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Families learn about local resources through Project CRADLE Care

By TIFFANY WATSON twatson@somdnews.com 14 hrs ago



Staff photo by TIFFANY WATSON

Renee Duckett, committee chair of Project CRADLE Care, gives information about the Catherine Foundation to Rebecca Conner, special education teacher at Westlake High School, at Waldorf West Library on Saturday.

A local sorority chapter created a "one-stop shop" event for young moms to have direct access to community resources for families. On Feb. 4, the Eta Omicron Sigma Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority partnered with the Charles County Public Library to hold its annual "Project CRADLE Care" event at the Waldorf West library branch.

Renee Duckett, committee chair of Project CRADLE Care, said the program is geared towards young women and children from birth to toddlers by bringing organizations together to provide information. She said the chapter is making a unified effort to pour back into local children and uplift families in the community.

"The event has been going on for four years — originally intended to be a one-stop shop to pull in the public," said Tonya Allen-Shaw, Sigma Gamma Rho Eta Omicron Sigma chapter president. "Moms, grandmothers and single dads who are trying to do what's right can also benefit from this program. It's resource overload and it's all for free."

"This year, unfortunately, we did not have a lot of giveaways, but we did have a lot of information to pass out," Duckett said.

Project CRADLE Care is a prenatal education and resource program that seeks to improve pregnancy outcomes in high-risk communities by increasing the number of women who receive adequate prenatal education and to better understand proper infant care and child development.

The goal of the project is to provide a wealth of information, resources and tools for women of childbearing age to help ensure they have a healthy baby. The program is done in conjunction with the organization's national partner, the March of Dimes.

Duckett planned for the event to include hospitals, managed care organizations, community-based prenatal care providers and special guest speakers. This year the organization had tables of information from the Catherine Foundation, Maryland WIC and the Southern Maryland ABC (Attachment Biobehavioral Catch-Up) Program.

Both organization members and attendees were looking forward to additional resources like car seat safety installments, local school information, a money/education speaker and other programs who did not attend. But that did not stop many families from grabbing information to take home.

"I see young moms at work every day and just the struggle — sometimes because of a lack of family support or not knowing who to turn to in the community — that's heartbreaking," Allen-Shaw said. "It's a little disappointing that we don't have support from the local organizations because I think [the program] could be bigger, but I'm glad that those who are participating are still here."

"I work with a group of people professionally where a lot of times kids and parents don't know resources [are] available to them — whether it's for healthy living and family decisions. Being able to bring out community partners is important because people of color don't know about resources unless you bring it to them," said Natalie Bennett, Sigma Gamma Rho Eta Omicron Sigma financial secretary and public relations. "When you know you have a free resource to get back on your feet or help you find food available — fruits and vegetables — in your community, then that's a great thing for any family."

Bennet said 50 or more people visited Project CRADLE Care at the library: moms, dads and grandparents. Rebecca Conner, special education teacher at Westlake High School, said she picked up some helpful information at the event on Saturday.

"I learned about classes they have available and I work with teenagers so they do go through pregnancy and other related circumstances. I do home and hospital teaching, so some of the students that I have are actually mothers. It's always good to be aware of what's going on in the community and have this information at hand," Conner said.



Stefania Bianco, community educator parent coach of the Southern Maryland ABC (Attachment Biobehavioral Catch-Up) Program, said she was there to connect with the community. Her colleague Nicole Wright, a Charles County Department of Health community health outreach worker, brought additional information about "safe sleep for your baby" and sudden infant death prevention.

"We recently had three infant deaths between October and November within the county. That is actually high because we want to have zero, so I am going to doctors' offices to distribute DVDs that they can watch and understand why it's so important to put babies on their backs and not on their stomachs," Wright said.

Bianco said the previously mentioned deaths were preventable, so the handouts are extremely necessary in order to help inform young mothers that it is safe to have babies sleep on their back.

The Eta Omicron Sigma Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority wishes to expand Project CRADLE Care to help young moms around the region. The program needs more local, resource-based organizations to help with obtaining sponsorships and contacting healthcare providers and workers who are willing to come out to the annual event and support young moms with information and additional resources. For more information, contact the Eta Omicron Sigma Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority at 240-416-9665 or info@eos1922.org.

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