



Community can help prevent child abuse through volunteering, awareness

By Linda Roush

FamiliesFirst Network of Lakeview

Can you prevent child abuse and neglect? As April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, now is a good time to ask what can be done to help keep children in our area safe.

The blue and silver pinwheel is being used throughout our community to bring awareness to prevention efforts.

Nurturing home environments, safe places to play, good medical care and stimulating schools are all needed to help children grow up safe and healthy.

Unfortunately, many parents struggle with complicated issues that hinder their ability to adequately provide for their children.

"Strengthening families and preventing child abuse require the shared commitment of individuals and organizations," says Janice Thomas, Circuit

One administrator for the Department of Children and Families. "There are so many ways to help strengthen families so a child never has to experience the trauma of abuse or neglect."

So how does someone help? Friendship and mutual support for a family you know is the easiest. Parents seek advice from family and friends when they have a question, so helping to guide parental responses to children's behavior will strengthen parenting skills.

When a family is in a crisis, respond with support either directly to the family or through support of community agencies that can help. Homeless shelters, food pantries and many other agencies all need support, particularly in tough economic times.

Learn about resources in your community. The Fleet and Family Support Center offers services for military families

and can be reached at 452-5990.

Other community services are United Way's First Call for Help — an information and referral service. The state of Florida also offers a free and confidential Florida Parent Helpline with information on a variety of parenting issues by calling (800)-FLA-LOVE.

Volunteer to help with activities that support children's social and emotional development, whether through schools, church, mentoring programs, after-school programs or sport leagues.

"All families benefit from the help of strong, supportive friends, neighborhoods and communities," says Ann Bernard, director of FamiliesFirst Network of Lakeview. "We can all play a role in helping our children thrive."

Lastly, look for early warning signs of child abuse or

neglect.

If you witness a child being harmed, see evidence of abuse or a child tells you about abuse, call the Florida Abuse Registry Hotline at (800)-96ABUSE.

FamiliesFirst Network of Lakeview Center, the community-based child protective agency for Northwest Florida, annually provides services to nearly 5,000 children whose families have had identified neglect or abuse.

When community supports for troubled families can't keep a child safe, child protective services are a necessary step to assist families in addressing often complicated issues.

The community can help at this point as well. Becoming a foster parent to shelter children during the process can be a tremendous help for children in need. Of course, some children will not be able to be reunited with their families, so becoming an adoptive family will give

these children the stable forever home they need.

During April the Fleet and Family Support Center on NASP will promote "Awareness and Prevention of Child Abuse" and the "Month of the Military Child".

The center will be hosting a block party that will include information and resources available to military families.

The block party is scheduled for April 7 from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. in front of FFSC Bldg. 625.

The block party will also have games, carnival-type activities, gifts and prizes for all age groups. The event is open to all military and their families. For information call 452-5990.

If you would like additional information on what you can do to help prevent child abuse and neglect or to become a foster or adoptive parent, call Families First Network at 453-7745.



Pinwheels provided by FamiliesFirst Network of Lakeview in Pensacola were used recently at the entrance at Naval Air Station Pensacola to promote awareness of child abuse. Photo by Phyllis Hain

History of child abuse month

From Phyllis Hain

Fleet and Family Support Center

In the early 1980s, Congress made a commitment to identifying and implementing solutions to child abuse. Recognizing the alarming rate at which children continued to be abused and neglected and the need for innovative programs to prevent child abuse and assist parents and families affected by maltreatment, Congress first designated a week for child abuse awareness. Then in 1983 April was proclaimed the first National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Since then, child

abuse and neglect awareness activities have been promoted across the country every year in April.

The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (OCAN) coordinates Child Abuse Prevention Month, providing information and releasing updated national statistics about child abuse and neglect each April.

In 2003 OCAN recast the National Child Abuse Prevention Initiative as a yearlong effort.

This initiative was launched at the 14th national conference on child abuse and neglect, which was devoted to the theme of prevention.

A national press conference was the setting

for the release of the publication "Emerging Practices in the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect."

In 2004, there was emerging consensus among organizations that building public will for child abuse prevention required engaging the public in efforts to strengthen and support families and enhance parenting skills.

Today, the Child Abuse Prevention Initiative is an opportunity for communities across the country to keep children safe, provide the support families need to stay together and raise children and youth to be happy, secure and stable adults.

Child Abuse Prevention Month: Need to defend our children

Dear Editor:

The Department of Navy (DoN) participates in a nationwide tradition of observing April as Child Abuse Prevention Month.

We observe the month with many public awareness and education activities involving both military and civilian efforts.

DoN community service and law enforcement organizations will come together to share ideas and to partner on this nationwide observance.

With many organizations throughout each installation working toward a common goal, it is quite appropriate that we have adopted the theme "Defend Our Children — End Child Abuse Now" for our observance efforts.

April is devoted to celebrating everything we can do to transform

our communities into places that care about and actively support families and children.

By making sure all parents in our community have access to quality child care, affordable health services, parenting education resources and substance and mental health programs, we make progress toward what the month stands for, the prevention of child abuse!

Child Abuse Prevention Month is about connecting all of these things so that solutions to child abuse receive the attention that we need and that people expect.

It is not enough to care about the problems of child abuse and neglect and to address the consequences.

We also have to pay attention to the kinds of efforts that will prevent it from happening in the first place.

Learn more about what you and your community can do to support child abuse prevention. It's a shared responsibility and we are stronger together.

A few specific things you can do in April and throughout the year to prevent child abuse and neglect:

- Attend local child abuse prevention month events;
- Educate yourself and others about child abuse and its prevention;
- Be a nurturing parent and make children a priority;
- Reach out to your neighbors. Isolation is often a contributing factor to child abuse; and
- Know the warning signs of abuse and report it.

Although April has been designated as Child Abuse Prevention Month, our efforts to highlight this issue will

continue through May and June.

By sustaining our message over a three-month period, we will reinforce its importance and continue to increase awareness throughout our community.

These are all of our children and we must work together to ensure they grow up happy and healthy in a safe environment.

"Defend Our Children — End Child Abuse Now.

From Phyllis Hain

Fleet and Family Support Center

People interested in submitting a signed letter to the editor can send them to Scott Hallford at scott.hallford@navy.mil.