Meeting Notes – Jan. 28, 2025

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, January 28, 2025. Rotarian Dr. Butch Busby was responsible for the program, and he invited as his guest speaker Mr. Robbie Hart from the Council on Substance Abuse. Former Rotarian Ms. Laura Smith had connected Mr. Hart with Dr. Busby, and she was present in our meeting today also.

The Council on Substance Abuse (COSA) is based out of Montgomery and has as its mission to reduce the incidence and prevalence of the disease of alcoholism, other drug-addiction disease and related problems. Their three-fold aim is to prevent or delay the onset of substance abuse disease (SUD), educate and inform the public on SUD, and encourage and support diagnosis, recovery, and long-term treatment.

Hope for Heroes is a suicide prevention grant for veterans administered by COSA. The need for such a program was made evident by the statistics Robbie shared. In 2022, Alabama experienced 22 deaths by suicide, per 100,00 people. In Chambers County, it was 27 deaths per 100,000. For veterans, the rate was 33.4 deaths per 100,000. In 2020, there were 152 veterans in Alabama who died of suicide. In 2022, that number had fallen to 122. According to the Veterans' Administration (VA), veterans are at high risk of suicide due to pre-service risk factors, military service risk factors and transition to civilian life risk factors. While addiction is considered a family disease, suicide is considered a community disease.

Robbie is a case manager through COSA and serves Chambers, Lee, Macon and Russell Counties. He works 1:1 with clients and is able to connect clients to resources and provide some financial assistance. The Hope for Heroes grant covers 20 counties in the Black Belt and offers comprehensive case management and service planning. Some referrals come from VA and some through veteran and drug courts. Robbie believes the best suicide prevention action is establishing connections with individual veterans.

Diane Sherriff