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Women at luncheon hear inspiring stories from other women

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Workshop's goal was to provide women with tools and resources needed to create a healthy life for themselves.

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Woman should embrace mental health as they seek to achieve overall wellness, according to Indiana Parenting Institute founder, president and CEO Laura Smith Wynn.

Wynn recently offered a luncheon and workshop, "Women, Mental Health and Success: Stories That Inspire. Services That Help," at the Radisson Hotel at Star Plaza in Merrillville.

"The impetus to offer this event was to open communication and remove the stigma about another area of health care that is vital to women and girls of the 21st century," she said, "and to provide them with tools and resources to create a healthy life balanced through both physical and mental well-being."

The four speakers presenting at the workshop were women who aim to help women and families. Sharing personal stories of survival — and the trials and tribulations that precede a positive ending — can be beneficial, Wynn said.

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While listening to the speakers, attendee Sandra Mosely of WorkForce Development Services agreed, adding that awareness of what goes on in the world of others can be an eye-opener.

"This (event) gives us a chance to pause and think. Despite these circumstances, these women were able to move forward, realizing they were not alone," Mosley said. "Even if we didn't have their situation, we can learn compassion and empathy."

The first speaker was Kelly Vate, co-founder and executive director of Fair Haven Center for Women. She titled her presentation "In Search of Happily Ever After," relating her story of abuse during childhood.

After not receiving support from the relative in whom she confided, Vate took the path of self-medication. After counseling, surrounding herself with a solid support group and self-nurturing, she found the road to recovery.

"Surviving the abuse was one thing. But surviving the telling of that abuse was another," she told the crowd. "But I believe that no matter where you are, change can happen if you work at it. Recovery is a lifestyle, not a destination."

Speaking on "Relationships: The Domino Effect" was Linda Perez, executive director of St. Jude House. Relating her experience, Perez said domestic abuse can happen to anyone, no matter what their status in life.

"I was educated and had a career as a professional," she said "The private battle I suffered most was in my home. Abuse can break you down."

Like Vate, she found a good support system and reminded herself daily that she was a good person who deserved a peaceful life.

Dr. Janet Seabrook, executive director of Community HealthNet Centers, chose as her topic, "Me First," a presentation on the positive effects of women taking care of their own health in order to deal with what life brings. A well-balanced mental attitude can work hand in hand with preventative measures for physical health, she said.

Just as passengers on an airliner in trouble are instructed to put an air mask on themselves before they try to help others, Seabrook said, "you have to take care of yourself. Without this awareness, you have a reduced ability to impact your universe."

Keynote speaker Danita Hughes, president and CEO of Edgewater Behavioral Health Services, told the audience that her experience in the field has shown her that much of the stress women experience is put on by themselves, as she discussed her topic, "Stress Less, Live More."

"When your sense of humor goes down, the ability to communicate goes down, and your stress level goes up, she said. "It's a vicious cycle."

She suggested various ways to combat this, such as meditation, exercise, or taking time to enjoy a hobby, among others.

"Make yourself the priority," she said.

Denise Dillard, chairman and CEO of the WDS Group and consultant to the Methodist Hospitals, served as guest host to the 60 women who attended the event.

Sue Ellen Ross is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.

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Workshop for women



Jena Bellezza, Indiana Parenting Institute community outreach and marketing director, (left) and IPI project coordinator Tara Nelson welcome 60 women to the luncheon and workshop in Merrillville. (Sue Ellen Ross / Post-Tribune)



Linda Perez, executive director of St. Jude House, shared her personal story during the recent Indiana Parenting Institute luncheon and workshop in Merrillville. (Sue Ellen Ross / Post-Tribune)