



# Terrence J: More conversations on mental health key

By Reggie Ponder Staff Writer   Apr 13, 2023



Dr. CharLynda Williams-DeVane (second from right), senior deputy director of the North Carolina Division of Public Health, speaks during a panel discussion at the Elizabeth City State University Fine Arts Center Wednesday with (l-r) Dr. Latonia Johnson, director of Counseling Services and Testing at ECSU; Cheryl Fehr-Banks, clinical social worker with ECU Psychiatry-NC STeP; and actor and television personality Terrence Jenkins, better known as Terrence J.

Reggie Ponder/The Daily Advance

Actor and television personality Terrence J reminded an audience at Elizabeth City State University Wednesday evening that money doesn't buy happiness — and assured them it doesn't relieve anxiety, either.

"Anybody who will tell you that money will fix all your problems hasn't made a lot of money," he said during a Community Connections lecture and panel discussion at the Mickey Burnim Fine Arts Center on the ECSU campus.

Terrence J, also known as Terrence Jenkins, is a successful television host and has appeared in a number of successful movies, including performing alongside stars such as Taraji P. Henson, Kevin Hart and Gabrielle Union in "Think Like a Man." He has also had a number of prosperous entrepreneurial ventures and is an advocate for protecting the environment and ensuring better access to health care.

Joining Jenkins for the panel discussion on holistic health and community collaborations were Dr. CharLynda Williams-DeVane, senior deputy director of the North Carolina Division of Public Health; Cheryl Fehr-Banks, clinical social worker with ECU Psychiatry-NC STeP; and Dr. Latonia Johnson, director of Counseling Services and Testing at ECSU.

Jenkins said it's critical to let go of things in your life that are dragging you down or holding you back.

"Letting go is highly important," he said. "All of us hold onto things."

He thanked ECSU for inviting him to the forum and said it was an honor to share the stage with three women he called "heroes" for health and wellness.

During the panel discussion, Fehr-Banks said problems accessing health care can be a barrier to people taking care of themselves. Another barrier to getting mental health care is the stigma that's often attached to mental health needs.

"A big barrier would be making that first appointment," Fehr-Banks said.

Williams-DeVane said systemic barriers are significant, and include things such as transportation and education.

Especially in lower-income communities, Williams-Devane said, it can be challenging to take care of yourself because you are always taking care of someone else.

Johnson said it's important to give yourself permission to say that you're not OK.

Student Blake Little interviewed Jenkins on stage and Miss ECSU Tonea Williams moderated the panel discussion.

Little noted that he is pursuing a career as an entrepreneur, and asked Jenkins about persevering amid disappointments. The actor said the key is just not to ever give up.



"In order to get yeses in life it takes a lot of nos," the actor said. "It only takes one yes. Just don't give up. Just keep chipping away at it."

Williams, who said she plans to become a psychologist, asked Jenkins about the emphasis he places on mental health.

He said he is glad to see mental health getting the attention it is now receiving.

"It's something that we were not talking about when I was in college 20 years ago," said Jenkins, who is a graduate of N.C. A&T State University. "Everything that we do in life circles around our mental health."

He said "having these conversations, having these discussions, having these open forums, is so important."

The event opened with remarks by Angela Richardson of the counseling center at ECSU.

"I want you to know that we are here for you," Richardson told students in the audience. "ECSU is dedicated to your mental health."

Richardson reminded the students that ECSU provides them access to the Calm app, which can help students get a good night's sleep and help in other ways with anxiety reduction.

She encouraged everyone to do what they need in order to take care of their mental health.

"It is now time for us to break the stigma on mental health," Richardson said.

Amid the emphasis on caring for yourself, there was also a reminder to also help others in the community.

"Your community's health is your responsibility," said Williams-DeVane. "I want you to leave here thinking, what is the gift that I have that can save my community?"

Johnson urged everyone to "continue to break the stigma."

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