

2015

Rose Beyond the Thorns

Caregiver Retreat

October 17-19, 2016

It was as if flood gates were lifted when 63 caregivers applied within 36 hours of opening the October 17-19 Caregiver Retreat application. This unexpected surge indicates a huge unresolved need for caregiver retreats. While we would have loved to include everyone, a twelve slot capacity was maintained to stay true to our small impact model of care consisting of respite and workshops.



Choosing 12 out of 63 was difficult. Participants were chosen based on being new to the program and how compelling their response to our caregiver challenge question was. Participants spanned age groups, campaigns, and were a mixture of spouse (10) and parent (2) caregivers from all over

the Nation. All were female caregivers this time. Flights were graciously provided by Hero Miles, to whom we are immensely grateful!

When the ladies arrived at Kingsmill Resort, a baseline of where they were emotionally was taken by an anonymous survey, looking at key touch points that were taken from their applications. Rated with a scale from 0-5 (3-5 being the higher degrees of identification with a particular statement); 84% indicated that they felt they had lost their sense of identity, did not make time for self care a priority; and felt they needed to improve their spiritual and emotional balance, relationships with their spouses, and sexual health and intimacy. These were areas of concentration during the retreat.

Interactive retreat work shops were led by Bonnie Owens, LCSW-R, CASAC, ICADC, EMDR 2, from NY, and CAPT Moira McGuire, RN, NC, USPHS, DHA, from Bethesda, MD, (see bios to follow) with interjected caregiver perspective thoughts, experiences of relevance, and lessons learned provided by Shannon Maxwell. Approximately 12 hours of workshops were offered over the course of the weekend. The following topics were covered: The neurobiology of trauma, TBI, and CRS; Understanding Grief; Renewing Your Identity; Sexual Health Intimacy and Communication; and Taking Care of Me. These targeted workshops were considered on point and helpful in strengthening caregiver resiliency and the workshop leads' ability to provide and communicate beneficial information were acknowledged and appreciated by 100% of the participants.

The remainder of the retreat was allotted for meals, free time, and respite at the spa. In addition, Bonnie took interested participants out on the river for Kayak therapy and taught the women Brain Body Centered relaxation techniques and meditation techniques.

(About the limited number: "...made the amazing retreat an avenue for us to connect with other kindred souls.")LS

The retreat is deemed a success with 100% of participants indicating in their post-retreat survey that they attained real tools that will allow them to regain a sense of identity and strengthen/improve their emotional and spiritual balance, relationships with their spouses and others, sexual health and intimacy. 100% left the retreat with an understanding of the neurobiological affects of trauma and how it may be affecting their life and relationships. Further 100% of the participants reported they felt hopeful, not alone, more connected, and likely to make self care a priority in the future. Post retreat, the women have stayed connected through a closed group Facebook page and some visits with each other. Many have expressed a sisterhood - real connections they feel they will keep for a lifetime.

Looking to the future, participant requests centered around more time, return visits, and more opportunities for retreats such as this. It is SemperMax Support Fund's hope that more can be offered through partnerships with other organizations. Initial discussions have been initiated with the Bob Woodruff Foundation to entertain a convening of organizations that offer retreats. Organizationally, it will be SemperMax's objective to repeat and share the success of this model with the particular workshop hosts and topics. Both Ms. Owens and CAPT McGuire brought true value to the workshop. It is considered to be the best one yet.