

## **Midwest Conference Represented at the Mental Health First Aid for Adolescents Training**

On Saturday, May 15, 2021, four representatives of the Midwest Conference attended a Mental Health First Aid for Youth Training sponsored by United Health Care of Kansas.

Attendees were Lois Johnson, Palmeda Robinson, and Sandi Smith from Bethel AME Leavenworth and Gail McClenton from Grant AME, Kansas City, KS.

Celia Ruiz, facilitator, did an excellent job of moving us through the 8-hour training course. “The Youth Mental Health First Aid USA training is designed to teach lay people methods of assisting a young person who may be in the early stages of developing a mental health crisis.” We learned that African Americans are more likely to experience a mental disorder than Whites but less likely to seek treatment. When working with youth it is often difficult to distinguish between normal adolescence behavior from mental health challenges and disorders.

Some important facts are: 1) mental health challenges and disorders often develop during adolescence; 2) mental health challenges and disorders are common; 3) too many youth and young adults are not well informed about these issues; 4) there is too much stigma and discrimination attached to these issues and disorders; 5) young people may not be aware that they need help; 6) unfortunately, professional help is not always available; and 7) mental health first aid has been found to be effective because the sooner an individual gets help, the more likely they are to have a positive outcome.

An excellent resource for adults wanting to understand these issues better is a documentary called “The Ripple Effect.” It is about Kevin Hines, a young man who attempted

suicide at the age of 19 by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. He survived and is now a mental health advocate.

There was a lot of information shared and discussed at the training, and each of us received a manual called “Mental Health First Aid USA for Adults Assisting Young People.” This is an excellent resource that can be used for better understanding all the issues. But something everyone can keep available is the following:

#### YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID ACTION PLAN

- Action A: Assess for risk of suicide or harm (hurt themselves or others).
- Action L: Listen nonjudgmentally. (Do not use “I” statements.)
- Action G: Give reassurance and information. (Do not downplay they’re feelings).
- Action E: Encourage appropriate professional help.
- Action E: Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

All those who attended the 8-hour course are now certified in Mental Health First Aid USA. The certificate is good for three (3 years) and states that we have been trained to provide initial help to young people experiencing mental health problems such as depression, anxiety disorders, psychosis, and substance use disorders.

Submitted by: Sandi Smith, Bethel AME, Leavenworth.