



**TURN AUTISM AROUND**  
WITH DR. MARY BARBERA

Transcript for Podcast Episode: 038

## *The Behavioral Science of ABA: Interview with Ryan O'Donnell*

Hosted by: Dr. Mary Barbera

Mary Barbera: Hey, you're listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast and I'm your host, Dr. Mary Barbera. And today I have a very special guest, Ryan O'Donnell, who is a fellow board certified behavior analyst and I'm going to introduce Ryan in just a second. Before I do that, I usually give a listener shout out someone who left me a five star rating and review on apple podcasts. If you haven't subscribed and left me a review and you're enjoying the show, I would love it if you would do that.

Mary Barbera: But today instead of giving a listener shout out, I'm going to give a shout out to someone, a behavior analyst named Spears who has been a long time member of my online courses and community and she said, "I'm forever changed as a BCBA as a result of taking Mary's courses." And Spears remains with us within our online community and it's great to have both professionals, behavior analysts, SLPs, teachers, as well as many parents within the same online community. We're really making some big headway. So if you would like to learn more about my online courses, you can attend a free online workshop at a time convenient for you at [marybarbera.com/workshop](http://marybarbera.com/workshop).

Mary Barbera: So let's get on to introducing Ryan O'Donnell. Ryan is a BCBA with a master's degree in applied behavior analysis and he lives in Nevada, but spends a lot of time traveling. Traveling internationally, which we're going to talk about in this episode. His goal right now is to fill the gap between the amazing science of behavior and the billions of people that it could impact to make their lives better. He has a video on YouTube called The Daily BA; he also has two podcasts which we're going to talk about, as well as he founded and runs a live event called ChattCon. So let's get to Ryan's discussion on how we can all behavior analysts and parents work together to spread the word about ABA and its power in helping both children and adults with autism.

*Welcome to the Turn Autism Around podcast for both parents and professionals in the autism world who want to turn things around, be less stressed, and lead happier lives. And now your host, autism mom, behavior analyst, and bestselling author, Dr. Mary Barbera.*

Mary Barbera: Okay. So I am so happy to welcome Ryan O'Donnell, otherwise known as Rhino, to the podcast. So thanks for spending some time with us today.

Ryan O'Donnell: Thank you so much for the invite. I was super excited when I saw this through my email inbox. Big Fan.

Mary Barbera: Well thank you. I know we met a few years ago back at the ABAI Conference and we've been friends and pioneers out there in the online space since... So first I like to start with how you fell into the autism world or the ABA world.

Ryan O'Donnell: Yes. So the kind of condensed version is I graduated from a very small town in central Nevada. Not sure what to do. Luckily I had some scholarships and was just exploring the first semester. My psychology class was the one class that I really enjoyed and found myself interested in, and not expecting that. So not knowing what to do... Biology, chemistry, being a little bit tricky. I was going to originally be like a premed was kind of the idea. I realized that I should probably pursue that a little bit more. So I signed up for just the next class in the sequence after a Psych 101 which happened to be a principals of behavior class. And the first class I found myself like wanting to really study; like I had the option to, you know, go to school or skip to go to the mountain and go snowboarding and stuff like that. And I was like, I'm gonna, I'm going to study this sort of stuff. And I was doing pretty well on it.

Ryan O'Donnell: From there I tried all the other different areas of psychology. They're all interesting to me, but the framework, the behavior analysis... turned me on. It really, really got me excited about the possibilities. So I asked my professor, what are some of the options for working to apply this stuff? Because you talked about these amazing things you can do. And there was a program for adults with intellectual disabilities locally in the area, a day program. And I signed up for that, and that was the first time that I realized like, you could help somebody and you could understand like how it's working and why it's working. And there was some sort of, you know, approach or methods that works that were evidence-based, that helped people achieve outcomes that many others didn't know were possible or maybe others may have doubted that were possible for those individuals.

Ryan O'Donnell: So I got really, really lucky and having two great mentors. One was a student a year ahead of me, and then another was a graduate student that already obtained her master's degree going for PhD. And they took me under their wing and said, this is how you work with somebody and help increase their opportunities in life. It was two years I worked in that program. There was a handful of people diagnosed with autism. But also at the time there was still some mental retardation, OCD, other diagnoses like that in the building. Uh, the people were labeled with and it was, yeah, it was not expected that this is where I'd fall into a line at all with a profession.

Ryan O'Donnell: But seeing that you could change and be a part of helping somebody, like change their life in the ways they wanted to was really, I don't know how to... I don't know how to say it. It's not scientifically, it's very heart... very touching, right? Like you get to see somebody grow and that part was amazing. So that's really what hooked me. From there I realized that you had to get into a master's degree program if you really wanted to like understand and get really fluent with behavior analysis. So I started approaching the graduate school application process and such.

