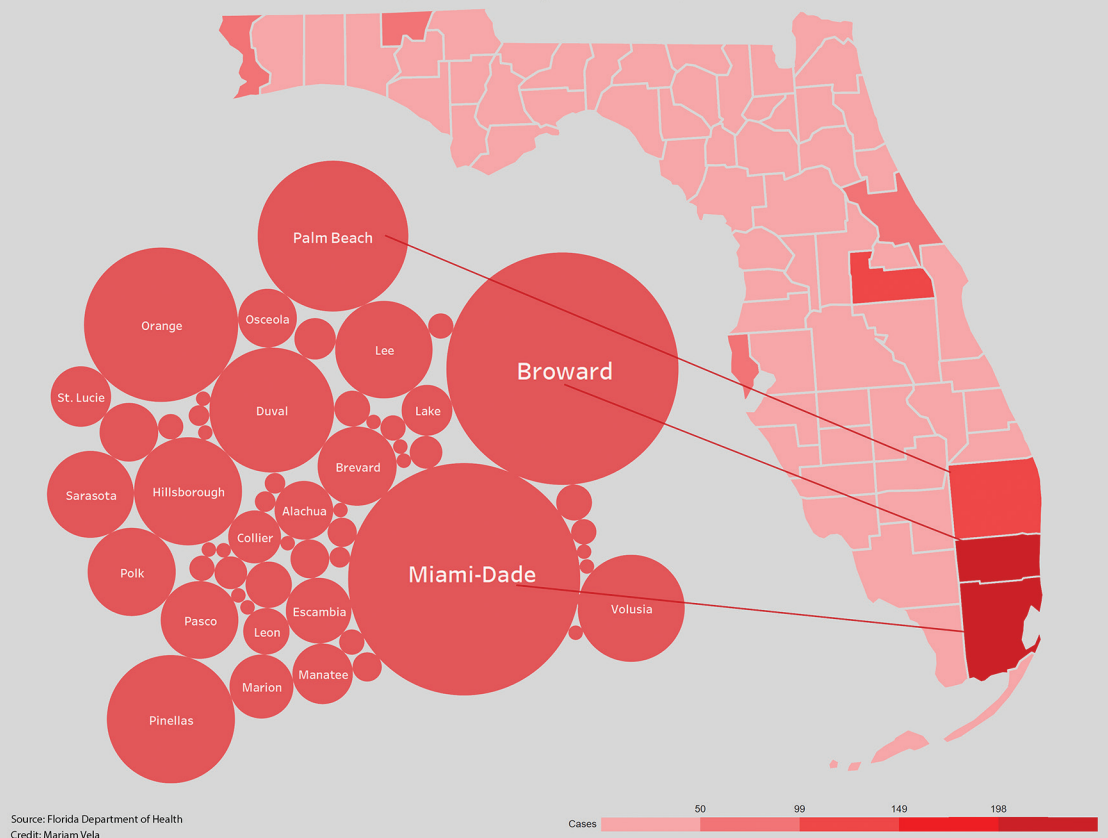
Some experts say this trend is due to a fractured line of communication between doctors and their patients, while others point to a conspicuous cultural difference between the baby boomer generation and their successors.

But the biggest problem may be connected to Price's complaint: a stigma against talking about people over 60 having sex.

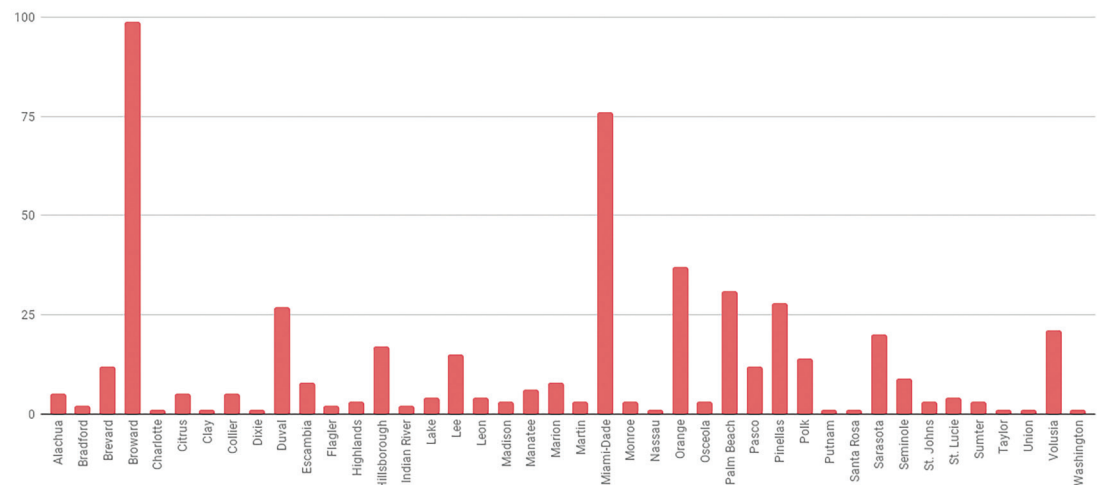
"We have preconceived ideas that this population isn't sexually active," said Greg Hartley, president of the Academy of Geriatric Physical Therapy.

"The myth of aging adults not participating in sexual activity later in life is just that: a myth."

Bacterial STDs, Ages 65+ Per 100,000 Population, 2015-17



Bacterial STDs Ages 65+, Per 100,000 Population in 2017



Experts say that healthcare professionals are not trained rigorously enough to precisely answer elders' sexual health questions and, on top of that, gynecologists who focus on the elderly are in extremely short supply.

"Miami and Florida have a huge lack of healthcare," said Mayte Canino, the program manager for Planned Parenthood of South, East, and North Florida.

"We see a lot of older patients in our centers just because there aren't that many gynecologists in the Medicare plan to choose from."

With a limited number of doctors focused on primary health matters for Medicare recipients, there are only a few organizations providing sexual health resources for seniors in Miami.

One such resource is Test Miami, an HIV testing center that offers innovative medicines that help combat HIV. Doctors don't talk about HIV with people over 65, said Germa Dubuisson and Hermi Molina, co-supervisors of Senior Human Services at Test Miami.

"They should include HIV in their regular routine...but they don't," Dubuisson said. Instead, seniors have to learn to talk about sex with their doctors.

Price agrees.

"So many people grew up at a time where it was very hard to talk about sex," she said. "We should not be written off because there's some artificial age or expiration date (for our) sex lives."

BEATING ADVERSITY: Lukas Paredes, 17, has spent much of his life fighting the urge to commit suicide.

Photo by
Steven Lee



Staring down death

U.S. suicide rate going up as advocacy groups seek to slow it down

BY STEVEN LEE

Christopher Columbus High School

When thinking back to the day he almost died, Lukas Paredes remembers it as if it were a dream.

The 17-year-old sat on the side of a bridge, looking over oncoming traffic, and thinking about jumping. After two hours, someone finally helped him.

"Life just felt unfulfilling," Paredes said. "Some days the thoughts get extremely hard to deal with. I wasn't thinking about my family or my friends or what I was leaving behind."

