



## News

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### **Neglect nearly doubles** *April is Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month*

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Published: Thursday, April 8, 2010 1:08 AM EDT

#### **Number of cases investigated in Grant County**

Sexual abuse 166 ('08) 141 ('09)

Physical abuse 144 ('08) 146 ('09)

Neglect 692 ('08) 1,225 ('09)

To report child abuse or neglect, call 1-800-800-5556.

Source: Grant County Department of Child Services

Neglect of children in Grant County increased significantly in 2009, according to statistics from the local Department of Child Services office.

There were 1,225 children in Grant County investigated to have been neglected in 2009. That's nearly double the 2008 figure of 692.

The data was discussed Wednesday during the annual Kids Count luncheon of the Prevent Child Abuse council.

Children investigated as being sexually abused decreased slightly in 2009; there were 141 children in 2009 that were investigated as having been sexually abused; in 2008, there were 166 children.

Physical abuse remained about the same. In 2009, there were 146 children that DCS workers investigated as having been physically abused, up slightly from the 144 cases in 2008.

Janet Bailey, director of First Light Child Advocacy Center, said she believes the state of the economy has a lot to do with child abuse numbers.

"There is a trend with the economy, and there is a huge drug problem — that's what we see a lot of, that's what the kids talk about a lot," Bailey said.

When people struggle to make ends meet, multiple families tend to live together. People living together leads to more opportunity for sexual abuse, Bailey said.

Also, she said the lack of funds leads to lack of appropriate child care, which increases neglect and sexual abuse cases.

"The neglect number floored me. I could not believe it doubled," Bailey said.

Connie Rose, president of the PCA council and director of Family Service Society, said incidents are up, but the amount of children reporting may have also increased. She said children may be feeling more empowered to talk with school officials about problems at home.

Local officials said if there ever was a time to get involved, now is the time to help children.

Bailey encourages people to report child abuse and neglect. She worried about how many incidents are going unreported.

"So many times, we just turn our back and think someone else is going to report it, or we just don't want to get involved," Bailey said.

Joseph Combs, Grant County director of the DCS, agreed that there has been an increase in drug activity over the last couple of years. That, coupled with people not having work, leads to children being abused.

He hopes the statistics cause people to be heightened, be aware, and get involved.

The local chapter of the DCS will be starting a fatherhood program soon, as well as a mentoring program to teach people how to parent.

"I want them to get involved. Don't think someone else is going to do it," Combs said.

One positive for Grant County, he added, is that the region has high numbers for relative placement. He said children taken away from parents are best served when placed with their own families. Grant County and the region — including Blackford, Jay, Randolph and Delaware counties — is leading the way in placing children with family members.

The meeting was held at the Roseburg Event Center, where dozens from the social services and law enforcement agencies came together to review statistics and recognize people in the community who are making a difference.

Darren Reese, director of development for the city of Marion, read a proclamation on the mayor's behalf, recognizing April as Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month.

Connie Horn was presented a service award; Lauren Belcher and the entire Belcher family received a volunteer appreciation award, and John and Carolyn Gause received a volunteer service award.

Organizations to receive the Champion for Children award were American Bikers Aiming Toward Education, Grant County Probation Department, First Light Child Advocacy Center, Court Appointed Special Advocates of Grant County and the Community School of the Arts.

Speakers emphasized that local organizations can work together to succeed.

Rose said the economy of the community has been challenging, but like Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett says, poverty can't be an excuse.

She said more religious groups are stepping forward to help children. She emphasized the need to build trust with kids, because if they don't trust, all the money put into pamphlets and educational materials doesn't do very much.

"The bottom line is, it is about relationships," Rose said.

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