

'Healing' event offers post-election coping strategies

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(Photo: Photos by Steve Perez / The Detroit News)

Seasoned professionals bursting into tears. Mothers fearful about their children facing harassment or worse at schools. Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community worried if they'll be able to marry.

People across Metro Detroit have experienced a wide range of emotions in the two weeks since businessman Donald Trump's unexpected victory in the 2016 presidential election.

Those feelings linger as the outcome of the divisive race settles in, sparking questions about how to cope. That's why the Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority hosted a "Post Election Community Healing Conversation" at the Northwest Activities Center on Monday night.

Panelists including law, health and social service leaders examined opinions about the current climate as well as strategies to move forward.

"This is something that's different," Dr. Carmen McIntyre, chief medical officer at the Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority, told the crowd of about 30 people. "It's really an opportunity for people to talk about the feelings they're going through."

Much of the discussion focused on the shock over Trump's win and apprehension about policies in his incoming administration.

He won by just over 13,100 votes in Michigan, according to unofficial results. But he lost the popular vote nationwide to Democratic rival Hillary Clinton, who leads by more than 1 million votes.

The results, and his controversial views on issues such as immigration, have sparked protests nationwide, including in Metro Detroit.

"It's a real extreme change and we generally as human beings don't do well with change," said attorney Regina Jemison, who has a Master of Divinity degree from the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. "For those who are disappointed, who are angry, who are challenged ... it's an experience of going from being heard to not being heard."

But some panelists cautioned against dwelling on the outcome and negative feelings. Doing so is comparable to "being held hostage," said Dr. Annette McCain, a hospital liaison with the Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority as well as an adjunct psychology professor at Macomb Community College.

"I think we just have to be careful how we take the fear of the unknown and make that a part of our everyday living," she said. "Being that fearful where you can't function actually has a negative effect on everyone around you."

As for solutions, some speakers advocated continuing to seek support systems and speak out.

"I really think this is a time to engage in our communities in a way that we maybe haven't before," said Loren Khogali, ACLU of Michigan's board president and an attorney with the Federal Defender Office.

The dialogue left some attendees optimistic.

"It made me feel like I wasn't alone," said Velda Hunter, a Detroit resident who works with a nonprofit. "It helped me to feel that something can be done so as a people we can rally together and try to create a better situation for everybody."

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