Over the past 20 years, suicide rates have increased in the United States, with conflicting answers as to why. But while suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10 to 24 nationwide, the Florida average for that age group is 6.6 points lower than the national average of 13.1 deaths per 100,000 people.

The numbers fluctuated in recent years, but in Miami-Dade, suicide rates among teenagers decreased from 4.9 to 3.2. Florida's rates among all ages increased. Suicide attempts by young people such as Paredes are a concern for mental health experts in the South Florida area.

Miami-Dade psychologist Wade Silverman attributes rising suicide rates at least partly to stress levels. "People tend to keep their nose to the grindstone," he said.

A 2016 American Psychological Association

survey also showed that 63 percent of Americans attribute stress to uncertainty about the nation's future. But while living in a high-stress society is difficult, lifestyle changes add another factor to those advancing to college life and adulthood.

The Counseling Outreach Peer Education, or COPE, at the University of Miami, tries to ease such major transitions by advocating for mental health awareness.

The group encourages students who need help to use the university's on-campus counseling services. They aim to eradicate the stigma surrounding mental health.

"COPE is committed to making sure the [university's] community is aware of what resources they have," said COPE board member, Kendall Mather. "I think it's especially important to encourage people who need it to seek help."

COPE also collaborates with The Clothesline Project, a group that raises awareness about and offers assistance to men, women and children who are victims of violence. As part of their namesake, the group hangs T-shirts in honor of survivors, but events like this can only do so much to combat the issue of suicide.

Paredes believes that stress is a major factor in his suicidal thoughts.

"I tend to just bottle things up inside," Paredes said. "A tiny amount of stress like a low grade could trigger an episode for me."

While organizations like COPE emphasize raising awareness and providing resources to those in need, many of those most in need of their resources are hesitant to seek them.

"Instead of going for help, I just wanted to take it into my own hands," Paredes said.

Paredes has not only struggled with this himself, he has seen others resist help from

outside resources, too.

"I've lost three friends to suicide and nearly another to the same cause," Paredes said. "When it came to the point of where me and my friends tried to help, it was too late."

This issue does not solely reside among the young, statistics show. The elderly community faces a different kind of struggle. Florida residents aged 60 and older have a higher suicide rate than other demographics.

Silverman believes a contributing factor is that senior citizens aren't as admired as they used to be.

"Old people are cast aside in today's society," Silverman said.

From 1999 to 2016, the suicide rate among Florida elderly increased from 20 deaths per 100,000 to 20.9.

A report from the Center for Disease Control showed a 10.6 percent increase in all suicides in Florida during that same time period.

Groups like Healing After A Loved One's Suicide, HALOS, approach this problem from a different angle. HALOS is a Florida-based organization that aims to provide a comfortable, safe space for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. With five Florida locations, the organization's mission is to create a world in which all people understand the value of life.

Jackie Rosen, CEO of the Florida Initiative for Suicide Prevention, said that more such options are needed.

"There aren't nearly enough mental health facilities in Florida," she said.

Paredes believes some suicide trends can be attributed to a stigma in society that sees depression and sadness as synonymous. Such a misconception, he believes, invalidates the severity of his situation. Those assumptions discourage people facing mental illness from reaching out.

"More and more people are struggling to find meaning in an increasingly meaningless world," Paredes said. "It's a really hard thing to do — to open up."

No retirement in sight

South Florida seniors working and living longer than ever

BY ALESSANDRA INZINNA

Miami Palmetto Senior High School

Every Sunday, 62-year-old Luis Orlando-Ricardo finds himself on the softball fields of Tropical Park. It's his time to decompress after working six days a week as an electrician, and as an Uber and Lyft driver.

"It's my time to relax," Orlando-Ricardo said.

A Miami resident of 25 years, he started driving for Uber because of the promise of more money in his pocket and a way out of working as an electrician in the hot sun. Looking to retire this year from his electrician job, Orlando-Ricardo plans to continue with his Lyft and Uber jobs and does not see retirement in his near future.

His situation is not unique. Baby boomers are working longer because of longer life expectancies, changing work demands and diminishing retirement plans. As a result, the number of people 65 and older who are still working has jumped from four million in 2000 to nine million in 2017.

Even more surprising, the number of people 85 and older who are still working has also skyrocketed from 2.2 percent of the population in the workforce in 2006 to 4.4 percent in 2017.

Teresa Ghilarducci, a labor economist and nationally recognized expert in retirement security, estimates that approximately 60 percent of seniors (people 65 or older) are working due to financial insecurity.

"Inadequate retirement accounts and pensions mean that millions of boomers and younger people will seek work in retirement, desperate to take any job at almost any age," Ghilarducci said.

Orlando-Ricardo started Uber and Lyft driving after a friend encouraged him to



Photo by Chloe-Amelie Aikman

PLAY BALL: Luis Orlando-Ricardo (right, front) walks with recreational softball players after scoring a game. It's one of the ways he passes time on weekends.

earn additional income with a side job. Now, Orlando-Ricardo drives his Dodge Grand Caravan up and down Miami streets all day, with his gold chain comfortably hung from his neck and a 4.81 star rating under his belt.

But the popularity of rideshare jobs has put more drivers behind the wheel, cutting his pay from about \$800 per week to just scratching \$500 for full-time work.

"It helps to make the extra money to help your family," Orlando-Ricardo said. But, while he still feels good enough to work, he doesn't know when he'll be able to finally retire.

Ghilarducci warns that when people are forced to stay in the labor market because they cannot retire, wages and working conditions erode, affecting elder health and productivity rates.

Not all older workers are like Orlando-Ricardo. Some continue working solely because they love their jobs.

Cheryl Pimento, a 63-year-old retired flight attendant supervisor from Trinidad, managed flight crews for 34 years as she traveled all over the world.

"In that job, you either love it or you hate it, and I loved it," Pimento said. "It was a beautiful job."

Her career came to an end when Pimento reached 60, Trinidad's mandatory retirement age. She then switched to her second career as a saleswoman at the Bloomingdale's in The Falls shopping center.

"It's a way to make extra money and a way to continue," Pimento said. "I always put all my full effort into any job that I do. Once you do that, everything will be positive, and you will enjoy your job."

Pimento, now 63, knew she would find

BACK TO WORK:

After an afternoon at the ballpark, Luis Orlando-Ricardo hops in his car to catch Uber and Lyft fares.



Photo by
Chloe-Amelie
Aikman



Photo by Mariam Vela

SHOWIN' OFF: Cheryl Pimento, 63, retired from her airline job in Trinidad, then took a second career at Bloomingdale's as a salesperson.

another job to fill time. For Bloomingdales, she put in her application and got the job after just one interview. She has no plans for retirement in the near future.

"I will keep working until I physically can't anymore," Pimento said. "In other words, I just keep going and never give up."

Pimento's mentality represents another common narrative for baby boomers in America. According to U.S. News and World Report, 31 percent of people age 50 and older who are working in their retirement age cite their reason as the boredom of a work-free life. Eighteen percent want to feel productive, and 15 percent have a job that is enjoyable.

