

WellHouse founder to speak at Mental Health America of Etowah County annual meeting

By Benjamin Nunnally / Times Staff Writer

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Mental Health America of Etowah County hosts its annual meeting at 11:30 a.m. Oct. 24 at the Downtown Civic Center, 629 Broad St. in Gadsden.

The keynote speaker at the event will be Tajuan McCarty, founder of The WellHouse, an organization that offers a safe home for women who have been sexually exploited, especially in regard to human trafficking and prostitution.

McCarty was herself a victim of human trafficking after running away from home at age 15. She was taken around the United States, Canada and Mexico as a prostitute before being arrested at age 26, which she used as a way to escape. She earned a master's degrees in public health and public administration and a bachelor of science degree in social work from the University of Alabama.

"We chose her this year because there is so much going on with human trafficking, and we felt like it would be an item of interest and awareness for our community," said Betty Willoughby, executive director of Mental Health America of Etowah.

MHA offers classes for court-ordered and voluntary attendees in various aspects of mental health, like anger management, stress management, parenting and domestic violence prevention, and also does indigent work with CED Mental Health. The organization also tries to raise awareness of mental health issues while treating those who suffer from mental illness.

Nurses and social workers receive one CE hour provided by Mountain View Hospital for attending.

Admission, which includes a catered lunch, is \$15. Attendees must RSVP by Oct. 19 by calling Willoughby at 256-547-6888, extension 115, or emailing



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