

Churches share strategies for making life better

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Religious leaders of Durham are stopping at nothing to achieve their goal of ending poverty and making life better for young people.



Dr. George “Tripp” Ake presenting on Trauma and Early Childhood Development on Oct. 11 to congregation staff and faith volunteers at the Durham Partnership for Children Lunch & Learn Series. (Staff photo by Ice'es Green)

Durham’s Partnership for Children, in collaboration with End Poverty Durham, has hosted a two-session Lunch and Learn Series this fall, focused on Congregations and Early Childhood.

The first installment of the series, entitled “Child Abuse and Congregations,” took place on Sept 27 at Duke Memorial United Methodist Church in Durham. Leaders of Durham churches explained the child abuse prevention programs they have implemented in their congregations.

Ted Whiteside, development manager of Durham’s Partnership for Children, was the keynote speaker. Michelle Old, childcare coordinator of Watts Street Baptist Church, Rev. Jessie Larkin of Mt. Sylvan United Methodist Church and Rev. Heather Lear of Fletcher’s Chapel United Methodist Church also spoke at the event.

Larkin, head Reverend of her congregation, stresses the importance of educating parents on brain development in children ages birth to 5.

“[We] raise awareness about the underserved population birth to 5; the ‘external population’ children that need more resources,” said Larkin. Though Larkin’s congregation has only recently gotten involved with the initiative, the child abuse prevention has had a strong focus in her community.

“The Methodist church is required to have programs implemented to stop abuse,” said Larkin. “Abuse prevention programs are something we incorporate all policies in.”

The second installment of the Lunch and Learn Series took place on Oct. 11 in the same place as the first session.

It was entitled “How Child Abuse and Trauma Impacts Early Development” and featured guest speaker Dr. George Ake, psychologist for the Center of Child and Family Health.

His presentation highlighted types of traumatic experiences children encounter, the impact of these experiences on their development, and what community members should know about resources for child trauma victims and their families.

Durham’s Partnership for Children is a Smart-Start initiative whose mission is aimed towards serving the needs of children aged birth to five and their families.

In conjunction with the Early Childhood Faith Initiative, an initiative of End Poverty Durham, the Lunch and Learn Series was created in order to provide insight to faith educators and any religious leader who works closely with children. The programs occur during peak lunchtime hours, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and attendees eat their lunches while watching presentations.

“It’s a way to attract staff from a congregation during a convenient time period,” said Winnie Morgan, Early Childhood Faith Initiative coordinator for End Poverty Durham and Durham’s Partnership for Children.

“It was started to provide some training opportunities for faith educators,” said Morgan. “Then we opened it up to anyone who worked with young children in congregations.”

An audience member who attended the Oct. 11 program said that she “loved hearing both the background on what abuse is and how to report [it] as well as the concrete application from three congregations on how to implement policies in congregations.”

The ultimate goal of the Lunch and Learn series are to educate congregation leaders on ways to fight child abuse. Abuse has a negative effect on children’s development, causing them to be behind in school and ultimately society, thus perpetuating the poverty level in Durham. Preventing child abuse is one medium employed to eradicate poverty.

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