

To: Senator Roger Chamberlain, Chairman  
Senator Justin Eichom, Vice-Chair  
E12 Education, Finance and Policy Committee

From: LiveMore ScreenLess Founders, Board Members; YouthCouncil Members; Professionals

Hearing Date: Monday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Esteemed Members of the MN Senate:

We are grateful for the opportunity to present to you a collection of written testimonies from Minnesota professionals and LiveMore Interns and Youth Council members. These testimonies reveal the complex problem facing today's youth and are a call to action for all of us, including each of you, to support the tidal wave of responsibility facing young people as they attempt to navigate the perils of digital media.

We trust to you review of these testimonials from educators; medical and mental health professionals; positive youth development advocates; parents; and specialists in the fields of pornography and addiction. Even more importantly, we urge you to carefully consider the words of young people and decide that today is the day for action.

On behalf of those who have taken the time to share with you their wisdom, knowledge, expertise and experience, we submit these testimonials.

In highest regards,

Katherine Myers and Maree Hampton

LiveMore ScreenLess CoFounders



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*LIVEMORE SCREENLESS BOARD MEMBER MICHAEL CARR*

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## INTRODUCTION

Thank you. My name is Mike Carr. I'm the proud Board Member of LiveMore ScreenLess that is engaging high school and college students to mentor younger children on how to manage technology in their lives.

BRAVO to Chair Chamberlain and this committee for giving some thoughtful sunlight to how best to help students to harness the awesome power of technology in their lives while addressing the persistent and sometimes devastating pitfalls it may have for their mental health, bullying, and addiction that ripples out to most everyone who has a child, knows a child, or is a child.

## BACKGROUND

I'm the parent of a child who grew up with screens and social media who now struggles with severe and persistent adult mental health. I'm a former schoolteacher, camp director, and canoe guide who treasures children, the outdoors, and the incredible uplifting impact that combination can have. I'm also a former Super Lawyer, who gave up litigation to champion children, like my own child, with disabilities as a parent advocate working with hundreds and hundreds of families on school issues. I also help supervise a Children's Mental Health Youth Board working to stem discrimination and stigma for the ever-growing numbers of children living with mental health struggles.

## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

Personally, I sought out LiveMore because these former educators were the only ones around tackling this unmet need for my own children, for the children I taught, and the children I advocate for. There are too few resources and even fewer practical solutions to address this very real everyday struggle for children to manage the technology overload. LiveMore and their Youth Council are changing that and we can only imagine the exponential impact it could have if we could introduce this Council to every student government and to every student in Minnesota.

## IN CLOSING

We live in one of the better countries in the world to have a kid with a struggle and one of the best states in the country to have a child with a struggle. That is in no small part due to the work of this committee, this legislature, our government, our teachers, and our schools and the support they give to our students and to organizations like LiveMore, like PACER Center, and so many others that are making an exponential difference for our children.

Thank you.

Michael Carr



## INTRODUCTION

My name is Kylie Peterson and I currently serve on the LiveMore ScreenLess Board as one of the Youth Development Experts.

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

I've been leading in the youth development field for about 10 years with various positions supporting young people through the nonprofit sector and OST (out of school time). In these spaces I've partnered with youth to actively create opportunities where their voices are centered and honored. I've worked with our youngest kindergartners all the way to our post high school and college age. Each stage needs different things but also brings so much creativity and knowledge. Technology is something that bridges all these different age groups as well as how they use it and how often. My focus is more centered on the high school experience but as a mother of a 3rd grader I see the positive impacts it has on him and the negative first hand. This is what brought me to LiveMore, ScreenLess.

## TECHNOLOGY'S IMPACT

This generation is creative, innovative, adaptable, and vocal. They grew up with technology and many by age 2 could fully function a smartphone. We are seeing their innovation and creativity as they use their devices to create, and disrupt systems for change, but we are also seeing higher rates in mental illness, isolation, bullying, and overall misuse of technology. We see teens using technology to organize community efforts and send messages to our officials. We also see the hidden uses where students share all aspects of life and technology shifts to being a call for help rather than seeking out the support needed.

## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

Katherine and Maree asked the question, what can we do? LiveMore, Screenless answers this and then some. It allows space for both to live. Technology is a lifeline for our young people but it causes a lot of harm and carelessness. LiveMore is a balance. It identifies best practices with young people in the driver seat and enables young people to be the change and creates a support system for schools, adults, and others to be prepared for all uses. It provides adults like us the tools to identify the trend and propels us to action. This partnership speaks to the role of youth and control of devices in a brave space. It allows both parties to be heard and present for solutions. I believe in this work and in my own career and as a mother this is needed work.

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LIVEMORE SCREENLESS BOARD MEMBER MICHAEL KELLER

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## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

I am writing to you in support of the testimony being provided to you by Maree Hampton and Katherine Myers of LiveMore ScreenLess: 1) overuse and misuse of screens is having a measurable negative impact on the health of children; 2) every adult needs to become more aware of and educated about this issue to better advocate for and support youth; and 3) an evidence-based peer-to-peer model may be the most effective way to help. LiveMore ScreenLess has the data to demonstrate the depth of this silent crisis *and* the tools/resources to help combat it.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I am a board member for LiveMore ScreenLess and I am also a bullying victim who barely survived his early teenage years. I maintain that, had social media existed when I was a teenager, I would not be here today. The signature of cyber-bullying, the 24/7 pervasiveness of dark, toxic, destructive messages on multiple social media platforms, would have produced tragedy in my case.

## BULLYING PREVENTION

As a result of my experience, when I had the opportunity to help the PACER Center launch its National Bullying Prevention Center, I jumped in with both feet as their Marketing Advisory Board Chair to steer that effort. I became increasingly cyber-bullying aware and educated. In turn, just five years ago, when my daughter became a victim of cyberbullying, I was in a position to help her.

## FAMILY EXPERIENCE

My daughter was a successful student-athlete at Southwest High School. When she became the target of months of cyberbullying on Instagram's then evil twin, Finsta, her life fell apart. The more time she spent on her smart phone to defend herself from her bullies, the more addicted to that behavior she became and the more her situation worsened. Her eating, sleeping and other healthy habits; her grades, athletic performance; her social life; and most critically, her self-esteem, all plummeted. We (her parents) literally removed her phone for a time and then encouraged her to delete the social media platforms that were hurting her. Finally, her health improved. Ultimately, her reduced, smarter and more informed phone-based use of social media allowed her to return to some kind of normal.

## CALL TO ACTION

In just the past two years, families and kids my kids know have struggled with cyber-bullying. Reputations have been damaged through slander/rumor, and tragically, lives have been lost as some teens reach a point of no return. It does not have to be this way. With the training, education and programs LiveMore ScreenLess is proposing, more and more adults, and young people, can be equipped with real tools to lessen, or eliminate, the risks of cyber-bullying that are at their worst when screen time is at its highest. As a board member of LiveMore ScreenLess, as a bullying victim and as the parent of one, I urge this committee to do all it can to stem the tide of screen use in youth culture.

Thank you for your consideration and support for LiveMore ScreenLess and its proposals.

Michael Keller 3133 E. Bde Maka Ska Pkwy, Minneapolis, MN 55048; [michael.davis.keller@gmail.com](mailto:michael.davis.keller@gmail.com)



## INTRO/BACKGROUND

My name is Karin Hampton. I am a clinical psychologist licensed to practice in Minnesota since 1991. I have spent my career providing psychological services to children, adolescents and families and helping to supervise and train clinicians to be practitioners. I am proud to be a board member of Live More Screen Less in their critical mission to promote the digital wellbeing of children and young people with an emphasis on their mental and emotional health. As a psychologist trained in the scientist-practitioner model, I am especially proud of the evidenced based and science driven approach that is foundational to LiveMore ScreenLess.

## CLINICAL WORK

I have seen the ever-increasing impact and role of the use of digital devices in my clinical work. I see young people who are paralyzed by anxiety and obsessed about what they post and what is being said about them on social media. I have worked with adolescents who have been traumatized by cyber-bullying, being “ghosted”, or had secrets betrayed on social media, and those who have been manipulated by online predators. Many of my male clients, especially those with Autism or Attention deficits, developed addictive patterns of use as they have often found the world of video games so much more rewarding and predictable than their real world. The parents and caregivers of these individuals are desperate to help their children and try to set boundaries and protect them, but it can often turn into terrible power struggles and cause harmful impacts on relationships. Parents also struggle to find ways to balance their use of screens and model healthy use to support their children. The solutions are not obvious nor is it easy to undo the damage.

## BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

We cannot let children and parents cope with the impacts of digital technology on their own; this is and will become an even greater public health crisis, especially as the impact of COVID has led to even more screen time. The research into the impacts of digital technology on children’s brains shows that the same areas of the brain that are activated when someone wins a jackpot, has sex, or gets high are also being activated when children (or adults), play video games or engage in some of the social media sites like Snapchat. The more “hits” the brain receives from these digital activities, the more their use is reinforced and gradually the hobby can become an addiction just like that of any substance. Research also shows that children’s attention spans are literally getting shorter and it is likely that they crave the highly stimulating world of their devices whereas the lower stimulation that they get from reading a book or listening to a teacher just does not meet that craving. There is powerful evidence that empathy, creativity, and problem-solving capacities evolve not from what children get from a screen but from real world activities, being in nature, face to face interactions, reading books, and conversations. Also, children need to be bored and learn to manage that, delay gratification, and use their imaginations to be healthy and productive adults.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND PARENTING

My husband and I raised three sons navigating the challenges of video game use, social media, and the compelling nature of “online life” competing with “offline” pursuits. This “work” of balance is never really done for our sons or for us; it requires discipline and intentional awareness to avoid being sucked into the various games and social media platforms that have been designed using brain science to capture our attention and keep us glued to the screens. As a parent and a mental health professional, I believe that

we must support the work of Live More Screen Less to try to prevent the worst impacts of digital technologies while promoting healthy and balanced use of them.

#### LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

Specifically, Live More Screen Less is engaging high school and college students to raise their voices and help the next generation of youth to develop the tools and knowledge to have a healthy relationship with screens. Peer to peer models of intervention have a high success rate for effectiveness and longevity of impacts. LMSL is thus poised to have a tremendous benefit for our communities in Minnesota.

#### NEXT STEPS

As legislators, you have the opportunity to join in this mission to help our youth, their parents, the teachers, and our whole community to reach a goal of digital wellbeing and prevent more youth from experiencing the serious mental health impacts of misuse and overuse.

Thank you for your attention to this important health concern.

Karin Hampton, Ph.D, L.P.

Residence: Golden Valley

## INTRODUCTION

I have been a school counselor for 20 years, with the last 4 being at William Kelley Schools (WKS) in Silver Bay. I am an alumni of WKS which is a K-12 school with approximately 350 students. I started my career in the Twin Cities, first at Fridley, then Princeton, which included being the counselor for their new ALC and Online program. As a school counselor, my domains include college and career readiness, personal and social development and academics. I received my M.S. in School Counseling from St. Cloud State University.

## BACKGROUND

Two years ago, I decided to put digital well-being at the top of my priority. Cell phone use was interfering in the classroom and teachers were frustrated. I was also dealing with constant “drama” during the day regarding student’s texting and postings. In addition, I was becoming more and more concerned about student’s digital well-being and reached out to LiveMore ScreenLess (LMSL) for help. LMSL was very new at the time, and extremely responsive and supportive. With their backgrounds in education and public health, they immediately earned the respect of educators (typically hard to do!). We decided to start with educating teachers first, in a morning session with KK and then offering a session for students and parents in the evening at our high school orientation. Time and funding have slowed the work in continuing this important work.

## THE SILENT CRISIS

Move forward two years, and we find ourselves in a pandemic with everyone in the world becoming dependent on computers. My concerns continue to grow. While it’s not in the DSM-5 yet as an official category, it’s close. Addiction of devices is an issue in schools. I have a 7th grade student who has a serious YouTube addiction and is going to counseling because it’s negatively impacting his social life and academics. Sleep - they aren’t sleeping because they are staying up late on devices, which affects their school attendance and quality of work, not to mention their physical health and being able to cope with life’s daily problems. They are on their phones during class - it’s a great diversion. The dependence on their devices is scary, if you don’t believe me, take a phone away from a kid and you’ll see what I mean! I do a monthly distance learning check in and one of my questions is, “How much time are you spending on devices beyond school work” (school work is on an average 4-5 hours a day), the average for beyond schoolwork is also 4-5 hours with some being higher than 6. We live in a beautiful, outdoor-based area, and they are not getting outside because once you get sucked into your computer for hours, you are exhausted and lose motivation for everything. I can only imagine how much worse it is in metropolitan areas who aren’t as recreationally-based.

Anxiety and depression certainly existed before Instagram, but if you do the research, you’ll see that the trend lines correlate with widespread smartphone use in 2011. The round-the-clock responding to texts, posting to social media, obsessively following exploits of peers, comparing self to others -- it definitely affects moods and personalities.

The other major thing that I see happening is that because we are always plugged in, there is no time to process emotions/feelings which is so important. Instead, we just keep our brain going and pick up our phone/device. Our brains need time for creativity which also gets shut down with constant use of technology.

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

How does this affect kids development? They aren't learning to go into new situations and deal with uncertainty (it's easier to see who's checked in online). Many students are not wanting to go to school, they are more comfortable being at home learning online and not "dealing" with life. They're not learning resilience, they are overweight, tired and definitely not ready to learn. Jean Twenge, a psychologist and author of the book, "iGen," highlights a number of studies exploring the connection between social media and unhappiness. Twenge "believes that smartphones and other screens promote antisocial behavior, prolong childhood and increase loneliness, depression and political disengagement and I echo her beliefs.

## CALL TO ACTION

I am also a member of our local North Shore Mental Health Group, whose mission is to "build a community where it is safe to talk about mental well being, and to live well with and encourage treatment of mental illness, brain injuries and disorders." The group acknowledges our own use and dependence on social media and digital devices and they have energy for educating our community. So, this fall, LiveMore ScreenLess put together a proposal which would educate our community and school leaders and develop some focus groups for our students. They have the most comprehensive view and understanding of this issue that I've found in my professional experience in listening to dozens of speakers at conferences, etc. Our group has put the project on hold for now as our timing is not right with schools being out of session and overwhelmed with navigating the logistics of the pandemic. In addition, we continually struggle with how we will fund the work. Mental health providers, educators and community members are concerned about our youth and society, and this collaboration and guidance with an outside organization is necessary to navigate the amount of information and research in order to be done well. Without the guidance, and funding, it is difficult for educators and communities to get this agenda off the ground. The use of technology isn't going away, so we need to learn how to manage it.

Tami Duke

School Counselor

William Kelley Schools, Silver Bay, MN

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*Protecting, Maintaining and Improving the Health of All Minnesotans*

January 21, 2021

Minnesota K-12 Education Senate Committee  
Attn: Senator Chamberlin  
95 University Avenue W.  
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3225  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senators,

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the impact of screen misuse and overuse on mental health and well-being. Below is some information about the impact from overuse of technology and social media on mental health and well-being.

As you probably know, mental health needs and concerns are on the rise among youth and across populations. The [2019 Minnesota Student Survey data](#) showed more Minnesota students than ever report having long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional problems. This number was up from 18 percent of students surveyed in 2016 to 23 percent in 2019.

Healthy relationships and social connection are the foundations of mental health and well-being. In 2017, U.S. Surgeon General Murthy declared that the U.S. has a social isolation and loneliness epidemic, and youth are no exception.

*“While counting “friends” and “likes” are priorities for kids in this age of social technology, adolescents and young adults have some of the highest rates of loneliness today.” – Dr. Vivek Murthy, 19<sup>th</sup> U.S. Surgeon General of the United States*

A [2018 Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index](#) highlights the trend that younger generations are lonelier than older generations. Loneliness and social isolation are linked to poor mental health and well-being, suicide, poor academic performance, lower productivity, substance abuse, and poor physical health<sup>i</sup>. In fact, social isolation is a greater risk factor for mortality than smoking, obesity, exercise, and air pollution<sup>ii</sup>.

While hyper-utilization of technology and social media alone does not predict poor mental health and well-being or loneliness, it can distract from in-person relationships, creating an illusion of social connection. When technology use crowds out in-person relationships, it can impact the development of interpersonal skills and meaningful in-person interactions. There are social and physiological benefits that in-person communication provides that are not facilitated through technology. For example, empathy scores among college students dropped 40% from 1979 to 2009 with the biggest drop after 2000<sup>iii</sup>. Evidence shows that detaching

from technology and engaging in in-person relationships can impact youth empathy. Other opportunity costs of high rates of technology use or misuse is equally challenging for mental health and well-being, such as the reduced amount of time in nature or time spent engaging in creative free play.

Bullying is another prominent concern with overuse and abuse of technology and social media. In 2019, 19 percent of Minnesota students surveyed reported being bullied or harassed weekly in at least one way during the last 30 days, including an increase among fifth, eighth, and ninth grade students. Social media overuse can exacerbate loneliness by amplifying comparison and enabling bullying by freeing users from the social expectations and consequences supported in a school environment. Children who report feeling bullied weekly report the highest rates of feeling lonely, helpless, and being left out.

Parents, teachers, and youth appear to care a lot about this topic; in 2019 MDH developed a tip sheet on technology and kids for our state fair booth and had a great deal of interest. There is also evidence that most youth do not want to spend most of their time online; when youth are empowered to come up with their own solutions, they can be very effective at curbing technology dependence and engaging in pro-social activities.<sup>iv</sup>

Thank you for the opportunity to share some information about mental health and well-being. Let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Joan Brandt  
Children and Family Health Division Director  
Minnesota Department of Health  
[joan.brandt@state.mn.us](mailto:joan.brandt@state.mn.us)  
[Mental Health Promotion \(state.mn.us\)](https://www.state.mn.us/health/promotion/)

Cc: Katherine Myers, Maree Hampton

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<sup>i</sup> Murthy, V. (2020). Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World. New York: Harper Collins.

<sup>ii</sup> Holt-Lunstad, J. (2017). The Potential Public Health Relevance of Social Isolation and Loneliness: Prevalence, Epidemiology, and Risk Factors. Public Policy and Aging Report, 27 (4) 127-120.

<sup>iii</sup> Konrath, S.H., O'Brien, E.H., Hsing, C. (2010). Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time: A Meta-Analysis. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 15:2, 180-198.

<sup>iv</sup> Murthy, V. (2020). Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World. New York: Harper Collins.

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*LIVEMORE SCREENLESS BOARD MEMBER EVERETT TOUSSAINT*

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## INTRODUCTION

My name is Everett Toussaint. I am an excited Board Member of LiveMore ScreenLess that is engaging high school and college students to mentor younger children on how to manage technology in their lives.

Bravo to Senator Chamberlain and this committee for allowing there to be a presence on this matter. For there to be some light shined on the silent crisis of screens negatively impacting the wellbeing of our youth. To advocate for the mental, physical, socially, and emotional stability for them as well.

## BACKGROUND

I work in mental/behavioral health and have been since I graduated college. I have seen depression, anxiety, stress-induced psychosis all originate from technology among patients. I have worked in this field for several years. I am currently taking classes to become a Physician Assistant to furthermore help in a hospital setting.

## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

I truly trust in the organization. I was sought after because of my experience working in the mental health field and while being on this board, I have learned even more about this overlooked crisis we have in our homes, minds, and hands. In America, it seems more and more people are becoming aware of the “mental awareness” movement. The time to LiveMore and ScreenLess is now! The idea of having a peer-to-peer program is beneficial in multiple ways, not only having the youth learn but to also have the youth lead. Young people can connect on a level that sometimes only the same demographic can connect on. LiveMore and their Youth Council are creating those connections. Let’s make possible the growth it could have if we could introduce peer leadership to every student leadership group and to every student in Minnesota. It is time to wake the sleeping giant, to attack this silent crisis, and to LiveMore and ScreenLess.

## **Thank you.**

Everett Toussaint, Psychiatric Associate Child & Adolescent Mental Health  
University of MN Medical Center, Fairview  
University of St. Thomas Major: Health Promotion

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*LIVEMORE SCREENLESS BOARD MEMBER REBECCA SKOLER*

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## INTRODUCTION

My name is Rebecca Skoler, Family Nurse Practitioner, Board Member of LiveMore ScreenLess. I work as a Family Nurse Practitioner in Minneapolis and I am also on the Board of LiveMore ScreenLess. I strongly support the mission of LiveMore as an organization advocating for the health of our young people as it relates to screen misuse and overuse.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

I see first-hand the declining physical and mental health of our young people due to increased screen time. In the early 2000's we as Medical Professionals, asked that young people spend no more than 2 hours per day on their screens. Now we are living in a world where most young people cannot find 2 consecutive hours per day when they are NOT on their screens.

## MEDICAL TRENDS

I see the rising rates of obesity and diabetes that coincide with the reduced amount of time that young people are spending outdoors and being active. I see less creativity in young patients as they spend more time scrolling and less time drawing. I also see the acute feelings of anxiety and depression in young people as they spend increasing amounts of time on social media. They talk about the vortex that they get sucked into, as well as the false body image messages that make them feel depressed.

## CALL TO ACTION

We urgently need public leadership when it comes to the mental and physical health of our young people. We are looking to you to take a pro-active and public health approach to this rising epidemic of screen misuse and overuse.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca Skoler, APRN, MSN, FNP  
Community University Health Care Center  
Minneapolis, MN  
612-207-1040

## INTRODUCTION

I am a family medicine physician and a fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). At ACSM, we have a statement that "Exercise is Medicine." Exercise garners the physical and mental health benefits that we wish we could prescribe. Evidence is increasing that it's not only just exercise that helps boost health, but also that it's the avoidance of prolonged sitting. Notably, researchers are trying to discover precisely how much sitting is too much, and how little activity is too little.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

Randomized studies are nearly impossible to conduct when it comes to sedentary time. Still, it's clear, our bodies evolved to move and lack of movement is harmful to our physical and mental health. With this in mind we are all strikingly aware that screen time is a mostly sedentary activity. Conversely, we know that when young people engage in extracurricular activities and are not on their screens they reap physical and mental health benefits. A recent study published in the journal Preventive Medicine underscores the importance of young people being active and I will highlight this study here:

- Adolescents who participated in extracurricular activities were significantly less likely to engage in recreational screen-based activities
- Taking part in extracurricular activities was associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and optimism, and lower levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms
- Longer screen time (more than two hours a day) was associated with lower levels of life satisfaction and optimism, and higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms
- Differences among boys and girls, with longer screen time negatively affecting girls' mental health more significantly than boys
- Among both boys and girls, however, mental health was strongest when teens both participated in extracurricular activities and spent less than two hours on screen time

## NEXT STEPS

It would be extremely helpful to the field of healthcare, if policy makers realized that sedentary behavior was a risk for depression, anxiety, and other health hazards and used their powers to help Minnesotans, particularly our young people, to be more physically active.

Steven Stovitz, MD, MS, FACSM,  
Professor of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Minnesota,  
Associate Editor, British Journal of Sports Medicine  
Associate Editor, Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise

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LIVEMORE SCREENLESS BOARD MEMBER SARA MOHN

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## INTRODUCTION

My name is Sara Mohn and I am a board member serving LiveMore ScreenLess. I am honored to be serving an organization dedicated to empowering young people to take back their mental health as they manage their screens.

## CALL FOR ACTION

I am thrilled to see potential policy gaining traction and to see efforts for critical funding equip schools and all adults to respond to this very real and urgent crisis.

## BACKGROUND AND CRISIS

As a high school English teacher in the midst of my 31<sup>st</sup> year, I have had a front row seat to the havoc that progress, particularly technology, has wreaked upon our children. During my first twenty years of teaching in three different districts that ranged from rural South Carolina to a bedroom community on the edge of the metro to a top ranked high school serving affluent suburbs, I would staunchly declare that “kids are kids”. Ten years ago, things shifted. A string of suicides forced our attention to the mental health crisis that is bubbling up at an alarming rate among my students. The crisis has snowballed since then. To put it in perspective, the first twenty years of my career I knew of one student who died by suicide and one other who needed to be hospitalized for suicide ideation. Now, each year several students are hospitalized, and at any given time a significant number of my students are in active treatment to fight depression and suicide. I am convinced that the computer that landed in their hands disguised as a phone has contributed significantly to their fragility and sadness. They have traded authentic human connections, the outdoors, books, hours of real phone conversations, note passing, conflict resolution that demands more than 14 characters and even the fruitfulness of boredom, for endless scrolling, hours of streaming, shallow connections, and the daunting task of branding oneself in constant comparison.

## TIDAL WAVE

And my students know how sticky the web is in which they have been trapped. They are hungry for strategies and craving genuine connection. But the power of the “like”, the lure of the “next episode” and the illusions of the gaming world are powerful. I will never forget my student Emma, who is disciplined beyond measure and has no social media, telling me about a magical week in the wilderness with friends and no phones and about her dismay when the screens were returned, and the scrolling and disconnect instantly emerged. Increasingly, my students are recognizing that they have been played and they have paid a price. However, they don’t know how to fight the tidal wave.

## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

LiveMore is on the path to real solutions. Their peer to peer model is backed by research and makes infinite sense. Armed with research and a golden strategy that will empower kids to change school cultures, I am optimistic that change can happen.

Sara Mohn, English Teacher

Residence: 3401 Snelling Avenue North Arden Hills



## INTRODUCTION

I have served as assistant principal at Faribault High School for the past four years. During that time I have worked closely with hundreds of students, helping them navigate life's challenges and any barriers that stand in their way to academic success. Based on my experiences with these young people that I care deeply about, I can say two things with absolute certainty: First, that many of our young people are currently experiencing a silent, invisible, and widespread crisis that is negatively impacting their mental and emotional health. Second, that the overuse and misuse of cell phones, digital applications, and social media deserve a significant portion of the blame.

## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

This is why I am writing to you in support of the efforts of Maree Hampton and Katherine Myers of LiveMore ScreenLess to disrupt this crisis by providing training, education, programs, and resources to those who work closely with our youth. I share their view that parents and other adults in our state need to become more aware of the issues these devices are causing and be better prepared to advocate on behalf of our state's most precious resource – our children. Further, I share their view that an evidence-based peer-to-peer model that empowers our youth to act on behalf of each other's well-being is a key to raising awareness and creating change. Young people listen to and are influenced by their peers, especially on issues related to social media and technology.

## STUDENTS

I am confident that if you asked other school leaders around the state what their thoughts are on this topic, most would agree with my assessment. Many of them could tell you about students that are asked to focus on reading, math, and science but can't because they are so distracted by constant notifications. These students all want to be successful; of course they do. However, many are suffering from a literal addiction to their phones. The relentless buzzing and dinging are known barriers to the achievement of their life's goals, but the reward centers in their brains have distorted their priorities. Their grades, self-esteem, and pride in their own efforts and academic achievements are too often sacrificed along the way.

## HEALTH IMPACTS

School leaders from around the state could share some of the unspeakable things that young people have posted on social media that have led to anxiety, fear, degradation, depression, or suicidal thoughts in their target. Bullying has been pervasive in schools for generations, but cell phones and messaging apps have taken it to unprecedented levels. The catch-22 of the situation is that many teens retreat to their phones when they are hurt emotionally by cyberbullies. They believe the phone and its magical apps can numb the pain. But too often, it simply means the portal through which this toxicity entered their lives remains open, the relentless attacks persist, and the deepening darkness completely overtakes their emotional well-being.

## EFFECTS OF SCREEN MISUSE AND OVERUSE

School leaders from around Minnesota could share stories of students who come to school too tired to learn because they cannot log off at a reasonable time at night. Or others who have sent a picture of themselves intended for an audience of one but instead have to face the humiliation of having it shared with countless individuals. Or others who commit acts of academic dishonesty because the camera feature on their phone makes it so easy to cheat. Or others yet who are able to access disturbing and graphic content any time, any day. Cell phones are powerful tools that can absolutely be used for good, but more

and more they are being misused, disrupting the innocence of our young citizens, and causing harm. Our children are in need of an intervention from the adults.