Mary Barbera: And what year was this, Ryan?

Ryan O'Donnell: This was 2009 when I stumbled into everything and really got going into it. Yeah, yeah, we're at 10 years now.

Mary Barbera: Wow. And when did you become a BCBA?

Ryan O'Donnell: That was in 2013 when I became a BCBA. I think it was 2011 or 2012 when I was able to sit for my BCABA. So the distinction for people that have their bachelor's degree... I was able to sit for that first. So I've been in that system for five or six years now about.

Mary Barbera: Okay. So you went on and then after you were a BCABA and a BCBA, did you continue to work with kids or adults with autism or other things?

Ryan O'Donnell: I was in a really fortunate situation, both like family mental health, socially, economically and such to where I could always have like a full time job and a part time job as well. That just, I poured a lot of time into. So that was essentially three years working with children in a school setting or as a consultation, like an outreach component, working with public schools. And then three years in organizational behavior management and like startups. After my, after my graduation we started a program down in Florida called Lodestone Academy. It's still down there, still rocking and rolling. It was to fill a need in the Orlando, Florida

area for children that just couldn't quite find the right placement in the school system. And so it was about three or four years after graduating that I was still heavily involved with working with people with autism related disabilities. It was typically folks that were... I would say probably in middle school to high school age, typically. I did not work as much with the younger populations. Then adults is where I spent a lot of my time outside of a couple of years of working in early intervention.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. So for the last couple of years, I know I said in the intro, you're really focused now, like I am, on online trying to get the word out. So you have the daily BA, the controversial exchange podcast and a live event called ChattCon. So when did you start all this and can you tell us more about those three avenues, which is helping us get the word out that ABA is a proven science and really helpful for kids and adults with autism?

Ryan O'Donnell: You know, it took me a few years to start putting this all together and learning how behavior analysis works professionally; like who did what and what entities performed what tasks and things like that. And there was one book that really stood out during graduate school that I thought was fantastic, but not a lot of professionals paid attention to like, how much it impacted the field. I felt like... and that was Catherine Maurice's book, Let Me Hear Your Voice. That book talking about a family's triumph over autism. I think that's a subtitle. Something that effected... Many people in our field credited being pivotal to the profession as it is today.

Ryan O'Donnell: And watching some of the struggles that behavior analysts can have sometimes trying to describe the science and how it works and things like that, myself included, struggling on how to communicate with the general public or with specific people that aren't in the field because you get so used to your technical language of behavior analysis in the scientific speak that it was, it was really tricky.

Ryan O'Donnell: So it was kind of this slow evolving thing over a few years where I was like getting more and more interested in trying to figure out how to create things that may be interesting to others and share the science for what we know it can do, but in a way that's easily consumable. So we first started with a podcast called Why We Do What We Do, and the idea there was just a really clean, user-friendly podcast. You don't know what you're going to get topic wise, and it's going to be from a behavioral perspective, but really a scientific and skeptical perspective. There's no jargon. And the point there was if we could put out something that was just really fascinating and interesting on a specific topic where hopefully the two people didn't have any biases outside of obviously we're BCBAs ourselves and come to that perspective.

Ryan O'Donnell: Podcasts as you know, I'm sure, are on a huge second wave. There's so much time that you can spend consuming information like this. And so it's why we chose that medium. And then I realized video was another thing that I slowly got fascinated with trying to understand why cat videos on YouTube and you know, would have 12, 20 million views, and things like that. When a science, it was so robust and so able to help people increase such amazing stories wouldn't get those views and wouldn't get that sort of traction online. And for me it was, it was trying to understand like, is there a recipe to this online content? Is there a way in which we can take our science and make it fit that recipe without losing the essence of the science and be able to at the end of the day, affect more people through these practices just by putting the message kind of canned in a different ways?

Ryan O'Donnell: So that's how the video production stuff started getting started up is I was like, I'm gonna make a YouTube video about this stuff. And I realized how hard it was to, and how fantastically skilled and amazing a lot of online content creators were. So both of these avenues of creating online content with their audio or video form really just kind of bred out of trying to understand how we could get the amazing stories, the amazing people shared more often online. I'm a big fan of you roll up your sleeves and you figure out the process yourself at least to start, especially if you can't figure out a way to, you know, be paid to do that work and such. And that's how I started getting into this sort of line of work...

Mary Barbera: And so what year was the Why We Do What We Do podcast?

