

Teaching Trafficking and Trauma for a Better Future

BY LAURIE BICK

THE WILMINGTON UNIVERSITY College of Social and Behavioral Sciences is on the leading edge of two major issues in Delaware and the U.S. One is human trafficking, for which the university provides education that is essential to raising awareness about trafficking in support of state, regional and local efforts to curb the practice and help victims. The other is becoming trauma informed, and raising awareness of the personal and pervasive impact of trauma on people, organizations and systems. Working within a highly recognized model of wellness, WilmU raises awareness through its innovative Trauma Informed Approaches. These two certificate programs are the only ones of their kind at the undergraduate level in the country.

Human trafficking is in Delaware

Also known as sex trafficking, human trafficking is modern day slavery and it is rampant throughout the U.S. and the world. The portion of I-95 that slices through Delaware is a primary artery for the flow of trafficked young people in the Mid-Atlantic States who are sex workers, forced laborers, and involuntary domestic servants. It's also a pipeline for the child commercial sex trade. Over the years, the network of human traffickers has grown, flourishing in shadowy places and often in the underbellies of even the most respectable agencies and businesses.

Most people in Delaware are unaware of the problem and don't recognize the gaunt faces and empty eyes of those who are forced into a life of subsistence and servitude as they walk through a truck stop along the highway. The good news today is that there is a growing number of people in Delaware who are learning about human trafficking, how to see those who may be trafficked, and how to be of help.

Dr. Johanna Bishop, director of the Wilmington University Behavioral Science Program, is the founder of the 4th Annual Human Trafficking Symposium that was held June 12-13 at the university's main New Castle campus. Dr. Bishop created the Human Trafficking Awareness Certificate program at Wilmington University, then opened its doors to the community at large to offer a symposium of workshops and a special keynote address to educate as many others as possible.

The annual symposium is open to teachers, clerics, law enforcement, school nurses, social workers, human services workers, state employees, and those who want to learn to recognize and help those who may be victims of trafficking. For more information, contact Dr. Bishop at johanna.p.bishop@wilmu.edu.

WilmU Trauma Informed Approaches Program wins first Compassionate Champion Award

Dr. Rebecca Ghabor, regional chair, and Dr. Debra Berke, director of the university's Psychology Department in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, received inaugural Compassionate Champion Awards in May from Delaware First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney for their work in developing Delaware as a trauma-informed state. Winning in the education category, the College and department were honored for training three divisions of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services in Trauma Informed Approaches. The awards were celebrated by Governor John Carney and the First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney at a special luncheon on May 13, 2019, for the award recipients at Woodburn, the Governor's mansion in Dover.

Trauma informed work is critically important to many populations and WilmU has become a champion in the field. Faculty and students in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences psychology program are giving social services staffers the tools and techniques needed to help clients through trauma informed training workforce development.

For the past two years, the team has worked at nonprofit agencies, state agencies, community centers, early childhood centers and private schools, says Dr. Berke. "In a trauma-informed approach, the perspective is shifted. The question is not 'What is wrong with you?' Rather, it's 'What happened to you?'"

"Brain science now shows that significant developments in early childhood have an impact on our thought processes, how we manage our emotions and interact in our lives," Dr. Berke adds. "For example, if we know what events led to a person becoming homeless, we are better equipped to help them make positive changes."

The training also emphasizes self-care for staff members. "If you don't take care of yourself, it is difficult to take care of others," Dr. Berke says.

WilmU is the only university in the country that offers training in Trauma Informed Approaches at the undergraduate level. Dr. Berke developed the winning DHSS curriculum from the certificate's core courses. The college offers Trauma Informed Approaches training at WilmU and online. Dr. Berke will also work collaboratively with other organizations that may desire on-site training as well.

"People are hungry for this kind of training," she says. "They go away excited and energized."

For more information about the Trauma Informed Approaches certificate, contact Dr. Berke at debra.l.berke@wilmu.edu. ■