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Lunch And Learn teaches that hope springs eternal



Lesley Hersey, a community engagement specialist at Lutheran Services of Florida Health Systems, welcomes participants to the third Lunch and Learn training session on Thursday afternoon (May 4).

Story, Photos and Video By Jeff M. Hardison © May 7, 2017 at 1:17 a.m.

OTTER SPRINGS -- Hope springs eternal.

During part of her training session for people involved with children, Latanya Urquhart said on Thursday afternoon (May 4) "It is never too late."

Video can be seen from the link on the May 2017 page

Latanya Urquhart, a care coordinator specialist with LSF Health Systems, tells listeners that she plans to show them better methods for them as they all seek to heal others from trauma so that those people can become more resilient.

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Latanya Urquhart, a care coordinator specialist with LSF Health Systems, shares insight with about 50 professionals from across a broad spectrum of agencies that help people.

Urquhart, a care coordinator specialist with LSF (Lutheran Services of Florida) Health Systems, was the keynote speaker. She was providing a two-hour session as an introduction to Adverse Childhood Experiences and some of the short-term and long-term effects from trauma in individuals' lives.

This introduction to “trauma-informed approach to promoting resiliency” may be among the methods listeners consider as they work with children and others in the various professions represented at the event.

Even the 50-year-old man who has become a homeless schizophrenic that talks in response to voices he “hears” as a result of a lifelong abuse of alcohol and other drugs can start turning his life around, Urquhart said.

While all absolutes are flawed, except perhaps that all absolutes are flawed, the theme of “It’s never too late” may be likened to the thought that hope springs eternal, and it is an idea to bolster caregivers’ spirits.

Before a person reaches that point of homelessness and drug-induced dementia, though, there are opportunities for caring humans to help reduce the odds of that

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outcome, she explained in the training session.

This was the third Lunch and Learn training session sponsored by the Levy County Prevention Coalition, the Anti-Drug Coalition of Dixie County, the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office, the Lutheran Services of Florida and the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Here are some of the Subway sandwiches and fixings provided to the 50 attendees at the most recent Lunch and Learn. There were also brownies and many different kinds of bagged potato chips. Sweet and unsweet tea was the beverage of choice. This lunch, the two before it for this set of training events, was free to participants. The next sets of Lunch and Learn events are probably going to cost participating diners \$10 each.



The very first one was held in Fanning Springs at the Bible Ministries building, which is a former bar on U.S. Highway 19 near State Road 26. The second two were held at the Otter Springs Campground and Park, home of the ForVets Inc. organization.

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Katrina Gross VanAernam, of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition, shares with the group that a coalition of people can bring positive change to communities.

The first three of these sessions provided a free lunch. Lesley Hersey of LSF and Katrina Gross VanAernam of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition asked participants to consider paying \$10 each to cover the lunch for the next session.

The Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office has covered the cost of one lunch and GCSO retiree Anita Moore covered the lunch cost more recently.

The next Lunch and Learn is set for Sept. 21 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in the ForVets Lodge at Otter Springs Campground and Park, 6470 S.W. 80th Ave., in the Trenton area. The next session will be in regard to drug crime diversion programs, where people who have drug problems are given help to overcome their addictions, rather than just incarceration.

There were 82 people registered for the session on Thursday. Fifty people arrived. There was a broad spectrum of participants from law enforcement officers, to public relations staff, to mental health counselors, to school nurses and many more professionals.

One table with five people at it won plastic glasses with straws, and another promotional gift for having the five people at one table with the most years of experience – they had 130 years.

VanAernam spoke about the series. She said some people in Dixie County thought there was a lack of resources to help people who have become addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

Instead, she found there are many resources. The problem she unraveled was that there appeared to be a disconnection between the providers of services and the people who needed them.

She said the Anti-Drug Coalition of Dixie County is modeled after the Levy County

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Prevention Coalition. These groups show that people working together can bring about “population level change.”

“We want to see,” VanAernam said, “our entire community change.”

To achieve that goal, she continued, takes everyone working together.

Members of the Levy and Dixie counties’ coalitions wanted to hear about training. Another goal was to have people speak with each other and visit with one another in a networking format.

