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Conference On Poverty Provides Strategies For Professionals

By Cindy McSperritt | April 24, 2013

Over 200 community leaders, educators and area business people were in attendance for the “Bridges Out of Poverty” Conference held April 10 at the Winston Community Center. The conference, sponsored by the Child Abuse Prevention Partnership, featured guest speaker, Terie Dreussi-Smith, co-author of the book *Bridges Out of Poverty, Strategies for Professionals and Communities*.

This book is currently being used for a Bridges Out of Poverty class offered online for the first time at UCC. The class is facilitated by Caroline Hopkins, TRIO advising specialist, and is unique in that it includes faculty, staff and students.

Dreussi-Smith spoke about how agencies and local employers can improve the lives of those struggling with poverty by recognizing and helping their clients adapt to the “hidden rules” associated with different economic classes. “We strive to help communities develop an accurate model of the concrete experiences of those in poverty within their community,” Dreussi-Smith said. “These models can then be used by individuals, institutions and communities to analyze economic class, rather than just reacting to it.”

An example of the hidden rules of economic environments can be seen by comparing the middle class with someone struggling with poverty. “Living in poverty means having to concentrate on surviving today,” Dreussi-Smith said. “Planning for the future gets put aside. Time is about the present.”

For the middle class, however, today is a “given”. Their financial resources mean they can focus on an education or their career and make decisions that impact tomorrow.

“Institutions designed from this perspective are always about choices, planning and



CINDY MCSPERITT / MAINSTREAM

Terie Dreussi-Smith addresses community leaders and business people at the “Bridges Out of Poverty” conference.

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messages for a better future,” Dreussi-Smith said. “Which is great! But if the people coming to an agency do not share this focus and do not have the resources to even survive today, the messages aren’t as clear or meaningful.” If institutions can realize this is happening, they can change their policies and ways of communicating to better match their clientele.

Following the conference, Dreussi-Smith recalled a part of her own history as an example of the importance of education in today’s economy. She said her father was born in 1911, had only a 6th grade education and worked at a factory for 52 years. He bought a house and passed it along to the next generation, which allowed several family members to put themselves through college.

“If he would have been born in 1970, he would not have been able to do that,” Dreussi-Smith said adding that in her father’s time, all that was necessary to get to the top of the career ladder was hard work. “But all that has changed,” Dreussi-Smith said. “Now for every rung on the career ladder, another level of education is required.”

“Education is one of the indicators of not living in poverty,” Dreussi-Smith said. In her opinion, it’s important to do three things. “Don’t have kids too soon, have a two-income household and get an education! If you do these three things, you probably will never live in poverty.”

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CONTACT
Umpqua Community College
PO Box 976
Roseburg, OR 97470
(541) 440-4687
uccmainstream@yahoo.com

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