

A photograph of a man with glasses and a patterned shirt playing a drum. The man is wearing a shirt with a geometric pattern in brown, yellow, and black. He is also wearing a necklace with a large pendant and a bracelet. He is holding a drumstick and playing a drum. The background is blurred.

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Dr. Patrick O'Connor

The Road Less Traveled is a recurring feature that describes the path creative, interesting people took to get to where they are in life. Most creative people have traveled very interesting paths to get to where they are ... usually zig-zagging a lot, shifting artistic gears, retracing steps, exploring new passions, revisiting previous works, failing a whole bunch, and generally bouncing back often. All these experiences are part of their creative profile and serve to motivate and inspire them. This feature tells that story.

This issue of *The Road Less Traveled* explains the path of Dr. Joe Hendershott, president of Hope 4 the Wounded, Inc.

Author note: If a reader would like to suggest someone to be considered the subject of a future Road, e-mail the publisher at info@aroundkent.net.

Dr. Joe Hendershott

Overview

Dr. Joe Hendershott is a nationally recognized educational consultant, speaker, author, and professional development trainer. His life's work has been devoted to understanding and reaching wounded children who have experienced trauma. This requires a basic understanding of the effects of trauma on learning, behavior, and relationships.

In 2006, Joe presented at a conference in Colorado. He was there to share his experience and knowledge on the subject of teaching children who are wounded from trauma. Only one person showed up for his presentation. Somewhat dismayed, he did his presentation anyway with

the thought "this one person wants to learn about this subject and that's why we are both here." This rather humble start ignited a journey that has taken Joe to many more places than he ever expected. And, he has shared his message and wisdom with thousands since that first conference presentation.

In Orlando, Florida in June 2017, the National Dropout Prevention Center partnered with Joe for the second national conference on this subject. The "Reaching the Wounded Student" conference featured keynote speakers,

presenters, vendors and about 500 professional people who strive to make a difference for students who have experienced



“*I took the road less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.*”

— ROBERT FROST

trauma. Teachers, judges, parents, probation officers, corrections officers, counselors, social workers, and others attended. They are trying to figure out how to support children wounded from trauma. Joe thinks of these professionals as first responders. Plans are underway for a third conference in June of 2018.

What Is Wounded?

The term “wounded” is a relatively new one to describe difficult situations some students have experienced from traumatic events. It is often confused with “at-risk”. Basically, being at-risk means there are various conditions which could result in harm to a child. These are often related to socioeconomic factors. Students in at-risk situations are often thought of as “hard to reach and hard to teach” and usually have high dropout rates.

Being wounded means the harm has already occurred. It means the children are beyond at-risk. Dr. Hendershott (in *7 Ways to Transform the Lives of Wounded Students*) defines wounded students as “children who have

experienced or continue to experience emotional and/or physical traumatic events.” There are some estimates that as many as 47% of our school children have experienced trauma in their lives. Another startling statistic is about 30% of children entering kindergarten are traumatized. The most common trauma experiences relate to physical and emotional abuse, drug abuse, violence, and incarcerated parents. The effects, if untreated, often last a lifetime. As a result, wounded children have an increased likelihood of further adverse experiences as adults.

Trauma has become a national priority in recent years. This is due in part to legal proceedings filed against school systems that lacked training for staff and teachers to address the needs of traumatized students. Many teachers were trying to care for wounded students but lacked the professional know-how to do so. Joe Hendershott and his family feel called to respond to this need.

How do you Prepare for This?

When you look at Joe’s work, you might expect him to be a minister, psychologist, social worker, probation officer, psychiatrist, or a counselor of some type. His work, however, incorporates many of the concepts and skills from those professions. His extensive first-hand and professional experience, training in adoption and foster parenting as well as professional development have prepared him to address the many aspects of working with traumatized youth. He has blended his personal,



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professional, and educational experiences into a coordinated approach to meeting the needs of traumatized youth. This is a multi-faceted problem and thus requires a multi-faceted solution. Joe comments, “every experience, both personal and professional, has brought me to this spot”.

