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Students walk for breast cancer

By Mackenzie Byerlee
Features Editor

The "RHA Breast Cancer Awareness Walk" on Oct. 20 brought students, faculty and outside guests together to speak about the importance of early detection, support and community.

Covering My Sisters Founder and CEO Grace Clark spoke about her experiences as a breast cancer survivor.

"When I first got my diagnosis, the only association I had with any cancer was death," Clark said. "Back then, there was no talk of survivorship. So when I first participated in a support group, I began to see women that were years ahead of me in their survivorship."

Covering My Sisters is an African American Breast Cancer organization with their main mission being to support those with breast cancer and their families.

With October being Breast Cancer Awareness month, the university showcased their care for those that have been affected by breast cancer.

Having an outside resource on campus allowed students to fully understand the importance of organizations like this.

The walk itself started in the Academic Quad and continued into the Residence Life Quad. The organizers from the Residence Hall Association as well as those from Covering My Sisters held signs promoting breast cancer awareness.

The Wellbeing Center and Health Services were also in attendance to not only show their support but also to highlight their services when it comes to breast cancer.

When speaking to attendees, Clark wanted to highlight the importance of self breast exams.

"The goal is to save as many lives as possible and this is done by administering self exams," Clark said. "Don't neglect that something might be happening."

Women should be doing self breast exams monthly right after the end of their periods.

Doing this ensures that any changes will be detected and keeps women aware of anything abnormal occurring in their breasts.

Clark shared that lumps are not the only symptom of breast cancer to look out for. Women should also be looking out for rashes, discoloration and abnormal breast pain.

Interdisciplinary studies major Sara Kojeli, a junior, shared that even though her family does not have a history of breast cancer, learning more about the topic was helpful.

"It's about being safe and taking care of yourself," Kojeli said. "It could happen to anybody."

Being able to share her message and spread awareness about breast cancer, specifically in the African American community, is exactly why Clark started Covering My Sisters.

"I wanted to give back and I wanted others to feel the validation and support that I felt, but I also wanted to be able to provide education. African American communities are dying at a higher rate from breast cancer than the caucasian community," Clark said.

Informing students about aspects of breast cancer that they may not have known previously gave them the opportunity to learn from those with firsthand experiences and see that no one going through this should have to do it alone.

Covering My Sisters is one of many organizations that are available resources for those with breast cancer and their families.

"With support groups, I began to see life and I began to see hope," Clark said. "It changed the experience of my journey."

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PHOTO | MATEUSZ GAZDZICKI

Students participating in the 'RHA Breast Cancer Awareness Walk' on Oct. 20 in front of the Buley Library.

'Disability Awareness Seminar' calls for inclusion

By Brianna Wallen
Editor-in-Chief

With National Disability Employment Awareness Month recognized each October, it is important to highlight the experiences of people with disabilities and promote a greater level of understanding accessibility, inclusion and disability justice.

Students and faculty explored these topics during a disability awareness seminar on Oct. 13, by discussing ways to dismantle barriers, challenge ableism and create environments where people with disabilities feel supported and understood.

"It's not just about being seen, but it's also being spoken with and being understood to the best of everyone's ability," interdisciplinary studies major Sophia Gugliotti, a senior, said.

Gugliotti organized the event as part of her commitment to disability advocacy. Having a learning disability herself, she said her experiences with accessibility issues, discrimination and bullying inspired her to create spaces where students could connect and discuss their experiences.

"I knew I wanted to take what I learned and spread it," Gugliotti said. "I feel very happy for everyone that they can have a safe space, even if it's just one time a semester, to really connect and talk."

The seminar brought together guest speakers from across the university and the disability advocacy community to discuss topics including attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder , ableism, invisible disabilities and dismantling barriers to accessibility.

Speakers also explored disability joy, disability justice and the importance of educating others about different disabilities.

