

PINWHEEL GARDEN CAPA raises awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month
By Nancy Hastings

HILLSDALE — In an effort to increase awareness of child abuse and neglect, Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness of Hillsdale County (CAPA) is distributing pinwheels — the symbol for child abuse prevention — as part of the national Pinwheels for Prevention campaign. Since April 2008, more than 3 million pinwheels have been distributed nationwide. On Friday morning, two Head Start classrooms went outside to plant pinwheels on their playground in observance of Child Abuse Prevention Month. “This is the fourth time CAA has partnered with us to have the children plant a garden since I have been director,” CAPA executive director Christie Campbell said. “It is a wonderful partnership and I love watching the kids get to be a part of the planting of the pinwheels.”

CAPA Hillsdale has also facilitated the planting of several other local pinwheel gardens and the installment of a billboard aimed at creating public awareness of the detriment of child abuse in Hillsdale County. Additionally, CAPA partnered with Sigma Chi Alpha Kappa Chapter (a men’s fraternity) of Hillsdale College to raise more than \$400 in support of child abuse prevention in a Child Abuse Prevention Month fundraiser. In the state of Michigan, more than 15,000 children are living in and out of home placements, Campbell said. Every day (statewide) 58 more children are identified to live in a family with allegations of abuse or neglect.

The problem is not just statewide; in Hillsdale County there are more than 80 children in foster care. According to the Department of Human Services, the top three reasons children enter foster care in Hillsdale County are parental drug use, physical abuse and domestic violence. “Statewide, the number of neglect and abuse cases is shocking,” Campbell said. “Locally and statewide these numbers are unacceptable. To think that every one of these 80 kids currently in foster care in Hillsdale have been subjected to an unhealthy and destructive home life is distressing. These are our kids, the next residents and the future of our county.”

Campbell said Hillsdale County, as rated by Kids First, a statewide assessment of child welfare on a county basis, is ranked 62nd out of the 82 counties of Michigan. “We’re definitely on the lower end of the list,” she said. “This is something that needs to change.” Campbell said CAPA’s Child Abuse Prevention Month campaign is designed to entreat community members to view each child as an individual, with hopes and dreams, affected by abuse or neglect and not simply as a number. It is estimated that every dollar spent in prevention of child abuse or neglect saves \$7 that would have been spent to right such a situation using foster care and other state and county services. Regardless of the benefit, Campbell said the fact that prevention eliminates the victim of a child abuse or neglect case is priceless.

Hillsdale Community Action Agency Children’s Program manager Cindy Rowe said representatives of the Great Start Readiness Program wanted to become involved in the awareness program because they are supporters of early childhood. “We want to work collaboratively with other organizations in the community and support victims of child abuse,” Rowe said. “We also feel it’s important for the children to be a part of this since it trickles down to the families when they take a pinwheel home and talk about what it represents in order to bring more awareness.”



Hillsdale Community Action Agency Children’s Program Manager Cindy Rowe passes out pinwheels to Head Start students who planted them on their school grounds Friday morning. PHOTOS BY NANCY HASTINGS



Douglas Sauer, 4, blows his pinwheel before decorating his playground fence in observance of Child Abuse Prevention Month.



Head Start teacher Sue Walberg helps her students decorate a playground fence with pinwheels in observance of Child Abuse Prevention Month. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTO