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Giving hope to those who need it most

By DONNA HICKMAN / Daily Journal Staff Writer

Dr. Gene Abrams, Chaplain at the Farmington Correctional Center, talks about his experiences working with offenders and the need for volunteers who will work with them inside the facility.

Donna Hickman / Daily Journal — Denis Rigdon of Project Hope in Cape Girardeau talks about how mentoring can change the life of those in need as he speaks at the Beyond Hope conference Feb. 22 sponsored by the Southeast Missouri Community Treatment Center.

It's a riddle used by Dr. Barron Pratte to make a point about helping people in need. He told it to begin a conference called, "Beyond Hope," sponsored by the Southeast Missouri Community Treatment Center.

"You come across three people who have earned, in the course of a day, 17 gold coins," said Pratte, president and CEO of the treatment center. " Because of their differential contributions to the success of the enterprise, they have agreed in advance that 'A' will receive half of the takings, 'B' a third, and 'C' a ninth. Try as they may, they cannot make the division work. What do you do?"

The answer, he said, is to add a coin of your own which brings the total to 18 and allows for the division. His message: When we add something of ourselves we make the world better for everyone, and we get back what we give.

About 60 people from churches and social service groups attended the event Feb. 22 at Mineral Area College.

Denis Rigdon of Project Hope in Cape Girardeau talked about how mentoring can change the life of those in need. Rigdon talked about how faith-based organizations can offer support to change lives of people suffering with addiction.

"I will help you. I will walk beside you. It's relationship that makes the difference," he said. "It's different from just putting the person in a treatment facility."

Project Hope, which stands for Helping Other People Excel, matches resources with people in need and volunteer mentors with people who need their help. For example, old cars donated to the agency are repaired and refurbished by a volunteer mechanic who donates them back. Rigdon says they are then given to people who need them to get to a job, take their children to school or go for treatment.

He encouraged church leaders at the conference to find a way to help their members put their faith in action with people who need it.

"The churches we work with empower the people in the pew to step up and use their life skills that mean a world of difference to the people in the community," he said. "What we provide is a mentoring team that pushes people in need to come up with a plan for their lives and then to work their plan successfully."

He told of a client with panic attacks who had three children under the age of 5. When her bus stop was moved too far for her to walk to it from her home, her mentors intervened. They helped her develop a plan with the goal of getting a car so she would no longer be dependent on public transportation.

Rigdon encouraged the churches to become catalysts for transformation in the lives of those in need.

Dr. Gene Abrams, Chaplain, Farmington Correctional Center, talked about the importance of volunteers to work with offenders in giving them hope in their lives. To find out more, call him at (573) 218-7100, ext. 391.

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