Advisory Board Highlight: Dr. Dennis Embry

Tell us a little about the PAXIS Institute.

PAXIS Institute was founded on a rather old-fashioned idea that for-profit businesses ought to do measurable good in the world. I view myself as a scientist entrepreneur, and have taken on very large scientific projects even as an undergraduate student. I founded PAXIS Institute to make gold-standard behavioral science into real-world products that better the world, improve the present and future, and to demonstrate that doing a real measurable good could be broadly profitable for the employees, our beneficiaries and communities. Doing measurable good for children, families and communities should not depend on begging for funds.

PAXIS Institute focuses on population-level change using scalable strategies. Presently, we are focusing on population-level approaches to prevent psychiatric and behavioral disorders, which have been steadily rising to the point that one-half of America's children will have such disorders by age 18. We cannot treat ourselves out of problems of that magnitude.

What is the PAX Good Behavior Game?

The PAX Good Behavior Game (PAX for short) is an elegant environmental prevention strategy that teachers use during any school, afterschool or similar setting. PAX employs simple, well-proven strategies throughout the school day that teach and reinforce self-regulation, co-regulation and group regulation without use of coercion. Students and teachers apply these skillsets during almost any activity. The PAX Game combines frequent cooperative visioning and fluid teams dramatically reduce behavior problems (e.g., bullying, ADHD, anxiety, aggression, trauma symptoms, poor learning, dawdling, freeloading). For any given round of a PAX Game, all teams can win, some can win, or even none can win. "Winning" results some silly fun for a few moments, involving imagination, laughter, and physical activities.

Playing the PAX Game requires significant cognitive effort and behavioral self-monitoring, which are the foundations of all prosocial behaviors that predict life successes. Randomized longitudinal studies of PAX GBG in the US and other countries reveal that self-regulation and co-regulation skills acquired by students has lifetime benefits well into the third decade of life. Specifically, PAX GBG students fair better in immediate academic success, and are more likely to graduate high-school and enter college. They are also less like to have psychiatric disorders in adolescence or adulthood, and less likely to have any form of

addictions. PAX GBG students who have are less likely to have any criminal histories, commit violent crimes or engage in self-harm. Risky sex is also reduced. PAX GBG students are more likely to have better employment and earn more money.

What are a few accomplishments that you have been most proud of during your career?

I told my early mentor in 7th grade that I wanted to become a scientist, an artist and a political leader. While it sounded grandiose then, that is precisely what I've accomplished. I've used potent science to prevent the 3rd leading cause of death and serious injury when I was in graduate school working with Sesame Street, Foundations and Governments in the U.S. and overseas.

Later, I used the same scientific lessons and scaling ideas to reduce the traumatic impact of the Gulf War on children of deployed military, while on special assignment by the Secretary of Defense, Richard Cheney. That wasn't in my life's plan as a conscientious objector and a gay man. At the same time, I was asked to co-chair a specially created Congressional Taskforce that was charged with figuring out how to handle the impact of mass military casualties on U.S. Civilians.

And then, in 1991, my Sunday school students challenged to apply that knowledge and skills to help children "build more peace in the world." That lead to my CDC funded research project (PeaceBuilders) that was among the first randomized trials of whole school behavioral supports to prevent actual violent injuries at school, which is how I began working with Dan Flannery.

And along the way, all these efforts also used my skills of graphic arts and experience with political leaders. I would tell my wonderful mentor, Mrs. Butler who saw and nurtured my gifts: "I did what I set out to do, and the road to it was curvy, hilly and never easy—but always exciting."

When you're not working, what do you like to do in your free time?

Thanks to a graduate student friend, I learned that I was athletic. I enjoy running in the riparian part of the desert that surrounds our home area. And, I read omnivorously in science. I enjoy cooking a nice meal for my husband. And there is a part of me that only a few see like my husband and few others: the ability to be completely silly without the aid of any substance.

If you were given $1,000 and you had to spend it on something fun for yourself, what would you buy?

Depending on where I was, I get my diving certificate, and dive in Virgin Islands, Hawaii, Tahiti, or the Great Barrier Reef.