

Schuyler Sun

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COMMUNITY

REMEMBER THE KIDS

Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month and Week of the Young Child in full swing

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SCHUYLER SUN

The intersection of the Week of the Young Child (April 8-12) with Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month (April) is far from a coincidence, Early Childhood Community Coordinator Kim Parsons said. It's entirely intentional.

"It's talking about caring for children, providing services families need to thrive. We know that sometimes when families don't have support or resources they need it can be stressful and that can lead to negligence and abuse cases," Parsons said.

That's part of why the Columbus Area United Way, the Community Family Part-

nership and Communities for Kids recognize the week of events every year, Parsons said. It's about celebrating the children themselves and the people involved in their care and education.

"We need to be creating more awareness around how important early childhood care is to our economic success our community, that child care is really infrastructure," Parsons said. "We can build houses for people in the community, we can have plenty of jobs, but if we don't have quality child care for those families in those houses, they're not going to come and not going to stay."

Things kicked off Monday with Sing

With Me, Baby and Music Monday at the Schuyler Public Library. Wednesday was Work Together Wednesday, featuring the Work it Out Wombats from the same-named PBS Kids TV show. Thursday, from 4:30-6 p.m. at the Schuyler Central high School's West Gym, Cookies with Cops returns, where youngsters can meet local law enforcement and they and their parents can get helpful resources from local agencies. This year, the Nebraska State Patrol will join for the first time. Last, on Friday, kids can have a little athletic fun at the Schuyler Middle School fieldhouse

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from 5:30-7 p.m. for Tots on the Turf.

On April 2, Mayor Art Lindberg officially declared Schuyler's acknowledgment and participation in the Week of the Young Child at a Schuyler City Council meeting. This is Schuyler's third year doing so, Parsons said. As a fun extra, the CFP's Elevated and Equitable Early Care and Education Committee will be delivering gifts to all credited early child care providers, such as flowers. Early childhood education still has a massive need, Parsons said.

"In Schuyler we have a gap number of about 180 kids, that number is the amount of children under six with both available parents working, who are not in licensed child care," Parsons said. "This is to create awareness around the important of high-quality early care and education and to show appreciation for those who do care for

our kids."

Parsons and several other members of the community heard from Colfax County Attorney Bruce Prenda, a participant in the Community Family Partnership, last week about child abuse, for Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month.

"Prevention is a product of partnerships and that's what is at the core of the Community and Family Partnership, so the county attorney is one part of a larger system that's in place to meet the needs of families and children," Prenda said. "The system itself is a combination of not just law enforcement and courts and prosecutors and defense attorneys, but it's also a coalition of policymakers, community providers, state and local human services and schools."

Prenda went on to say that this network of partnerships means he gets to work with law enforcement, schools and community organizations for the prevention of abuse, through things like organizing truancy forms and collaborat-

ing with school administrators to identify abuse.

"We're engaging the community resources and forming those partners partner, with the United Way, also CHI here in Schuyler, through behavioral health groups and I partner with the Child Advocacy Center in Columbus and the Center for Survivors, also in Columbus. And then we have victim advocate position in the county attorney's office here and in Columbus," Prenda said.

In Colfax County and Schuyler, Prenda said, a couple forms of abuse are a little more prevalent than others, such as driving under the influence with a child in the vehicle. Schuyler Police Chief Robert Farber said the number of arrests for DUIs in Schuyler spiked this year to 52 from 27 last year. Some of those, he said, do involve a child in the vehicle, which is incredibly dangerous.

"We're always worried about quality of life, how things affect children and also the impact driving

under the influence can have with injury and fatality accidents," Farber said. "We've had a few in Colfax County over the last year or two, we're very aware of it and try to prevent it."

Sexual assault, human trafficking and physical and emotional abuse also occur, Prenda said. Even being exposed to abuse of another individual, Prenda said, can have a lasting effect, which is why the CFP recognizes this month and works to prevent abuse altogether.

"In addition to the physical and emotional abuse that children suffer from, children are also present during relationship violence otherwise known as domestic violence, and children who are present or children who are witnessing the violence in homes experience that trauma and carry that with them," Prenda said.

As a sign of remembrance, hope and awareness of the individuals working to prevent child abuse, pinwheels will be placed on the Colfax County Courthouse lawn.