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EDITOR'S PICK

North Alabama participating in Mental Health Month

Rebecca Croomes May 6, 2016

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May is Mental Health Month and local organizations are participating to battle the stigmas associated with mental illness.

Oakdale Baptist Church was recently awarded the RESPECT Award by clients of the Limestone County branch of the Mental Health Center of North Alabama. Pastor Rick Cantrell said the award was not something the church was working toward, but is the result of circumstance.

“This was not just something we set out to do,” the pastor said about the church's mental health work. “We just count it an honor to be able to serve these folks.”

The RESPECT Award, according to church member Steve Pendegrass, is a recognition for the congregation's work in integrating clients of the Mental Health Center of North Alabama into their fellowship. Pendegrass said the folks at Oakdale go out of their way to make sure everyone is welcome and included. Cantrell, who met Pendegrass five years ago, said helping the mentally ill became a large part of the church's mission once people realized how common it is.

“It's a whole range of people with mental health issues,” he said. “We'd be foolish not to try to help them. It's something that kind of manifested itself within us.”

Being aware of mental illness, the number of people it affects and how those people are actually affected erases the myths and stereotypes keeping patients in the dark. People suffering with mental illness are just like other chronically sick people, but often do not get the support offered to those with visible signs of illness, Cantrell said. The church has made it a point to be open and available to all.

“We just give them a place where they can come and we accommodate them with camaraderie and friendship,” he said. “We try to integrate them into society and try to help them thrive the best they can.”

Workshop

The Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama is partnering with other mental illness advocacy groups to provide a free workshop on mental illness to the public on Friday, May 13. Lectures are set to begin at 8:30 a.m. at the Decatur campus of the MHCNA, located at 1316 Somerville Road, Suite 1.

Ashley Jones, communications director for Wellstone Behavioral Health, will give the first lecture on identifying common myths and stigmas surrounding mental illness, recognizing signs and symptoms of prevalent mood and anxiety disorders, recognizing signs of suicidal risks and identifying effective support techniques or interventions to address mental illness and suicide prevention.

Morgan County Probate Judge Greg Cain will follow with a presentation on understanding the commitment process to a state mental health facility. Though free, those interested in attending are asked to register by May 9.

For more information, or to register, email suebrantley@mhainmc.net, or call 256-353-1160.

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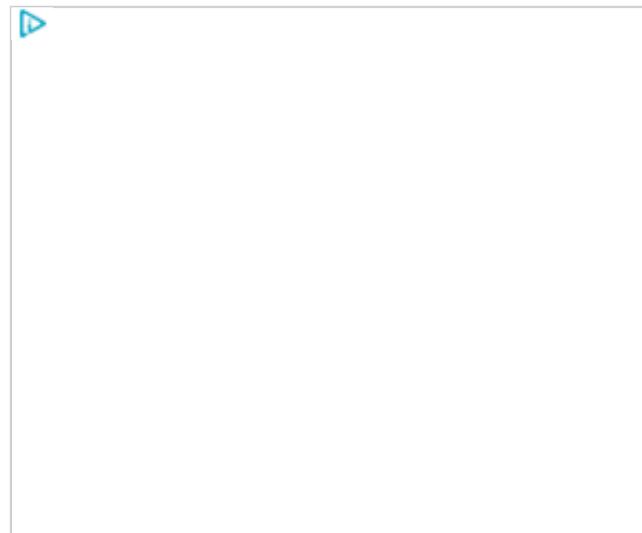
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