

THE KANSAN

Discussing threat prevention

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Like so many community organizations, Prairie View Mental Health Center played a key role following the shooting at Excel Industries on Feb. 25. While a contributor in the recovery, Prairie View is also joining the discussion regarding the prevention of any similar events in the future, directly reflected in its annual educational symposium coming up Oct. 28.

The topic this year is “Threat Assessment: Understanding the psychology of targeted violence and implementing plans to prevent violent attacks” and the decision to have this particular conversation began even before the events of last February. According to Prairie View President and CEO Jessie Kaye, the organization was looking to make this topic the focus of discussion following the attack in San Bernardino, California, in December 2015.

“We had no way to predict the conversation would take on such a personal meaning,” Kaye said. “The tragic events in Hesston gave us perspective and greater conviction.”

Discussion on the topic will happen in two forums, with the symposium (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) targeted at community partners like mental health professionals, law enforcement, school officials, etc.. Additionally, a community Q&A with the symposium’s featured speaker Dr. Russell Palarea will be held at 7 p.m. on Oct. 28 at Hesston High School, which is free and open to the public.

“Everyone should have a role in this conversation,” Kaye said. “The full day education symposium is intended for professionals with a role in these situations and the Q&A event is intended for interested persons in our community. We wanted the free evening event to be an opportunity for every voice to be heard and every person allowed the opportunity to learn what they can do as a member of their community to engage in this conversation to prevent targeted violence.

Palarea regularly provides investigative consultation, operational training and program development on threat assessment, counterterrorism and insider threats to Fortune 500 companies, federal, state and local law enforcement, government agencies, global security firms and more.

With the symposium intended to teach attendees how to define targeted violence, understand various mental illness diagnoses linked to past cases and apply behavioral-based contemporary threat assessment concepts to conduct investigations and design threat management plans, Prairie View Director of Advancement Misty Elder-Serene noted this is a broad subject matter.

“This isn’t an active shooter training. This event allows us to really explore targeted violence,” Elder-Serene said. “We can learn what any one of us can do to spot and stop violence in our workplace, school or community through better collaborative strategies.”

“Targeted violence is a social issue that we can’t ignore. Although mental illness can be a component to threat assessment, we must recognize that mental illness and violence are not synonymous,” Kaye added. “As mental health advocates, we want to provide education about

targeted violence and challenge the association of mental illness as the cause. Violent attacks can happen anywhere and every person has a role in prevention.”

Having both events allows Prairie View to lend in the efforts to train for future scenarios while also making the entire community part of the discussion.

Offering that opportunity for members of the public to relate questions to a leading expert in the field was key for Prairie View, as they have tried since February to approach the situation in a delicate nature.

“Prairie View has been in a unique position over the past several months to be in conversation with many groups affected by what happened in Hesston,” Kaye said. “We have worked closely with the Hesston Community Foundation and Excel Industries to approach this topic with the utmost respect and sensitively. Prairie View has refrained from participation intended to sensationalize the events. We choose instead to help frame this conversation toward lessons learned, lessons still to be learned and education geared toward prevention.

For more information on the symposium or Q&A, visit www.prairieview.org/education.