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Barnabas: In counseling program, Nassau women recover from trauma, support each other along the way

By Beth Reese Cravey Mon, Sep 5, 2016 @ 7:58 pm | updated Tue, Sep 6, 2016 @ 6:03 am



Beth.Cravey@jacksonville.com
Barnabas Center provides a variety of crisis assistance and health services in Nassau County. Funded by a \$110,000 grant, the mental health program began in January

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NEXT

FERNANDINA BEACH | After a troubled 11-year marriage, painful divorce and cross-country move back to her native Nassau County, single mother Tiffany Alderman is slowly trying to find her way in the employment and dating worlds.

But after a year, she has not found a job and the men who have come into her life seem to want to move relationships ahead too fast.

"I'm trying to figure out what to do," said Alderman, 31. "I thought I was the only person

BARNABAS

Barnabas is Nassau County's only comprehensive service center, providing crisis assistance, health services and the county's largest food pantry. For more information about the Women's Health Initiative program, contact Linda Ellis at (904) 261-7000, ext. 131. To make an appointment for other services, donate or get more information, contact Barnabas at (904) 261-7000 or (888) 885-6498 outside Fernandina Beach or go to barnabasnassau.org.

■ Main office, Weaver Center, 1303 Jasmine St., Suite 101, Fernandina Beach, FL 32034

General hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday

■ Satellite office, 45103 Green Ave., Callahan, FL 32011

Client assistance hours: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday and Wednesdays, appointments preferred

■ New to You Resale Store, 930 S. 14th St., Fernandina Beach, FL 32034

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Beth Cravey@jacksonville.com
Tiffany Altlerman, 31, shares her story of surviving divorce and figuring out her next chapter at a support group meeting at Barnabas, a social service center in Nassau County.

in the world going through this."

She was wrong.

At the Barnabas center, the comprehensive community resource hub in Nassau County, Alderman found counseling with licensed clinical social worker Mary Grice and a support group of women who are all recovering from one trauma or another. They have become a second family of sorts and, at a recent group meeting, praised her progress and boosted her confidence.

"You didn't let it break you. Look at you! You look good," said Tara Timmons.

Timmons, Pat Cochran and Sandy Clendenen gave Alderman tips about Nassau County businesses likely to have openings in customer service, in which she has experience, and even promised to give her phone number to friends

who might be able to help.

"You keep at it," said Cochran.

Also, Cochran warned her to ignore unfamiliar Facebook suitors.

"Delete, delete, delete," she said.

The group is part of Barnabas's Women's Health Initiative Nassau, or WHIN, program, which is designed for women in crisis in Nassau County. Funded by a \$110,000 grant from the Jacksonville-based Women's Giving Alliance, the mental-health program began in January and has helped 85 women since, according to Barnabas.

The alliance, an initiative of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, was "delighted to partner with Barnabas to provide critical mental health services in Nassau County," said Jan Healy, grants leadership team co-chairwoman.

"Barnabas' Women's Health Initiative ... is research-based, collaborative, trauma-informed and creative — all qualities we look for in our grant making," Healy said. "Barnabas is an exceptionally well-led agency and, not surprisingly, the ... program is significantly improving the lives of so many women."

At weekly 2-hour meetings, the women learn survival life skills — what healthy relationships look like, how to make and maintain positive life changes and manage stress and how feelings can influence overall wellness — through discussion and interactive journaling. Those skills help them stay healthy during difficult times.

Grice provides individual counseling and leads the support groups, one at Barnabas, another for women inmates at the Nassau County jail. The first groups met February through June, the second ones began in July.

"They are deciding what their strengths are, what areas they need to work on," she said. "The women come to be very supportive of each other. A lot of women don't have a lot of support, they don't have a lot of people they can talk to."

Cochran, 59, became so enamored of the support group that, after completing the first session in June, she joined the second one as well. In 2014, medical problems led to financial issues and the loss of her home. Since then, she has lived in a Fernandina Beach

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shelter, but has a car and uses it to take senior ladies to appointments around town. She likes to help people and excels at it, she said.

At Barnabas, she has learned about all of her strengths and weaknesses.

"We have had a lot of things I found to be helpful. You rate yourself," she said. "If you tell me something good to help me prosper, I'm for that."

Timmons said her trauma stemmed from a series of medical problems that led to disability and losing her job. She and Alderman said they both had supportive families, but treasured the additional help they received from Grice and the other women in the group. With a confidence boost and financial help from the center, she will soon begin a home-based medical coding and billing training program, which she hopes will lead to a home-based job.

"I am blessed to have the Barnabas center," Timmons said.

Clendenen, 78, said she had been traumatized by ongoing conflicts with a property manager and neighbors at the condominium community where she used to live in Savannah. After moving back to Nassau, where she was raised, she found Barnabas. She said she received dental services and was "so impressed" with the nonprofit she inquired about other programs and joined the mental-health initiative.

"There was no doubt I was going to be here to get support and share my life and work to become a whole individual again. I had been fractured," she said. "For me, this is a safety net."

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