

Training focuses on suicide prevention

More than 70 attend workshop at Post 57 to raise awareness.

By **TONY BRITT**

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More than 70 people, from a variety of community and public organizations, attended a two-pronged suicide awareness and prevention training session at American Legion Post 57 on Wednesday, part of a concerted effort to reduce suicide numbers.

The training combined tips for suicide prevention though the community at large, as well as for veterans.

The focus of Wednesday's session was suicide prevention and what to do next once you're aware someone has had that conversation, as well as how to use the proper protocols to get

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TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

Wendy Lakso with the Columbia Lighthouse Project through Columbia University, led one of the suicide prevention sessions Wednesday at the American Legion Post 57.



Photos by TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

Hope Crawford receives a bag from American Legion Post 57 Commander Bill Huggins during Wednesday's suicide prevention workshop at the Legion.

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them connected to help.

Wendy Lakso, an independent consultant with the Columbia Lighthouse Project, through Columbia University, led one of the sessions Wednesday.

The Columbia Lighthouse Project is an organization that has formed out of the Columbia Protocol, which is behind the Columbia Suicide ratings scale.

"Our director is the lead scientist of this suicide detection tool, which is a scientifically-validated suicide detection tool to identify when somebody maybe suicidal," Lakso said, noting the goal is to get the Columbia Protocol in the hands of everyone across the nation. "Anybody can use this tool."

The tool was an integral part of the second half of Wednesday's training session. It lists six specific questions that should be asked to check to determine whether a person is considering suicide.

"The easiest way to get the word out is to just talk about it," Lakso said. "We've got organizations and communities that are at work to help in the suicide prevention initiatives.



People talk during Wednesday's session at the American Legion Post 57 about suicide awareness and prevention.

You can always reach out to the Columbia Lighthouse Project."

Lakso also suggested people visit an American Legion Post near them and gather information about the facility's Be The One program, which addresses suicide prevention among veterans, since the Columbia Lighthouse Project provides the Be The One training for American Legions across the nation.

Megan Douglas is the program manager of the

Fire Watch Project, which is a veteran suicide prevention organization. Douglas spoke about having the local training sessions.

"It is crucial," she said. "I'm from the community. I grew up in Suwannee County and it's so often that veterans separate from the military and they don't

know how to get connected with services. Then people end up struggling and not knowing where to go and where to turn. I know too many families that have lost people because of something that was as simple as a 988 call or 911 call to help someone get the help that they needed

and it ends up becoming fatal. We lost too many people this way. It's really important to train, not just veterans, but the community members, because the signs of a crisis are the same for everyone and the resources are the same."

Douglas said she was pleased to see so many people attended the training sessions.

"I think that it's the beginning," she said. "I think that I would love to see this grow and evolve to include more of our religious organizations, community organizations and I would love to see the area become a community veteran safe space."

Natalie Moore, Living Hope Executive Director and owner of Living Well Therapy, said the training

sessions went well.

"It was wonderful. We were very grateful for the turnout. There were over 70 people registered and all different partners from the faith community and different veterans. Post 57 had a great turnout. We're very excited so many members were trained."

Moore said the concerted effort will continue in the future.

"The Wellness Committee and Living Hope will continue to hold quarterly training and events, educate and provide support to the community for prevention and improving mental, spiritual and emotional health," she said. "Living Hope and American Legion Post 57 have ways to volunteer and connect with the community and bring hope to others."



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