



Soaring on the Winds of Change: 2016 Recap World EAP Conference

Editor's note: *This article describes key findings from this important gathering. EAPA's Conference on Demand is now available for anyone interested in downloading conference breakout sessions from either the 2015 or 2016 conferences. For more information, visit <http://eapa.sclivelearningcenter.com/index.aspx?PID=8163>*

CHICAGO, Ill. – “EAP Innovation: Soaring on the Winds of Change” was the theme at EAPA’s 2016 World EAP Conference, held Oct. 31-Nov. 3 at the Sheraton Grand Chicago.

DAY ONE – “*Starting, Selling, and Growing an EAP*” was presented by **Marina London**, LCSW, CEAP, Manager, Web Services with EAPA, and **Michael Klaybor**, Ed.D., CEAP, psychotherapist with The Lovett Center. This extensive training covered every aspect of building and growing an EAP, including staffing, marketing, selling, implementing, and nurturing a fledgling program.

The annual **Chapter and Branch and Leader Development** session was expanded this year. Run by the *EAPA Board of Directors*, the session featured “*Leading a Volunteer Organization*” by *Steve Smith* with Rosecrance Health Network. Finding enough volunteers can be a real challenge for any organization, Smith said. “*You need ‘job descriptions’ to find out where they fit. You need a consistent way of training, which creates greater buy-in, what do YOU want to do?*” Smith noted. Success stories from EAPA Chapter and Branch Leaders, and award presentations, were other highlights.

Day One concluded with the always popular **EAPA Expo Grand Opening Reception** (formerly known as the EAPA Marketplace Reception). Among the almost 100 vendors were *Elements Behavioral Health*, *Center for Discovery*, *Pride Institute*, *Harting EAP*, and *PsyBar* (for a full list visit <http://www.eapassn.org/Conferences-Education/2016-World-EAP-Conference/2016-Exhibitors-and-Sponsors>) Held on Halloween, the festivities also included plenty of candy and costumed attendees, including a Cat in the Hat, various ghouls, and even a ghostbuster or two.

DAY TWO – The opening keynote, “*Moving from Victim to Victor through the Power of Forgiveness*” was led by **Lyndon Fitzgerald Harris**, co-director with Tigg’s Pond Retreat Center. Lyndon presented groundbreaking ideas from the new science of forgiveness. His ideas are an outgrowth of his heroic hands on work at Ground Zero, NYC, in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks. “*We need to create a culture of forgiveness in the workplace,*” he stated.

Sessions the author of this blog attended included:

“High Stakes Fitness for Duty Evaluations: When Concerns of Violence Arise” was led by *George Vergolias, Psy.D.*, Associate Medical Director with R3 Continuum. Among other areas, participants learned the differences between affective and predatory violence, and how to determine when to refer for Fitness for Duty versus Threat of Violence evaluations. *“Clinical judgment is often only 50%, we have to consider other factors,” he said. “Can we mitigate risk? We can’t predict, but we can manage risk factors.”*

Bev Younger, Ph.D., LCSW, Clinical Associate Professor with the University of Southern California School of Social Work, presented *“Rapidly Diversifying EAPs: Strategizing for the Future.”* This session addressed the continuing diversification of internal and external EAPs, and offered strategies for adapting to accelerating change. From factories to labor policies; like the ADA, FMLA and others, to broad brush EAPs, managed care, digital delivery, and the Affordable Care Act, EAPs have always needed to adapt to employee needs, she explained. *“Is diversity a loss of Core Technology or a necessary adaptation?”* she postulated.

DAY THREE – Wednesday’s keynote address was something quite different from the norm: short, engaging **EAP TALKS** (think TED Talks) about current EA topics from **Jeff Harris**, MFT, CEAP, Program Manager, EAP & WorkLife Services, University of Southern California; **Marina London**, Web Services, EAPA; **Sally Spencer-Thomas**, Psy.D., President & CEO, Carson J Spencer Foundation; and **Mark Attridge**, Ph.D., President, Attridge Consulting.

Harris spoke on how EAP practitioners can build credibility as consultants. *“Make it your business to know their business, including micro-cultures,”* he explained. *“Trust is everything. Deliver consistent, good results and don’t challenge a manager in front of a team. Get periodic feedback, and follow up.”*

London posed the question, *“Is EAP ‘Tech Proof’ in 2028?”* She said that after a recent trip to Las Vegas, it dawned on her that certain things in Vegas had not changed even though she hadn’t been there in decades. They included slot machines, comedy and circus shows, and magic acts.

