

CARE-ing support system during economic crisis

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It seems as though no one is entirely immune to the economic downturn that the country is currently facing. However, those affected do not have to feel they must go it alone, as there are many resources in the community they can turn to, according to a network of community representatives.

CARE Darien (A Community of Accountability & Respect for Everyone) is sponsoring two seminars that are designed to help people learn how to navigate the job search process as well as protect one's family and assets from the recession.

The idea for the workshops began in December at a Community Fund meeting, according to Martha Rhein, co-chairman of the Human Services Planning Council. "Everyone that was part of the council was saying they were seeing the community would be facing job losses, which would have an impact on the family," said Rhein. "[We thought,] 'What could we do to offer some support to those people in need? What would be some of the things people would be looking for in the event there was a job loss?'" The seminars were put together by a subcommittee that spent the last six weeks planning the events.

Two different workshop series will be held: "Career Management" and "Recession Proofing Your Family." "The objective of the Career Management seminar is to help people who have either lost their jobs or feel in a precarious position in their jobs," said John Bassler, recently retired managing director of Korn/Ferry International, who will be speaking at the event. "It's to help them have some specific information and guidelines on how to go ahead and find another job and deal with the overall situation."

Harry Geller, the former vice president of Right Management Consultants, and Doug Campbell III, who has his own business, the Success Coach, will also be part of the seminar.

"Three different perspectives are being provided by the three of us," said Bassler. "The feeling was, that provides a complete picture."

Within each session, there will be a presentation segment and then an extensive question-and-answer segment.

"Many of the [people participating] are with our local agencies in town and some of them are retired or still in the professional world, giving their opinions, advice and service," said Rhein. "It's a community effort to potentially help those who may be in need of such a service."

After the workshops end, there are still many resources in the community that those affected by the economic crisis can turn to.

The Child Guidance Center provides therapy for a wide variety of issues that children and families are facing.

"When times are stressful, it can be very difficult for everyone in the family and sometimes children are very much affected by the stress their parents are experiencing," said Susan

Jasko, the clinical administrator at the Child Services office in Darien. "We're there to provide support for families."

Children, as well as adults, may face hardships as a result of the economic crisis. Jasko recommends speaking to children in a way that is appropriate for different developmental levels.

"With younger children, you don't need to give a lot of specific details," she said. "They need reassurance that they're going to be safe and that things will be, as much as possible, the way they've always been." However, older children are acutely aware of what is going on around them and are also driven by a need to fit in with their peer group.

"With older children, you want to talk about the struggles related to peer pressure," Jasko said. "They want to know how it will affect their ability to fit in with their peers. [Parents should] think of the ways everyone can work together as a family."

Darien's schools are another outlet for families who want to ensure their children are not affected negatively by changes in the family's economic situation.

"The tangible effects of the economic situation are beginning to show - people who are losing their jobs need to regroup in their personal and professional lives," said Don Fital, superintendent of Darien Public Schools. "We are extremely sympathetic to that and supportive of this series that the various organizations are sponsoring."

The YWCA of Darien/Norwalk provides another option for those interested in attending free seminars about finance. It is featuring five workshops under the heading of Money Matters; each workshop specifically focuses on one aspect of finance or job loss, such as how to get out of credit card debt and how to secure one's future when it comes to college and retirement funds. The workshops begin March 3 and run weekly through March 31. Another program being held by the YWCA is the Discover Yourself program. Each workshop is \$20 for members or \$25 for non-members.

"The Discover Yourself workshops are a way to help people get those resources, so they can get a new job," said Carol Piscitelli, a career coach at the YWCA. "Let's target these key topics that touch on people's lives right now. It's affecting our young people to our seniors."

The New Directions program at the YWCA helps women who are going through a transition in life to enter or re-enter the working world. "It's a weekly support group of high level skill-building for the job search process," said Piscitelli.

For a fee of \$110, the workshop includes an office and computer skills class at Norwalk Community College, as well as career coaching and instruction on keyboarding and office math.

"There are a lot of different psychological things that can impact your ability to get back into the workforce," said Piscitelli. "With the support of the peer group, the coaching and the hand-holding, it gives women a sense of a place they can go."

Darien has been hit by the economic crisis in a way many could not have anticipated, however the close-knit community atmosphere is conducive to giving and receiving help.

"The schools realize that in a town like Darien, some people are in a position that they haven't been in before, where they may need to reach out and seek some help," said Fiftal. "For a group of people who are very self-reliant, that's a sea change in their lives."

"We're hearing from different organizations that there is an increase in job loss," said Rhein. "You hear that around town and try to take action and try to get to the plate before the problem escalates, to help people who are facing it or will be facing it potentially."

The issue of confidentiality and privacy is an important one in a small town.

"There's a real awareness on the part of the different programs and agencies about the importance of confidentiality and privacy," said Jasko. "The resources that are out there for families are very confidential. The fear shouldn't hold people back from having access to resources."

"The message in the schools is to reach out to anyone who feels the school could be a help, whether it's with some financial assistance on a school trip or some need where our awareness and our support could be helpful," said Fiftal. "People should feel welcome, even though it may not be an easy thing to do, to call a school administrator or a school psychologist on a confidential basis if they need some kind of assistance the school can provide."

According to Rhein, if there is an interest in the workshops, the Community Fund hopes to continue them in the future on a monthly or every-other-month basis.