

The Crowd: New Directions for Women turns around lives

By B.W. COOK
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Sue Bright, executive director of New Directions for Women, addresses supporters at the Balboa Bay Club and Resort in Newport Beach. New Directions help women in recovery get their lives on track. (Photo by Laurel Hungerford)

By 7:30 on a recent Monday morning, 400 O.C. neighbors were sharing coffee in a ballroom lobby at the Balboa Bay Resort. They had come in support of a serious and personal mission directed at saving the lives of women addicted to drugs and alcohol. Representatives from the organization behind the mission, New Directions For Women, welcomed supporters to the 11th annual Circle of Life Breakfast.

Appropriately named, the event shattered stereotypes and challenged established misconceptions on women dealing with addiction. Overcoming obstacles requires support, often coming from others who have been there. Equally important, it requires honesty in facing the harsh reality and havoc created not only in the lives of substance abusers, but also in the lives of their families, especially children.

Clearly, there is no easy fix. Further, in past decades this has been a matter relegated to the shadows. But times have changed. There is no more hiding. Addiction is no longer a scarlet letter. Rather, New Directions, as an example, has replaced shame with treatment avenues leading to healthy change and, along with disclosure of the causes contributing to substance abuse in women, the results have been dramatic.

As the doors to the Balboa Bay Resort ballroom opened for an 8 a.m. breakfast confab, the New Directions crowd would be immersed in a presentation on the organization's work. Words were not sugar-coated. Overriding kindness and empathy prevailed, yet many of the stories presented were raw, albeit with inspiring outcomes.

In particular, one woman shared her life story that began with a happy and healthy youth that led to college, where stress and other factors led her to experiment with drugs. Over ensuing years addiction ruined her marriage, career and finances, putting her on the streets, where she faced unfathomable horrors. By age 27 she was addicted to heroin and homeless. She had nearly overdosed eight times. She had tried seven different treatment centers in Orange County.

When she came to New Directions, she was three months pregnant. With help from an obstetrician-gynecologist who specialized in high-risk pregnancies, as well as the New Directions team, she learned to balance pregnancy, detox and recovery. Today, she is a sober, loving mom to her 2-year-old boy and the

alumnae coordinator at New Directions. The audience applauded her bravery with sincerity.

Additional speakers, including several remarkable children who became residents of New Directions with their mothers while in therapy, joined her. They too were examples of survival and healing and the circle of life message. The poise and confidence of children under 10 years of age addressing a ballroom of adults brought the crowd to its feet.

The personal testimonials were an emotional part of the program designed to inform donors, friends and supporters about the progress and needs of New Directions going forward. To this end **Ann Premazon**, board chairwoman of NDFW, welcomed the large crowd, introducing **Carole Pickup**, founding board member and major donor, who offered an invocation. On the roster were passionate addresses by **Tania Bhattacharyya**, executive director of the NDFW Foundation and **Sue Bright**, executive director of the NDFW program.

Special tributes were offered to exemplary women, including the late **Faith Fayman Strong** and **Joan Howard Sammis**. Dedicated supporters, with seven individuals newly inducted into the Amethyst Society, a group comprised of sustaining investors, also earned honors. This year's awardees included **Sannon Eustace**, the Rev. Dr. **Charles Dorsey**, **Devon** and **Kevin Martin**, **Stacy Forstaall**, **Diana Sammis Brookes** and **Rebecca Flood**.

Significant support for NDFW came from the generosity of donors **Howard** and **Katherine Bland**, Dr. **Rafael Penunuri**, **Diana Sammis Brookes**, **Tracy** and **Rick Weiner**, Ashley Addiction Treatment, Brown-Forman, Casa Capri, IT Proactive, Seabrook, and Kahana and Feld, to name only a few.

Spotted in the breakfast crowd were **Sam El Rabaa**, general manager of the Balboa Bay Resort, and **Leticia Rice**, general manager of the Balboa Bay Club. Also attending were **John** and **Ann Huffman**, **Caroline Davenport** with **Joe Moody**, **Susan De Grassi**, **Lisa Fujimoto**, **Rob** and **Adriana Gallagher**, **Richard Pickup**, **Tom** and **Sara Hopper**, **May Anna Jeppe**, **Jerry Johnson** with daughter **Kara Johnson**, and **Larry** and **Myra Kirschenbaum**. Front and center were **Carl** and **Rebecca McLarand**, **Sandy Morales**, **Devin O'Day**, **Natalie** and **Todd Pickup**, **Gail Soderling** and **Tracy Wilder**.

An impressive \$550,000 was raised for NDFW changing women's and children's lives, fighting substance abuse and breaking the negative cycle of life and restoring the positive — hopefully for generations to come. Special thanks to matching donor Carole Pickup making this success a reality.