"The rest work for love," Ghilarducci said. "They enjoy their job and like the pay."

But despite the older Americans who work because they want to, for many, the retirement system fails to serve them well. The devastating effects of the 2008 recession on retirement savings across the country left many elder Americans no option to stop working.

"Many elders would tell you that they lost twice," Ghildarucci said. "Their 401K plans took a hit when the tech bubble burst in 2001 and again in 2008 with the financial crisis."

Between 2005 and 2015, the number of elder Americans working jobs with unstable and low-wage jobs jumped 10 percent, according to The New School Retirement Equity Lab. By 2015, 25 percent of older

workers were in those insecure jobs.

"The U.S. is in a unique position among rich nations to be able to afford universal adequate pensions," Ghilarducci said. "But

the U.S. is the only rich nation that leans so heavily and clings so strongly to work as the answer to inadequate retirement income security."



Photo by Mariam Vela

KEEPIN' ON: Cheryl Pimento says she will continue working "until I physically can't anymore."

Ill immigrants in rural Florida

Lawyers, case workers educate migrants on their rights and health

BY DEVIN DUBON

Miami Lakes Educational Center

INDIANTOWN – In a small room at the back of the Elisabeth Lahti Library here, more than 30 people sit in chairs waiting anxiously for a presentation to begin.

The people are mostly undocumented immigrants, having come from Guatemala, Cuba, Haiti and many more countries but all have two things in common: They don't know what rights they have, and they're scared of being deported.

Immigrant families who need medical attention are among the most vulnerable. Many immigrants are unaware that free clinics exist and choose instead to deal with the problem themselves.

"We really want to make sure that people understand their rights as immigrants," said Frances Davila, an immigration attorney for Americans for Immigrant Justice (AIJ), a nonprofit organization that represents low-income families across South Florida.

"There's a misconception that because you're an immigrant, you have no rights and the police can do anything to you. That's not true, and we want to make sure that people understand that's not true."

AIJ helps with many common problems, and one of those is parents not wanting to get health benefits for their children.

According to Davila, many U.S. consulates deny visas to families with children who are citizens who have received food stamps or WIC (Women, Infants and Children) support.

"Now people are like 'I don't want to get these benefits for my kid that's sick or hungry because then I'm not going to be able to get this application or visa,'" Davila said.

Even those who have a legal status, such as residents and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, can have difficulties acquiring health insurance.

DACA recipients are exempted from laws put into place allowing those who are "lawfully present" to access health care, and although TPS and green card holders are allowed to apply, recipients are often unaware of this.

"I can't get health insurance. I usually feel fine but whenever my daughter gets sick I just solve the problem at home... I've never heard of any free clinics I could go to," said Maria, an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala.

People like Maria will have to pay out of pocket for any health coverage they need, something which most of them are not able to do. Merly, a U.S citizen raised in Guatemala, came to America to give birth to her second child after learning the baby had complications.



Photo by Taisa Strouse

THE INTERVIEW: A volunteer starts a file on an immigrant woman who will soon see an attorney.

Despite being a citizen, Merly was told she didn't qualify for Medicaid. She does not know why and came to the meeting for guidance.

"After the labor, they sent me a bill of \$2,000. I don't have insurance and I don't work so I don't know how I'm going to pay this," Merly said in Spanish.

South Florida is home to around 450,000 undocumented immigrants, nearly 7 percent of the region's population, according to the Pew Research Center. Organizations like the Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC) and Catholic Legal Services (CLS) have organized immigration clinics across the state — from downtown Miami, to Tampa, Jacksonville, Orlando, West Palm Beach and even Indiantown to serve this large demographic.

"The people who are coming to these events are families who have Temporary Protected Status, who have parents or children who are undocumented and through this they talk to an immigration lawyer for free, get a free consultation and review," said Grace Toapanta, a volunteer and hotline coordinator for FLIC.

The turnout at these meetings fluctuates wildly — as many as 600 people could show up, or none at all.

"Turnout can be uncertain. If something happens, we may see a lower turnout because people are afraid to even come and get legal services," said Adonia Simpson, director of the Family Defense Program at AIJ.

"We had one event where rumors went around stating that it was an ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] trap... that if people came, ICE would be there to arrest them."

It is this fear that stops immigrants from seeking out help for themselves and their

families. Although programs like the ones put together by AIJ, FLIC or CLS can alleviate the problem, the underlying issue remains.



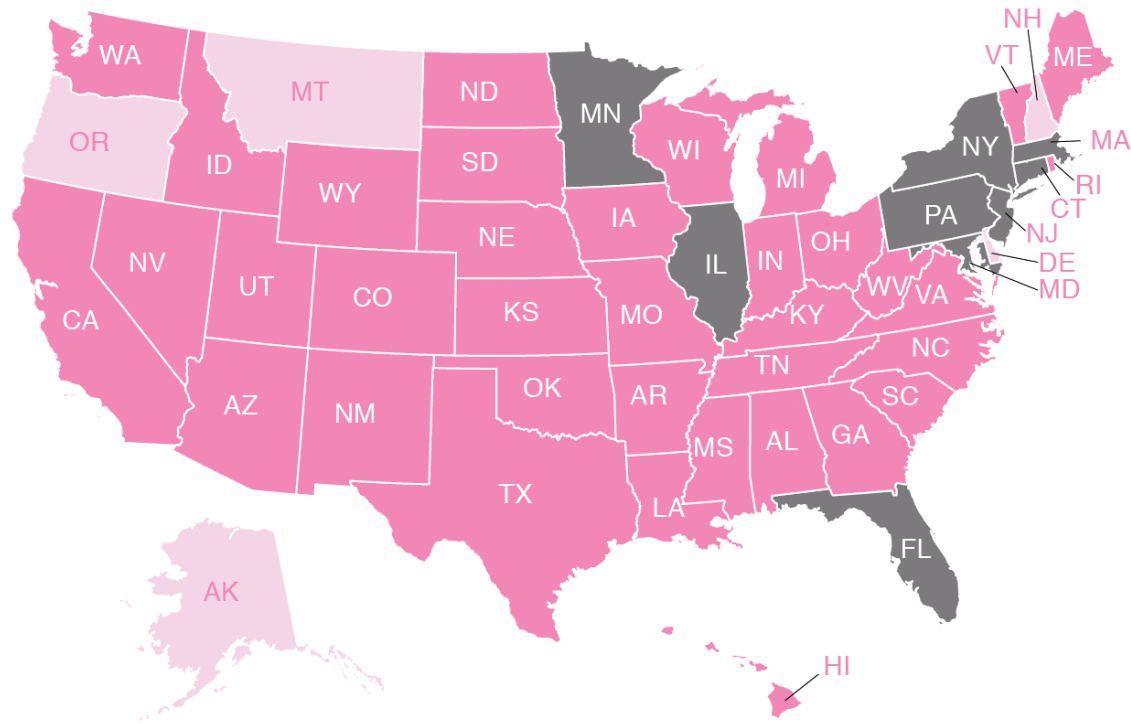
Photo by Taisa Strouse

THE COUNSEL: Blanca de Reyes, a counselor who works along the Treasure Coast, advises Merly on the status of her health care case.

