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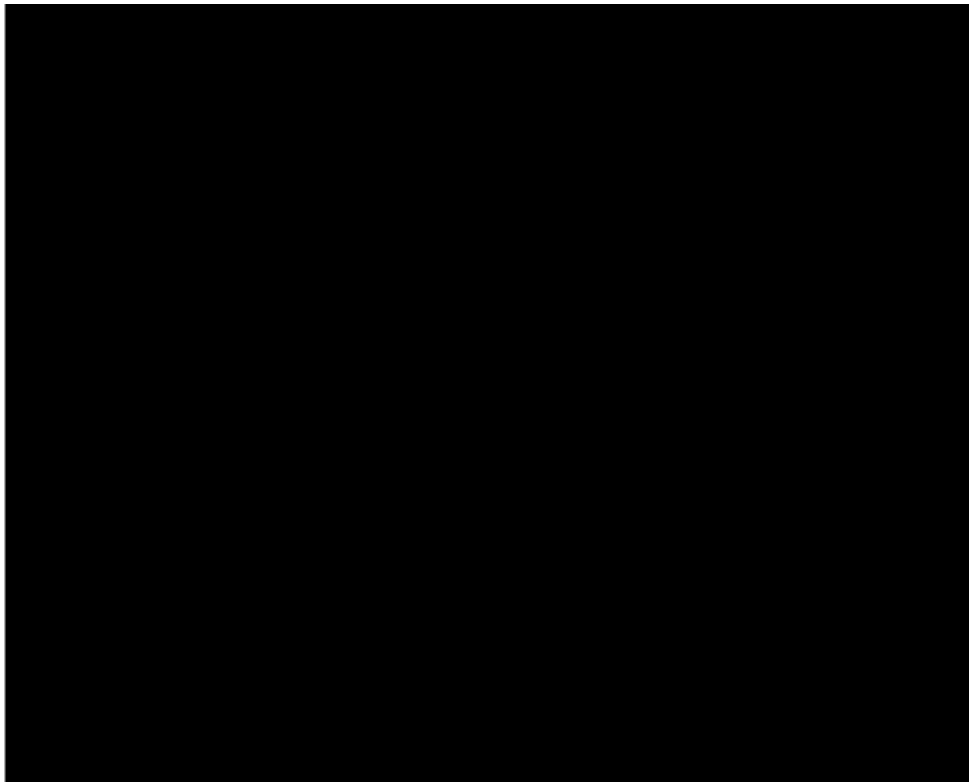
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## **DAYA Hosts 2010 Annual Seminar Why Counseling**

**Posted on 24 September 2010**

**By Kalyani Giri**

HOUSTON: Non-profit organization Daya Inc. hosted its 2010 Annual Seminar at the Hilton Southwest Hotel on September 18, from 9.00am to 2.30pm. The topic Why Counseling was addressed by a distinguished panel of experts in the fields of social work/health and mental wellbeing, with speakers coming in from other cities within the United States. About one hundred from the local community attended the event that was both pertinent and informative. The seminar highlighted the benefits of counseling on mental issues, marriage, career, children, adjustment issues in the US, to name a few. Counseling, according to the experts, is not just for people with mental illnesses but anyone facing serious issues in life and in need of talking to a professional about getting advice and finding better options. The seminar also addressed the barriers and misconceptions that South Asians have about counseling.



Keynote speaker Dr. Jerry Ruhl, Ph.D, Executive Director, Jung Center, Houston, discussed Framing the issue: Why Counseling? A psychologist in private practice, Dr. Ruhl earned his doctorate developing a holistic model for coping with the trials and tribulations of life. Having observed spiritual practices in India, Japan, and Nepal, Dr. Ruhl advocates meditation in stress management and incorporates relaxation exercises in therapy sessions with clients.

