

HIGHLIGHTS

AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID



C4 staffer Sara Lindstrom makes a point at MHFA training

What do a middle school teacher, a crime victim's advocate, and an airline steward have in common?

If you answered that all are certified Mental Health First-Aiders, you'd be right on target. The three participants were among the 23 individuals who enrolled in the New Mental Health First Aid training offered by C4.

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Last January C4 became one of the original seven agencies certified to present the 12-hour training, which is designed to help non-professionals respond to a mental health crisis before the professionals arrive on the scene.

Since then, C4 has presented the interactive training to nonclinical

staff, board members, the Asian Health Coalition and most recently, to a group of individuals drawn to the program because of their interaction with the public. Others came because they wanted to better understand family members struggling with mental illness.

For Laura Gardner, a junior high teacher living in Uptown, the training was a useful tool in helping her

“tween-age” students navigate crises.

“I’ve had several students who were abusing alcohol, and a 13-year-old boy who was having panic attacks,” Gardner explains. “His parents didn’t know what to do. I think every teacher should have this training.”

Mercedes Abacra, who counsels teen-age girls at the Alvio Medical Center in Little Village, said the MHFA training helps her better understand the emotional crises of her clients, most of who come from Mexican immigrant families.

“Many of these young women suffer from depression, and culturally, depression is not well understood in the Mexican community,” she explains. “Now I can explain to the girls how to get help.”

Elizabeth Burnside, who counsels crime victims at CJE Senior Life, said the ability to recognize mental illness among her clients is critical.

“I see many cases of elder abuse, and have talked with some men and women who had some traits of bipolar and schizophrenia,” she

observed. “This training helps me to refer them to the right services.”

For Toula Stolle, the motivation to attend MHFA was personal.

“I have several family members struggling with mental illness, and I wanted to learn more about how I could help them,” she said. “I’m sure I could help a stranger, but when it’s your family, it’s more difficult.”

MHFA just expanded its curriculum to include eating and self-injury disorders, both of which have been increasing among women and adolescents.

“You hear less about eating disorders these days, although you know it is occurring more often,” said Stolle. “I knew a girl who was anorexic and killed herself.”

MHFA TRAINING SET FOR EVENINGS IN APRIL

If you’re not free in the daytime, and want to take MHFA you’re in luck. The next training will take place on four successive Wednesday evenings beginning April 8 from 6pm – 9pm. The May training will be held May 14-15 from 9am – 4pm. All sessions take place at C4 Clark, 4740 N. Clark, Chicago.

Cost is \$150, which includes a manual, lunch (day sessions) and snacks. Scholarships may be available. For more information or to register, contact Marta Gomez at 773.765.0824 or marta.gomez@c4chicago.org.