TAMPON TAX THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES

Only 13 states out of 50 do not tax menstrual products.

● States with tampon tax ● States with no tampon tax ● States with no sales tax



SOURCE: BBC "Why is the US 'tampon tax' so hated?"

CREDIT: Nicole Schwyn

Menstruation without taxation

Pink tax forces women to pay more than men for hygiene products

BY NICOLE SCHWYN

Gulliver Preparatory School

Until the Florida legislature passed the tampon tax repeal in 2017, Florida women were burdened by a stealthy tampon tax which made the necessary seem extravagant.

It classified feminine products as a luxury, subjecting them to taxes not placed on basic items such as food.

"The exemption of the tampon tax occurred because women from all over, not just my constituents, began to send me emails about the need for this exemption," said Rep. Katie Edwards-Walpole, a co-sponsor of the tampon tax repeal.

"Several people even received emails with the subject being 'periods are not a luxury,' so people who did not know what that meant would open it up and then realize ... that menstrual products, like similar products such as diapers, are not a luxury, they are a necessity."

A 2015 Consumer Affairs study on gender pricing also affirmed the existence of a "pink tax." Their analysis of five industries (toys and accessories, children's clothing, adult clothing, personal care products, and senior/

home health care products) found that women paid seven percent more for these products than men. With personal care items, women paid 13 percent more. The tampon tax repeal has helped diminish the gender inequity for Florida women, but the pink tax remains.

This "tax" creates hard times for women on a tight budget. Lower-income women have adapted to their situations and have used products such as towels or toilet paper to replace products they cannot afford. While some women might use medications to control their periods, these women might not see them as something that is needed.

Working women who would buy feminine products get no support from federal programs. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs do not cover menstrual products because they define those items as "luxury" products.

According to a Time article, "America's Very Real Menstrual Crisis," many women have reached the point of trading or selling food stamps for tampons. Some receive these products through nonprofit organizations that create menstrual hygiene kits.

College women, on the other hand, might not be able to receive menstrual products for free if they are not provided by their university. They would, however, have access to birth control, and might consider that to be a necessity if they are buying cheaper versions or have an insurance plan that covers much of the cost.

"I am taking birth control and it is completely covered by my parents' plan, even though I have a plan with UM," said a 20-year-old junior at the University of Miami who asked to remain anonymous. "While my birth control happens to be free, I do not know if the insurance at UM covers it."

According to Bizfluent, a college student's income can range from \$7,000 to \$42,000 a year. The Department of Numbers, a website that catalogues data on social, economic and financial data, lists the average income in Miami at \$51,362. If these college students have to also pay tuition, rent, and other bills then they might not have enough money to pay for birth control or menstrual products, even the cheapest options available.

"One of the more cheaper pills that I prescribe is \$90 a month," said gynecologist Michelle Starke. "However I have heard that Planned Parenthood provides even cheaper birth control pills, around \$10-\$20 a month."

Until the price of menstrual products and medicines, like birth control, go down, women who are on limited budgets will not be able to access the products when needed.

"Getting off birth control should not directly affect the health of a patient, but could indirectly affect her health. As her periods could be heavy and it could lead to anemia," Starke said.

"It is not stopping the pill that causes problems, it is just that the pill usually masks problems and when you stop the pill you unmask the problems."

Conflicted aftereffects

Parkland survivors coping with slaughter in very different ways

BY TAISA STROUSE

Miami Country Day School

When Kevin Morris dropped his son off at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on the first day of class after the tragic Feb. 14 shooting, he saw what he called “a military installation.”

The police presence had been greatly increased, metal detectors had been installed and clear backpacks became mandatory.

“Stoneman Douglas might have been a welcoming place before,” Morris said. “I can’t say it’s like that now.”

It was hard for Morris’ son, a sophomore, to be reminded of the tragedy every day. It impeded his ability to find a new normal in the wake of the shooting.

For MSD English teacher Nicole Blands, however, these severe measures were the only option. The comfort that the increased police presence provided was a vital part of her healing process.

The shooting’s aftermath has greatly increased the burden faced by Stoneman Douglas teachers like Blands. They have to cope with their own fear, guilt and grief, while simultaneously needing to support students facing identical emotional trauma.

“As a teacher, you have to keep it together,” she noted. “But at the same time, you have your own grief you’re dealing with.”

Teachers returned to Stoneman Douglas on Feb. 23, just nine days after the shooting. Blands feels they returned to the MSD campus too soon.

“There was a lot of anger,” she said. “There was a lot of pain. There was just an eerie feeling of sadness on the campus.”

Laurel Thompson, director of student services for Broward County Schools, concludes that the decision to go back so soon was never one that could have had 100 percent consensus.

“The decision was made to bring the teachers back in a staggered way,” Thompson said. “They came back for a few hours, for a few days, to get back into a routine in a very slow, deliberate manner.”

Nicole Blands expected the tragedy would bring all the Parkland survivors together but was surprised to find indifference from some parents and students once everyone was back at school.

“I know you are hurting, but it doesn’t matter. Get back into the routine,” one parent told her.

After some time back at school, the teachers began to regain their footing. The staff was offered a plethora of resources to help with recovery, including a comedy show, art therapy, educational seminars, as well as optional group and individual therapy sessions.



Photo by Joseph Fernandez

MOURNING FATHER: Kevin Morris, 55, says the MSD shootings changed the school dramatically.

The district also provided support from the employee assistance program, a team focused solely on the well-being of the faculty.

Despite the additional support, Blands was still struggling during the school day with keeping up a façade for the sake of her students.

“[The criticism] forces you to suppress what you are dealing with and just get through the day,” she said.

The Broward County School Board has taken steps in recent months to better respond to crises. According to Thompson, the board has partnered with the University of South Carolina to certify all teachers as trauma cognitive behavior therapists for the 2018-19 school year. This two-day course trains them to assist anyone on a campus who is experiencing grief.

The district has also opened the Broward County Resiliency Center. It is open seven days a week for free walk-ins and offers mental health services to everyone including students, parents and staff of schools in Broward County.

“The students can come in,” Thompson

said. “The families can come in, it is open to the whole community, and they can get therapeutic services or just come there to use the facility.”

The Florida Education Finance Program has earmarked \$40 million in mental health assistance for the 2018-19 school year. According to Eva Regueira, director of inter-governmental affairs for Miami-Dade County, the district has begun to allocate the 13 percent of that budget assigned to them since the fiscal year began on July 1.

The Parkland shooting fractured the MSD community.

In the future, Kevin Morris hopes that MSD will “find a way to continue to offer a sense of community.” Blands also hopes that the public will become “more empathetic and understanding” towards the teachers, who are still feeling their own grief six months later.

When the press exposure thins and #neveragain and #msdstrong stop trending on Twitter, the effects that the shooting had on the Stoneman Douglas Eagles community will linger for years to come.

Changing the plan



Photo by Allesandra Inzinna

FRUIT IN PERIL: People who need food most may suffer the most when the government changes how it subsidizes residents of the nation's food deserts.

