A GUEST SPEAKER WITH A CRITICAL TOPIC

On September 21, 2019, the highlight of our membership meeting was a presentation by Ms. Hawa Magona, a graduate student at Trinity Washington University. Based on her professional experience and her in-depth research, Ms. Magona spoke on the topic “Being Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Responsive: Intimate-Partner Violence.” She shared some eye-opening incidents of violent behavior among adolescent females in juvenile detention, where she was working, and questioned why this behavior was occurring. These observations drove her to elaborate on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), a concept and a reality that schools are facing and addressing in our current educational environments. Simply put, a variety of negative life experiences can produce individuals, starting with very young children, whose outlooks, attitudes, and behaviors will influence how they act and go through life. Examples include neglect, abuse (physical, mental, emotional), loss of a parent, divorce/separation of parents, separation from parents, seeing or experiencing drug or alcohol misuse and the effects, and many other events.

As a graduate student in Urban Area Counseling, Ms. Magona was tasked to collect and analyze data that could impact on student behaviors—particularly in the sample population she was studying—for years. She then had the task of asking herself questions that arose about this phenomenon, generating a plan to change the behavior, then crafting a hypothesis. Her plan consisted of creating a Healthy Relationship Curriculum for Students, particularly for those in her target group during their detention that would draw out the reasons for their behaviors and elicit their ideas for changing the negative into positive; in this way, the interaction between her and the detainees could bring a trauma-based awareness program to the juvenile detention center so that negative behaviors would not continue into adulthood. While this research project focused on a specific population, Ms. Magona went on to state that all schools should have such a program for their students to help prevent violence and to promote peaceful, rational relationships, especially among those with a high incidence of ACEs, as well as special-needs students.

The presentation continued into deeper discoveries, as members asked many questions, which Ms. Magona answered directly and effectively. President Thomas Jones at length had to close the discussion due to time constraints. Nevertheless, all who were present were enriched and increasingly informed by the information, including colorful and pertinent handouts for future reference. We are grateful to Hawa Magona for her outstanding contribution to our chapter and its goals of supporting and improving education for all students, no matter their situations in life.

 A WORD ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Hawa Magona has worked in Montgomery County Public Schools assisting classroom instructors with special education students (autism spectrum, learning disabilities, and emotional disturbance), where her duties included processing, collecting, and recording data for Individual Education Plans (IEPs). She earned an Associate of Arts Degree from Montgomery College in 2015, where she also completed paralegal courses. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Human Relations from Trinity University in 2017 and is currently working on a Master’s Degree in School Counseling: Urban Track.