There was some very light networking on Thursday afternoon at lodge in Otter Springs Campground.

There was about two hours of lecture as “training.” One key element of the basis for the lecture Thursday afternoon was a study conducted using 17,000 people from a population based of equal male and female participants, from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds. The mean age of the participants was 57 years old.

Urquhart, who mentioned that LSF provides help across 23 counties, sought to impart to listeners so they could understand concepts from research into Adverse Childhood Experiences. She lives and works in Jacksonville.

Urquhart works with “high utilizers” of the mental health and substance abuse system. These individuals, she said, often cycle in and out of the criminal justice system.

In this introduction to Adverse Childhood Experiences, Urquhart spoke about research that shows how adults in positions where they can provide support to children may improve that effort by thinking more about the children’s lives outside of when they see them in the classroom, in the church, in the community center or on the playing fields of athletic sports and the like.

People do well when they live in a community that wraps them in services where they can feel successful, even if they may be suffering from mental health issues or even facing the dilemmas and demons from substance abuse.

Teaching children proper coping skills was among the ideas that the trainer shared. This helps children get through issues they may be experiencing at home.

There are many forms of trauma that affect children. These include child abuse (sexual, physical and psychological); childhood neglect (physical and emotional); and then there are congenital issues (heredity) as well as environmental issues such as growing up in a home where there is mental illness, a family member with a severe physical illness, family members in prison, a family where substance abuse is not understood as abuse but rather as better living through self-medication, and the loss of one or more parents by death, divorce, separation or abandonment.

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* Representing the agencies sponsoring the event are (from left) Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office Capt. Sheryl Brown, Levy County Prevention Coalition Project Coordinator Rose Wilder, Lesley Hersey, a community engagement specialist at Lutheran Services of Florida Health Systems, Katrina Gross VanAernam of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition and Levy County Prevention Coalition Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Lewis.



* Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office Capt. Sheryl Brown (left) and Levy County Prevention Coalition Project Coordinator Rose Wilder

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Lesley Hersey, a community engagement specialist at Lutheran Services of Florida Health Systems (left) and Katrina Gross VanAernam of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition



Levy County Prevention Coalition Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Lewis

Among the many concepts Urquhart shared in the session was that adults who

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interact with children that come from backgrounds with trauma need to provide support rather than ridicule.

When a child is acting ill-mannered or worse in a classroom for instance, rather than saying to the child “What’s wrong with you?” the person who can serve as a parental figure outside of that child’s home might ask “What happened to you to make you so angry?”

Even trying to help with a question about the cause of the child’s actions can present a barrier. Children who are 7 to 12 years old, or even older, might lack the communication skills to share with a caring adult their experiences from their homes.

They may not be able to explain that they live in a house with six brothers and sisters who all compete for a space on the carpeted part of their one-bedroom house floor, where they sleep every night. Or they may not be able to explain that they are very hard-pressed to win in competition for the available food in the house.

When the person finds a place to cope with adversity, that helps the person move on to a better point in their lives, Urquhart said.

“If I don’t ever find that adult,” Urquhart said, “and if everyone around me always thinks I am bad, and I am constantly getting punished because I don’t have the language or the words at 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12, sometimes older, to tell you what my life experience is when I am not with you, then I get labeled.”

Those labels are not “good” labels, she added.

Adults in professions that deal with children look at those tags and form a method to work with that child based on the label, rather than seeking to find what led to that action where the child became so labeled and trying to provide the child with a safe and comfortable place to discuss what might be one or more of the factors causing the deviant or antisocial behavior.

Children who are unable to find a safe and supporting adult figure won't learn proper coping methods to deal with the stress caused by the adversity they see in their daily lives.

Instead of having a versatile coping method, the affected children act out. They lash out from the anger and frustration caused by no one giving them a place to start learning better methods for a positive lifestyle.

“But there is hope,” Urquhart said. “I don’t mean to be such a bleak creature. There is hope, because there are people like you in the room. And you are caring. And you are willing to work with individuals, and help them get to that safe place. And they can become whole and healed.”

Hope springs eternal.