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Free mental health first aid course offered

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From Envision 2020:

The Healthy Minds Network, which is the Collective Impact initiative of Envision 2020 in partnership with SummaSource at Auburn Montgomery, announces the availability of instructor certification training in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA).

Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour training that takes the fear and hesitation out of starting conversations about mental health and substance use problems by teaching participants how to identify, understand, and respond to a variety of mental health situations. The training gives participants the skills needed to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who has a mental health or substance use problem or is experiencing a crisis.

In an effort to make this valuable skill more available in the region, the Healthy Minds Network (HMN) is hosting two Mental Health First Aid Instructor Certification courses, which are managed, operated, and disseminated by the National Council on Behavioral Health, in Montgomery this October. The Adult certification (how to recognize signs and symptoms in adults) will be offered from October 17- 21, 2016. Upon successful completion of the Adult certification, participants will have the opportunity to take the Youth certification (how to recognize signs and symptoms in children and adolescents), which will take place from October 24-27.

The standard cost for one certification is \$2,000 (or nearly \$3,000 for both), but through a generous grant from the Montgomery City/County Joint Public Charity Hospital Board, individuals who live in Montgomery City or County will be able to attend one or both of the certification trainings at no cost. Others in Alabama can receive the certifications at deeply discounted rates:

- Individuals who live in the other River Region counties of Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, or Macon, can apply to receive BOTH the adult and youth certification for only \$500.
- Individuals who live anywhere else in Alabama can receive BOTH adult and youth certification for \$1,000.

This instructor training is the launch of the River Region's Mental Health First Aid training program, which will be coordinated by the Healthy Minds Network and equip more Mental Health First Aid "first aiders" than ever before. Once certified, instructors are required to teach the course three times per year to maintain their certification. Courses are team taught by two certified instructors.

The primary role of certified Mental Health First Aid instructors is to teach the Mental Health First Aid course. When they offer the course, instructors teach the full 8-hour course with fidelity to the core program model and key messages. Each instructor has a set of materials to help guide them through course facilitation.

According to Mental Health First Aid USA's website: Mental Health First Aid is an international program proven to be effective. Peer-reviewed studies published in Australia, where the program originated, show that individuals trained in the program:

- Grow their knowledge of signs, symptoms and risk factors of mental illnesses and addictions.
- Can identify multiple types of professional and self-help resources for individuals with a mental illness or addiction.
- Increase their confidence in and likelihood to help an individual in distress.
- Show increased mental wellness themselves.

Studies also show that the program reduces the social distance created by negative attitudes and perceptions of individuals with mental illnesses.

Mental Health First Aid is listed in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) national registry of evidence-based programs and practices <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=321>.

Individuals who should consider becoming certified Mental Health First Aid instructors are typically from high-need groups such as: teachers, administrators, HR directors, case managers, managers at the housing authorities, military, first responders, and churches. However, anyone with an interest in helping others learn more about mental illness and substance use crises has the potential to be a successful instructor. Because the MHFA course is intended to train non-clinical "first aiders", it is not designed to be taught by medical professionals.

To apply for the Mental Health First Aid Instructor Certification course, go to www.riverregionhealthymindsnetwork.org or contact Alana Barranco at alana.barranco@summasource.com.

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