



IU program seeks to change attitudes toward mental illness

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Posted: Saturday, August 23, 2014 12:51 am

Who will you protect from the galaxy of stigma?

Answer the question on a white board, then pose with it and a cutout of actress Glenn Close as Nova Prime from “Guardians of the Galaxy.”

The photo opportunity was intended to raise awareness about mental health stigma through Bring Change 2 Mind, a campaign from Close, a mental health activist, to address stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness.

Some students wrote specific names, but others were more general, with the name of their residence hall or just IU, said Susan Barnett, who was working at the booth.

It was just one of the stops at Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll — an annual Indiana University Welcome Week resource fair about topics such as drinking, drugs, sexual violence and mental health as well as eating healthfully and how to address new experiences.

Students were having fun, but are also learning information that can sometimes be difficult to find otherwise, said one of the organizers, Chris Meno, a psychologist at IU's Counseling and Psychological Services.

And in the case of mental illness, the goal was to raise awareness of how common it is.

“It's kind of like the common cold for the brain,” said Victoria Perez, a sophomore working at the Bring Change 2 Mind booth.

The booth was also to promote the campaign's newest pilot program — the College Toolbox Project.



Changing attitudes toward mental illness

Valerie Friberg, left, takes a photo of Nicholas Hunter-Shields with a cutout image of actress Glenn Close Friday at an Indiana University resource fair booth addressing the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness.

Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

Close — who works with IU sociologist Bernice Pescosolido — visited IU last year and picked IU as the only pilot site, said Barnett, who is the project manager and a Ph.D. student at the School of Public Health.

Surveys will be distributed annually to this year's incoming class to see how their attitudes about mental health change over time as well as who is in their network of support, Barnett said. She said the first round of surveys was already emailed out to the freshmen.

Plus, Barnett said, there will be optional surveys after awareness events —open to the entire student body — to gauge effectiveness.

Talking about something like mental illness can be scary, but the goal is for students to feel comfortable, said senior Samantha Ries, who was also at the booth.

Once the four-year project is completed, the most successful awareness events will make up the toolbox for all universities to use.

The awareness events will all be designed by a Bring Change 2 Mind student advisory board at IU as the project is ongoing, so Barnett said there is no way to predict what events will be in the toolbox or how many.

“It could have 10; it could have 50,” she said.

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