While the EAP service delivery mechanisms of the future will incorporate advances in technological innovation, London maintained that certain core aspects of society, and EAP, will remain “tech proof,” (defined as those activities, feelings or experiences that continue to exist despite developments in technology.) She noted some key elements of EAP core technology while prevail in the future, noting *“The very act of helping is tech proof.”*

Spencer-Thomas discussed how EAPs can be shining lights of hope in the *social movement* of suicide prevention. She concluded her compelling talk by having the lights turned off. Then she asked audience members who've been affected by suicide – first indirectly, and then directly – to hold up their turned-on cell phones. As the room went from dark to heavily lit, it was apparent what a terrible thing being depressed, in the dark, with no idea where to turn is, and how MANY of us have been impacted by this disturbing trend.

“No one should die in isolation and despair,” she said.

Attridge led a talk on how EA professionals can better integrate EAP into other workplace programs. The effort is worthwhile because EAPs can enhance their business value by creating connections with other health and benefit programs within the same organization. He also pointed out that he writes a column on this topic, [“Integration Insights”](#) for the *Journal of Employee Assistance*.

Sessions attended on day 3 included:

[The EAP Connection to Military Sexual Trauma and Campus Sexual Assaults](#) led by *Patricia Herlihy*, Ph.D., RN, CEO and founder of Rocky Mountain Research; *Lauren Bloom*, a grad student at the University of Maryland; and *Leah Marshall*, a college sexual violence prevention advisor. Herlihy said that sexual assault has a tremendous ripple effect – from the victim and survivor, to family, co-workers, friends, and even the community. *“It’s not just rape, but unwanted touching, grabbing, threatening, offensive remarks, and threatening and unwelcome advances.”* And yet, according to “Protect Our Defenders,” in 2014, 85% of victims did not report crimes.

Bloom pointed out that sexual violence is not just physical in nature, but also includes voyeurism, sharing intimate images, catcalling, and leering. There is a common misconception that there is something the victim could have done to prevent the assault. *“There is too much onus on the individual,”* she said. *“Whether it’s college, the workplace, or the military, it’s difficult to acknowledge how prevalent this problem really is,”* Marshall said. *“This is not a women’s issue or a men’s issue, it’s a human issue,”* she stressed. *“Power and control can occur in any relationship, anyone can be a perpetrator.”*

[Innovations in Suicide Risk Assessment, Management, Recovery, and Grief Support](#), led by *Sally Spencer-Thomas* and *Bernie Dyme*, LCSW, President and CEO, Perspectives Ltd. *“A co-worker’s suicide has a deep, disturbing impact on workmates,”* said Thomas. *“For managers, tragedies post challenges no one covered in management school. For survivors, they feel, ‘when is the next shoe going to fall?’”* *“Since co-workers often have more face-to-face time than family, we need to do a better job promoting what mental health is.”*

“We need to make suicide a health and safety priority,” Dyme stated. *“Reduce stigma, open dialogue, promote EAP, and find champions willing to tell their stories. Encourage*

talk about mental health and determine if and how to make accommodations for those with mental health conditions and issues.”

Understanding the Changing Latino Demographic and Diverse Latino Cultures, presented by *Gerardo Canul*, Ph.D., behavioral health consultant with GK Partners in Wellness. The growth in the Latino population in the U.S. requires EAPs to have a plan of action in order to offer effective EA services. *“It’s important to understand core cultural Latino values and beliefs,”* Canul explained. For instance, he noted that Latinos typically have a philosophy of collectivism versus individualistic beliefs. *“The value of being a member of a community of family takes priority to individualism. Cooperation is valued over competitiveness.”*

DAY FOUR – The last day of the conference featured a **president’s breakfast** in which EAPA President *Lucy Henry* and President-Elect *Tamara Cagney* spoke to the audience. Cagney offered her vision for the EA field in a well-received address, and the incoming Board of Directors was also installed.

The breakfast also featured a panel conducted by EAPA CEO Greg DeLapp, ***Creating a United Vision for the EAP Field***. Participants included organizational EA presidents *Jeffrey Gorter*, MSW, National Behavioral Consortium; *Kaoru Ichikawa*, Ph.D., CEAP, Asia Pacific Employee Assistance Roundtable; *Judy Plotkin*, MSW, Employee Assistance Society of North America; and *Igor Moll*, MWO, Employee Assistance European Forum.

The 2017 World EAP Conference will be in Los Angeles. For more information, visit http://www.eapassn.org/Portals/11/Docs/Conf_Ed/2017/2017_ad_web.pdf

A version of this article, written by Journal of Employee Assistance editor Mike Jacquart, was also published in his Impact Publishing blog:

<https://impactpublishing.wordpress.com/2016/11/10/world-eap-2016-final-post-in-a-series/>