Ryan O'Donnell: 2015, 16...17. It's been going for two years. So 2017 is when we started that. 2018 was the video work and in fact the video works just about now finally refined to where I'm pretty excited to hit upload and I feel like everyone is enjoying it more. Because there's a pretty steep learning curve, you know, maybe on little things that... To get this content out there in the right way, from the thumbnails, titles and things like that. So that's how I ended up there.

Mary Barbera: And is the Why We Do What We Do... Is that still in existence?

Ryan O'Donnell: It is, yeah. We've crossed 120 or so episodes 130.

Mary Barbera: Okay. Is that a weekly podcast?

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah, it is a weekly thing.

Mary Barbera: I think I listened to it awhile back.

Ryan O'Donnell: It's pretty general psychology. Yeah. It's, it's a very general psychology approach. here's a few autism related episodes but it's not specific to the ABA Industry.

Mary Barbera: Okay. And then you have the Controversial Exchange podcast.

Ryan O'Donnell: Yep, which I will preface for folks on that one is an explicit podcast. So if you're not looking for something like that is... like inward speak of the behavioral community right now. So it is kind of like hot topics that are going on and behavior analysis. Um, so it's probably not as interesting to others, but that doesn't mean that some of the topics aren't fascinating still.

Mary Barbera: Well, we have a lot of BCAs that listen to this podcast, so they definitely should check out Why We Do What We Do and the Controversial Exchange, as well as your daily BA videos. Is that still daily?

Ryan O'Donnell: Yes, yes. Sorry, I titled that daily to try to push myself to go daily. I did not upload daily. I've yet to be able to hit daily. I've had a few pretty good 20, 30 days streaks on it, but oh man, it's hard. An average and the average video takes me about 68 hours to complete. So it's a full-time gig if you wanted to go daily and, and yeah, so it's out there. There's about 300 videos have been posted.

Mary Barbera: And that's on YouTube?

Ryan O'Donnell: YouTube, Facebook. It was meant to just share something free daily with the behavioral community about behavior analysis. Whatever was interesting to me, people that I could find. It's, it's been clear that the more I can integrate others include some behind the scenes, like real looks at people's lives, interviews, uh, with professionals and such that are kind of, you know, Ron Shrimps versions of those folks that that does well. So that's where that's kind of shaping up. It's a little bit of escapism too.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. So let's talk a little bit about the live event that you helped to found and co-found. And I think you just did your second or third one, it's called ChattCon and it was both human behavior and animal behavior compilation. So can you tell us why you decided to start that and why that information would be important for parents and professionals? BCBAs and non BCBAs.

Ryan O'Donnell: There's this essence, right? These certain things that you get out of an in person event that you don't get with online content. And so I still firmly

believe that the in person events as much as you can make them happen are really valuable. So ChattCon. It's the convergence of human animal training and technology as we have those three pillars of human behavior, animal behavior in technology, really cofounded just out of Joan with TAGTEACH and know that you had Theresa with TAGTEACH international on recently and she was like, Hey, I really think that we could collaborate and do something amazing here. Because she works a lot with animal trainers with TAGTEACH specifically. I knew a lot of the behavioral community and the BCPA community and such and so it was really thrown together last minute.

Ryan O'Donnell: Last year in 2018 is our first event held in Seattle and what we were aiming to do and so far I've succeeded to do last year and this year, is just bringing together what we can to be the most like, intimate single track event. Meaning everybody goes to the same talks. It's not very large, and we just are trying to really focus on can we bring in the best people, like world-renown in behavior analysis technology and animal behavior and have them share ideas back and forth. Cause there's a lot of things that are different, but there's also some really amazing similarities with human behavior across all sorts of different species at the end of the day. And the technology component there's a sense of what can you automate, what can you use technology wise to kind of speed up people that are looking to maybe be a really good animal trainer, be a really good supervisor for people that, you know, provide services with children with autism. So technology is that add on to try and get us always constantly thinking about how can we speed things up but maintain the quality of that as well.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, I think that's one of the major reasons that I started serving the online community. Because, you know, going door to door, speaking at conferences for, you know, a keynote for 50 minutes is not going to change the world. And I think both of you, both of us have realized that, you know, we need to use technology to spread the word. There does seem to be a lot of controversy and many people here probably haven't listened to the TAGTEACH podcast or even know what it is. So just to clarify, TAGTEACH is teaching with acoustical equip guidance. And I'm tagged teach certified and just recently did a podcast with Teresa McKeon and she's an expert. She was one of the cofounders of TAGTEACH and it's basically came from Theresa's work and really Karen Prior's work with animals in terms of hearing a clicker or hearing with dolphins going up and touching a mark and then they hear a whistle and that whistle marks the, the behavior and that whistle to the dolphin means that they'll be getting a fish as a reinforcement on the next time around.

Mary Barbera: And so when I was pursuing... Trying to become an even better behavior analyst several years ago, I think it was a decade ago in 2009 is when I came across TAGTEACH, and I ended up presenting at a conference in front of Julie Vargas was a discussion. I'm like, I know like so little about TAGTEACH and here I am with BF Skinner's daughter presenting on TAGTEACH, but I used it to teach my son how to tie his shoes. I've used it for a bunch of different things and that's why it was really great to have Theresa McKeon on the show recently. And I really do believe that in order for us to get better at teaching our kids and adults with autism, especially the kids that don't have much language or any language, that the better we can get an animal training the better behavior analysts we can be.

Mary Barbera: But there seems to be a whole lot of controversy with that statement and many.... Some, I can't really say many. Maybe it's just a very small group that are very loud, but adults with high functioning autism who can read and write and type and communicate are saying, you know, we're just a little different, not less. You know, you're treating us quote unquote like animals and you know, us behavior analysts and parents of kids on the severe end of the spectrum or parents of little kids who want to catch our kids up as much as possible are kind of needing to explain ourselves and I'm assuming... I've not been to ChattCon yet, but I'm assuming that part of it of combining animal trainers and human trainers might be to try to dispel some of that controversy and try to be like, hey, so can you respond to that?

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah. So yeah, there is a group and I'll put it out, I kind of look at it this way. Anybody who has any sort of concerns and things like that, like they justified in that, that was their experience and their perception of things. So if anyone's listening to this came from that perspective, I come from the approach of like, I hear you. The side that I think what's needed in these sort of discussions is some communication back and forth. So I did a talk over at the Pan African Congress on autism in Kenya earlier this year, speaking about how... What would constitute good behavior analysis. And the reason was, is there's times that I hear of stories from this community that I would totally agree that is like very terrible experience that they had; that is not the field that I signed up for at the end of the day, and what a lot of us are in, and like why we got into this line of work.

Ryan O'Donnell: And so a good example is if there's anything that's being used that like applies, a verse of things that, things that we don't like, anything that's very punitive and punishing, there's a good chance that that person might need some more training or that might be some sort of weird



circumstance going on there. And that's not representative of the entire field. So we're seeing some pretty strong growth rates in our certificates. How many people are getting their certification and such. And I think right now the important thing to do is for behavior analysts. Like am I the position I'm in is communicate what the science is in good, easy, plain English ways and describe that to people and kind of create those boundaries of what we, where we probably share similarities with that group.

Ryan O'Donnell: And so the convergence topic largely right now brings in a lot of people that understand and have experienced that perspective of that there's shared principles are good examples, reinforcement that you described with a fish reinforcement literally allows us to continue our lives, continue our species at the end of the day; it's the reason that we're all here. It's the reason we like certain things, not other things. And that principle is shared across all species that are living, but it operates individualist in an individual way. And it should be acknowledged that sort of way. So the people that are attending ChattCon are getting that perspective. But we have been speaking literally in the last couple of weeks about our role as a community of trying to convey these things more clearly and have open conversations about what we do, share what we do, know what we don't know, I think is a good one when it comes to similarities and differences amongst these communities.

Ryan O'Donnell: So yeah, I try to approach socially, like welcome conversation about these sorts of things as much as I possibly can. Because it might be just a difference in assumptions or experiences. And at the end of the day I've had some pretty interesting conversations like at the Pan African event where there's a lot of people that came back and after the talk and said, you know, I didn't realize I'd have a behavior analyst, a BCBA saying that the things that I experienced and like was also things that they didn't like, like realizing that we are on the same page with certain practices were being deployed. Or a good example is there's a lot of one off trainings that happen internationally where someone will come in for two or three hours, provide some training, and then people try to run with that. And that two to three hours sometimes is sufficient to get a little bit of progress. But sometimes it's just enough for people to struggle more at the end of day cause they get a little bit progress but then they don't know where to go next.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, that's a big, pretty deep topic. Reason that I don't speak much internationally because you know, in some ways it's kind of like giving people a loaded gun and not telling them how to shoot it. And so, you know, you might go and give a keynote or a day long workshop and then

you leave and then Johnny's throwing Mr. Potato head or Johnny's on the floor, and in my videos the child wasn't. And so then there becomes this vicious cycle of it doesn't work or I don't know what to do. And the kid actually can get worse. And that's why I've found with my online courses and community, it's a much better, safer way because there's no Mary leaves and there's no way to check up with, well the child is throwing Mr. Potato head. So that's a problem.

