

Abused children not forgotten

Some students get emotional at a rally that focuses on prevention.

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Twenty-two large, cuddly, stuffed bears lined the steps of the Marion County Courthouse on Tuesday.

Each represented a child in Oregon who died of abuse or neglect in 2002, the most recent statistics available.

Eight of the children were about the same age as Sierra Ocampo and her friends at McKinley Elementary School.

"It's really sad that can happen," the tearful 10-year-old said.

Ocampo and her fourth-grade classmates were chosen to present the bears at a child-abuse-prevention rally.

"When I told them, many of the kids were very emotional about it," teacher Donna Grossarth said. "They're taking it very seriously."

For Kendra Moe, 10, it was hard to imagine "that some children in Oregon aren't safe from child abuse. They don't deserve it because they didn't choose it."

An estimated 300 people attended the noon rally in downtown Salem, where a large sycamore tree in front of the courthouse is filled with blue ribbons in remembrance of confirmed victims of child abuse in Oregon.

The ribbons, all 8,424 of them, flapped in the breeze as advocates, politicians and law enforcement officials spoke to raise awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month.

"As bad as this is," Gov. Ted Kulongoski said, "I've been told that in 2003 the numbers will even be worse.

"Where are these abused and neglected children? We don't have to look very far. They're living next door, they're sitting in your child's classroom, they're waiting in line behind you in the grocery store, they're attending your church, they might even be having sleepovers at your home."

Inga Michels' personal story about volunteering at Family Building Blocks, a relief nursery that serves high-risk children and families in Marion and Polk counties, left many in the audience wiping away tears.

Ocampo, the fourth-grader from McKinley, was just one person touched by the words of Michels, who urged others to volunteer for a child-abuse-prevention program.



Donna Grossarth (left), a teacher at McKinley Elementary School, comforts fourth-grader Sierra Ocampo, 10, on Tuesday during a rally for Child Abuse Prevention Month in downtown Salem. An estimated 300 people attended the event.

By the numbers

8,424 children in Oregon were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2002, including 988 in Marion County.

22 children died of abuse or neglect in 2002, including three in Marion County.

What you can do

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. As many local organizations work to raise awareness and show support for at-risk children, here is what you can do to help:

Advocate for community services to help families.

Volunteer your time at a local child-abuse prevention or intervention program.

Report suspected child abuse or neglect.

Contact your state legislators and urge them to support programs that support at-risk children and families.

To get help, give help or report suspected child abuse, call (503) 581-5535.