



8/29/15

Of the many events that marked the 10th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, only one focused on Mental Health and Wellness Issues. This public Workshop sponsored by the Louisiana Psychological Association (LPA), was conducted at the First Evangelist Baptist Church Community Center at 1801 Willow Street in New Orleans. This part of New Orleans has seen little recovery since Katrina. Most residents in this underserved area have benefited greatly from the work of Reverend Reginald Landry and Councilwoman LaToya Cantrell and their respective staffs, who have served those in need despite the paucity of resources.

Both Reverend Landry and Mr. Julius Feltus, representing Councilwoman Cantrell, readily embraced the importance of the Wellness Workshop scheduled for 8/29/15, and made it happen.

Many Professional Organizations joined in to co-sponsor this special event. They included the American Psychological Association (APA) via Susan McDaniel, Ph.D., President-Elect, the Louisiana Group Psychotherapy Society (LGPS), The Recovery Center of Baton Rouge, and the Baton Rouge Area Society of Psychologists (BRASP), who all gave donations to underwrite this event. Other contributors included The Neuropsychology Center of Louisiana, LLC (Baton Rouge & Gretna Offices), Dr. & Mrs. Ramon Beluche, The Charles Lamar Family, The APA Caucus of States, Territories, Provinces, and Regions (CSTPR), The APA Division 56 - Trauma Psychology, and The Jambalaya & Company via Burt Kemp, owner.

This program, which was created and produced by Darlyne G. Nemeth, Ph.D., M.P., M.P.A.P., C.G.P., Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., Tommy Davis, Ph.D., Fernando Pastrana, Ph.D., Gail Gillespie, Ph.D., and Kerritt Saintal, B.S., was endorsed by The Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN), the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), and the World Council for Psychotherapy (WCP), represented by Kelly Ray, Ph.D., M.P., Vice President. The Wellness Workshop featured three well known trauma specialists—Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Chair, Psychology Coalition of NGOs, accredited at the United Nations; Father Wismick Jean-Charles, Ph.D., Vice Chancellor, University of Notre Dame, Haiti; and Dr. Tommy Davis, Philadelphia Community Psychologist and Gospel Singer—who were very instrumental in the effectiveness of the interventions used in their program.

Several corporations provided complimentary snacks etc., including Aquafina from PepsiCo, Hershey's bars & Kisses from The Hershey Company, Potato Chips from Zapp's Chips, lunch items from Jambalaya & Company, and coupon books from River Walk Outlets.

The workshop events began around 11:00 a.m. and concluded around 4:00 p.m. Participants were asked to complete pre- and post- assessment measures and were then inspired by Dr. Tommy Davis' performance of the song, "You Are Still Loved" which he recorded especially for this event. All who attended were given a copy of this CD, which also included a copy of the RILEE Bear Relaxation Exercise. To include an ecumenical note in the Workshop, Fr. Wismick Jean-Charles, Ph.D., and Reverend Reginald Landry began with blessings.

Most participants had never interacted with a psychologist or social worker before and had not understood the power of healing music and psychological exercises. They were introduced to some basic facts regarding the origins of emotional trauma, including their biological, historical, and environmental roots.

Physical exercises representing balance, imbalance, and empowerment then followed. Dr. Kuriansky's empowerment exercises, which were conducted after lunch, were invigorating and brought new energy to the program. Before lunch, which was provided to all, participants were taught Emotional Freedom Techniques to reduce emotional and physical pain by Dr. Gail Gillespie.

In the morning, participants were asked to recognize, label, and share their myriad of feelings and actions that had occurred as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Later that afternoon, they were introduced to the concept of developmental regression that tends to occur post-trauma.

Via a variety of experiential exercises, participants were invited to regress and rebuild via a journey through Dr. Harville Hendrix's developmental stages of attachment, exploration, identity, competence, concern, and intimacy. Grief work, affective coping strategies, and drawing exercises were used to help participants to go back in time in order to move forward. New action banners were developed to express the emotional movement of participants throughout the day (see page 1, upper left side).

The emotional growth experienced by so many during the Workshop cannot be fully quantified. Findings from a training workshop on 8/15/15 are currently being analyzed. The 19 Psychologists and Social Workers who participated in the Wellness Workshop are as follows: Joe Carr, L.C.S.W., Lucinda DeGrange, Ph.D., Gail Gillespie, Ph.D., Chin-Chin Ho, Ph.D., Jenny Hughes, Ph.D., Darlyne G. Nemeth, Ph.D., M.P., C.G.P., Danielle Newman, M.S., Fernando Pastrana, Ph.D., Jessica Pavlich, M.Psy., Lindsey Poe, Psy.D., Kelly Ray, Ph.D., M.P., Melanie Richardson, L.M.S.W., Lauren Robinson, Psy.D., Mark Skellie, Psy.D., Beverly A. Stubblefield, Ph.D., Joseph Tramontana, Ph.D., and Kim VanGeffen, Ph.D. All volunteered to be group facilitators during the actual Workshop, with Kathleen Randall serving as the volunteer coordinator. Individual groups, using Billow's Contain the Container Model and Group-As-A-Whole concepts were used to facilitate this Workshop.

After all groups shared their drawings and members engaged in a group-as-a-whole experience, Dr. Davis, Father Wismick, & Reverend Landry closed with songs and prayers of thanks, forgiveness, and gratitude. Then all participants said goodbye in their own unique ways. In general, this anniversary experience, which symbolically represented the infamy of 8/29/05, was marked by resilience, hope, and growth.

Summary Respectfully Submitted by,



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Lead Workshop Author