Joe grew up in Ashland, Ohio doing pretty much what all kids did in friendly, small town America. He loved sports and the outdoors. He went to The Ohio State University in the mid-1980s, earning a physical education teaching degree while minoring in science. His passion for working with traumatized youth began at OSU during his sophomore year as part of the *Directions for Youth* initiative (*now Directions for Youth and Families*). He was also part of the *Big Brothers and Big Sisters* program, serving

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Joe, Dardi and their children; *Hope 4 The Wounded* based in Kissimmee, Florida

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as a big brother. His little brother got into trouble and was sent to the Boys Village School—a residential treatment center in Wooster, Ohio. Joe went to visit him. During the visit, he met the school director Bob Maruna. After getting to know Joe, Bob offered Joe a position as a summer school recreational therapist. He accepted and worked there for nine summers! He blended his experience in physical education with his passion for working with wounded youth. Bob is acknowledged in Joe's first book on trauma. He still works part-time at the facility (now called the Village Network) and they remain in contact.

Professional Preparation

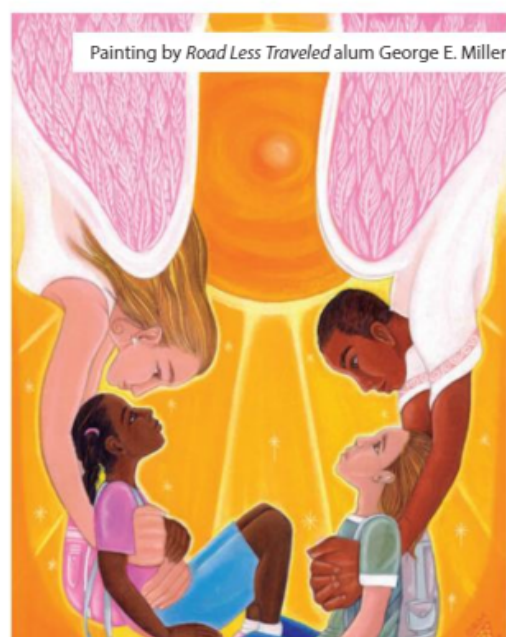
After college, he took his first teaching position as a physical education and science instructor at a military academy in Florida. He has served as an educator/administrator in diverse settings such as juvenile corrections facilities, treatment centers, private schools, public schools in both rural and urban settings, and alternative schools. All of these experiences convinced him that wounded children can be found everywhere at any age.

Joe continued his education studying for a masters degree at Ashland University in educational administration. This led to additional teaching and administrative positions in a number of schools for youth at-risk. He followed the masters degree with a doctorate in educational leadership studies at Ashland. Dr. Harold Wilson, his doctoral advisor, had a major influence in his development. Dr. Wilson's support (he even traveled to Alaska once to hear Joe present at a conference) set the bar very high for Joe. Also, Dr. Terry Wardle of the Ashland Theological Seminary provided Joe the specialized knowledge and skill of

working with wounded children. Dr. Wardle really helped shape Joe's beliefs and approach. A major lesson he learned from Dr. Wardle was to suspend judgment when working with wounded children and to meet them where they are.

Personal Preparation

In addition to studying and working with wounded youth, Joe lives in this world. He comments, "witnessing brokenness up close and personal has had a profound impact on my work. At some point, the calling on my heart became greater than the perceived safety of the status quo." By this time, he and Dardi



(married in 1993) had foster-parented nine children in addition to raising five biological children. He was also formalizing his theories about how to make a difference in the lives of kids who have been traumatized. Joe's background in teaching and educational administration fit nicely with the work he and Dardi did in their personal lives.

A family RLT

Each of us has a *Road Less Traveled*. Joe does, too. However, Joe's *RLT* is a bit different than most. His *RLT* is really more of one family's *RLT*. His wife Dardi and all their children are a significant part of Joe's *RLT*. In fact, they started a resource and training group called *Hope 4 The Wounded* based in Kissimmee, Florida. The mission of the group is to "equip, empower, and encourage those who are called to work with the broken and lost children of this world." There is a tremendous need to provide resources on this subject. Joe feels he, Dardi, and their children can respond to God's calling to assist in this important area. In fact, it is their personal ministry.

The group's resources are designed to educate and empower anyone working with children who are wounded. The end goal is to provide resources and programs that foster esteem building and emotional development. They offer consulting, conferences, books, seminars, and recently started an online certification program that focuses on working with wounded youth. They already have over 100 participants! More information on their work can be found on the *Hope 4 the Wounded* website <http://www.hope4thewounded.org>

Joe and Dardi have five biological and four adopted children. Four adult children are teachers: Kaelee (4th grade), Kearsten (Special Education), Kyler (Special Education), and Kameryn (Biology). They have five children still in K–12 schools. Kade is a senior in high school and four children are in grade school. K'Tyo is from Ethiopia while Kemer is from China. Kaya and Kendi are adopted from Ohio.

Their daughter, Kameryn, joined Dardi on the trip to Ethiopia to bring K'Tyo to their family. Also, son Kade went to China with Dardi to

bring Kemerl home to America. Joe remained at home to tend to the remaining children. Joe and Dardi gave all their children the same first initial in their first name. This was intentional as they (and their children) wanted this to serve as a way for everyone to feel connected to each other.

Joe and Dardi have blended their calling to serve those in need. Together, they are presenting at national professional conferences. They are also planning to write a much needed book on the role of parents and family members to support adopted children. Their personal and professional lives enable them to provide a holistic look at addressing the myriad of needs of wounded youth and those who serve them.

"Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."

— JOSHUA J MARINE

The Hope 4 the Wounded Approach

Joe believes we need to rethink our approach to working with wounded youth. We need to expand our thinking and move away from a "one size fits all" approach. He believes the strategies in place for at-risk children are preventative in nature. He has made it his mission to make a distinction between at-risk and wounded children.

We need to shift our thinking away from "fixing" broken youth. We need to work toward putting those who have been wounded in a position to experience educational success and transformation in their lives. He wants to equip professionals with the knowledge, skill, and experience to meet the growing needs of

wounded children. These are the people who read his books, attend his conferences, and earn his certificate. To Joe, these professionals have a "first responder" role. He, Dardi, and their children want to equip this group of first responders to be successful in meeting the needs of traumatized youth.

The approach Joe teaches focuses on three main themes in support of wounded students. He believes and practices that we must foster quality relationships with youth. Those relationships can only succeed when they are viewed from a healing perspective. Any attempt to control the relationship is likely to fail. The three themes in his approach are:

- *Understanding*
- *Reaching*
- *Transforming*

The most important way these three themes can be achieved is to:

- *Suspend judgement*
- *Understand the difference between at-risk (preventative strategies) and wounded (responsive strategies to the effects of trauma)*
- *Listen to the wounded youth plea: "As my caregiver, do you understand me and what I am dealing with?"*

What is Down the Road?

"To be honest, I'm not totally sure how I got here," Joe comments. Seems like an odd observation from someone who has followed his calling for over 35 years. He has, throughout his journey, held steadfast to his belief that the needs of others exceed his own. He has committed extensively to his work and done much of it on his own "dime and time". Joe has had many unexpected events both personally and professionally in his *RLT*, such as working at Boy's Village, writing books, adopting children,



Joe and Dardi Hendershott at the 2015 National Dropout Prevention Network Conference

and being a father of nine. In the process, he has learned "a whole lot about patience, grace, mercy, empathy, and forgiveness". He intends to continue to follow his calling.

Joe believes every child has a story and sometimes that story overshadows their gifts and abilities and impedes their academic success. He feels privileged to do this work. He is humbled when he meets people who say his training has inspired and encouraged them in their profession. He shared his feelings that "knowing I get to play a small part in others' lives as they seek to make a difference in the lives of marginalized children inspires me to keep going". Joe practices without preaching.

Joe, Dardi and their children, in all their personal and professional endeavors, feel called to guide those who support wounded youth. They are leading dozens of professionals to address this important work. Their goal is to follow God's call to equip first responders to position wounded youth to experience transformation through education. The ultimate benefactors of their work are the wounded youth who so desperately need our support, understanding, and hope as they heal. ■