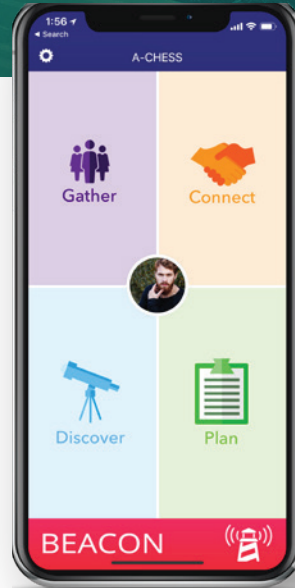


Collaboration is Key: A Fellowship at YSS to Build a Recovery Alumni Network

YSS's mission statement is, "To create hope and opportunity by putting kids first." This sentiment is truly at the heart of where the Alumni Network is heading. Originally, when I started on this project, I was communicating with YSS's older alumni and researching what kind of support they wanted from us in their communities. I found out very quickly that older alumni were ready to provide support to others and that they too, like YSS, wanted to put the kids first. This shifted my focus to our youth residential clients. Time and time again, I have been shown the effectiveness, thoroughness, and deep sense of care at YSS's residential treatment houses, but ***what happens for youth when the 90 day stay is over?***

Often, youth just go home. This can be great because they are surrounded by family and friends, but it is also a challenge because they are often back in the same environment where their addiction began. Youth are not totally disconnected from YSS when they leave the treatment house - YSS advocates keep in touch for around 6 months as best they can. That being said, there are still many barriers created by confidentiality, accessibility, and simply time to making this service effective enough to mitigate relapse and facilitate connection.

These barriers create what we call a gap in services - specific to recovery. Through my research, I found this was extremely common for organizations who work with clients experiencing substance abuse issues. With the help of my research and staff at YSS, I was introduced to technology designed out of research about addiction to address this gap.



This technology comes in the form of a smartphone app, by **Chess Health**, called A-CHESS. A-CHESS stands for Addiction Comprehensive Health Enhancement Support System, and is described as "a comprehensive relapse prevention and care coordination platform for patients with substance abuse disorder", according to Stuart Hammond, VP of sales for Chess Health. It originated out the the University of Wisconsin, Madison and is listed on **SAMSHA** NREPP registry as the only evidence-based relapse prevention technology platform of its kind recognized by SAMSHA.

The vision of how this will help our youth is exciting and complex. It starts with creation of recovery coaches as an addition to our residential care staff, which right now includes the administration, counselors, advocates, residential staff and more. The recovery coaches would be in-charge of facilitating the apps use to its full potential. One of the most exciting tenets of this would be creating a care team for each resident while in our care to have connection with as soon as they leave.

Some of the other features are:

- Daily Motivational Messages & Check-in
- Peer Connection via Messages and Group Discussions
- Messaging with Counselors
- Care plan, Medication, and Appointment Reminders
- Goals, Journals, and Surveys
- Weekly BAM (brief addiction monitoring) surveys
- BEACON button - an alert to start an automatic intervention
- Education Content About Recovery
- High Risk Location Alerts - voluntary GPS system

These features are all amazing and greatly needed, but the foundation of this app and why it works is its client-focused approach, because it is not just about the technology - it is about the humans who use it - both clients and care staff. Like changes to most programs, this technology is a process to adapt to, but it is absolutely the innovation YSS needs and the next step forward in addiction recovery.



Learn more about **evidence of A-CHESS and a success story of its implementation**

This kind of technology is not only beneficial for our youth with substance abuse issues, but also for the communities we serve. First and foremost, when we decrease the likelihood of relapse, we also decrease the chances of recidivism - youth needing to come back to treatment, and legal intervention. It has the ability to connect people in healing and fostering stronger relationships within communities all over the state.

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This is especially important because our youth do not just come from Ames and Mason City, where residential houses and outpatient treatment centers are located. Serving all our youth is a top priority and it shows when we work to increase accessibility that can transcend money and location. This is also greatly beneficial to our communities because it gives us space to collaborate with other programs, organizations, and projects based on what our clients are involved in and passionate about. Another benefit is the future creation of more local fun sober events that are open to the whole community - what an amazing way to teach youth how to have fun without the help of substances and to give them more structured opportunities to do so. All of these things are some of the necessary steps forward to combating addiction and the stigma around addiction.

The understanding I have of substance abuse disorders and the programs that work to treat them has increased tenfold.

This fellowship and project, by far, have been some of the most educationally significant, challenging, and experientially rewarding opportunities of my life. My growth in personal and professional development started at the very beginning with the FLIA retreat week. It made it so that I came to YSS ready to make an impact and with the confidence that I could do anything I set my mind to. It truly set the tone for the next 3 months where YSS welcomed me with open arms. I cannot thank the staff I worked with enough for their help - doing research, navigating a professional organization, and providing feedback as well as time whenever I needed it. They also challenged me to grow in my professional skills by providing opportunities to work on strategic thinking and public speaking. This is the type of experience that, every time I look back on what I learned, something new and actionable comes forward.

It is safe to say that the experience exceeded my expectations and I was able to also meet all my goals, which included leaving YSS with something functional and actionable for their alumni network, networking with people across the organization, and having a better understanding of what I wanted my next step in life to be. From this growth, I plan to continue working in the social sector and have gained the clarity that I want to do direct-service advocacy work. I cannot wait to see the impactful future of FLIA and YSS and I am beyond grateful to have gotten to be a part of both organizations!