

Promoting awareness with purple

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Staff Reporter

The purple ribbon campaign is a symbol for Child Abuse Prevention month.

A provincial effort that began 12 years ago, over 50 children's aid societies participate.

Family and Children's Services Niagara use the month of October to promote awareness through the media and through the purple ribbon campaign.

Ann Godfrey, director of development and public relations, explains that they targeted different groups with ribbons this year.

Both the municipal and regional councils are wearing the ribbons along with schools and churches.

Three to five thousand ribbons have been distributed thus far.

"This is about awareness. We know that within families there's a secrecy and this creates a hopeless situation," explains Ms. Godfrey.

It is difficult for a community to acknowledge that there are kids being hurt within the community because it's an unpleasant topic.

In Niagara, there are 5000 calls a year, while 3500 of those calls are investigated.

1200 of those calls turn into protection cases and 650 of those calls are in FACS care.

Ms. Godfrey explains how even though people don't like to think abuse happens here it is still the responsibility of the community to pick up the phone if they detect something.

"If you don't report it, who will?" asks Ms. Godfrey.

She speaks of different

reasons why people may be hesitant to call.

Sometimes people feel as though there is not enough proof however the burden of proof does not rely on the person reporting but rather the social worker when they investigate.

Other times people worry about retaliation but people do have the option of reporting anonymously.

Lastly, people worry that the children will be taken from their families and this only happens when it is absolutely necessary and is a voluntary act with consent of the kids. It is rare that kids are just taken away immediately.

Often time's family members and friends will be asked to care for the children.

This awareness program looks at the basic care and safety of children and allows people to become aware and educated.

"The community is our eyes and ears," explains Ms. Godfrey.

She also discusses discipline and how this does

not need to involve abuse.

"Discipline needs to be positive. Discipline is about learning."

Although abuse is predominantly one of the most important factors when assessing a family, there are other areas that are necessary to examine.

Chronic neglect is a reason to call FACS. When a child's basic needs aren't met, the child is in danger.

Lack of supervision is also a reason as well as inappropriate discipline.

There is a community standard that has been set and over time things are changing.

Spanking is not effective and most people do not like to hit their kids.

Laws have also changed regarding spanking.

"People don't intend to hurt their kids, if you are angry it's hard to control."

There are many factors that result in child abuse, neglect or lack of supervision including substance abuse, violence, clinical depression and economical issues. Any combination of these plus the already tough job of parenting can result in a negative environment.

Kids need to be protected because the long-term effects can hurt both the kids and the community.

"The kids see themselves as victims."

In a sense it can become a chain. If the kids are being abused, they may do poor in school, they may not go to post-secondary, they may get a poor job and so on.

Sometimes they end up in the correction system.

As a community people need to join together to look out for children who are too young to do it themselves.

It is crucial to help make this difference.



Photo by Chrissy Sadowski
Carol Jones, a First Response Worker at FACS, answers questions to a concerned citizen.