

THE REFLECTOR

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Event aims to reduce addiction stigma

March 8, 2017 - by Madison Hays | Online Editor

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Joyce Beaven, a University of Indianapolis alum, shared her story of her battle with addiction to crack-cocaine at the Stamp Out Stigma event held in the Health Pavilion on March 2 at 6–7:30 p.m. Beaven spoke of her struggle through her first divorce, addiction and recovery and her work today as a case manager at CICOA Aging & In-Home Solutions. After she shared her story, a panel of professionals including social workers, professors and a police officer took the stage to answer questions provided by the moderator and questions asked by students.

The panel discussed the stigma surrounding addiction and people with addiction and efforts that should be made to break down that stigma. A critical point that the panelists made was the need to educate politicians, police officers, doctors and peers about the disease of addiction and the fact that it is not something that can be fought with willpower alone.

Senior social work major Austin Elliott said the event helped him open his eyes about these stigmas and also gave him knowledge to help break down such stigmas. He also learned some tactics to try to break down the stigmas surrounding addiction and mental health when he talks to peers.



A panel of social workers, professors and a police officer answer questions at Stamp Out Stigma on

“I like how they commented on the language that you’re using. Instead of saying ‘the addict,’ say ‘The person with an addiction’ or just say their name and not even bring up the addiction in general,” Elliott said. “So focusing on the language you’re using and the mannerisms in which you’re talking about people who face this is really powerful and how you show others by leading by example. So you’re showing your peers to be respectful and how to

March 2. Photo by Madison Hays

do that. That's what I took away [from the event]. And if I were to talk to someone about what I learned, it would

be about the language and how to use it. Because once you start using different language, people start recognizing it, and they will start asking you, 'Why do you phrase it that way?' And then you can go into your segue about what you know about it. So just using certain things that will strike up conversation and bring awareness."

Co-Executive Director of Life Recovery Center and UIndy alum Eric Davis was also one of the panelists and said a big problem with the stigma of addiction is that people do not view it as a disease. He said addiction is medically classified as an illness, and for us to break down this stigma, people need to educate each other. According to Davis, people especially need to educate legislators because there is still a lack of funding, professionals, treatment centers, detoxes and education, which are needed to fight addiction.

Davis said that a good way to help break down the stigma that addiction is a battle of willpower is to explain addiction as more than a chemical dependency.

"The way I explain it is that chemical dependency is curable," Davis said. "If I'm using heroin and a doctor detoxes me, I'm no longer chemically dependent. That's what detox is. So now that's done, addiction is the thinking and the behaviors that exist long after the detox has been done. Those thinking and behaviors are why people go to 12-step meetings after 30 years clean or 50 years clean. It's because that problem is not something we can cure. Me, I've been clean for 17 years. I still think about using every single day. That's the truth. I don't do it. I handle it in different ways, but that thinking is still alive and well every single day."

According to Davis, it is important to have these discussions with peers, friends and family members because in some way everyone is affected by addiction.

Davis said that more information about addiction and finding help, is available at Life Recovery Center's [website](#) or by watching the film "Pleasure Unwoven: An Explanation of the Brain Disease of Addiction."

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