Mary Barbera: That is one of the real benefits because I think, yeah, in dissemination it's always hard because even the free videos, you know, the free videos, you do the free videos, I do the podcast, you can give people just enough information to actually be a little bit dangerous. But it's just before we move on to the other topics we wanted to cover. So how from your perspective, cause you know, we're really on the same page, I think, in terms of animal training, human training technology. We've got to get the word out that this is a powerful science. So how would you react or coach other professionals to react from if a parent says, I don't want you training my child like a dog, or I don't want you treating my child like a dog, or I don't want you to use that clicker because that's what so and so used for her dog. So what do you say?

Ryan O'Donnell: I think there's a couple of fronts there. It depends. So as a professional like if you're valuing evidence based practice, like there's some pretty clear data since the 1950s they say that if you create this us versus them mentality with somebody, which you might not be explicitly stating it that way, but if you're coming in, you know, a little abrasive and creating a divide amongst people, what that does is it actually pushes people farther apart. So the first thing I try to coach people to do is let me just step back and listen. Acknowledge, right? Like what that person is trying to communicate to you what their intentions are, what their preferences are, especially if they're speaking on behalf of somebody else; their child, right. Like us as professionals need to I think step back and listen as a first step in those sorts of situations.

Ryan O'Donnell: And then just that first part I mentioned was just recognizing that your behavior can affect that divide very quickly...

Mary Barbera: I think that's great advice. Go ahead.

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah. And from there I was gonna say it's... I look at as like a shaping process. There are some, some areas where like in the ethics code where there's a little bit of things, we got to stand a little bit more firm on what we can and can't do. But we're seeing even with the ethics code, people are taking a much more functional approach as to how can I help this

client that I'm serving at any day achieve their goals best? And if that requires, you know, shutting your mouth at certain points and listening, like I think that's okay as professionals and it's something we haven't largely tried as a profession. More so we kinda created these divides in the past decades and decades ago. So I coach people that way personally.

Ryan O'Donnell: And yeah, I mean if your evidence-based approaches like try that strategy, you know, like before you make a change. But that's, that's where it's very well with me for building bridges in the behavioral community outside the behavioral community and it fits within an evidence based approach. So it makes me happy at the end of the day and I can sleep well.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. Yeah. I think that's great advice. And we can also, I think my shoe tying video with Lucas for instance, that has, is based on TAGTEACH and has me using the clicker. I think she's pointing people to videos like that, that show like... Or we don't have to use the clicker. We could use a yes or we could use a little bear in a cup that would provide an auditory and visual reinforcement system so that you don't have to be like, this is the way or doing it, you know, take it or leave it. So I like that approach of you know, that person may have baggage from something else and from another behavioral program that really wasn't in line with a completely positive approach like we use.

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah.

Mary Barbera: We'll get back to the episode in just a minute, but before we do that, whether you're a parent or professional, I hope you're enjoying this episode and I really hope that the content that you're getting through my podcasts and my video blogs are helping you make progress. But I wanted to hop in here quick and let you know that I truly believe that the best way I can help you, is if you join my online course and community. Whether you are a professional, such as a behavior analyst, speech pathologist, teacher, or whether you're a parent of a child just showing signs or already diagnosed more than a decade ago. I know I can help you. We have seen tremendous progress within our community. One behavior analyst said, "I'm forever changed as a BCBA as a result of taking this course". And we get lots of praise from parents stating that they've gotten their child from zero words to talking in short phrases. I mean, just really great progress that I see within my online course in community. So you can find out more about our unique approach and join like-minded professionals and parents within our online community by going and attending a free online workshop today at [marybarbera.com/workshop](http://marybarbera.com/workshop). I'd love it if you would tell every parent and professional in the autism

community about this free workshop at [marybarbera.com/workshop](http://marybarbera.com/workshop). So let's get back to the episode.

Ryan O'Donnell: Okay. So you have done extensive traveling over the past couple of years. Can you tell us some of the areas you went to and why? You know, you're so passionate about going to different areas internationally.

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah. So just another one of those things I kind of realized it was coming down the pipeline is a potential opportunity for me as a behavior analyst. I wasn't planning to do these sort of things. So as I began developing more of these online videos, putting those things out there, there are some people that saw it, one of them was Megan Miller. I know she was one of those who were on your podcast before and she was like, Hey, like I'm in a position... She was telling me that she was in a position to where she was doing some international consultation, not one off trainings, like sustained stuff that she's working with people; working with families and centers who serve people with autism or where we can that sort of capacity. And she was like, hey, it would be cool to collaborate on these sort of things.

