

STEPHENVILLE EMPIRE-TRIBUNE

Blue ribbons bring awareness to Child Abuse Prevention Month

By **Ashley Inge**

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Paluxy River Children's Advocacy Center in Granbury is spreading awareness about April being Child Abuse Prevention Month by decorating the squares of Stephenville, Glen Rose and Granbury with two blue ribbons in each town.

Normally, the blue ribbons are put up around the squares of those three towns on April 1, but because of COVID-19, the ribbons were put up on Friday, April 17.

"We had a lot of prevention activities planned for April [and] we were all so disappointed that we couldn't have those celebrations. We did feel like we needed to get something out to the community to represent Child Abuse Prevention Month," said Margaret Cohenour, executive director at PRCAC. "It's a big deal, especially for us because obviously if we can prevent child abuse, that would be our ultimate goal."

One of their annual activities is their pinwheel garden, where pinwheels are planted in a garden in Granbury with each pinwheel representing a confirmed child abuse case.

However, with the increase in cases of COVID-19, Paluxy River had to shut down their activity and instead, created a virtual pinwheel garden that was viewed by over 15,00 people.

"What we really stress in April is that nine out of 10 children are never going to tell anybody that they've been abused," Cohenour said. "Statistics say only one in 10 children do talk, so our focus has been trying to get a lot of information out there, especially to adults who see children like teachers, parents, relatives, just to be aware of what to look for and to make those reports."

Cohenour said Paluxy River has been reaching out to schools in the area and providing teachers with educational and instructional videos.

PRCAC is also still conducting forensic interviews and telehealth counseling services remotely as well as face-to-face interviews with precautions.

“We are still taking care of children who have been abused and being a part of that investigative process by having those interviews, and just continuing to focus on outreach and prevention and get that message out. It gives you an idea of how important April is for child abuse prevention and what we’re having to do as an alternative to make sure we get all of that information out there,” Cohenour said.

Cohenour said statewide intake reports show that there has been a 40-60 percent reduction in the number of calls being made regarding child abuse, but she doesn’t believe there has been a huge drop in the number of child abuse cases; she believes that more people are becoming aware and recognizing the signs to report.

“I think that when we see more children that have been abused in our community it’s because the awareness has been raised and more people are making those calls so when we see a drop, I would love to think we’d solved the problem,” she said. “Ideally the goal of children advocacy centers of Texas is that we would eliminate child abuse throughout Texas. We know it’s lofty but it’s worth striving for. Our mission is to promote the healing of child abuse but also to keep it from happening so that’s our primary focus in the month of April is to do what we can to prevent it from happening in the first place, but if it does, we’re there and we’re going to help them through the interview process and counseling services to help them with the healing.”

For more information and to support Paluxy River Children’s Advocacy Center, visit their website at paluxyrivercac.org or call their main number at 817-573-0292.



▲ HIDE CAPTION
Traci Cropper, community education coordinator for Paluxy River Children's Advocacy Center, poses with a 'No Excuse for Child Abuse' blue ribbon. (CONTRIBUTED)