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Taking the Next Step

How an Alumnus Entrepreneur Channeled Passion into Purpose

SATURDAY, MARCH 04, 2023

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Recently, the [UNH Sustainability Institute](#) had the opportunity to catch up with [Sam Warach '17](#) ([Finance](#) and [International Affairs](#)), a cofounder of the UNH [Entrepreneurship Club](#) and winner of the 2017 [Paul J. Holloway Prize](#)

[competition](#). Since founding his company, [NextStep Health](#), Sam's been connecting individuals to mental health resources and new digital infrastructure. He shares some of the experiences from the journey for students and readers.

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What led you to enter the 2017 Holloway Competition and start your business, NextStep Health? Could you share more about your journey and why you took that path?

When I was a senior, I was extremely passionate about innovation, design, community development and entrepreneurship. I was serving as the President of the Entrepreneurship Club and incorporated as many opportunities to learn as I could about business and technology.

I had a clear goal to build a social enterprise to make a positive impact, and chose the space of mental health, as I identified it as the most pressing social challenge of our generation. I had seen many people in need of support and wanted to use my passion, energy, and skills to help.

By my senior year, I had the idea to develop a software platform that helps individuals and communities cultivate resilience, by connecting people to resources and helping them cultivate health literacy to prepare them to navigate challenges before they arise. This led to developing the early concept for NextStep that I showcased in the Holloway Competition. This was the genesis of NextStep Health.

What have some of the biggest challenges and successes been in regard to developing NextStep and continuing to build it? Where do you hope to go with the company in the future?

Most people overestimate what they can do in one year, and underestimate what they can do in ten. I've cultivated a long-term view; executing our vision in the short term and adapting as times change and new technologies are developed. I've learned that operating with this long-term thesis, being patient with outcomes and impatient with action, and taking the process one step at a time creates an outsized impact.

Today, we partner with health & social service providers, educators, government agencies, and various NGOs to create impact in urban and rural communities across the US and beyond. NextStep Health's

software infrastructure helps bridge gaps in public health and education to facilitate greater access to resources for people to develop resilience, healthy coping skills, a greater sense of self-worth, and become agents of their own change.

The world of mental health care is continually changing. How does that affect NextStep's actions, especially considering the 2020 Pandemic?

We've operated from the very start with the thesis of solving an incredibly multifaceted problem that requires multifaceted solutions. In order to improve community mental health across the US and beyond, we need to focus on helping people recover from mental health challenges, but also focusing on what can be done upstream in order to mitigate the downstream challenges that we see affecting our communities today.

The pandemic served as a catalyst for bringing mental health challenges to the front and center of the mainstream zeitgeist. It also made our work a lot more relevant to those who hadn't previously recognized the importance.

Reflecting on your time at UNH, you were an active member of the PAUL College community and helped found the Entrepreneurship Club. How did your academic experience lead you to where you are today?

My educational experience at UNH was incredibly formative. The academics, extracurriculars, and community were foundational in my early career and have been great sources to grow both personally and professionally.

Professors like Dr. Fiona Wilson and Dr. Andrew Earle were instrumental in helping me develop and refine my approach as a social entrepreneur and innovator.

Looking forward, what are your next ambitions?

As I continue my work to make a positive impact within communities across the US and beyond through NextStep Health, I also advise and mentor early stage entrepreneurs and innovators who aim to create a positive social impact with their work, helping them accelerate their learning and positive impact. Stay tuned on my website <https://samwarach.com>

If people want to get involved or join the Nextstep community outside of accessing our available mental health support resources, they can grab a pair of NextStep sneakers or other NextStep gear at <https://nextstep.world>!

What continues to motivate and inspire you?

Through the journey of building NextStep, I've learned that channeling hardship and grief into productivity and community development is a service for which we all have potential, and through this we can all create positive impact in our communities.

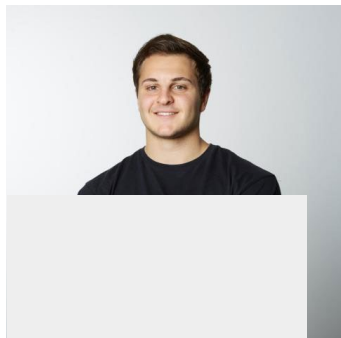
What advice would you offer to students based off your experiences?

Education continues after college; focus on learning and trying out as much as you can and pursuing your interests while you're a student.

Understand that an important key to success is maintaining your curiosity even after you get out of school, as cultivating a practice of being a lifelong learner is an investment that will serve you in all of your pursuits.

We all have the potential to create positive impact in our communities. I cover actionable advice for doing this in my book [Take the Next Step: Harnessing Tenacity in the Face of Adversity](#).

I am excited to see where students' ideas take them, as they take the next step toward living a good life and continue in their journeys, employing the power of education.



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