

Stop the Silence rally to raise awareness of violent crimes in Erath County

LeAnda Staebner

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In 2022, 504 Child Protective Services reports were made in Erath County, according to the Paluxy River Children's Advocacy Center.

On Thursday, the community is welcome to an event to help raise awareness of these crimes and others and the resources available to its victims as the PRCAC, Cross Timbers Family Services and many other organizations host the annual Stop the Silence rally at 6 p.m. at the Erath County Courthouse.

“Stop the Silence is a rally meant to bring about awareness and knowledge of existing resources for victims of violent crimes, such as child abuse, sexual assault, and general violent crimes here in Erath County,” said Laura Gambino, executive director of Cross Timbers



Traci Cooper-Ives, director of Community Education and Engagement for the Paluxy River Children's Advocacy Center, recently spoke to the Rotary Club of Stephenville about our center and Child Abuse Prevention Month. *Courtesy of Paluxy River Children's Advocacy Center.*

Silence

Family Services. “Our event is kid friendly and will have crime prevention activities for their involvement.”

Following an opening ceremony with the national anthem, there will be a flag presentation by the Tarleton Corps of Cadets, reading of the Stop the Silence Proclamation and a wreath dedication by the Erath County Sheriff’s Office Honor Guard as well as a welcome from the local district attorney and other community officials.

In addition, area law enforcement, EMS, and non-profit agencies will be on site with informational booths and interactive games. There will also be food prepared by the Tarleton Corps of Cadets “Grill Team” for sale by donation to help fund next year’s event.

“April is Child Abuse Prevention and Sexual Assault Awareness Month as well as National Crime Victims’ Rights Week (April 23-29),” Gambino said. “We want to prevent and educate about these crimes in our community as well as support those victims as they go through their recovery.”

One of the ways that the PRCAC kicked off Child Abuse Prevention Month was by planting a pinwheel garden in each of the counties that it serves, including Erath, Somervell and Hood. Each pinwheel planted represents a CPS report made in the county in 2022. In 2022, Erath County had 504 CPS reports; Somervell County had 132 CPS reports; and Hood County had 728 CPS reports, according to the agency.

On March 31, the garden, featuring blue pinwheels — the official color of awareness for Child Abuse Prevention Month — was planted at the PRCAC Stephenville office, 1359 W. South Loop. Local law enforcement, PRCAC staff and volunteers of all ages helped place the pinwheels as a reminder to those in Erath County who suffered child abuse in 2022.

“We are blown away by all of the volunteers and community members who came and helped us plant our Pinwheel Gardens in Granbury, Stephenville, and Glen Rose,” reads a Facebook post from PRCAC. “We hope as you drive by these gardens throughout the month of April you will remember the bravery of the children who made an outcry and think about the adults who made a report when they suspected a child was being abused.”

In 2022, Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas reports 67,558 children “received critical services at a Texas CAC.”

Of those children, 65% were female and 35% male, the majority of whom (45%) were in the 6-12 age group. Nineteen percent were in the 0-5 age group and 36% in the 13-17 age group, according to statistics from cactx.org/ child-abuse-in-texas.

The majority of reports were related to sexual abuse at 67%. Other reports include 16% physical abuse; 6% child witness to a crime; 6% neglect; 2% sexual and physical abuse; and 1% fatalities.

In addition, 686 of the children were involved in sex trafficking; 98% of the victims knew their alleged perpetrator; and 21% of the alleged perpetrators were juveniles, the website states.

“Child abuse happens in every county. Join us as we take time to honor the brave children who made an outcry, the adults who reported their suspicions, and the community partners who stepped in to help,” the post from PRCAC states. “Child abuse is defined as ‘doing, or failing to do something that results in harm or risk of harm to a child’. Any child can become a victim of abuse. No race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic demographic is immune. Educating our community is one of the top ways to help prevent child abuse from happening.”

If you suspect a child is being abused, call 800-252-5400 or contact local law enforcement. Abuse can also be reported to the National Child Abuse Hotline at 800-422-4453.

National Crime Victims’ Rights Week (April 23-29)

Since 1981, National Crime Victims’ Rights Week has challenged the nation to confront and remove barriers to achieving justice for all victims of crime. Every April, the Office for Victims of Crime, which is under the umbrella of the federal Department of Justice, leads communities throughout the country in their annual observances of NCVRW.

“The 2023 theme — Survivor Voices: Elevate. Engage. Effect Change. — calls upon communities to amplify the voices of survivors and commit to creating an environment where survivors have the confidence that they will be heard, believed, and

supported,” according to information from ovc.ojp.gov/program/nationalcrime-victims-rights-week/overview

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April 2023 marks the 22nd anniversary of Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

“The theme of Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2023 is ‘Drawing Connections: Prevention Demands Equity.’ This April’s campaign calls on all individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions to change ourselves and the systems surrounding us to build racial equity and respect,” according to information from nsvrc.org/saam “Systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and others contribute to higher rates of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse,” the site reads.

Statistics show: – More than 1 in 4 non-Hispanic Black women (29%) in the United States were raped in their lifetime.

– More than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3%) have experienced violence in their lifetime.

– 1 in 3 Hispanic women (34.8%) reported unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime.

– 32.9% of adults with intellectual disabilities have experienced sexual violence.

– 47% of all transgender people have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.

(Information from: <https://www.nsvrc.org/saam/drawingconnections>) “We join together as a community to lock arms and support each other because we know that it takes all of us united to stop violent crime,” — Stop the Silence social media.



In March, students from Tarleton State University helped the Cross Timbers Family Services office prepare for the Stop the Silence rally. They delivered posters all over town to spread the word and created awareness posters for the event. *Courtesy of Cross Timbers Family Services*