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'It's OK Not to Be OK': Community Leaders Discuss Mental Health

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From left: Hopedealers Worldwide Executive Director Nadine Psarea, Goshen Valley Foundation CEO Zach Blend, PathLight Counseling Executive Director Britt Parramore, Universal Alloy Corporation Human Resources Administrator Amy Leatherman and Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Commissioner Kevin Tanner.

Shannon Ballew

Although progress has been made in Georgia to increase access to mental health care, more work is needed to further improve access and remove the stigma around seeking help, a group of panelists said at a recent forum on mental health in Canton.

The Rotary Club of Canton hosted “Promoting Mental Health in Our Community,” a panel discussion on mental health issues March 16 at the Timbers on Etowah. The event featured Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Commissioner Kevin Tanner, with a panel of community leaders and stakeholders in mental health: Zach Blend, CEO of Goshen Valley Foundation, Amy Leatherman, human resources administrator for Universal Alloy Corporation and Britt Parramore, counselor and executive director at PathLight Counseling. Hopedealers Worldwide Executive Director Nadine Psareas, a member of the club, served as the panel moderator.

The club estimates that about 200 people attended the event.

Panelists agreed that stigma remains a barrier for people to get the help they need.

“It’s so important to interact with our faith community and others to let people know it is OK not to be OK. And it’s OK to ask for help,” Tanner said.

It’s also important to promote more access to mental health care, and increase awareness of how people can get help, panelists said.

“Access to care has been a big deal,” Parramore said. “I think that a person who’s struggling with mental health issues is less likely to talk to their primary care doctor than they would be if they had access to a mental health care professional.”

Children and youth have been increasingly facing mental health challenges in recent years — Parramore said that the number of children who are suicidal “skyrocketed” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Blend said that while his nonprofit is known for its work with youth in foster care, its Goshen Therapeutic Services branch aims to address root causes and prevent the need for children to end up in foster care in the first place. He said that by the end of the year, Goshen Valley plans to be a licensed care provider.

“We want to be an access point for here in Cherokee, especially around ...community mental health, behavioral health services access with the standards that many of you have come to know us by, through our work in foster care,” he said.

One resource for people in immediate need of mental health support is 988, a national crisis line. If you call 988, you can be connected with a licensed clinician, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, Tanner said. In Georgia, 988 can dispatch two-person mobile crisis teams anywhere in the state. Statewide, the line receives about 20,000 calls a month.

Discussing mental health in the workplace, Leatherman said it's important for employers to create a culture where employees feel comfortable seeking help if they need it, and to make sure employees are aware of any resources available through the company. At UAC, a telehealth benefit for employees includes behavioral health services. Additional resources include Marketplace Chaplains, and there's also a licensed counselor available to employees: Christy Cushing.

"She's been phenomenal and a great addition to our team. She really has been an extension to to our UAC family," Leatherman said.

A video of the full event is available on YouTube at <https://tinyurl.com/3cbh876s>.