#### COMMUNITY PARTNER

This is why almost two years ago, I reached out to Katherine and Maree at LiveMore ScreenLess. The misuse of technology and the damage it was causing to our youth could not be ignored. I was instantly impressed by their expertise and passion as they went to work surveying our teachers, students, and parents. They connected us with the latest research so we could make informed decisions that were centered around the digital well-being of our students when we discussed policy changes. They arranged focus groups and led parent information nights. Their partnership has only become more valuable as the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically heightened our reliance on screens to teach our students. They have worked closely with our district leadership and teachers to ensure that Faribault Public Schools are promoting healthy digital habits and doing everything we can to limit the negative effect this pandemic is having on the mental health of our students. Ms. Hampton, Ms. Myers, and their organization have impacted our community in a number of ways. I have seen first-hand the good that can come out of an educated and trained group of adults who are focused on the digital wellness of children when utilizing technology.

#### CALL TO ACTION

There is a tone of inevitability and surrender to the status quo when talking to some people about cell phones and digital applications. Many feel “there is no going back” because personal devices have become so ubiquitous and interwoven into every aspect of our lives. However, many of those same people are willing to concede the fact that overuse and misuse of technology is harming our kids in myriad ways. And if we believe that, then we must act. Certainly, pulling back on the overdependence will be difficult and time consuming. It may force us to experience inconvenience and perhaps be placed in some uncomfortable situations. I for one sincerely hope that we, as Minnesotans do not value our own convenience and comfort more than the physical, mental, social, emotional, and cognitive health of our sons, daughters, and grandchildren.

Thank you for considering joining LiveMore ScreenLess in their mission to disrupt this ongoing crisis our youth are experiencing.

Shawn Peck  
Assistant Principal Faribault High School  
330 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW Faribault, MN 55021



## INTRODUCTION

I am Tom Myers. I have been a high school social studies teacher for 24 years in a metro area high school.

## THE TECHNOLOGY TIPPING POINT

In his 2002 book **The Tipping Point**, Malcolm Gladwell writes of viral trends in human behavior and described the events or circumstances that tipped them:

“The tipping point is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire.”

Although Gladwell wrote his book nearly 20 years ago, I do not believe that there is a better example of reaching a tipping point that we have in the last 5-10-15 years with technology.

Students have endless and immediate access to information. Information and Research projects that took week a can be done in a class period. Student progress and grades are available 24/7, communication with parents is ongoing and continuous and, of course, technology has enabled education to take place despite not physically being in the classroom.

Unfortunately, we have gone beyond the tipping point with using **technology appropriately** in schools

## CELL PHONES -#1 CHALLENGE

For me and a good majority of my colleagues, the #1 challenge in being an effective teacher is the distractions caused by cell phones and computers. Regardless of the rules or policies that schools and teachers attempt to put in place, the critical mass of cell phones/computers in the classroom has made the monitoring of their appropriate unmanageable. Just like all of us, high school students carry their cell phones at all times and have them with them in school. The expectation of teachers to monitor and restrict cell phone presence in school is not only unreasonable but impossible.

Cell phones in schools is now my #1 challenge and creating an environment for students to focus and achieve academically

## ATTENTION ECONOMY

As former Google Exec Tristan Harris says, “**We are living in an attention economy.**” In my classroom I SIMPLY CAN NOT compete in the battle for attention with Tik-Tok, Youtube, Instagram, Snapchat, video games, and texting. And even if a student’s cell phone is in their backpack, the unconscious attention they are giving to their phone robs them from attending in class. Numerous studies have shown that the mere presence of a cell phone competes for human attention.

## TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

I am a fair but strict teacher. I have a “no phone” policy in my classroom.

Yet, every day I must to tell students to put their phones/computers away at beginning of class and continue to do so throughout the class period. For most teachers, this constant enforcement creates stress and puts **teacher-student relationships** under **duress**

## PSYCHOLOGY EXPERIMENT

Last school year my 11<sup>th</sup> and 12 grade psychology students participated in an experiment for three days. Each day, prior to 1<sup>st</sup> hour students, many with hesitation and anxiety, brought their phones to my classroom where we locked them in a cabinet. At the end of the school day, students picked them up, many with excitement and a large smile on their face.

As the experiment was completed our classes discussed the experience that the students went through. The words below express the most commonly cited feelings of their cell phone learning days.



## CALL TO ACTION

As we transition back to the classroom in the coming year, I urge you as lawmakers to put policy and practices in place that protect young minds and aid teachers in creating a learning environment where all students will feel: “free, focused, and relieved” to learn.

Tom Myers

Social Studies Teacher, Henry Sibley High School

1897 Delaware Ave, Mendota Heights, MN 55118

Residence: White Bear Lake

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*LIVEMORE SCREENLESS SUPPORTER MADELINE MYERS*

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## INTRODUCTION

My name is Madeline Nelson and I am an educator in St. Paul Public Schools who strives to support my students' wellbeing.

## BACKGROUND

As a fifth grade teacher, I have the opportunity to work with students at a unique and significant stage in their lives. The students in my classroom are 10 and 11-year-olds who, although still in elementary school, have the screen lives that one would typically expect from teenagers. They are fully equipped with phones and their own accounts on Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. Among my young students, I've witnessed the distress caused by sexting, late-night gaming, cyberbullying, and the addictive nature of so many digital applications. Many of my students struggle to work independently on their school-issued iPads because they are constantly attracted to watching videos on Youtube and playing online games. All students in St. Paul Public Schools are required to complete digital citizenship training provided by Common Sense Media. While this curriculum explores safety and respect online, it does not educate students on the wide-ranging impacts of screen time on their mental, social, and physical health.

## SOLUTIONS

Just like how I establish routines with my students around bathroom breaks, walking in the hallway, working in small groups, and turning in homework, I would like to see all educators, school staff, and parents equipped to help students establish healthy screen time routines of their own, both in school and at home. LiveMore's approach goes beyond digital citizenship - it teaches and promotes digital wellbeing. I know that LiveMore ScreenLess is the organization that can help us do this important work.

Madeline Nelson, 5th Grade Teacher,  
Riverview Westside School of Excellence in St. Paul Public Schools  
Residence: Minneapolis

## **Introduction**

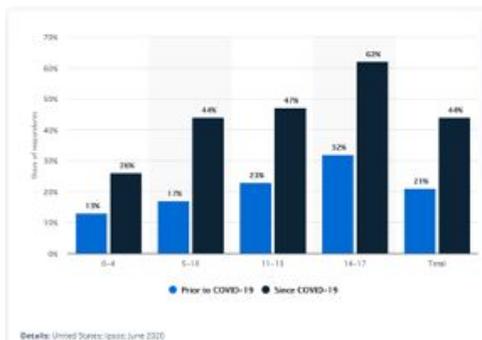
My name is Dr. Gail Dines, and I am a professor Emerita of Sociology (Wheelock College). My area of research is the impact of social media use on young people, with special reference to the harms of online pornography viewing. Culture Reframed argues that in light of the multidisciplinary empirical evidence, pornography is the public health crisis of the digital age. Moreover, this is a stealth public health crisis because few parents, or experts charged with child protection, are aware of the multiple harms of pornography on young people.

## **The Problem**

Today, many young people access mainstream, hardcore pornography via teen social media platforms (such as Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok). Although social media has many positive effects, recent research has shown that repeated and long-term use of teen media platforms can have ongoing negative impacts on the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of young people. According to a number of studies, these negative impacts include:

- Sleep disruption
- Increased cyberbullying and rumor spreading
- Increased depression and anxiety
- Declines in life satisfaction
- Loss of interest in daily activities with peers
- Increased tendency to send sexualized images
- Suicidal ideation
- Self-harming
- Obesity

This has been exacerbated by the pandemic because more young people are spending a majority of their time on screens. The chart below illustrates the degree to which youth are spending more time online during the pandemic.



## Impact of Pornography on Young People

A growing body of research shows that one of the most serious consequences of increased social media use for young people is their risk for seeing hardcore mainstream pornography. Most young people today access porn through social media sites that are targeted to teens and free internet porn sites. In addition, young people increasingly are exposed to porn, either intentionally or by accident, through Snapchat and Instagram, which are becoming gateways for growing adolescent hardcore porn use.

Porn sites are among the most traveled sites in the world. Pornhub alone had 42 billion visits in 2019. Pornhub boasts, “That’s as if the combined populations of Canada, Poland, Australia and the Netherlands all visited Pornhub every day!” Today’s mainstream internet porn—what most boys and young men are regularly viewing—is free, hardcore, and undermining the healthy sexual, emotional, and cognitive development of our youth. Youth are not simply exploring sexuality by viewing the *Playboy* pinups of past generations. Rather, this is about repeated consumption of scenes of violence-laden sex acts. The most respected and cited study on mainstream pornography content found that 90% of scenes contained at least one aggressive act.

### Boys

Studies show that males, on average, first view internet pornography between ages 11 and 14, and recent anecdotal evidence from the medical community puts it even earlier, between ages 8-10. Researchers from across disciplines have shown that the earlier a boy views pornography, the more likely he is to:

- Experience Increased anxiety and depression
- Have poorer academic performance
- Have decreased capacity for empathy, connection, and healthy relationship skills;
- Experience lower empathy for rape victims;
- Increased likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviors;
- More likely to commit sexual abuse
- Experience increased erectile dysfunction

### Girls

With respect to hypersexualized media and girls, over twenty years of research show that exposure to sexualized images contributes to girls’:

- Self-sexualization leading others to objectify them
- Feelings of shame, appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, eating disorders
- Low self-esteem
- Increased depression and anxiety
- Increased likelihood of early sexual activity
- Increased tolerance of sexual violence

### At Risk Youth

While widespread, hardcore porn use among youth crosses boundaries of class, race, and geography, its impact is compounded when used by youth who are already at risk due to other social factors. We hypothesize that the added stresses on these youth that already tax their resilience, combined with fewer social resources to protect them, lowered social visibility, and less social tolerance for their behaviors, are likely to result in increased negative impacts of porn culture. Of particular note is the fact that pornography has increasingly become a “grooming tool” that pimps use to recruit low-income and marginalized youth into trafficking.

### **Solutions: Addressing the Harms Through a Peer to Peer Model**

In light of the research on social media as a public health issue, there is a clear and obvious need for young people to develop knowledge and skills that will lead to increased digital safety and making smart online choices. In conversation with the cofounders of LiveMore ScreenLess. I learned that they are also using a public health approach to digital wellbeing. The Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community model stresses that all adults have a role to play to promote the health and wellbeing of children. As the LMSL cofounders seek to promote the digital wellbeing of Minnesotans, I look forward to serving as a national resource on the problematic issue of children's access to pornography.

Respectfully submitted by Dr. Gail Dines, (January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

Professor Emerita, Wheelock College

Founder and President: Culture Reframed

**CULTURE REFRAMED**  
SOLVING THE PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS OF THE DIGITAL AGE

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Danyelle Joy Robinson, I live in Blaine, Minnesota, and I am a freshman in college at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. Currently, I am majoring in Communications, but hopefully, I will be transferring to Macalester College in St. Paul in the fall of this year, and double major in Cultural Anthropology and Spanish.

## BACKGROUND

I am excited to be able to share my voice with you all here today, what an incredible opportunity! To start, I am 18 years old, which means I am a part of Gen Z. If you look up on Google “what does Gen Z mean”, Google will say that, “Generation Z (aka Gen Z, iGen, or centennials), refers to the generation that was born between 1996-2010, following millennials. This generation has been raised on the internet and social media, with some the oldest finishing college by 2020 and entering the workforce.” I was born in 2002, and I did graduate in 2020, but the part about being raised on the internet and social media is mostly true. And the reason why I say that, is because I was 10 when I got my first smartphone, and for other kids my age, it was a lot later in life. But over half of *my* life was spent without one.

Growing up, I remember riding my bike with my neighbors and having lemonade stands, and just being outside all of the time; without any digital distractions. I didn’t have homework on an Ipad until I was in middle school. The point that I am trying to make is that smartphones and technology came at a pivotal point in my life where I (and most other kids) weren’t prepared.

## GENERATION PERSPECTIVE

Not only were we not prepared, but we were (in theory) the guinea pigs of this experiment called “social media.” There was no one to tell us how to properly use social media and technology in a way that wasn’t damaging to our brains...and our bodies...and our mental health. And what happens when you put a human into an unfamiliar environment? Well, they would adapt, because that’s what human beings are naturally inclined to do.

## MALADAPTATION

But without any guidance, they might adapt in the wrong way. That is exactly what I believe happened and is currently happening in our society today. There are far too many young people (and older people) who are addicted to their phones or simply just not using technology most beneficially. I used to love posting on Instagram in middle school and having a ton of streaks on Snapchat. I would be on my phone all of the time and I loved it. The difference between then and now is that I still go on my phone just as much, but I don’t love it anymore.

## MISUSE OF TECHNOLOGY

I’m cautious about what I put on the internet and I worry about the perception people will have on me if I post a certain thing. It’s no longer a place to go to connect with friends and share our experiences. My misuse of technology has ultimately led to the corruption of my mind. I average about 6 hours a day on my phone and I couldn’t even tell you why. I don’t enjoy going on social media anymore because it’s draining but also because my 10-year-old self decided to immerse herself in social media culture, which now has 18-year-old me addicted to something that no longer benefits me. I am only one of the millions of young people that have this problem.

## CALL FOR ACTION

But we are here today, to tell you that we are determined to fix this digital epidemic that has plagued our society for years. That brings me to a proposed solution. Currently, the LiveMore Youth Council is working on a Digital Wellbeing Training that includes modules, testimonies, journal prompts and more, that will hopefully help to see how technology can be used more intentionally. We hope that this training can eventually be widely accessible to all young people. On a smaller scale, we need parents and older adults to be aware and educated on the effects of misuse of technology. We, as young people, are asking you to listen and be understanding and do as much as you can to help combat this issue. On an even smaller scale, it might be beneficial to notice how much time you're spending on your devices, but also how you spend your time on your devices. Intentional usage is our main goal, not canceling usage.

## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS YOUTH COUNCIL

The LiveMore ScreenLess Youth Council and that is exactly what it sounds like. We are young people who advocate for creating a more balanced digital experience for other young people. So far, I have personally participated in the ListenIn videos earlier in 2020, our "Live More May Challenge", where we challenged others on social media to get outside or start a new hobby and document it. And I contributed to the youth4youth summit and now this senate hearing. I have been a part of the Youth Council for almost a year now, and I hope that we can continue to advocate for digital wellbeing and changes in our society.

Danyelle Robinson

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Cece Hawley, and I am a first year at Wesleyan University. Currently, I am living in White Bear Lake, but I went to Mounds Park Academy for my high school.

## BACKGROUND

I love to play sports and music. In terms of academics, I am super undecided in figuring out my major, but I am very interested in working with and helping people. In my youth, I grew up when technology was starting to become inescapable. In Middle School, we were very fortunate to have had iPads and a computer room. As little 5th graders, we loved downloading games and emailing back and forth during class. We would feel when we heard a ding or see our screen light up with a notification that gave us constant delight throughout our eight hour day. We thought it was the best thing in the world.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Fast forward 8 years, now, as a teenager and young adult, I find myself surrounded by technology in my home and my academic life. Even before our mandated time at home, I had a hard time navigating my time spent on my phone. Whether it be swiping through Instagrams or TikToks or binge watching seasons of TV shows on Netflix, I couldn't put down my phone.

Growing up with this technology like no other generation before, I never had an instruction guide or mentor that could help me navigate my journey with technology. Now that I am in LiveMore Screen Less, I realize I can be that mentor that I needed. In school we would have Technology Contracts put together by a generation that didn't really understand how we use technology, then we would see it constantly be ignored in different circumstances.

## PEER LEADERSHIP AND LIVEMORE SCREENLESS

In my Senior Year of Highschool, I was part of Peer Leaders which helped mentor 7th and 8th graders. Because I am part of the Youth Council for LiveMore ScreenLess, I have been able to learn about different methods we can use to help with digital wellbeing, and I can share those ideas to a younger group without seeming overbearing. One module we focused on was Technology Usage. Ironically, we had to have our meeting over Zoom, yet we still saw a spark of enthusiasm by these middle schoolers when teenagers were talking to them about Social Media and using specific references that they would understand. I believe because we had similar experiences with technology growing up, to them, this mentorship made a greater impression than it would with someone older "telling" rather than "discussing" technology usage.

Cece Hawley

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## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS YOUTHCOUNCIL MEMBER MILES HILL

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### INTRO

My name is Miles Hill. I'm a resident of West St. Paul and am attending my senior year at Henry Sibley Highschool. In my year with LiveMore's youth council I have been given many opportunities to directly interact with digital wellbeing in many forms. Before officially joining I got to participate in LiveMore's Henry Sibley student panel and ListenIn videos. Now my role is often dedicated to contributing my experiences and perspective to other young people and adults.

### PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Technology has always provoked a profound fascination from me. It's potential to solve problems and create convenience for a user is captivating. But there's a point in which, like many things, too much becomes harmful. The effects of technology overuse are disconcerting, but the willingness to acknowledge them but not change anything is frightening. We adapt our lives around our screen usage rather than adapt our screen usage to our lives.

### PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I'm no exception, even as a member of LiveMore my technology outlets play a prominent role in my day to day life that often takes the form of overuse. I'm willing to recognize this but unwilling to change many of my behaviors. To change my use of technology would be like changing my diet. I may choose to make small healthier choices but many of my habits remain the same. That is not to say it's hopeless, but something that is not done easily or overnight.

### SOLUTIONS

In the same sense the solutions of abusing screen use are similar to that of dieting in two ways; being informed on the issue helps, and no one process works for everyone. Many of the children who were born around the establishment of personalized screens are now grown up enough to see the effects of it on their lifestyle. Like me despite the negative effects many can't overcome the deep rooted behaviors that have been initiated. Rather I think it's important to practice methods of prevention at a younger age before habits have a chance to form. Teenagers will fight tooth and nail to defend what they think is right and will readily refute or discredit any opposing views. But with early education healthy screen use can be easily taught and learned.

### PEER INFLUENCE

That is why it's important to raise awareness and there's no one more qualified to pass on the message than those of us who have experienced it first hand. LiveMore is not just a teaching experience but also a learning experience. it's a place I feel I belong and where I know I'm not alone in my struggles, and in my opinion that's half of the battle.

Miles Hill

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Charlie Galicich, and I am currently a first year student at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. I was born and raised in Minnesota, spending most of my years living in Shoreview and being educated at Mounds Park Academy.

## BACKGROUND

My connection to these two states is mirrored in my connection to spending time outdoors; my favorite way to pass several hours is to walk on the wooded trail systems near my homes in both states. Being in nature, away from distractions, is what inspires me; as someone who loves writing and is interested in studying English, I value these opportunities to clear my head and savor my own thoughts. I plan on studying Education as well as English in college, so my potential future as an educator pushed me to wholeheartedly join LiveMore's mission based upon their values of recognizing the undeniable benefits of technology for young people while also recognizing the unhealthy behaviors prolific device usage can perpetuate. It is paramount for students in both the present and the future to consider this balancing act of wise screen usage.

## DIGITAL AGE

Growing up in the digital age, my education was always intertwined with the usage of screens. The handoff from the iPad program of my 5th grade year to the laptop program of high school to the virtual methods of schooling during the coronavirus pandemic cemented the fact that electronic devices were to become a cornerstone of educating students, at least in my world. Based on this prominence, teachers tried hard to incorporate these devices into learning routines, but sometimes the strain of attempting this incorporation was evident. Overall, my understanding of technology as a necessary tool emerged from this relatively new way of doing school.

Because devices became normalized in my routine, I found them becoming a tool for pleasure and leisure activities as well, from scrolling through social media to streaming shows and movies. Especially in my middle school and early high school years, I found myself using a screen for a majority of hours in the day, going from extensive online homework to the mindless activities of scrolling through Instagram or watching Netflix. It didn't necessarily feel wrong to be using screens this much, since so many of my peers obviously held the same habits, yet it never felt quite satisfying all the same. Even as being on social media so much felt emotionally and cognitively draining, it almost felt more natural to do this after long hours of homework than to push myself further by doing any physical activity or actually holding a phone conversation with a friend.

## SOLUTIONS

I envision two solutions to excessive engagement, both passive and active, with devices and social media outside of necessary usage for young people. Firstly, it is the responsibility of educators and schools to ensure that students are informed about the impact of technology on mental, social, and physical well-being from a young age, before they begin using technology extensively in their education. Teachers must instill within young minds the negative impacts on physical health from screen over-usage, from effects on eyes and vision to reminders to be physically active several days a week. Additionally, students must be taught about social media; how platforms such as Instagram can be good in doses to establish and maintain connections, but how over-usage of these platforms can be detrimental to mental and social health, whether by preventing meaningful in-person connections or convincing peers of glorified

narratives of one's life. This education cannot happen in the classroom alone; parents and all adults must be prepared to empower their children with these simple but effective reminders.

#### LIVEMORE'S PEER-TO-PEER MODEL

Secondly, LiveMore's model of using young people's voices and putting them in conversation with each other is essential. Peer to peer conversations are wise and necessary for promoting digital well-being for students because young people are far more likely to listen to their peers and internalize their experiences rather than adult authority figures who simply tell them to use screens less. We need young people who are fully informed about Digital Well-being to lead a bottom-up charge in addressing over-usage of screens because it is our generation that is most likely to have screens ingrained as an essential part of their professional and social life, so the call for education on these essential issues mean the most from those they will impact the most.

#### LIVEMORE AND ME

My main work with LiveMore has been propagating YouthVoice blog posts, which disseminates personal stories about the usage of screens by a variety of young people. Sharing these voices proves that this is a veritable movement with which many people my age can find identification and a need to use technology and social media responsibly.

#### URGENT

Technology is not going anywhere. It is a fact of our everyday lives, and will continue to be as my generation grows up and enters the workforce and is replaced by a new generation of students. So the time is now to begin educating all people, young and old, on how to balance screen usage for work and fun with time away from technology for other essential activities, such as reading and physical activity. No longer can this crisis be silent; young people must begin and sustain the conversation on how to provide for Digital Wellbeing for all.

Charlie Galicich

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*LIVEMORE SCREENLESS YOUTHCOUNCIL MEMBER LEO HUGHES*

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## INTRODUCTION

My name is Leo Hughes, I am a senior at Henry Sibley High School. I would like to speak on my introduction to the Live More Program and the contributions we have made as a collective.

## BACKGROUND

As funny as it may seem I was first told about Live More by my Spanish teacher. He was offering extra credit to anyone who attended LiveMore's after-school presentation and wrote a short essay on what they had learned. Similar to most students, I utilize any opportunity for extra credit to the fullest potential. I also knew some of the students contributing to the presentation, which only acted as more of a reason to attend.

## TURNING POINT

I felt very moved by the youth panels opinions on the use of their phones and social media as a whole. They discussed a test that they conducted in their psychology class, placing their phones in a box for five days to see how they would manage without the contact of the digital world. As simple as it might seem to resist the temptation of your phone for a couple days, the reality of communication barriers and other simple tasks make it a very difficult task. I really enjoyed the presentation and felt that their desire to motivate other youth on technological awareness was necessary for our day and age.

## LIVEMORE YOUTH COUNCIL

Soon after my attendance of the presentation, I joined the Live More Youth team allowing for my own beliefs and ideas to be presented to young students and parents looking for guidance. Hosting Zoom meetings monthly has allowed me to create strong friendships not only with my peers but with many of the Live More directors and helpers. I am very satisfied with our team's message and am excited to continue pursuing awareness of digital wellbeing and moderation.

Leo Hughes

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Olivia Schultz and I am a Senior Psychology major at Colorado College, but I am originally from Arden Hills. I worked for LiveMore last summer and over my J term as a research intern.

## BACKGROUND

In 2020, I made two huge changes to my life. The first was my relationship with my phone, the second was my relationship with food-- gluten to be specific. However, it wasn't until just the other day that I realized just how similar these two things are. Both digital devices and gluten work as "binding agents" whether it's to bind together breads and pasta, or people and communities. Additionally, both of them "taste" really good and are often considered to be comforts, but these effects only exist in the moment of consumption. Further, research has shown the harmful effects of both on our health, but for some reason most of us can't imagine a life without them. However, when you give them up, or start to choose healthy substitutes, you feel healthier and lighter, both physically and mentally. The actual act of choosing the healthier alternative to create a balanced lifestyle takes a lot of support and education. I've tried many times in the past to give up both gluten and my social media, but I was never successful until now. With the support of my roommates, I have been gluten free for almost exactly 5 months. With the support of LiveMore, I have been working toward digital wellness for nearly 7.

## LIVEMORE SCREENLESS AND RESEARCH

When I started working for LiveMore last spring, I must admit that I was a little skeptical that digital devices are really having such a big impact on our wellbeing. "You can't point to causation" was a phrase that repeatedly left my mouth. However, the more research that I collected, organized, and shared on LiveMore's behalf, the more I realized how wrong I was.

First, I learned just how harmful usage patterns can be for our health. I learned that Internet Addiction Disorder actually alters your brain structure. I learned that children who watch tv or use their phones at bedtime are respectively 2.4 and 2.3 times more likely to be obese. I learned that as a woman, I am more likely to experience back pain when using a computer for 3 or more hours a day no matter how good my posture is.

Next, I learned about all the connections that social media has with poor mental health. Again, my hesitations about a lack of causation rang through my head, but I discovered a true experiment which provided evidence that passive users are less satisfied with life compared to active users. I also discovered that the longer college students used Facebook, the more they engaged in upward social comparison, which has been previously linked to depression and anxiety.

Then, I turned to look at social media's effect on social skills and relationships. I thought that social media was supposed to make us feel more connected to our friends and family, but learned that instead it makes us feel lonely and impairs our interpersonal skills.

As if I wasn't convinced yet, I also learned that texting more when you're stressed actually leads to emotional burnout which is incredibly harmful for emotional wellbeing, and that emotions can ripple through social media in real time, affecting followers creating pockets of happy and unhappy people around the world.

Finally, I learned how disruptive phones and computers actually are for learning. To me, the most striking study provided evidence that just simply having your phone on your desk when learning or concentrating unconsciously impairs your working memory and functional fluid intelligence.

#### WAKE UP CALL

All of these studies and more were a wake up call for me, just as I hope it is for you. It inspired me to make changes to my relationship with my phone and computer. While support from KK, Maree, the LiveMore Board, and the Youth Council have all helped me in my process to become healthier, I still find myself getting pulled back into my habits from time to time because my sister, my friends, and my classmates are not on this journey with me yet. Change takes a village, and the LiveMore staff can only do so much on their own. This is why the pursuit of Digital Wellness must also be driven by student leaders who can help create an environment that will be conducive toward progress-- student leaders that will be educated and trained through LiveMore.

A year ago, I could not imagine my life without gluten or a reliance on my phone. Now, I have accomplished both and I am the healthiest I have been in years. LiveMore has the ability to help young people like me, and I hope you will help them do so.

Sincerely,

Olivia Schultz

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Keana and I am a junior at the University of Minnesota. I have had the privilege to work with LiveMore ScreenLess in promoting the importance of digital wellbeing. I have helped LiveMore promote digital wellbeing by working alongside the team in order to create content that educates parents, teachers, and young people about the importance of this crisis. LiveMore ScreenLess has played a huge role in collecting evidence and hearing the voices of young people who are experiencing this first hand.

## STUDENT EXPERIENCES

As a student, I am constantly on my laptop. Due to COVID-19 and distance learning, my time online has become even more. It has not only affected me mentally and physically, but also many of my peers. The overuse and misuse of screen time and social media continues to negatively impact the health of young people. The unwritten “standards” and “trends” of social media take a toll on the mental health of young people because they believe they need to follow these standards and trends in order to fit in. This leads to many young people feeling lonely and left out. This is only a few of the many ways that social media and technology continue to take a toll on the health of young people. It is important that parents and educators are aware of these issues and know how they can take a step in supporting their children and students!

Keana Vang