


Local

# Education key to Preventing Child Abuse, event organizers say

 By Jacob Mulliken Messenger-Inquirer

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As National Child Abuse Prevention month reaches its second week, awareness and education are front and center.

To this end, GRADD Community Collaboration for Children and Family Engagement Coordinator Kristy Clark has set up various free events throughout the month geared toward abuse prevention and identification.

"The primary focus is to bring awareness into our community that child abuse does exist in our region," she said. "The goal is to provide parents and families with resources that will improve the quality of life in the home."

The first, Stand Against Child Abuse, will be on the front lawn of Kentucky Wesleyan College on Friday. This event, beginning at 4:30 p.m., is meant to offer a family fun element combined with a layout of the various family resources available to families in crisis.

"We want families to come out and enjoy themselves, but also learn about prevention and gain important parenting skills. If they know that they have a support system, hopefully, occurrences of abuse will lessen."

To continue the April-long community awareness drive, GRADD will be hosting a drug abuse prevention summit at its facility at 300 GRADD Way. The summit, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on April 23, will be opened by Kentucky State Trooper Corey King, who will discuss substance abuse trends specific to Kentucky.

The keynote speaker of the summit, author David Parnell, spent 23 years as a substance abuser, and now lets his actions as a former addict serve as a cautionary tale about the dangers of methamphetamine, Clark said.

Aside from the April programming, Clark also actively works throughout the year aiding GRADD counties in gaining mini-grants through the organization to help various organizations fund training and assistance programs to families in crisis and community members, she said.

"We have two agencies that were able to obtain funding through us," she said. "The Boys and Girls Club are offering multiple anti-bully courses, and Intervention Associates in Henderson received a mini-grant through the program to fund their Children's Program Workshop Kit, a training to assist people in working with children of alcoholics and addicts."

Over the almost 15 years that initiatives like Stand Against Child Abuse have been in existence in Owensboro and around Kentucky, the incidents of child abuse have increased, said Michelle Baize, clinical associate for the Two Rivers Region.

"There has been a steady increase partly due to the environment that we live in today," she said. "The drugs are worse and the heroin epidemic that is moving in are major causes of incidents of abuse."

Baize, who has partnered with Clark over the past five years, believes that some of the most important aspects of the April initiatives are a focus on what to look for and who to call if child abuse is suspected.

Currently, according to Baize, Daviess County has 147 children in foster care that have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. In her 17-county region that includes Daviess, from Feb. 1, 2018, to Jan. 31, 2019, 3,460 children were the victim of abuse and neglect. That's why these initiatives are so important, she said.

"The numbers are startling," she said. "However, the positive is that as community members are becoming more educated. We are receiving more calls so that we can identify and aid children in need."

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