“We exist” calls for action against child abuse

Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center recognizes Child Abuse Prevention Month with public display at Daley Plaza, volunteers from NFL Alumni Chicago

In recognition of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center is hosting “We exist” at Daley Plaza today until 6 p.m. Now in its fourth year, the display calls attention to the realities of child sexual and physical abuse, and it champions the impact of the city’s coordinated services to protect children and help them heal. Displays arranged across the plaza feature children’s, caregivers’ and professionals’ firsthand accounts of preventing, responding to, reporting and healing from abuse.

“This display is a call to action for adults to recognize the prevalence of abuse, the responsibility we all have to protect children, and the possibilities of healing,” said Char Rivette, executive director of ChicagoCAC. “Through our clients’ stories, we put a face to the more than 30,000 children and families that ChicagoCAC has served since we opened our doors in 2001.”

In Chicago, approximately 2,000 reports of child sexual abuse are made to the DCFS Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-25-ABUSE) each year. These cases are referred to ChicagoCAC, where the non-profit’s staff coordinate the city’s response and provide family advocacy, forensic interviews, mental health therapy and other services to help families heal, all free of charge. Still, an estimated 20 to 40 percent of sexual abuse is ever reported to authorities, meaning at least 3,000 additional children in Chicago are victims of abuse each year – but do not get the protection and support they need to heal.

In the last year, ChicagoCAC has expanded its outreach, education and prevention efforts to better meet Chicago’s needs. Supported by TIF funding, the center opened a new addition in June, and has since launched a new series of trainings for parents, caregivers of children with disabilities, teachers, faith communities and youth-serving organizations on preventing abuse, recognizing warning signs and taking action before grooming becomes abuse. Most notably, ChicagoCAC recently partnered with Chicago Park District to train its more than 3,000 staff and implement proactive policies and procedures to keep kids safe.

“Adults are responsible for preventing abuse,” said Rivette. “Through ‘We exist,’ and our community outreach efforts, we make a topic as difficult as child sexual abuse more approachable. By raising awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month, we hope to inspire parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and every other adult in our community to get informed with ChicagoCAC’s free resources and trainings, and to take action to prevent abuse.”

Alongside ChicagoCAC, members of the NFL Alumni Chicago are volunteering their support for the exhibit. Former NFL players including Desmond Clark, Angel Rivera and Ray Austin held a press conference this morning to commit their chapter’s support for preventing abuse.

“We are proud to support Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center and ‘We exist,’” said Clark. “By bringing awareness to a sensitive and difficult subject, we hope to educate on how to prevent, recognize and respond to signs of child abuse.”

The display will be live until 6 p.m. at Daley Plaza, and ChicagoCAC staff and volunteers are on-site all day to answer questions, provide resources and give support.

For information on ChicagoCAC, its resources on preventing abuse and photos of “We exist,” visit ChicagoCAC.org/exist. Materials for the exhibit are generously donated by the Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters.

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