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Child Abuse Prevention Month opens with Monday vigil

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Child abuse prevention advocates will bind together this month to spread the word about a social ill they say happens too often in Douglas County.

The Child Abuse Prevention Partnership, a collaboration of some 25 nonprofits and businesses, will hold several community events during Child Abuse Prevention Month.

"Douglas County happens to have some sides to it that we're not yet proud of," said Judy Robertson, a member of CAPP. "We want people to know that there are things we can do."

According to the annual Children First

for Oregon report, 4.6 out of every 1,000 Douglas County children were abused or neglected in 2004.

The rate is 33 percent better than it was the previous year, but advocates say that could be in part due to cuts in services or decreased reporting.

Nevertheless, some advocates believe the lower rate could also be in part attributed to the efforts of CAPP, which gained a strong presence in the community last year.

"It's better, but it isn't good," said Robertson, a board member of Douglas Child Abuse Response & Evaluation Services. "We have work to do." Even though Douglas County may be

improving, the abuse rate remains higher than the state average.

That's one reason CAPP members are trying to educate the community about prevention and support services for victims this month.

The month's events will kick off with a candlelight vigil Monday evening at Stewart Park and end with a fun-filled, educational event at Wildlife Safari April 29.

The events not only educate the community, they help local agencies better partner with each other, said Jennifer Goode, Douglas C.A.R.E.S.'s executive director.

"Everybody has discovered what a great

partnership it's become and pretty readily joined in," she said.

Douglas C.A.R.E.S. has also noted a slight decrease in the number of suspected abuse cases that come through the agency, referrals in 2004.

Goode attributes the decline in part to increased awareness about how to prevent abuse.

"I think that that is reflective of the amount of education we're putting out into the community," she said. "... I would like to see the trend continue."

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