Produce markets in food deserts may lose EBT access for a time

BY JOHN FOLSOM

Florida State University Schools

On July 31st, Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards may no longer work at farmers' markets nationwide. For many Americans living in food deserts, this poses a potential for catastrophe.

EBT cards allow citizens to receive welfare benefits via a payment card similar to a debit card. The program is seen as a more efficient version of traditional food stamps. Of the 7,000 markets across the country that currently accept EBT cards, 1,700 may end up with no way to process them.

If this scenario plays out as predicted, many people in underprivileged areas will lose access to fresh, non-processed foods. This would lead to the creation of more food deserts, places with limited access to fruits, vegetables and other produce.

According to a 2015 Sun-Sentinel report, South Florida is home to 326 food deserts. The issue impacts 23.5 million Americans, including nearly 2 million Floridians. Elderly citizens with physical handicaps are most at risk.

"A food desert is any geographical area where the ability to grow your own food is limited, or impossible," said Rebecca Thomas, food security major at the University of South Florida.

The issue stems from a gap between government contracts. The Department of Agriculture used to hire the Farmers' Market Coalition to be the mediator between itself

and technology companies that provide hardware and software for government services such as EBT card readers.

However, the DOA has recently made the decision to switch to a new company, Financial Transaction Management. This transition may not be seamless.

EBT cards, are just one of the the government's methods of fighting food deserts. In 2016, the Florida Legislature passed the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, a bill that provided \$500,000 in funding for programs that promote healthy food access.

The bill was originally intended to provide \$2 million in assistance, but was scaled back to test the effectiveness of food desert prevention methods without investing as much money.

So far, the money has been allocated towards two separate projects by the Florida Community Loan Fund, the company tasked with distributing the assets provided in the bill. One of those projects, Fresh Choice Marketplace, is projected to service 23,000 people that currently reside in a food desert.

"Fresh Choice Marketplace is in a town called Ft. Meade, Florida, where there hasn't been a grocery store for several years. It may not be a huge store, but it's going to create a lot of impact for the people that live near it," Janet De Guehery, spokeswoman for the FCLF, said.

The Evans Center, set to open later in 2018 in Brevard County, is an attempt at revitalizing an area that has previously seen success.

The building will act as both a source of produce and a community gathering center.

"There used to be a grocery store on that site, but it closed down years ago.

A survey was done in the community, and all the residents said, 'We really need a grocery store within walking distance. A lot

of us don't have a car.' They may not be huge projects, but they'll have a big impact on the people around them," De Guehery said.

Lawmakers aren't the only ones fighting food deserts. Local non-profit organizations such as Health in the Hood are dedicated to providing fresh produce to underprivileged areas in South Florida.

Specifically, Health in the Hood finds vacant lots near the center of inner cities and converts them into vegetable gardens. The produce is then distributed free of charge to those living in the surrounding community.

"A lot of the residents in our area aren't focused on what they're eating. Health in the Hood has had a palpable impact, changing the health trajectories of many local residents," Asha Loring, founder of Health in the Hood, said.

Health in the Hood educates people of all ages about nutrition, fitness and gardening in order to prevent the formation of new food deserts.

Furthermore, the organization also provides classes geared towards children, teaching healthy diets, how to read nutrition labels and grocery shopping tips.

"One of our goals is to eventually become a global classroom, and to expand our net worth of markets," Loring said.

On the federal level, a bill has been introduced that would provide \$125 million in aid for areas lacking access to fresh, nutritional food across the entire country. However, the Healthy Food Financing Initiative Reauthorization act of 2018 has just begun its path to being a law, and there is no guarantee that it will be passed by either house of Congress.

All of these initiatives are working to solve a problem that has been plaguing Florida communities for decades. In the meantime, food desert residents must make do.

Please take a number

Shortage of health care professionals hits South Florida's graying population

BY RUBEN ESCOBAR

Coral Gables Senior High School

About a decade ago, a frustrated Derek DuBois met up with former medical school classmates at a New York bar. They were fed up with the medical profession and decided to do something constructive about it.

They dropped out.

"Some people decide early that they are motivated to do something different than traditional practice or research," said DuBois, co-founder and president of DOCjobs.com, a website for people who have left or are considering leaving the medical profession.

Like DuBois, thousands are leaving medicine in droves, which is contributing to a shortage of medical professionals across the nation, especially in South Florida.

A 2017 Florida Center for Nursing report revealed there were approximately 12,000 nurse vacancies in Florida. In addition, a report by the Association of American Medical Colleges also predicted a shortage of 90,000 doctors and physicians nationwide by 2025, and nearly 7,000 in Florida.

As the U.S. population grows older, the need for medical healthcare professionals is increasing. According to a study by AMN Healthcare Services Inc., about 14 percent of the U.S. population is 65 years of age or older, and about 19 percent of the population fall into that age group in Florida.

"Floridians in many parts of the state will have serious trouble getting the care they need because there won't be enough specialists in the community available to treat them," said Ron Bartlett, managing editor of the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida.

Despite this issue, nursing schools rejected about 56,000 qualified applicants from undergraduate nursing programs, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

In response to the shortage, hospitals such as Boca Raton Regional Hospital, Baptist Health South Florida and Adventist Health System are offering bonuses to nurses who sign up.

Due to these shortages, physicians are shouldering a much bigger workload and are suffering from burnout, depression and lawsuits. DuBois said that this causes many medical students to pursue another career.

A Stanford University School of Medicine survey this year found that 55 percent of doctors experienced symptoms of burnout and 33 percent had high levels of fatigue. In 2017, 6.5 percent of doctors had thoughts of killing themselves, whereas less than 4 percent of



Photo by Alexandra Sansone

THE DOCTOR IS IN: Dr. Alina Siblesz-Ruiz hands a chart to Hildanis Gonzalez, a medical assistant.

Americans consider suicide, according to the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

"The major drivers of the nursing shortage include an increasing demand for nursing services by a rapidly aging population, student enrollment limitations at schools of nursing, and an aging nursing workforce," said Robert Rosseter, chief communications officer with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

Many factors in the career of a physician, such as medical school costs, debt and the process of finding a residency, persuade professionals to leave the field.

The typical medical student often spends 11 to 15 years in medical school. Each of the first four years cost students an average of \$34,592 for in-state tuition and \$58,668 for out-of-state, according to Kaplan Inc., a for-profit educational service. That does not include the additional costs of books and other supplies. As tuition increases, so do student loans, creating debt that takes years to pay back.

"I'm currently still paying for [medical school debt]," said pediatrician Alina Siblesz-Ruiz. "However, I am one of the lucky ones in my era where they really lowered the interest rate. I have about \$300,000 debt that I will finish paying off in eight years."

The average med student's debt builds up to about \$167,000, according to a survey by personal finance site NerdWallet. The average medical healthcare professional makes \$189,000 a year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Therefore, even with a physician's wages, it takes about 30 years to pay off debt that resulted from going to medical school, according to MoneyWatch.

Although there has been a 29 percent increase in medical school residency slots in Florida since 2013, there is insufficient space

for every incoming professional. Under such conditions, medical professionals who could help alleviate the shortage in South Florida are being forced to relocate elsewhere.

To help increase the number of residencies even more, the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida requested an additional \$2 million in funding for Medicaid regions in 2018.

This would provide Southwest Florida hospitals a \$100,000 bonus for each resident in primary care.

Additionally, the alliance requested \$50 million to help 13 of Florida's teaching hospitals recover from financial losses that resulted from charity care.

Although funding has been requested, there is still an issue with the population of physicians. As the shortage continues, current physicians will grow old and eventually retire.

The AMN study reported that about 30 percent of the physician workforce in Florida is at least 60 years old, compared with 27.6 percent in the whole country, says a study done by AMN Healthcare Services Inc.

"Florida's physician workforce is aging," Bartlett said. "Many physicians are at or are nearing retirement age."

As physicians increasingly age, they pose a threat to patients as performance is affected.

According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), research has shown that 20 percent of cognitive ability declines between the ages of 40 and 75. Additionally, significant variability has been observed from one person to another.

"The problem of physician shortages in America is a very real one," said pediatrician-in-training Yanet Ravelo.

"If there are not enough physicians available to care for these patients it can result in patient neglect and long wait times that interfere with management."

Alternatives to autism

Caregivers design creative therapies to treat the condition

BY CHLOE-AMELIE AIKMAN

Henry B. Plant High School

Amongst the banyan and oak trees of Miami's Kendale Lakes, plastic rings dangle from the ears of a horse, hoops and large letters decorate the riding arena, and children and seniors both come by for a weekly ride.

"Several parents tell me that the only time they ever see their child sit still is when they're sitting on a horse," said Robin Bramson, the head riding instructor and program director of Whispering Manes' Therapeutic Riding Center.

Bramson taught the first riding lesson at Whispering Manes when it opened six years ago. Unlike other equestrian programs, Bramson's offers lessons designed exclusively for those with cognitive, emotional and physical disabilities.

Servicing 50 to 70 people a week, half of their regular participants are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, a condition reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to affect one in every 59 children in the United States.

That number is a 15 percent increase from the number of diagnoses two years ago.

As part of Whispering Manes' program, riders have the chance to groom, work and participate in activities with horses. One exercise Bramson introduces is reaching over to a ring stand and placing a hoop on the horse's ear.

Another involves sitting on the horse and shooting a basketball. Large posters of letters are positioned in the arena, not only to break down the steps of riding and maneuvering the horse, but also as cues to start speech activities.

"For every potential challenge someone may be experiencing, being on the horse or around the horse can help them address that," Bramson said. "[It] expands their world a lot."

Autism is often characterized by sensory-seeking behaviors, which can manifest in "hand flapping" and other repetitive motions. The horse has a lot to offer in terms of sensory input, which can have a relaxing effect on riders.

With three dimensions of motion, including bilateral, side-to-side and front-to-back movement, the rhythm of a horse is thought to stimulate the verbal center of the brain, a particularly helpful aspect for those on the spectrum with minimal verbal language.

Physically, riding also provides opportunities for muscle toning, social development and skills building.

One of the participants Bramson worked with previously went from refusing to receive instruction to winning a gold medal at the Florida Special Olympics.

"When they're around the animal, they're able to connect with the animal, and they



Photo by Kennedy McKinney

HORSIN' AROUND: Robin Bramson uses horse Cinnamon to help participants with disabilities relax and build skills. Cinnamon was rescued as a stray pony on the island of St. Thomas.

have that warm feeling between the animal and them," Autism Connections Manager Bellkiss Vigil said. "Once the child connects, it seems like the child opens up a little bit more to people."

Although similar to hippotherapy, another kind of horse-assisted therapy, Whispering Manes' riding program stresses riding goals first. Where hippotherapy might conclude once a specific health target is met, participants at Whispering Manes can continue to incorporate horseback riding as an activity in their lives.

Traditional forms of therapy continue to play an important role in autism treatment, but alternative options are springing up all over South Florida.

STARS Autism School incorporates aromatherapy and yoga into their instruction. Autism Soccer, headquartered in Miami, offers structured play for children to develop communication and behavioral skills. And Empower Farms affords its visitors a chance to become involved in sustainable farming practices in Homestead.

"It's always just enjoyable for people to get out," Bramson said. "They might want to still come and participate in the program so that they have something to look forward to."

Whispering Manes currently employs one full-time instructor and one part-time instructor and stables six horses. Bramson anticipates the Whispering Manes program will nearly double in size over the next five years to meet community demand. With a wait list running during the school year, which is their busiest season, public and private schools often partner with Whispering Manes for eight-to-10-week sessions.

Before being added to the program, Whispering Manes horses, which average between 13 and 15 years old, must be screened and specially trained.

"The horses, they don't judge," said Sarah Merrill, a certification representative of PATH, an organization which Whispering Manes is accredited through. "They accept you for who you are."

Bramson has seen her share of reluctant riders. From distress at wearing a helmet, to uneasiness around large animals, Bramson works with each participant to take that first ride.

"We haven't turned anybody away, even people who are uncomfortable," Bramson said. "I have a variety of techniques to try to get them to just try it. Once they're on, then they're sold."

RAPPING UP:

Local artist King Hoodie is one of many who perform to shed light on mental illness in the rap industry.

Photo by
Ruben Escobar



Rap goes mental

Songwriters take different approaches to sensitive topics

BY ISAAC GROSSMAN

Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School

Rap music is the new rock. So much so that the Nielsen 2017 U.S. Music Year-End Report showed that for the first time, R&B/hip-hop (rap) surpassed rock as the No. 1 music genre, with 24.5 percent of consumption

Rappers therefore have a bigger megaphone to address any issue they deem important, be that promoting a ceaseless party lifestyle, speaking the nasty truths of drug addiction or discussing issues of mental health.

“As an artist, you’re a leader whether you want to be one or not,” said Miami rapper Southside P. “As a leader, it only makes sense to bring your followers to the light.”

Today, there is an uneven divide among famous rappers on the topic of mental health. Some use their music to spread awareness of mental health issues, while others use their music to glorify drug use.

Mental health has been a rap subject since the 1990s. Biggie Smalls “Suicidal Thoughts,” Tupac’s “Thugz Mansion,” and Eminem’s “If I Had” all touched on depression and other mental health issues.

More recently, Logic’s 2017 song “1-800-273-8255” moved suicide prevention into the rap world’s consciousness. Taking its title from the Suicide Prevention Hotline number, “1-800-273-8255” is told from the perspective

of a person contemplating suicide.

After the “1-800-273-8255” music video was released, Dr. John Draper, director of the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, said that calls rose between 30 and 50 percent.

2018 heard mental health raps from a variety of perspectives.

Lil Pump, a local rapper with an international following, celebrates drug use in his raps “Drug Addict” and “ESSKEETIT.” Conversely, perennial chart-topper Kanye West confesses to his struggles with suicidal thoughts, bi-polar disorder and opioid addiction on his seventh solo album “ye.”

Southside P and his fellow Miami rapper King Hoodie, fall on the reflective of this spectrum. Southside P uses his own traumatic experience to inform his work.

“In December 2017, I got into a severe freak car accident where I witnessed a mother of two lose her life in a horrific way,” said Southside P.

“Witnessing and being a part of that accident really took my appreciation for life to the next level.”

Southside P used his songwriting as a form of therapy. Processing the car accident with his music helped him find emotional balance and create an emotional bond with his fans. Southside P found he served as a musical therapist for many fans.

“A few years ago, I released a song called ‘I Gotta Make It,’ and it inspired many of my supporters to follow their dreams,” he said. “One person that contacted me after listening to the song said I inspired her to pursue a nonprofit organization that provides help for at-risk teen girls.”

Southside P’s rap contemporary, Raymond

Jean Philippe, otherwise known as King Hoodie, based his sets on promoting positivity and truth.

King Hoodie wrote his first raps in a journal his sister gave him after he was expelled from North Miami Beach Senior High.

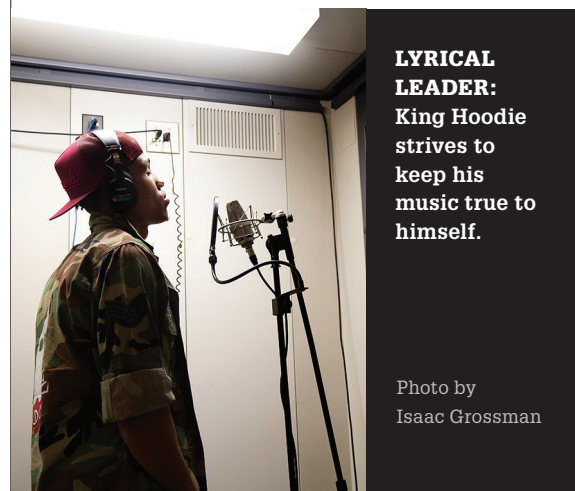
His sister gave him the journal to document his feelings, but he found rap to be a more therapeutic form of expression.

King Hoodie has since released several albums, singles, EP’s and freestyles, and amassed 12,700 followers on Instagram as “King Hoodie” (@_kinghoodie).

“I want my music to force people into a creative life,” he said. “Whatever the case may be, I want to bring out the inner talent in those who don’t believe their creativity is worth sharing.”

Like Southside P., King Hoodie serves as a therapist of sorts to his followers, but one who sometimes makes custom remedies for fans.

“My song ‘My Brother’ was written for a friend of mine that struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts,” King Hoodie said. “He likes the way it sounds and appreciates it. He even posted a video of himself enjoying the song on his Instagram.”



LYRICAL LEADER:
King Hoodie strives to keep his music true to himself.

Photo by
Isaac Grossman

Disrespecting elders

LAW & DISORDER: Health care attorney John Coleman is critical of the state's mandate on generators at nursing homes.

Photo by
Olivia Solomon



Nursing homes face intense scrutiny after post-Irma legislation

BY BRIANNA NADERPOUR

St. Thomas Aquinas High School

Hurricane Irma took a heavy toll on the elderly when it swept through Florida in September. Power outages from the storm caused 12 deaths after the air conditioning went out a Hollywood nursing home.

Floridians responded quickly, and Gov. Rick Scott signed two bills in March that required generators be installed in nursing facilities.

Some declared the nursing home crisis “solved,” but the lack of generators in nursing homes is just one symptom in a much larger epidemic of elder abuse.

The legislation amounted to “closing the barn door after the horse is out,” said Dr. Kenneth Goodman, a medical ethics specialist at the University of Miami. “We needed to have a bunch of dead people before anyone thought that was necessary, and that is dispiriting.”

Elder abuse includes anything from sexual abuse to fraud to neglect, and it is a key issue in Florida, which has the highest percentage of elderly people in the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

It is difficult to find statistics on elder abuse, as there are no national records. But in Florida, the number of verified cases of elder abuse was 2,525 in 2015, a 74 percent increase in four years, according to the Florida Department of Children and Families.

While some groups in Florida are advocating for the elderly, the challenge lies in balancing protection of the vulnerable with the cost of providing that protection.

Although the Florida legislation originally had a 60-day installation deadline from the bill's passage (the end of May 2018), nursing homes and advocates pushed back. The deadline for installing generators has now

been extended to Jan. 1, after the end of the current hurricane season.

Other politicians have also tried to tackle the issue. State Sen. Gary Farmer, a Democrat from District 34, is known for having fought for stricter rules governing nursing care facilities.

He said that legislators should focus on creating “a regulated high standard that is in the best interest of the residents and patients, not what is in the best interests of the business of nursing homes.”

But some people in the healthcare industry were concerned that the initial proposals were too rigid.

“We don’t want to trade one tragedy for another,” said Kristen Knapp, director of communications for the Florida Health Care Association (FHCA).

“We want to make sure work is done correctly in the most reasonable timeline. The initial emergency rule that dropped gave facilities a 60-day timeline to install generators, which we believed was just an unrealistic timeline to accomplish. The process for installing a generator properly and safely from start to finish takes about 38 weeks.”

Nursing home health care attorney John Coleman agreed.

“The government, rightfully, was upset by what happened in Hollywood Hills, but it was a knee-jerk reaction by the government to say that, ‘This needs to be done in these many months and we don’t care what the cost is,’” Coleman said.

He said many facilities were left without resources to make changes and had to shoulder a large financial burden. He described the issue as multitiered.

“The individual operators and the families need to be the voice...for their loved ones,” he said.

On a local level, it is close to impossible to have a clear indication of how deeply rooted the issue of elder abuse is. Without regular and continued attention to these cases, neglect and abuse of the elderly will remain a mostly invisible issue, surfacing only briefly and exceptionally, as the 12 deaths at Hollywood Hills did.

↑ **74%**
Elder Abuse
in 4 years

12 
Deaths
in one nursing home
from Hurricane
Irma


2,525
abuse cases
in 2015

Source: FDCF
Credit: Brianna Naderpour

But when the institutions tasked with caring for the elderly fail, experts say that it is society’s responsibility to make sure those over 65 are protected.

“Any time you find circumstances, especially in some sort of aggregate living environment, [where the individuals] are not well cared for, that’s a failure of our society to take adequate care of them,” Goodman said.

And, currently, he believes Florida is coming up short.

“This is an example of a society that keeps talking about how important its values are, but is unwilling to put its money where its mouth is.”



Chloe-Amelie Aikman, 15, will be a junior at Henry B. Plant High School this fall. She is the features editor of her publication, the Pep O' Plant, as well as junior president of her school's National English Honor Society chapter. She enjoys painting, writing and playing badminton.

Devin Dubon, 16, will be a junior at Miami Lakes Educational Center. He is a copy editor and social media manager of his newspaper, The Harbinger, and a staff writer and photographer for his yearbook, Alpha & Omega. He spends his time reading and listening to music.



Ruben Escobar, 15, will be a junior at Coral Gables Senior High School this fall. He is the business manager of his school's news magazine and an anchor for his school's TV production, GablesLive. He plans on studying aerospace engineering at MIT or pursuing a career in journalism.

Joseph Fernandez, 16, will be a senior at Christopher Columbus High School this fall. He is a pianist, drummer, singer, and the president of CCNN Live, his school's broadcast journalism club. He hopes to pursue a career in digital media and production and keep music as a hobby.



John Folsom, 17, will be a senior at Florida State University Schools this fall. He is an avid tennis player and the editor in chief of his high school newspaper, The Tomahawk Talk. He hopes to continue his MMA training and pursue a career in journalism.

Isaac Grossman, 17, will be a senior at Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School this fall. He enjoys graphic design, scriptwriting and boxing. He owns a clothing line called Oligarchy Supply. He's entertainment editor for his school's newspaper, The Lightning Strike.



Nyah Hardmon, 17, will be a senior at Cypress Bay High School this fall. She is a spoken word poet, the features section editor of her school newspaper, the Circuit, and the editor-in-chief for her school's literary magazine, Electric Ink. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism and creative writing.

Allessandra Inzinna, 17, will be a senior at Miami Palmetto Senior High this fall. She is the senior copy editor of her school newspaper, The Panther. She hopes to study investigative journalism in college.



Nuha Islam, 17, will be a senior at Cooper City High School this fall. She enjoys dissecting movies and is currently writing a novel. She is a staff writer for the school newspaper, The Lariat, and is involved in National English Honor Society.

Ian Krupkin, 17, will be a senior at Miami Beach Senior High School this fall. He loves playing sports such as soccer, basketball and tennis on top of being involved in media and he's an intern at a production company. He is not sure where he wants to attend college.





Steven Lee, 17, will be a senior at Christopher Columbus High School. He is the vice president of CCNN Live, his school's news network, and co-founder of a production company, Glitchroom Productions. He hopes to study broadcast journalism and pursue digital media.

Zachary Letson, 17, will be a senior at Gulliver Preparatory School. He is the editor in chief of the school newspaper, The Raider Voice. He hopes to study mass communications in college.



Kennedy McKinney, 17, will be a senior at The Bolles School this fall. She is the editor-in-chief of her school newspaper, President of the Autism Awareness Club, and runs her own blog, kennedymckinney.com. Kennedy plans on enrolling in college and majoring in Journalism.

Brianna Naderpour, 16, will be a senior at St. Thomas Aquinas High School this fall. She is the editor-in-chief of the school's newspaper, Raider Review, a member of the Quill and Scroll Journalism Honor Society, and has her own creative writing blog. She hopes to pursue journalism and film in college.



Carolina Niebla, 17, will be a senior at Maritime and Science Technology Academy. She is the Photo and Social Media Editor for her school newspaper, The Beacon. She hopes to major in Journalism in college and become a writer.

Alexandra Sansone, 16, will be a junior at Cooper City High School this fall. She is the Managing Editor of the school newspaper, The Lariat, Cappies Critic and lover of music. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism.



Nicole Schwyn, 17, will be a senior at Gulliver Preparatory School this fall. She is the co-editor-in-chief of her school's yearbook, The Raider, and also performs in her school's orchestra. She intends to study history in college and plans on attending law school.

Olivia Solomon, 16, will be a junior at Miami Palmetto Senior High this fall. She is business manager for her school newspaper, treasurer of her junior class and a member of National Honor Society. She hopes to study journalism in college and change the world through her reporting.



Taisa Strouse, 15, will be a junior at Miami Country Day School this fall. She is the sports editor of her school newspaper, The Spartacus, and she plays soccer and runs cross country. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism.

Mariam Vela, 17, will be a senior at Coral Gables Senior High School this fall. She is the copy editor of her school's news magazine, highlights. She hopes to attend university and major in political science and journalism.



A look at Florida's wellness

Montage students explore controversial health care issues

BY NUHA ISLAM

Cooper City High School

For 21 days, 20 high school journalists from all over Florida made the trek from their dorms to the University of Miami School of Communications. There they worked hard to report stories on health and wellness in South Florida, specifically in the teen and elderly populations.

"What we cover at Montage are things that haven't been in the spotlight but really should be," said John Folsom, a participant from Florida State University Schools.

"We hit stories that people don't necessarily know about even though they are just as important as the main news stories of the day."

Miami Montage, formally known as the Peace Sullivan/James Ansin High School Workshop in Journalism and New Media at UM, takes place annually in July with funding support from the Dow Jones News Foundation, the Ansin Family Foundation, Peace Sullivan, The Miami Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Students chosen for the program learn from industry experts about photojournalism, news writing and graphic design and gain exposure to many different career paths in journalism.

"The most valuable thing I learned is really how to go get the story," said Alessandra "Alle" Inzinna, a senior at Palmetto High School. "Sometimes sitting around, waiting and researching isn't enough. You have to go and find your sources, look for what you need."

Inzinna's article centered on elderly people staying longer in the workforce. She sought out potential interviewees at a local Sedanos and through Uber.



Photo by Mariam Vela

SHOOTING STRAIGHT: Video instructor Trevor Green guides Steven Lee and Carolina Niebla on a video shoot inside a local smoke shop that sells vaping products.

This year marks the 50 year anniversary of urban journalism workshops in America. The first workshop, held at American University, was designed to give black students the tools to report the experience of black communities during the civil rights movement.

Since its founding, the Dow Jones News Fund has supported 12,000 high school students in free workshops all across the country.

"People will always need accurate information to make decisions about purchases, politics and just about anything," said Linda Shockley, managing director of the Dow Jones News Fund.

"So there will always be a need for professional people who know how to find out information and filter it in a way that is understandable to the average citizen."

Fred Blevens is the co-director for editorial content. He began working with Miami Montage 10 years ago. He said the face of journalism is evolving and will become more multi-media in the future.

"I actually think [the future] is bright. We've had many periods of transition in journalism since the founding of the nation. We're in one right now, and more and more stuff is getting sorted out with the move to digital journalism," Blevens said.

This was the first year the theme was predetermined by sponsors, specifically the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

"Healthcare seems to be the biggest issue with young people and with old people. Those are the two demographics we focused on because they seemed to be the ones with the most difficulties," Blevens said.

"Anything that contributes to peoples' knowledge of how it works and what's going on is valuable to people making decisions or forming opinions about our health care system."

When they weren't working on story deadlines, workshop students got a taste of the college lifestyle.

"There is more to this than starting a career in journalism," Blevens said. "Maturity, learning to live in a dorm, being away from parents, surviving on your own, socializing with everyone in the group, eating terrible food.... are all things you learn."

GETTIN IT DOWN: Nyah Hardmon jots notes during an interview.



Photo by Joseph Fernandez



Photos by Miami Montage students and staff

MAKING NEWS: Workshop students learn the routines of real journalism in the field and in UM's media labs.



Photo by Steven Lee



Photo by Zachary Letson



Photo by Brianna Naderpour



Photo by Chloe-Amelie Aikman



Photo by Kennedy McKinney