Ryan O'Donnell: So the goal is just document and see where those things go. There was not much of a set plan, but it's taken us a lot of it really interesting places. So last couple of years, Kenya, Egypt twice. Uh, where else? Germany, Ireland, UK, Northern Ireland, Norway, Prague, France. There's a whole lot of them. And it's, yeah, and South America too. Yeah, Brazil as well. And there's kind of two things that I just, three things usually speak on. I've been super lucky and I work really hard also, I'll acknowledge that for creating those sort of videos and making this sort of opportunities happen. But for the international side of it, like we were talking about, it's not about this one off thing like you might see. It's trying to understand what are the needs internationally, what are similarities, and can we share more of those sort of things with people?

Ryan O'Donnell: So a big need internationally is quality training that's not at the same prices that we do now. So for example, the event that I put on ChattCon that is not affordable for many of the areas in the world that we've experienced, our price point is simply too high. The economics are very different. And so this travels not only helped share some perspectives with others and leaders in the field of what's going on, it's given some people a voice in a very cool way. And it's also in a way like humbled me up to what the larger field should probably be doing and focusing on. So, and a good example is events that are priced based on your geographical, social status and situation where you are on the globe? I guess something that I'm working on making happen over the next year or two. It's just

figuring out how and when to make those things happen. So yeah, there's... I try to speak as humbly as I can about it. I'm super fortunate, super lucky. It's a lot of work that goes into it. And the biggest thing I can tell people is the little bits that we share online of that is just trying to ask people to take the perspective of somebody else and realize that the world is global now. Like this global community, people need different things and we need to share across these cultures, what's working, what's not working, as much as we can.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. I've had a lot of experience traveling too in the past, but not that much recently. But my online courses have participants have had participants from over 65 different countries and it's only in, it's only in English at this point, but I see it being like a very big need to translate and to gather pockets of information out.

Mary Barbera: Are you involved in the global autism program? I've seen you kind of promote them.

Ryan O'Donnell: So the global autism project, I luckily ran into while at that conference the Pan African Congress on autism this April and made a quick video of one of their centers overnight because there was no internet and I was jet lagged and had some time to make a video and they really enjoyed it. So they said, hey, we should collaborate more. So I do not have an official role with them. I was contracted with them to produce some videos that we put up on the channel on their channel as well. So they flew me out to the recent events where they bring in all the people that are about to go out. So just a quick description of it. It was set up to where they encourage people to sign up, help raise funds to where they can go internationally and work sustainably with autism programs around the world. Getting involved in that and getting that resource and coaching from them on that system is a process. Like they don't work with just anybody; they work with the right people in the right circumstances, it's all described on their website.

Ryan O'Donnell: But the component that I was really sharing out there was that this is a way that if you wanted to do international work is set up as a system that you know that you're going to be effecting people and not in that way that's just one off training, because they work with people continuously. So they have small groups, four to five people that go for a couple of weeks. Like I said, those people fundraise that money to be able to go onto that sort of trip and take that time off and experience it, develop those skill sets, help people internationally, and then come back home and, you know, have a little bit of a different perspective there. So there's a lot of shared values and experiences that I had with global autism

project. And so that's where we collaborated on those, those pieces. I think there's a total of six videos that are up on the channel; four or five now, but there's more coming.

Mary Barbera: So we'll link that global autism project in our show notes for today. And I would also like to interview someone directly involved with that project because I've heard a lot about it over the years, but I haven't really made a personal connection yet. So I think that...

Ryan O'Donnell: I'm glad to put you in touch with Molly.

Mary Barbera: Okay. So what are the biggest struggles that new and seasoned behavior analysts face today? And are they the same? Are they different? What are the struggles?

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah. If I could compartmentalize people a little bit just for the sake of the conversation, I would say a lot of folks that have are really seasoned in this field, I'm talking about 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years, I think are seeing this explosion of the BCBA certificate largely from a perspective of that there's so much change going on and things are changing so quickly that the quality is being affected. And for me that's kind of like a, if that's a thing, that's a thing, how do we handle it? Right? Like how do we move forward? And so working with those in that pain point that they may share, but for example, sitting down with them and creating a video of, you know, or a podcast in a medium that younger generations will consume and listen to is a way I kind of think you can move forward with that.

Ryan O'Donnell: Struggles with younger folks in the field, they're just getting into the field, I think are kind of multi-facet. It's growing so fast that there's definitely, it's hard to find really good supervision and mentorship. So, we're definitely seeing a lot of changes, like people trying to figure out where quality mentorship, leadership, training and things like that come from. I'm really excited to see that develop more and more. And the other side of that would be trying to understand a quick way to, to filter what works and what to do in a situation, which can be achieved through mentorship. But I think a lot of analysts are, you complete your two year program... I'm speaking from my experience, you complete your two year program and you feel like you have a good understanding of what's going on, but when you start working with people or in a situation that you weren't specifically trained in, it's tough and stressful. It might be scary, it might be anxiety provoking when all of a sudden you find yourself responsible for, I remember back in Grad school when I was, I walked into a job

thinking I was gonna have a case load at 12, and I walked out with 48 on my first day.

