



Community Leaders Spotlight Child Abuse and Neglect

Hamilton County Draws Attention to more than 5,300 Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect

Cincinnati, Ohio (April 9, 2010) More than 5,300 colorful pinwheels will be planted at Burnet Woods Park at 3 p.m. April 12 in a dramatic attempt to draw attention to the horrific problem of child abuse.

"Pinwheels for Prevention: It's Your Turn to Raise the Leaders of Tomorrow" is a statewide campaign organized by the Ohio Children's Trust Fund to promote awareness and prevention of child abuse. Many citizens are unaware of how widespread child abuse is in their local communities. In Hamilton County, 5,353 reports of abuse and neglect to the 241-KIDS child abuse hotline were validated in 2009.

Nationally, statistics are just as disturbing. Consider that, in 2008:

- 3.3 million referrals, involving 6 million children, were made to child protection agencies across the United States.
- 1.5 million of those referrals were determined to be valid abuse and neglect reports.
- More than 1,700 children died abuse or neglect.

"Abuse shatters the innocence of childhood," said Moira Weir, director of Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services, which operates the child abuse reporting hotline and investigates reports of abuse. "Pinwheels represent happy times for children. For the more than 15,000 children involved with our agency last year, those innocent, happy times were interrupted by horrific abuse. That is unacceptable in a caring county like ours."

Hamilton County joins all 88 Ohio counties participating in Pinwheels for Prevention as a kick off to Child Abuse Prevention Month in April. This year's local Pinwheels event is sponsored by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services, Hamilton County's Family and Children First Council, the Council on Child Abuse of Southern Ohio, Inc., the Cincinnati Police Department and the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department.

Patricia Eber, executive director of the county's Family and Children First Council, said her agency reviews every child fatality in the county and the abuse deaths are heartbreaking.

"Every citizen in this community should be outraged and sick to their stomach every time a child dies from abuse in Hamilton County," she said. "Let these pinwheels serve as a wakeup call to all of us."

While Cincinnati has many institutions involved in the battle to eradicate child abuse – for example, Cincinnati Children's operates the nationally-recognized Mayerson Center for Safe and Healthy Children -- Hamilton County residents themselves can play a more active role in fighting child abuse, said Heidi Malott, clinical coordinator at Mayerson.

"First, all suspected abuse should be reported immediately," she said. "Don't wait. But go beyond the watchdog role. Become a mentor to a child or parent. Volunteer or just take a neighborhood kid under your wing. Advocate on behalf of children with politicians. Do something. This problem is too big to sit still."

Karen McCann, senior program director of the Council on Child Abuse of Southern Ohio, Inc., said preventing child abuse is far less costly than dealing with its consequences.

"It is important that every member of our community consider what they can do to improve our collective well-being," she said. "Whether it is volunteering, making donations or advocating for family-friendly policies, everyone can take their turn in making a difference. When we invest in healthy child development, we are investing in community and economic development, as flourishing children become the foundation of a thriving society."

Here are the details for the event:

What: Pinwheels for Prevention

When: 3 p.m. April 12 (pictures of planting and interviews with experts)

Where: Burnet Woods Park, corner of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Clifton Avenue, across from the University of Cincinnati.

Why: To promote the awareness and prevention of child abuse and neglect

For more information, call:

Brian Gregg
Chief Communications Officer
Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services
513-946-1728
greggb@jfs.hamilton-co.org