



WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR SERIES

“The screening methods for mental health in children haven’t been updated since the 1980s.”

Wendy Ward
Founder
futuresTHRIVE

Wendy Ward developed a 21st Century mental health screening method out of frustrated necessity. Her stepson had an undiagnosed mental health condition and, as Wendy dug into the problem, she discovered that current screening methods were seriously outdated and ineffective.

“Everything was about trying to treat the emergency when the issue could have been diagnosed and treated effectively at a far younger age, often without having to resort to more extreme, expensive solutions,” said Ward.

Rather than accept that there was no solution, Wendy created a new model for screening children from an early age. The **futuresTHRIVE** method is a technology-driven tool that introduces a new, engaging experience for both child and parent during regular doctor wellness visits. That way, the child will have had a continuing series of screenings from age 4 until pre-teen age to carefully track progress and catch problems before they become entrenched.

Clinically-backed, state-of-the-art AI employing detects warning signs of mental health concerns through advanced question methodology and uses in-office support and care as well as community-wide mental health education measures to mine accurate information. The result is an unparalleled, dynamic view of a child’s mental health. The AI runs metrics on the back end making it easier for medical professionals to simply take the information and create a care path.

But how to make this vision a reality? Wendy found herself facing an uphill battle because she was female. “Men have classified me as ‘mom’ in a disparaging way...but moms move mountains,” said Ward. “Women garner less than 2% of overall funding so the prospect of raising money was daunting...but the current mental health crisis in youth is worth the battle.”

Wendy looked into SBIR funding through the National Science Foundation (NSF) for two reasons — the awards are non-dilutive, so she didn't have to give up any ownership of the company and the NSF embraces riskier propositions, so they were a perfect partner for **futuresTHRIVE**.

“Part of our product design was to employ video and voice activation, which other funding sources may have found too risky at this point,” said Ward. “That made SBIR with NSF a great way to advance our product.”

futuresTHRIVE is currently in final conversations on Phase I funding with NSF. BBCetc was Wendy's partner throughout the process. “Our BBCetc consultant readily provided all of his expertise — and it was knowledge we truly needed. Without his expertise and BBCetc's resources, we wouldn't be where we are today,” said Ward. “We always felt as though we were his only client. I seriously can't praise him and BBCetc enough.”

Although **futuresTHRIVE** is still looking for other investment partners to move their method into the marketplace, the SBIR NSF award will give them the starting point they need.