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# Forum looks at addictions, mental health issues

By Lana Haight  
of The StarPhoenix

They came to listen as much as they came to talk. Four university professors — experts in the fields of mental health and addictions — left their classrooms and ventured into the community on Thursday for what was billed as “a conversation.”

“I’m here tonight not only to tell you what I do, but to find out what you would like me to do,” said Caroline Tait, assistant professor in Native studies at the University of Saskatchewan and associate director of the Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre at the First Nations University of Canada.

“We’re paid to sit and think. It’s a luxury and a privilege,” said Tait, adding that unless she is connected to the people in the community, she is of no use to that community.

Welcome to Cate Scientifique — an informal meeting of some of Saskatchewan’s top social scientists and members of the community. The four professors and about 30 members of the public met at BE Burrios at 22nd Street and Avenue P on Thursday night for two hours of discussion.

Joining Tait were Sharon Accose, assistant professor at the school of Indian social work at the First Nations University of Canada, Dr. Peter Butt, associate professor at the U of S college of medicine and director of the northern medical services division, and Colleen Dell, associate professor and research chair in substance abuse in the department of sociology and school of public health at the U of S.

To start the evening and to spur discussion, those who came were asked a series of true and false questions.

“Women are less likely to seek treatment for mental health and substance abuse issues: True or False,” asked Dell. “True.”

The professors wondered why. Women are not good at asking for help, said one participant.

There is shame associated with it, said another. Women are supposed to be the ones fixing the problems, not having them, added yet another.

And, said Dell, women are afraid they will lose their children if they admit they are dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues.

The group discussed statistics at length. While aboriginal people are less likely to drink alcohol than non-aboriginal people, those aboriginal people who do drink are more likely to be heavy drinkers. And they discussed why Saskatchewan, in particular, has such a binge drinking culture that appears to be growing among young women.

Someone in the group wondered how much alcohol is too much. “It depends very much on the individual,” answered Butt.

“If the person’s family has history of addictions, maybe zero is the safest guideline.” Accose told the group that pre-Columbus, there was no alcohol. But the fur trade in North America and alcohol went hand-in-hand, with First Nations people paying a high price.

“I didn’t wake up one day and decide to be a drunk,” she said, after explaining her own history of addictions and working the streets.

Having the academics come out to the community impressed many who attended.

“That’s really quite something that they would do that,” said Ethel Ahenakew, in an interview after the event. Presented by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, Thursday’s event was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

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May 12, Saskatoon

Session will be of interest to individuals and couples considering starting a family, those with young families and health professionals.

Pre registration by May 7 is required. To register or for more information call Cassie at 244.0045 or e-mail [cassie.neshitt@rnsociety.ca](mailto:cassie.neshitt@rnsociety.ca)

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