Carlos Torre, a professor in the College of Education, spoke about creating inclusive classrooms where students with and without disabilities can learn together. Torre, who said he has ADHD and dyslexia, emphasized that differences in how people think and learn should not be viewed as shortcomings.

"Everybody thinks differently, and there's no cure for that," Torre said. "You don't want a cure. People think differently because we all do."

Torre explained that accessibility should be incorporated into everyday teaching.

"Our responsibility as educators is not to remove intellectual challenges," Torre said. "What we need to remove are the barriers that keep people from participating equally in addressing those challenges."

Torre encouraged instructors to create classrooms where students feel supported and welcome to participate in.

"Creating a classroom where all students experience both support and belonging, because kids don't learn from people they don't like. So if they don't feel wanted, if they don't feel included, if they don't feel they belong, why would they bother to get engaged?" Torre said.

Other guest speakers included English major Jeanette Bouvier, a sophomore, Rachel Furey, professor in the English department, Heidi Lockwood professor in the Philosophy department and Jeremy Ferrell, an autism advocate and university alumnus.

Their participation contributed to discussions surrounding disability awareness, accessibility and the experiences of people with disabilities.

"People with neurodiversity tend to communicate very differently," Ferrell said. "It is to our benefit to tell them what we care about communication-wise, because then they can build it into how they communicate with us."

Ferrell also challenged the idea that autism should be viewed as a superpower.

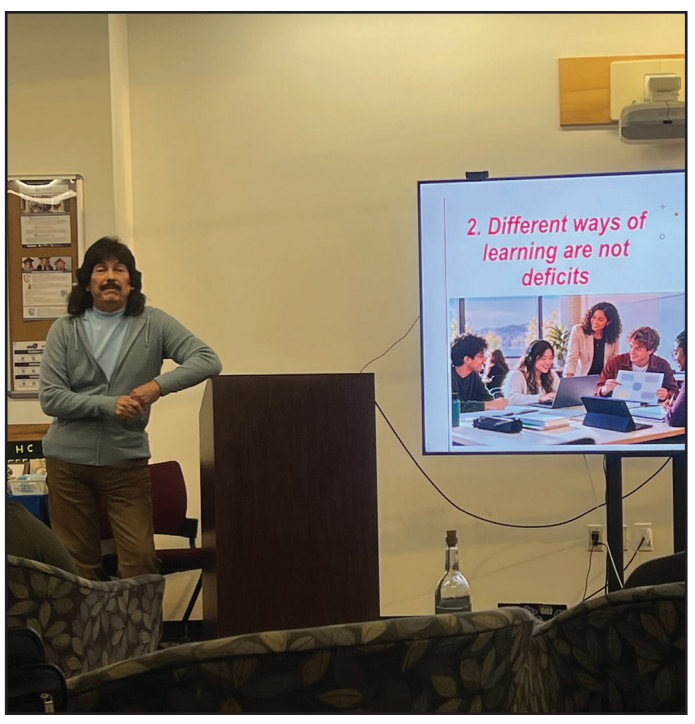
"It's not a superpower. It's just who I am," Ferrell said.

Adira DeMatteo, a graduate, said having more seminars like this can help challenge misconceptions and create better understanding among collegues and peers.

"I think it has become a culture in which people fear what they don't understand, and that leads to targeting at work or you know exclusion and things like that," DeMatteo said. "At the end of the day, if you want to work cohesively, everybody needs to work together and understand each other."

As Gugliotti's final event before graduating, she hopes the conversation on disability does not end here.

"I think having multiple safe spaces should be like the next step that Southern should pursue to make sure that people with all disabilities feel comfortable and recognized, and also connected," Gugliotti said.



PHOTOS | BRIANNA WALLEN

Carlos Torre, a professor in the College of Education, leading the 'Disability Awareness Seminar' on Oct. 13.



English major Jeanette Bouvier, a sophomore, interdisciplinary studies major Sophia Gugliotti, a senior, biology major Allen Motraghi, a senior and business administration major Zach McCarthy, a senior.