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Learners treated to Publix subs



Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition Executive Director Katrina VanAernam (left) welcomes people as she introduces Angie Land, who introduced Dr. Ryan Hall on Thursday at the Dixie County Public Library in Cross City, prepares to speak about the keynote speaker.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 29, 2018 at 4:18 p.m.

CROSS CITY -- A Lunch and Learn event hosted by the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition attracted at least 50 people to Cross City from Dixie, Levy, Gilchrist, Alachua, Columbia and Baker counties Thursday (Nov. 29).

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Dr. Ryan C.W. Hall (at right) tells listeners that he has a child who will be school-aged, and he has been robbed at gunpoint, as he shows his awareness – beyond just being academic – to some aspects of the topics he addressed. Hall is a lifelong member of the National Rifle Association since he was a teen, when his mother bought him a lifetime membership to the NRA.



Dr. Ryan C.W. Hall, a psychiatrist who works primarily in Orlando, served as the keynote speaker as he presented his topic titled “Guns, Schools, and Mental Health.”

The event was promoted under the title “How do we keep our schools safe?”

The two-hour program was not a nuts-and-bolts recipe for methods of school safety. It was a review of research showing both sides of several social and mental health issues.

If a researcher was watching the presentation, he or she might say, “More research is needed” before reaching some conclusion on how to keep schools safe (from people who kill students).

Diagnosing mental illness in children and teens, Hall said, is difficult, in no small part because children have not completely formed intellectually or emotionally.

Alcohol and other drugs, Hall said, can be contributors to developing or exacerbating mental illness.

During his program, the psychiatrist spoke about some infamous cases of mass killing, one case of stalking and the case involving the assassination of Ringo Starr by a man with mental illness.

“How do we keep our schools safe?”

The single answer Dr. Hall expressed was that gun control is not an answer. During part of his presentation, he explained that murderers in China killed many school children using butcher knives, and he alleged those murders led to permits being required in China to buy butcher knives.

As for the value of psychiatrists predicting things, Hall repeatedly conceded that he does not have a functional “crystal ball.”

He concurs with other scientists who believe clinical predictions by psychiatrists produce a fundamentally very low level of reliability in regard to determining the potential for a particular human being to become dangerously violent.

Clinicians can use indicators by testing subjects, but there are no guarantees either way that a psychiatrist will have a high degree of reliability in stating who will be “normal” or “abnormal” psychologically, in reference to their future actions.

For instance, one woman who had succeeded in being part of the team of astronauts for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration became a stalker that used extreme measures to ply her misdeeds – which eventually resulted in a plea-negotiated agreement with prosecutors where she pled guilty to felony burglary and misdemeanor

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battery in Orlando, on Nov. 10, 2009.

She had been well-vetted by psychoanalysts, but no one could see that she would become a stalker of her lover's other lover.

One important message from this concept of the fallibility of psychiatrists is that after 30 years of development, mental health professionals cannot with any level of comfortable certainty predict future acts of violence, sexual or criminal risks in most cases.

Sometimes, though, the flag that was seen as a yellow flag before an event, looks very much like a red flag after the bad event. Hindsight is 20-20.

Therefore, school administrators should not have unrealistic expectations of risk predications being accurate from clinicians who look at students. During his presentation, Hall showed how there could be problems from too much attention to strange behavior, just as there can be future problems when deviant behavior is not immediately investigated and dealt with.

In addition to diagnosis of mental illness, there is the other facet -- follow-up. If a psychiatrist determines a person has mental illness and nothing happens after the diagnosis, then there is not a likelihood of a positive outcome.

And then, even if a patient is found to need help and treatment is prescribed, another gamble is whether the patient will accept that he or she must take the medicine and attend the therapy sessions to maintain a normal lifestyle.

Even beyond the population of clinically mentally ill persons who may pose a threat to students or others, there is the clinically mentally sound person who overreacts to some emotional stimuli, and then becomes violent.

"How do we keep our schools safe?"

Hall questioned whether high fences with razor wire, single entry through a metal detector is something parents want, anymore than a completely open campus.

This Lunch and Learn event provided some tangible results, even if there was mostly psychological smoke and mirrors, and questions rather than answers, without any firm guidelines for making schools safer.

The participants enjoyed submarine sandwiches brought into Dixie County from some county where they have Publix – like Alachua County. Among the subs enjoyed by attendees was Boar's Head turkey. There were condiments, as well as lettuce, tomato and onion. And there were name-brand chips like Fritos. And there were drinks too, like Coca-Cola.

As for this Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition event, the "lunch" part was covered. The "learn" part of the event left more questions than answers. It was "fair and balanced" by not showing any inclination toward gun control, which according to some people is a non-starter answer in Dixie County.

Having questions, though, can lead to more learning – via more research.