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Children's conference focuses on foster care

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10:00 PM PDT on Thursday, May 21, 2009

By MELISSA EI SELEIN
The Press-Enterprise

Childhood experiences can affect a person well into adulthood.

A child who is loved and nurtured in a safe and secure environment has a better chance of becoming a productive adult than one raised in a neglectful, abusive home, said Faith McClure, a psychology professor at Cal State San Bernardino.

McClure was the keynote speaker Thursday at the 36th annual Children's Conference, put on by Family Service Association, a nonprofit organization that serves Riverside County.

The annual conference is aimed at parents, teens and mental health professionals.

This is the second year that the conference's main focus was on children in the foster care system, said Veronica Dover, Family Service Association's chief operating officer.

Workshop topics included recognizing child abuse; date violence; and the cultural aspects of adoption.

Family Service Association, which is based in Moreno Valley, has mental health clinics in Riverside and Moreno Valley. It also operates nine day cares in Riverside County and provides food for 19 senior nutrition programs in the Inland area.

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Conference attendees who donated a new suitcase got a discount on the cost.

When authorities have to remove children from a home, those who do not have their own suitcase typically are given a black plastic trash bag for their possessions, said Vanessa Holm, Family Service Association's mental health clinic program manager.

The suitcases donated Thursday will go to children who are being taken into the foster care system. They do not need the further humiliation of having their items put into a trash bag, Holm said.

"They are taken not because of what they did but because of what was done to them," Holm said.

Suitcases donations are still being accepted.

Bobbie Haywood knows the long-term effects that poor parenting can have on children.

She worked as a licensed social worker for 23 years.

Now, 10 years after her retirement, Haywood still studies the latest trends in mental health, she said.

"I come every year and I'm looking forward to coming next year," Haywood said. "I keep up to date for myself and so I can help others."

Haywood, who does volunteer work with the homeless and has several grandchildren and one great-grandson, said learning about society's problems and ways to deal with them gives her tools she can use at church and with her own family.

She said she planned to attend the "How to Outsmart a Bully" workshop so she could give advice to her grandchildren.

The most important lesson she learned in McClure's workshop was "to accent the positive and work on the weaknesses," Haywood said.

Reach Melissa Eiselein at 951-763-3462 or meiselein@PE.com

Suitcase donations

Through June 30, new suitcases and duffle bags are being collected for children who are taken into the foster care system.

Drop-off location: Family Service Association, 21250 Box Springs Road, Suite 213, Moreno Valley

Information: 951-686-1096



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