“I am a firm believer in eastern philosophy,” said Dr. Ruhl. “I believe in the slender threads that weave into the tapestry of our lives. We are wounded healers at different stages of healing. When seeking a therapist, look for someone who is compassionate to your needs. When you’re in a multicultural background it gets complex,” he added.

Dr. Ruhl led the audience in guided relaxation, urging them to “that quiet place”.

“We mortgage our energy the way we mortgage our finances,” Dr. Ruhl told gatherers. “In our busy lives we rarely stop and visit that quiet place within us where the mind stills and you concentrate on breathing,” he added.

Part video, part live skit, Reaching In: Reaching Out was a performance on the process of counseling by the Shunya Theater group and Daya Client Services Coordinator Meghna Goswami. The skit described how clients approach Daya for succor and are heard with compassion, and given the necessary tools and resources to make crucial changes for abuse-free lives. The dramatization hinged on circumstances Daya staff often encounters; an abused woman calling the Daya hotline for advice, hope, help, and direction.

Smita Ruzicka, Office of the Dean of Students, UT, Austin, spoke on Counseling Issues – The Client Counselor Fit.

“Some personal issues are like a dull pain interfering with our lives. We need a safe place to deal with these issues even in non-crisis situations,” said Ruzicka.

Counseling, she added, covered a wide spectrum; couples counseling, dealing with grief or terminal illness, career transitions, and group counseling where one can share one’s story in a non-judgmental environment. A good counselor would be empathetic, compassionate, have excellent listening skills, respect confidentiality, and have some cultural understanding. Their services should be financially feasible. And their areas of expertise must

be exemplary. Clients should look for therapists that are accessible, not a long distance away. Some clients are particular about the gender of the therapist, and others may prefer to be counseled by someone outside of their community, added Ruzicka.

Visiting freelance journalist from New York, Nisha Chhabra, offered her personal experience in *Lifting the Shame*. She told of the family's anguish coping with her father's bipolar disorder. She grew up dreading his sudden outbursts. The family was shunned because of her father's behavior.

"There was shame in admitting to anyone, even our family back in India, that my dad had a mental illness. It wasn't something he had control over but it ruled our lives because we couldn't predict what he was going to say or do," said Chhabra. Her father did get help and medication eventually, she added.

A panel discussion with Daya counselor Lakshmy Parameswaran, Smita Ruzicka, Bhawna Luthra, Kirit Mehta, Nisha Chhabra, and Rabia Ilahi continued to address questions from the audience and each took turns to answer satisfactorily. Moderator for the panel discussion was Dr. Vatsala Bhaskaran, a respected psychiatrist and Daya Board Member.

Daya promotes healthy family relationships in the South-Asian community by providing services that include counseling, referrals, legal advocacy, and financial support to women and children affected by family violence and sexual assault. Daya also promotes awareness on topics relevant to the welfare of South Asian families through educational seminars, publications, and outreach events.

For more information, visit [www.dayahouston.org](http://www.dayahouston.org). or call (713) 981 7645

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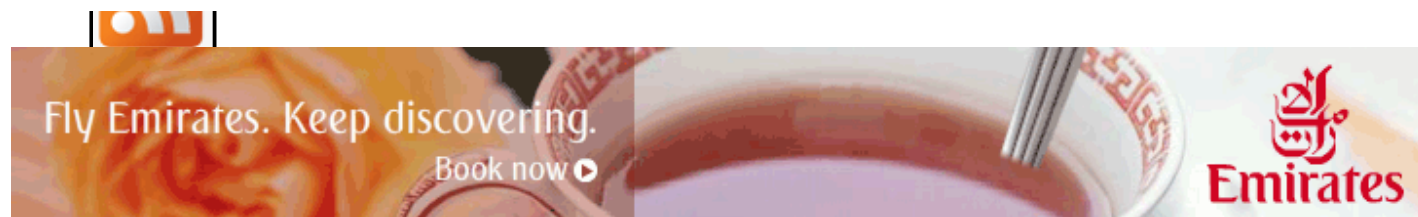
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