

Mental Health Symposium impacts community

Community members, counselors, educators, health providers and others devoted a day, in observance of Mental Health Awareness, by attending the 13th Annual Mental Health & Substance Abuse Awareness Symposium held on May 11 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Texas A&M International University, Student Center-Ballroom, 5201 University Boulevard in Laredo, Texas. This conference was made possible through the efforts of various community organizations who partnered to increase mental health awareness and education in the community. Over 168 community participants attended the event.

Julie Bazan, Executive Director of Area Health Education Center (AHEC) and Dr. Glenda Walker, Dean of College for Nursing and Health Sciences at Texas A&M International University welcomed conference participants, offered opening remarks and acknowledged Dr. Luis Gomez Rejon, Margarita Tagle and Jaime Arizpe for initiating this annual event to provide education and awareness in the community about mental health. Conference sponsors Methodist Healthcare Ministries, the Si Texas Grant project, Texas Department of State Health Services Office of Border Health, and Area Health Education Center were also acknowledged for being supporters of this conference. This year's Mental Health & Substance Abuse Symposium program included seven guest speakers covering topics pertaining to mental health: Dr. Yvonne T. Quintanilla, LPC., from South Texas Behavioral Health Center, presented on The Meaning of Transgender, with the intent of clarifying various matters regarding transgender individuals including the way in which they feel comfortable as female or male and the rights they have to be protected as individuals; Dr. Gilbert Salinas from Texas A&M International University presented on Mental Health



Executive Director Julie Bazan, Dr. Glenda Walker, Executive Director Daniel Castillon, Honorable Judge Tano Tijerina, Honorable Mayor Pete Saenz, and Dr. Pablo Arenaz proclaimed May 2016 as Mental Health Awareness Month during the 13th Annual Mental Health & Substance Abuse Awareness Symposium.

and College Students. He expressed the importance of maintaining a healthy mind and educating students on how this may impact their health if not properly treated; furthermore, he encouraged students to look for resources offered at their institutions of higher learning. The program included a proclamation reading offered by the Honorable City of Laredo Mayor Pete Saenz and the Honorable County of Webb Judge Tano E. Tijerina. Other speakers' presentations included Dr. Susana Rivera, LPC from SCAN presenting on Staying Safe While Staying Connected. Her presentation explained the impact of social media as a means of communication, but the importance of keeping messages clear from misinterpretations. Dr. Monica Urdiales-Alleman, DNP, APRN from Texas A&M International University presented on Adolescent Obesity: Weighing the Options. She emphasized the quality of life a person will have by consuming healthy foods and taking

control of healthy habits. Another presenter Mr. Michael Smith, BA, MPA presented on The Poverty Gap. His talk highlighted the manner which people can assist others who are dealing with stress by simply making time to converse or listen. In addition, he also reported that the homeless coalition assembles bags of personal hygiene items and dispenses them to those that need them in the community. Ms. Rose Saldivar, MSN, RN from Texas A&M International University presented on Chronic Illness and Mental Health. She highlighted the importance of managing chronic illnesses in order to maintain a healthy state of mind. The program concluded with Mr. Luis Diaz, LPC from Border Region Behavioral Health Center presenting on Schizophrenia an Overview. Mr. Diaz reviewed the different behaviors a person might experience when they show signs of schizophrenia.

Every conference participant received a package with information on the talks,

educational information on mental health services and was also invited to provide their individual evaluation regarding the program, presentations and overall conference. Some of the comments from the conference participants present included "Quality of the presenters, and their passion for their careers was great"; "I learned more about mental health issues and the obstacles faced by a Transgender individual".

The Area Health Education Center acknowledges the main sponsor of this year's conference Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc. (MHM), the largest private, faith-based funding source for healthcare services in South Texas. MHM is a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund which selected Texas A&M International University as one out of 12 South Texas counties identified as a cohort for the grant. The Si Texas project will focus on Social Innovation for a Healthy South Texas. MHM focuses on providing medical, dental and health-related services to low-income and uninsured families, presently with the "Si Texas" grant South Texas will have the opportunity to improve both physical and behavioral health such as diabetes and depression along with obesity and associated risk factors in nearby communities with high poverty rates.

The Area Health Education Center of the Mid Rio Grande Border Area (AHEC) is an outreach program under the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio and is a non-profit 501(C) 3 organization with a mission to enhance the quality of life our communities by increasing the number of well-trained health care workers; enhancing academic resources; and fostering a healthy lifestyle through community education programs. For additional information about AHEC and the menu of programs, visit www.mrgbahec.org or call (956)712-0037.