



Madison County Kicks Off Child Abuse Prevention Month

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EDWARDSVILLE — Officials and community leaders in Madison County kicked off Child Abuse Prevention Month on Friday at the Madison County Administration Building.

Pink and blue cutouts of children line the lobby of the administration building, each one symbolizing a child interviewed by Child Advocacy Center during the past year over allegations of abuse. Also on display are T-shirts from the Oasis Women's Center Clothesline Project that abused children paint and decorate.

Madison County Chief Circuit Judge William Mudge who emceed the event said since the establishment of the CAC 20 years ago, forensic interviewers conducted thousands of interviews on children.

"I would encourage any of you to visit CAC's website to see all the things they do, the people they collaborate with and what they've done to help children," Mudge said. "They've become one of the leading centers in the state."

He said in his my mind the CAC exemplifies teamwork.

"They deploy a multi-disciplinary team led by professionals within the center," he said. "They are also joined by DCFS, local law enforcement agencies, the State's Attorney's Office and professionals within the medical and mental health fields. Because one in 25 children are involved in allegation of abuse here in Madison County every year, the center is quite busy."

He said there are 486 paper cutouts on exhibition in the lobby that represent the number of children interviewed at the CAC during the past year.

Chairman Kurt Prenzler read a proclamation declaring April as Child Abuse Prevention Month in Madison County. Others and speakers included Assistant State's Attorney Ali Foley; Tarra Winters, director of programs Prevent Child Abuse Illinois; and Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Deputy Director of Child Protection Maria Miller. The event is part of a statewide effort by the DCFS and other agencies and groups to promote awareness on abuse.

Winters said events such as this are to raise awareness.

"All children deserve a great childhood and everyone has a role to play in it," Winters said. This year's theme 'Growing Better Together' calls us to action to support on another and to focus on the positive environment we all need to survive in the world."

She said the effects of child abuse and neglect last a lifetime.

Miller said during the past two years as the public struggled with COVID-19, support services provided by DCFS to families in crisis became even more important.

“The pandemic weighed heavily on the mental health of so many families,” Miller said. “Through it all we never wavered on our mission to strengthen families and keep children safe.”

She said the state found new ways to support the families it is charged with serving.

“Adoptions were finalized over Zoom,” she said. “We created a new mobile app so our youth could stay connected to their loved ones, caseworkers and support systems.”

She said the state created systems it make it easier for anyone to report child abuse and neglect.

“We are coming out of the pandemic stronger and more resilient than ever,” Miller she said.

The pinwheel cutouts T-shirts and large pinwheel will remain display will be on display throughout April. The pinwheel is the national symbol for child abuse prevention.

The pinwheel suggests whimsy and childlike notions and serves as reminder of the innocence of childhood.

“Children who live with violence act out, perform poorly in school and more likely to commit assault themselves and use alcohol and drugs at a higher rate,” Mudge said. “Step up, play your role and help us end the cycle of abuse.”