

Andalusia Star News

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Mental health first aid course offered

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Members of the mental health community are encouraging area residents to get certified in mental health first aid.

"It's like being certified for CPR in regular first aid," South Central Alabama Mental Health Center's Staci Wilson explained to local Rotarians Tuesday. "You are able to help a person deal with mental health type issues until a professional caregiver can take over."

A national web site explaining the concept, mentalhealthfirstaid.org, says the eight-hour certification class teaches:

- Signs of addictions and mental illnesses
- Impact of mental and substance use disorders
- 5-step action plan to assess a situation and help
- Local resources and where to turn for help.

"We want to train anyone in the community we can," Wilson, who is the director of marketing and training, said. "Hairdressers, school personnel, community leaders ... we need to get out there. You never know when someone may have an episode. With someone there who is trained, they can keep a crisis situation from getting out of hand until mental health could be there."

Most mental health consumers are not dangerous, Wilson said.

"They are more victims than they are anything," she said. "Even with substance abuse disorders. Some people are predisposed to that, just like to heart disease."

Wilson said there are two versions of the certification course – one for adults and one for youth.

"The youth mental health first aid is geared more to those who deal with adolescent individuals," she said. "It also is available to teens who have proven to be leaders, who 16 years and older."

Probate Judge Ben Bowden pointed out that Alabama recently has seen the closure of most of its mental health facilities, and it is, consequently, more difficult to get people into a state facility.

"As a result, we have a lot more mentally ill people walking around in our communities," he said. "This could be a very helpful course allowing people to render aid."

The course also could give the general public a better understanding of mental health issues, he said.

The SCAMHC has a 16-bed crisis residential center that it operates at the Montezuma Center. This program is designed to transition people who have been hospitalized into a less secure environment.

Wilson said businesses and organizations are being encouraged to set up certification classes for mental health first aid. She expects the course to cost \$30 per person, which will cover the cost of materials.

The class can be taught in one eight-hour setting or two four-hour settings.

For more information or to set up a class, contact Wilson at 428.5044 or staci.wilson@scamhc.org.