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Community comes together for Story County Mental Health Expo

by Emma Toms, emma.toms@iowastatedaily.com Sep 19, 2017



Sarah Benincasa, author and comedian, spoke in the Sun Room Tuesday on mental health. Benincasa stressed the importance of taking care of your mind as much as you take care of your body.

Chris Jorgensen/Iowa State Daily

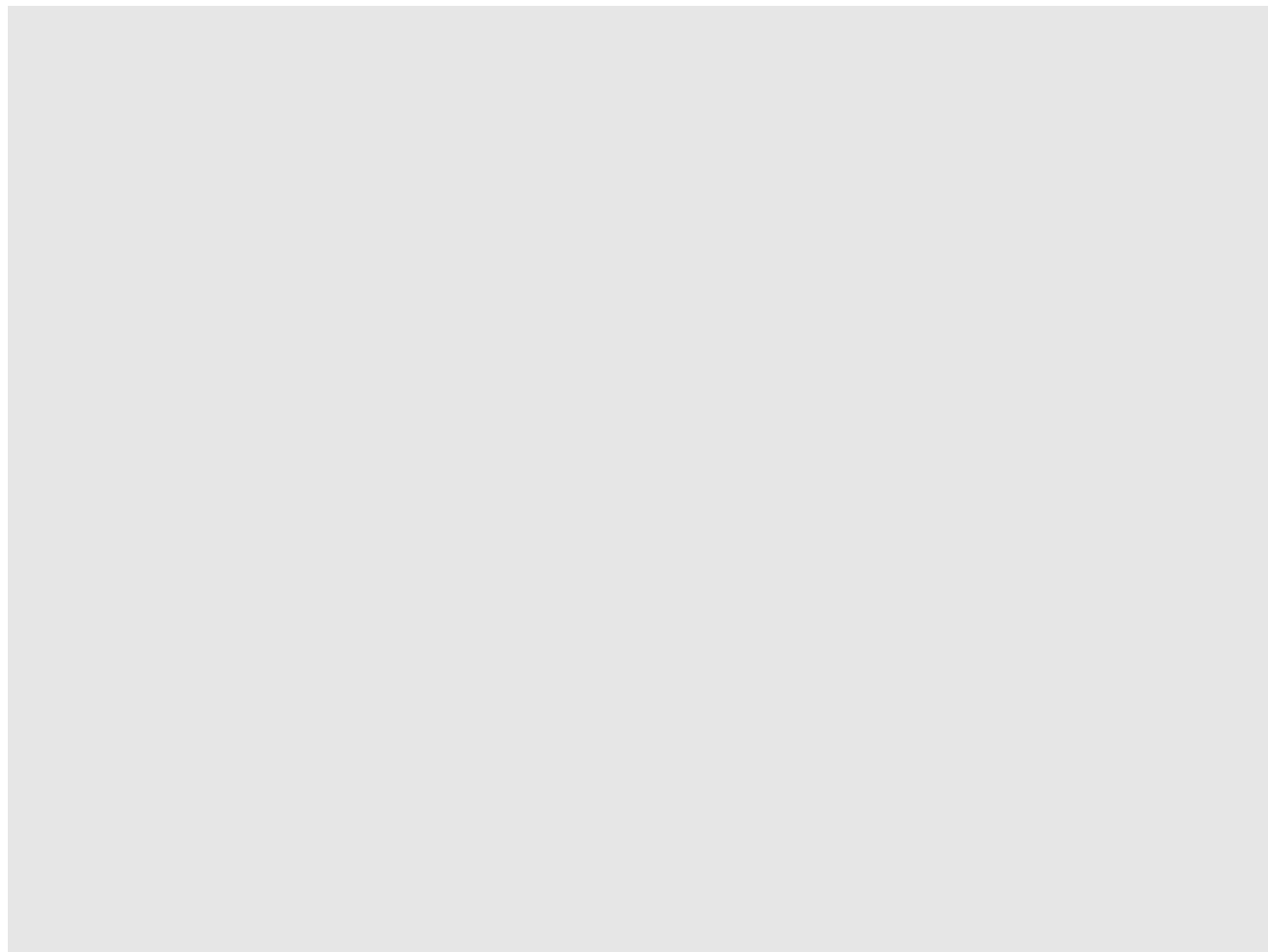
Iowa State University teamed up with eight different organization and companies for Wednesday's Mental Health Expo, bringing in around 320 people to the Memorial Union for the event.

"One of the main things that is really wonderful about the event is that both last year and this year, it does such a nice job of bringing students, parents, high schoolers and folks just from the community coming in all

around the topic of talking about mental health issues, raising awareness and talking about how important it is, and why it is so important,” said Warren Philip, of Central Iowa Psychological Services, or CIPS.

Of the event’s 24 vendors, eight of them were campus organizations, four were offices and four were organizations and clubs, according to Geri Derner, who works on the event committee, as well as at Youth and Shelter Services.

“We have committee meetings for probably about nine months to plan this event,” Derner said.



Iowa State Police Chief Michael Newton listens to Sara Benincasa's lecture on mental health in the sun room on Sept. 19.

Chris Jorgensen/Iowa State Daily

Derner also noted that attendees were engaged in what was being presented and asking questions about the vendors at the event.

“They [attendees] weren’t just walking by and picking up pamphlets, they were engaging in conversation as they had real questions to real problems and they felt it was worth their while to be here,” Derner said.

Keynote speaker Sara Benincasa also talked about her experience with mental health issues and what it felt like to deal with them. One of the main themes of her talk was the fact “that asking help makes you stronger, not weaker,” pointing out how not asking for help only made her battle with depression worse.

“It was just a very warm crowd,” Benincasa said. “They were warm, they paid good attention, even when they got restless towards the end they were really respectful about it.”

Benincasa was also pleased with the fact that the event was open to the public.

“I think it was really well organized... I go to a lot of schools and this is definitely been one of the best organized events that I’ve seen and in terms of the amount of interest and passion that I have seen,” Benincasa said.

“Many places that I go when they do the mental health talk it is not open to members of the community and I think that it was really important that it was here because that meant there was a bigger crowd, wider age range, and there was more diversity of experience and that’s really really important.”

The event also provided information on mental health resources available in Story County, ranging from counselling to helping people recover from substance abuse and eating disorders.

The Story County Mental Health Expo is an annual event, and plans for next year's event are already in the works.

Jill O'Brien