

Woman creates one stop shop divorce camp after her own break-up left her drained

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MINNEAPOLIS - Jennifer Morris knew that she had to get divorced. She just didn't know how to get divorced. So she grabbed a yellow-pages directory, flipped to "A" for attorney, and picked a name whose address was nearest to her house.

She'd never do that again.

"You really should check out many lawyers," said 36-year-old Morris, whose eight-year marriage ended one year ago. "I didn't know my choices. I wanted to get the ball rolling."

The ball started rolling, all right, but largely without her. Despite the fact that Morris sells real estate for a living, she had no idea how to make wise decisions about her own legal and financial future. On top of that, she was spent emotionally. Instead of feeling in control, she said, she let her divorce happen to her.

Determined to save other women from the same fate, she created Daisy Camp, a one-stop shop tackling many of the hardest challenges of divorce, from legal to emotional, in a supportive atmosphere. While the camps are directed at women, Morris also offers mini-camps for divorcing couples dealing primarily with legal matters and healthy co-parenting.

The latter is the biggest concern for men, Morris said. "Creating a parenting plan around the kids is big. They're just as much in the dark as women."

There's no canoeing at Daisy Camp's three-day retreats, but there are sessions titled "Real Estate ABCs" and "Financial Nuts and Bolts" as well as "Essential Oils." There's belly dancing and massage, too.

Her first camp in March, limited to 40 women, sold out and had a waiting list of 50. Website traffic (www.daisycampforyou.com) has increased from 20 to 1,000 hits a day, Morris said.

Expect no suits or ties at Daisy Camp. The weekend's speakers, all volunteering their time to talk about legal, financial and spiritual topics, are asked to dress casually; there won't be any overheads or PowerPoint presentations, either. Daisy Camp, Morris said, is all about turning down the noise.

"There is some crying, but a lot of laughing," she said. "There are morning walks, healthy eating. It's a place where you can feel really good."

Participants in the first camp came primarily from the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, but several drove in from Iowa, Wisconsin and northern Minnesota. They ranged in age from 20s to 70s, with vastly different stories. Some were leaving abusive marriages or spouses with alcohol or gambling addictions. Some "just lost interest." Some women were already divorced. Others were considering it.

Erika Rae, 37, of St. Paul signed up after hearing a radio ad. She's been separated for five months.

"The wonderful thing about Daisy Camp is coming home with a three-ring binder just fat with references and information, if and when that time comes," said Rae, married for five years. "Being a separated woman brings up many of the same issues (as with divorced women). Now I feel prepared and smart regardless of what may happen."

Chris Jordan, 38, of Roseville, Minn., almost didn't sign up. In the process of divorcing after a 10-year marriage, the last thing she wanted to do was spend three days with a bunch of women "sitting around feeling sorry for themselves. I didn't

want the negativity." She didn't find any. "The entire thing was a time to relax and learn and corroborate with other people who understand what you're going through."