

Encouraging growth, changing lives and enriching communities

Pauline Rose Moore, author of “Gabriella & Samantha’s New Mom,” spreads message about recovery at Family Service Foundation, Inc. event in Landover Hills

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Focusing on mental health and substance use recovery in an effort to encourage growth, change lives and enrich communities, the Prince George’s County Family Service Foundation (FSF), Inc. hosted a “Choose Recovery 2016” program celebration on May 20 in Landover Hills.

FSF is a nonprofit human service organization – headquartered in Landover Hills – dedicated to meeting the mental health and social support needs of people across Maryland. The foundation provides mental health services, substance abuse counseling, community residential programs for those with developmental disabilities and/or severe mental illness and day habilitation. In addition, FSF specializes in serving deaf and deaf-blind individuals with developmental disabilities or mental health concerns. Full-time interpreters fluent in American Sign Language are available at other satellite locations in Baltimore, Montgomery and Frederick counties, according to the FSF website.

“I love to integrate the community. The substance abuse needs to be there because it’s not something that’s addressed,” said 24-year-old Whitney Blakeley, a community support professional at the foundation who currently attends Bowie State University. “So many people are suffering from co-occurring disorders and they’re either getting the substance abuse treated or the mental health treated. That’s just not something that’s going to be acceptable anymore because they need both to be able to be whole. So having this program is really what drove me and having the support from this agency is amazing.”

The event featured a few testimonials from clients who shared how the foundation’s services benefitted them, and a poetry slam which showcased their public speaking or musical talents. Pauline Rose Moore of Bowie – a former foundation employee now turned motivational speaker, author and teacher – was the guest speaker.

Sandra McClain, a native of Richmond, Va., who was diagnosed with mental illness two years after high school, shared her testimonial about how the FSF changed her life.

McClain said she had been in different programs for most of her life. She not only dealt with personal issues but also symptoms like moving her neck and staring as a result of her mental illness, which had relapsed at one point when she was trying to get better.

But thanks to the help from the foundation, McClain managed to get over a lot of things by finding peace and was able to take back control of her life. She said she learned how to encourage and educate herself and enjoys sketching pictures as a hobby to keep her calm.

“I’ve come a long way,” McClain said as she stood under a tent and addressed a small crowd. “I’m doing a lot better and I have recovered from a lot of mental illnesses, so you can recover and you can get better. The little things that I was doing before I actually don’t do anymore. ... I always stayed in some type of program which I think kept me out of trouble because if you don’t have anything to do in your [free] time, that tends to make you get into the wrong things. So being in a program has helped me out a lot. ... I encourage everybody that you can get better, act better and you can do it.”

Moore shared her personal journey of dealing with hardships – including being molested at a young age – and how she overcame challenges through faith and triumph.

Moore’s biological parents, both of whom served in the Air Force, suffered from alcohol and cocaine abuse. As a result, Moore and her six other siblings were placed in foster care.

“I come to you as a child of parents who have chosen recovery not only from alcohol but also cocaine,” said Moore, who has served in the Air Force Reserves for almost 10 years. “For me, I was blessed because my very first foster mom remained consistently in my life throughout all the years I was in foster care up until adoption and even until this day. So by having that consistent person right there, she kind of became what they call a CASA [court appointed special advocate]. What they do is they help kids, who are in foster care, find safe and loving homes.”

Moore said serving in the military sustained and allowed her to have a lot of opportunities, something she wouldn’t have had living with her biological parents.

“My mom and dad had to make some choices and they weren’t the best choices because you can imagine the kind of hurt and the pain that they must have experienced by losing all of their children,” she said. “The way that I was able to cope with everything that I dealt with is through detachment. ... I can’t say that I really felt joy during those years because I don’t remember. You forget about those things and you suppress things and things just go on.”

As time went on, Moore said her biological father suppressed his pain with food which caused him to gain up to 600 pounds. Moore’s mom was incarcerated but eventually got out and was able to go to college where she received both a bachelor’s and master’s degree.

“I don’t know how many of you are faith believing but I believe in God. She [my mom] actually ended up working for the same agency that took us. You look at that and you’re like, ‘Man there must be a God in that because how is that possible? How does the same agency that takes your children, you end up going back to work for them?’,” said Moore. “I’m saying all of this to

say to you that there's still hope. You may not realize that everything you may be experiencing right now, you don't know what that final [outcome] is going to be. Perhaps you have children that you don't have a relationship with, or you have not been reconciled with them or maybe that you may know people who are currently struggling with whatever issues because of mom, dad or whatever. But there's still light, there's still hope, there's still purpose and plan. Had those things not happened to me, I wouldn't be standing here. I wouldn't be sharing this story with you."

Moore said it wasn't until 2013, a time when she was still on active duty, that she decided to reconcile her relationship with her biological mom.

"I was at work one day and I'm at my desk and all of the sudden, [the holy spirit spoke to and nudged me to call her]," she said. "It was just like pressing to, 'Call her, call her, call her.' And then all of a sudden, I started crying and I'm like what is this? ... I got up and walked outside and I took the phone with me and I called her. ... She answers the call and she's just like, 'Pauline?' and I just said, 'I forgive you.' But here's the thing – she had been waiting for that. The thing about forgiveness that people don't realize is that ... it's our job to just say, 'You know what? I forgive that person. I'm moving on with my life and will push forward.' Now understand, you don't have to tell them if you're not lead to tell them. However, you do have to forgive them."

The married mom-of-two, who is currently enrolled at the Howard School of Divinity where she will graduate next year, encouraged the audience to take the good, the bad and the ugly and learn to love themselves and their story.

"I know that when you choose recovery, there's this guilt. There's this lingering hurt and there's this pain that says, 'Man, I've made all of these mistakes up until now.' But that's not where you need to be," Moore said. "There are things and gifts within you and the only way you're going to be able to discover them is if you take a closer look at you. ... I love my story and I wouldn't change anything about it. ... Love yourself. Love your story. Choose recovery. Know that there's hope and God is in control. Focus on you."

Blakeley, whose last day at the foundation was the day of the event, said having Moore speak was like the icing on the cake for her.

"She has that extra piece that is often missing from the care we already provide here," Blakeley said. "This event is not about me. It's not about my story. It's about the clients, what they need to hear and the people who are willing to speak and share their story."