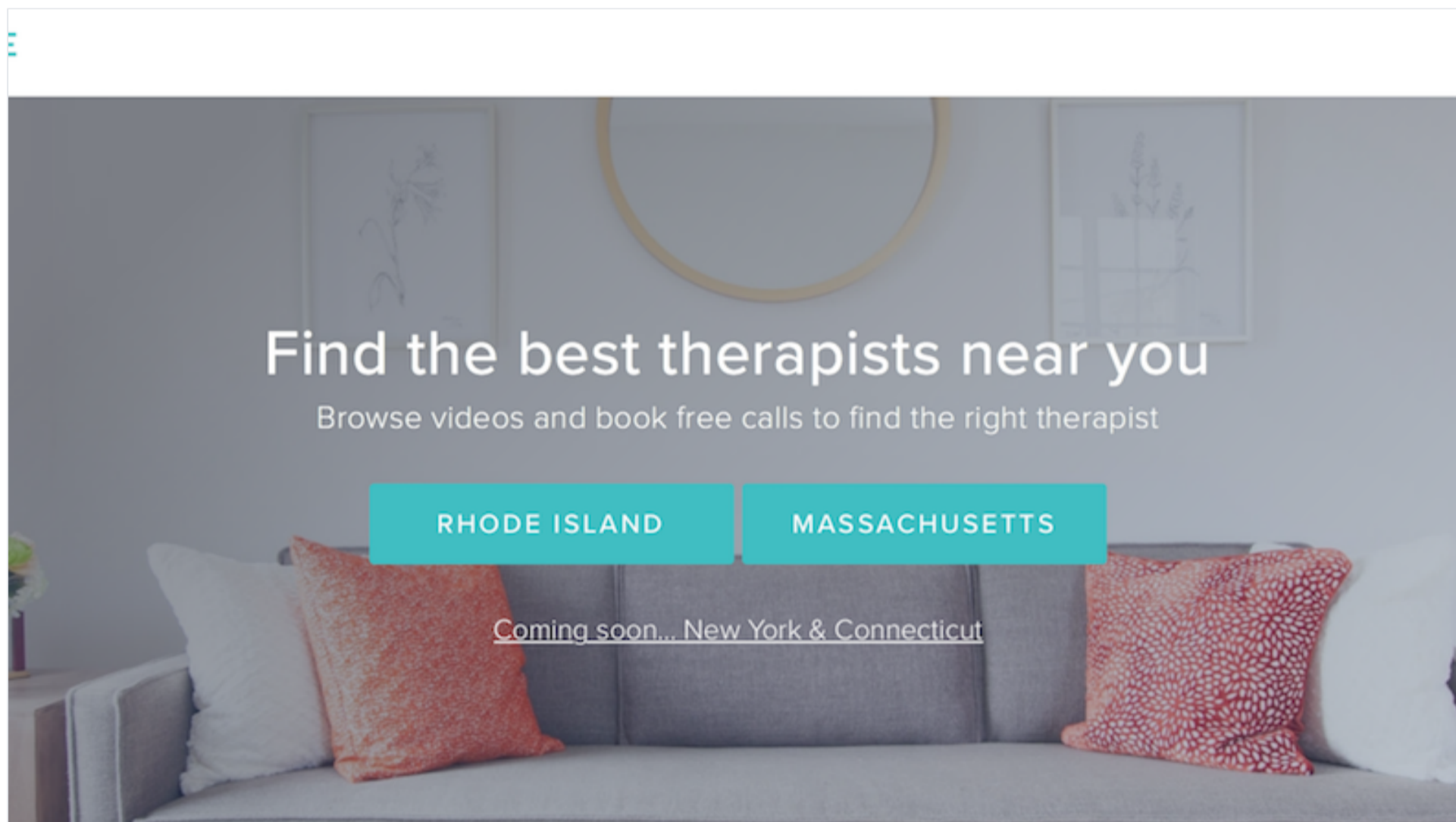


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# The 'Power of a Really Good Therapist': How Zencare Makes Finding One Easy

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Zencare homepage. Photo Credit: Zencare

By Courtney Gabrielson

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When you're stressed and need help, the last thing you want (or need) is a potential remedy to add distress.

Unfortunately, in Yuri Tomikawa's case, she found herself in exactly that spot: in need of a trustworthy therapist during a time of deep confusion in her life, and the search was proving drawn out and very unfruitful.

"Everyone's profile sounded the same: 'Are you stuck?,' Tomikawa said. "I couldn't tell who was an expert in what."

When she did find someone who seemed interesting, phone calls went to voicemail; emails were unreturned or the sliding scale cost of appointments was too much for a young professional like herself.

"There was a point in my life when I was fairly functional," Tomikawa said. "I recalled when I was in college, I developed an eating disorder ... I had a lot of family stuff at the time. If I was in that state, [or] going through much, much more, and looking for a therapist — [the frustrating search] would be the last straw for me."

"We all have therapists who we love, and we know the power of a really good therapist. That's what we want more people to experience, wherever they are in the wellness journey."

Luckily, through a friend's mother, Tomikawa was able to find a professional she connected with and trusted. But the difficult journey to finding a therapist stuck with her, and Tomikawa endeavored to ensure others wouldn't have the same struggle.

A Brown University alumna and former McKinsey & Company consultant, Tomikawa had kicked around starting an enterprise of her own before, but had been unsure about next steps. In fact, it was confusion about her life direction that inspired her to seek out a therapist in the first place. Now, with a clear problem she could solve illuminated, Tomikawa had a plan.

The result? [Zencare.co](https://zencare.co), a platform that aims to simplify the process of connecting clients to mental health professionals. It's now three years old and serves clients in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and soon, New York and Connecticut.

It works like this: Users interested in connecting with a therapist head to the Zencare website, where they can search by the professional's location, fees and specialties. When they find a therapist they're interested in, they can examine the therapist's profile.

This is a feature Tomikawa said sets Zencare apart. On each therapist's page is a video and other information, which keeps the guesswork out of the hunt. If users are stuck, they can ring Zencare for more help making a match. When they find one, they can then also schedule an initial free, five- to 10-minute appointment directly from the profile.

The call is a chance for potential patients to ask the therapist questions about fees and style, as well as to get a feel for the professional over the phone.

"What tends to happen is there are some clients who will play phone tag for days," Tomikawa said. This way, the two can "connect and schedule an in-person appointment right then and there."

"A trusting relationship between the client and the therapist is the No. 1 in determining factor in successful therapy," Tomikawa continued. "Making sure people find that really great fit is paramount."

Establishing fit is important, but Zencare can't do that unless it has a network of great therapists on its site. Tomikawa said her team had to work hard to develop this network and make it both robust and high-quality.

"We don't have every therapist and we don't include everyone," she said. Initially, Tomikawa did a lot of canvassing to get both an idea of what makes a therapist good and whether the ones the team vetted would be interested in joining the site.

Nowadays, interested professionals who want a Zencare profile must be interviewed, allowing the Zencare team to make sure that they're functioning at best-practice standards. Background checks are conducted. Currently, the site boasts nearly 200 therapists.

Establishing a network wasn't Tomikawa's only challenge: The team bootstrapped the process of getting Zencare off the ground.

Challenges aside, Tomikawa is passionate about the startup and its mission to "profoundly [improve] people's lives through quality mental health care."

This statement "informs everything we do," Tomikawa continued. As a result, "I think success for us is being able to help as many people find a therapist who is going to change their life for the better. We all have therapists who we love, and we know the power of a really good therapist. That's what we want more people to experience, wherever they are in the wellness journey."

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