

FSA Fundraiser Features Individual Stories of Mental-Health Issues



ON THE TOWN
David Laurell

The profound feeling of hopelessness and a much-needed miracle a family experienced in the wake of a suicide. The realization that embracing mental-health help is not just for the person in need, but also for those they love and care for. Coming to terms with an eating disorder and the realization that beating bulimia, like knitting a scarf, is a process that comes one stitch at a time.

This past Sunday evening, as part of a fundraiser series to support the Family Service Agency of Burbank, nine local individuals took a solitary step on to the stage at the Colony Theatre.

Standing alone in the glare of a spotlight, they each faced the audience and candidly shared stories of how they have overcome or are still dealing with myriad mental-health issues that have impacted them and their families.

Last week's event, billed as "Go There," was part of an ongoing campaign that FSA is staging to inspire those in need to go to

a place where it is safe to talk about their struggles, go to someone who will provide understanding, go to a place where they can discuss taboo subjects and go to sources of help and support.

The fundraising series, which offers people the opportunity to share personal stories on various topics, is the brainchild of Burbank resident and community activist Suzanne Weerts, who through her production company, JAM Creative, has produced programs that have raised more than \$25,000 for local charities since 2017.

Laurie Bleick, executive director of the FSA Burbank, was joined by the organization's Director of Operations Christine Ramos, to welcome supporters as they filed into the lobby of the downtown theater for the Sunday evening performance.

"We need more people like Suzanne Weerts. The whole world does," said Bleick, who has seen Weerts produce eight fundraisers for FSA over the years. "We are all finding ourselves in a time of crisis in which fears over what we see in the news every day coupled with the isolation we have all been through during the pandemic is taking its toll, especially on children, teenagers and families."

Explaining that the need for mental-health intervention and care is an issue that is touching every family in spite of their socioeconomic station in life, Bleick



Photos courtesy David Laurell / Burbank Leader

Suzanne Weerts, who produced last week's "Go There" fundraiser, flanked by Laurie Bleick and Chris Ramos of the Family Service Agency of Burbank.

said one only needs to look at those who participated in Sunday's program to see that no one is immune.

From teachers, a filmmaker, a novelist, and actors, to a UCLA computer programmer, director of membership engagement for a nonprofit and a California state senator, those who shared their stories, which were often heart-wrenching, also provided those in attendance with their experiences that were uplifting, inspiring, encouraging and even humorous.

Along with those who delivered their stories that, in Weerts' words, "Help weave the threads of our personal experiences into the fabric that connects us," Sunday's audience was also treated to the musical stylings of Pi Jacobs who "American Songwriter" magazine has called "a singer with a sultry, feminine, outlaw kind of sound."

Following Jacobs' performance, the evening saw the featured nine — Eric Connor, Lynn Lipinski, Vicki Juditz, Megan Dolan, Erica Blumfield, Sean Ewert, Wendy Hammers, Miyo Yamauchi and state Sen. Anthony Portantino — literally "go there" in sharing their honest and emotional stories about mental-health challenges that have affected them and their families.

Lipinski, a novelist who moved to Burbank in 2017, said her desire to participate in the program stemmed from the hope to become more involved with the Burbank community and support the work of FSA. Her story, titled "Stitch by Stitch," chronicled the journaling she did while battling bulimia.

"I have been a writer for many years, but I have never shared something as personal as this, much less on stage in front



Burbank Cultural Arts Commissioner Eric Connor, who teaches at Burbank's New York Film Academy, wove humor into his story on overcoming the pain of unresolved issues.

of an audience," said Lipinski who admitted to fighting off tears while writing and rehearsing the story she presented.

For more than 70 years, FSA has assisted Burbank youth, adults, families and military personnel. Along with their numerous mental-health programs they also work with local schools and operate three transitional housing communities for the homeless.

Last week's event, which raised more than \$3,000, will help FSA continue to provide mental-health support in Burbank.

For more information on the services they offer, contact their 24-hour hotline at (818) 845-7671.

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State Sen. Anthony Portantino shared a story of the 2010 suicide of his brother Michael, which brought tragic heartbreak followed by a much-needed message of miraculous peace.

AT THE BEACH

ACROSS

1. Like a certain eagle
5. "Beach-goer's protective acronym
8. "To ___ and to hold"
12. Arabian bigwig
13. Indian lentil staple
14. Wild West grazer
15. TV prize
16. Between Illinois and Nebraska
17. Quick and light on one's feet
18. "Wooden walkway by the beach
20. Not this
21. Unwritten examinations
22. Cherry middle
23. Relating to a rib
26. "Beach suit type
29. Kanye's genre
30. Pool hall mishap
33. 52 cards
35. "Sunny Dutch Caribbean vacation destination
37. Be unwell
38. Eagle's home

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A highlight of last week's "Go There" event was a performance by Pi Jacobs who tells her stories through song.



Burbank novelist Lynn Lipinski shared her story, "Stitch by Stitch," which chronicled her battle with bulimia.