This page was exported from - Bancroft this Week
Export date: Thu Mar 28 14:39:40 2024 / +0000 GMT

Raising awareness of child abuse

By Sarah Sobanski

You might have noticed people wearing purple this month ? here's why.

Earlier this month, Bancroft council decided to recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month. Council also recognized the week of Oct. 16 to 22 as National Foster Family Appreciation Week. Wearing purple this month is helping to raise awareness about child abuse, something that sometimes leads to child fostering ? but not as often as you might think.

According to a press release by Highland Shores Children's Aid (HSCA), 97 per cent of children involved in children's aid services (CAS) calls remain with their families after CAS becomes involved. It said CAS focuses on intervention and recognition of in-home problems to avoid more intrusive services. Breaking up a family can be avoided through counselling, parenting programs, substance abuse treatment services and other support services that raise awareness within the family to ensure any children in the home are looked after.

The Canadian Red Cross (CRC) describes ?child abuse [as] any form of physical, emotional and/or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that causes injury or emotional damage to a child or youth. The misuse of power and/or a breach of trust are part of all types of child abuse.? Children develop the fundamentals of their personalities and developmental abilities between the ages of zero and six, but abuse and neglect can continue or being during a child's teenage years as well.

Reporting a child that you suspect may be in danger or may be being abused could save a life. Not only that, but it is illegal to fail to report that a child is being abused due to the Child and Family Services Act.

The *National Post* reported in 2014 that ?one-third of Canadians have suffered child abuse.? According to the CRC, over 30 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls experienced physical violence as a child in Ontario. In 2015, the HSCA suggested 165,000 Ontarians made calls to CAS ? many of them teachers and police officers.

Reporting child abuse can be hard. It might be easier for teachers and the OPP because it's something they see every day ? it's their job.

We all face the same questions when deciding to report abuse. There is a little voice, I imagine, a subconscious train of thought that encourages the bystander effect. It asks questions like is that child being abused? But then, how can I tell? If seeing that child again the next time and they seem fine or happy ? how far is too far? What is emotional abuse? What discipline is too much? Is the family struggling? Is it my place? What's the alternative? What do I know?

It's important to ignore this voice, because the facts are staggering. In 2003, the most common call to CAS was for child neglect. If this is the case, and you suspect a child is being neglected through the hardships of a struggling family, CAS can put the family in touch with support to see them fed and clothed. When it comes to sexual abuse, remember that 85 per cent of child sexual abuse victims know their abusers. A mother, father, aunt, uncle, a long time babysitter or anyone else who has built a connection with the child they are abusing can confuse and shame the child from coming forward long into adulthood. Making that call could see the person put away and begin the healing process early.

Resources are available online to find out the signs and solutions for child abuse. This editorial has only just brushed the surface of the issue. Put on something purple and Google child abuse prevention. The next time you're confronted by what to do, you could have the ability to save a life.