Ryan O'Donnell: And with a lot of two to one staff to student ratios, I was like, I can't do that; like, I'm not equipped for this like that sort of situation. I think because of the demand and the need of our services causing some issues there. So that for me is what drives online content creation, automation of things. Like how can we start creating more of those sort of things like you've been doing. I think that's one of the past there forward. Unfortunately those things aren't going to come quick and so there's some pain points there with analysts feeling maybe like they can't handle every situation. So that's why I'm excited, you know, when we do these things like ChattCon we record everything to where that's going to be up there hosted forever, you can go find it. It might be a year that it's pay walled in or something like that to help us, you know, sustain the business and keep it more content coming. But the amount of information and good, high quality information I think is how you solve that problem.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. And I know you can appreciate not just the hours of work involved with producing videos, but all the back-end systems and people that help is a fortune. It's really expensive. And so there's not many of us out in the field, behavioral analysts that are doing anything online consistently, I think because of the cost and really just the knowledge that is involved with running things like this.

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah. We wanted a number for listeners. Like the YouTube Channel last year was \$20,000 of work and that's to run a channel that was new and not top end like you see on YouTube. Like there's a lot of costs to go into these sorts of things that you don't even realize. So, yeah, it's a challenge as creators figuring out how to balance that I think daily.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. When you were saying about like a pay wall and things like that, it's like people say, oh, well why should I pay for information when I can go get it for free on the Internet? But the problem is there are so much information on the Internet, within books, within posts that you really do need somebody like you or I to get the just the need to know those or your specific child or clients. And is more of a step by step system because otherwise just people are just like wandering around on the Internet trying things willy nilly and it's making things worse.

Ryan O'Donnell: Quality suffers. Yeah. Yeah. When you're doing that thing you're, you're... If someone has the right morals and ethics in place, like you're paying for something that works more efficiently, saves you time and weeds out the

stuff that is mediocre work that is not needed. If not, then we probably shouldn't be creating this content. Right. But that's what you're getting in those serious situations. I sign up for these models too. That's how I learned video skills, social media skills, cause I signed up for courses. Or I can find it all free, but I usually have some gaps and holes in my skill set. So I pay for those online courses.

Mary Barbera: Right. And I've taken a ton of online courses myself to learn how to do this. I took a podcasting course how to create webinars. I, you know, and it's like a whole other skill that, you know, we've had to create and I would encourage other behavior analysts to continue on and to develop businesses. But it's just a really complicated twisty roads. It's kinda like, you know, how do you treat autism? How do you start an online course? I mean, they're both completely complex questions that are not answerable. Okay. So we talked a little about the struggles for BCBAs. How about parents and professional collaboration? How can we improve that?

Ryan O'Donnell: You know, at first I thought it with parents is knowing what to expect of a behavior analyst is probably one of the biggest needs I think that needs to be filled. And it's not that certain professionals or different entities out there don't do it as part of the business practice, but knowing what to expect as behavior analyst is, I think one of the biggest gaps there. So my call for behavior analysts would be to really be open and honest with the people that you're working with as to what to expect, right? Like we can answer some of those things up front; like you're going to see me at this schedule, you're going to get decisions on what's working, what's not working, every x days or x, you know, whatever. If we can communicate those things up front, I think that would in the busy days that we do lead as behavior analysts, I think it would speed up some of the problems that we've faced, right, with people saying as being misrepresented for what it is.

Ryan O'Donnell: So it's one of the first things I think of for parents. I mean, I as a behavior analyst, like you, you come out of Grad school thinking that you've mastered behavior and you understand how things work. I studied perspective taking as part of my thesis mainly because I realized that it's fascinating, but also if I can't take the perspective of the person that I'm trying to deploy these services for, then I might not understand their situation. And I don't think you can fully understand someone's perspective at all. But if we try to take those perspectives, right, and that component of listening to these parents of children with autism or listening to the advocates, listening to the people that are diagnosed with the autism that are related disorders we're working with. I think that that



side of the field is shaping up, but we haven't... That's been a great way to really build bridges and get on the same page with parents. And I wasn't originally... some people didn't originally train me to like spend that time trying to take those perspectives all the way. And it's been really valuable for me to pause and look at those perspectives.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. I've had the fortune of being a parent before I was behavior analyst. So I think some of that, you know, is easier for me just because I did live it. I lived and I still live it. But there's kids all over the spectrum, all different levels, different ages. And I, you know, I think it's a great practice for anybody to learn perspective taking because even though I've been through it with my own son, I've been through it with my own son. That's it. And so I can't truly understand everybody's perspective.

Mary Barbera: Okay. So before we wrap up, part of my mission for this podcast is to give information to parents and professionals in the autism field so they can be less stressed, and lead happier lives. So do you have any advice about self-care, being less stressed, and being happier?

Ryan O'Donnell: Yeah, for sure. I love this topic a lot. So the way that I've approached this is what they call values clarification exercises. There's a lot of ways to do it. Simplest way, speak with people that you love, that you care about next to you as well as, you know, make a list, whatever it is that works for you, your phone, piece of paper. And start writing down those things that that you really enjoy. Those things you can't have and hold. Like you can't hold health. Those sort of values or the things that you'd like to pursue. And the way I think about this is your behavior towards them or away from them is what can lead to living that sort of less stressed or happier life and keeping those things in frame.

Ryan O'Donnell: So I started this practice in Grad school where every Sunday I'd think about my values. I'd spend at that time at that time a couple of hours; It's more like 15 minutes nowadays. Just saying, you know, what did I do this past week that was family oriented, that was health oriented. That was me professionally developing in some sort of way and looking at those allocations of my time. A good example right now that I'm thinking of is I talk with my family almost daily, but I have not seen my family, close family members, my siblings and my mother and father in about two months. That's way too long for me to be happy with. And those are things that go into my self-care, make me happy and recharged and ready to go as a professional. So I try to actively plan as much as I can, but also that component of that weekly review is like, where did I maybe not do as much as I want it to? Why did that happen, and what can I do next week?

Ryan O'Donnell: You can't beat yourself up for it, nobody's perfect. And sometimes pursuing one value is an opposition to another. I could value being a healthy person and sleeping eight hours, but I might be too busy to work out that day. That doesn't mean that I'm a bad human, because I didn't do both of those sort of activities to the degree that I wanted to. Just like traveling the world and helping people internationally and leaving my girlfriend and other loved ones behind that I don't get to see those are indirect opposition to each other. So it's a balance. It's one of those things, it's dynamic. You're never going to figure it out exactly. But what we can do is employ something daily, weekly, monthly, you know, in those sort of tiers that helps you adjust and reflect and sometimes you don't see that yourself. And that's why I say, ask people next to you, they can help keep you in check, you know, and realize sometimes your stressors or why you might be struggling and such.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, I love that. I love the whole weekly thing because I've been trying to do a daily thing, the five minute gratitude journal or whatever it's called. But you know, like a weekly review might be good. And I like doing, like what you suggested in terms of different categories of your life and your health and happiness. So I love that. So how can people follow you in your work?

Ryan O'Donnell: So the daily BA, it's **T H E D A I L Y B A** is meant for the daily behavior analyst is kind of the play there. That is on all social channels. It's where you can keep up with me. I'm on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, all of those. You can search me on there if you want. The podcast, if you're interested in Why We Do What We Do it's... just search that, Why We Do What We Do podcast that should pop up number one or two in those rankings now, it's pretty high up there.

Mary Barbera: And we can put these in the show notes as well.

Ryan O'Donnell: Okay, cool. I was gonna say, one of my favorite things to do is to hear other people's perspectives and stories and things like this. So if there's something to listen to you absolutely agree with like writing in, I will read all of those and reply to them all right now. And it helps me understand like where to keep going, and I listen to people as much as I possibly can on those for what I continue to do. So you can influence what I'm doing, what I'm talking about, I just ask people to throw it in a constructive way if you have anything that you want to follow up on.

Mary Barbera: Cool. Well thank you so much for your time today, Ryan. I really enjoyed talking with you. Hopefully we'll get to see each other in person soon.

And for those of you that are listening, I just want you to know that Ryan is doing a great job with his videos and his podcast.

Mary Barbera:

And I also, I know I talked a little bit about joining my online courses and community, that there's people from over 65 countries who have joined and I do provide type two BABCUs for those of you that are in the ABA field, but I also have courses for parents of young children of older children. So I really am creating something quite special that is sustainable and like Ryan and I talked about. So to find out more information, attend a free workshop at [marybarbera.com/workshop](http://marybarbera.com/workshop). Thanks again for your time, Ryan, and I hope you all tune in next week for another episode of the Turn Autism Around podcast. Have a great one.

*Thanks for listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast with Dr. Mary Barbera. For more information, visit [Marybarbera.com](http://Marybarbera.com).*