Local advocacy center recognizes child abuse prevention month

By Treméne Triplett
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Locally, statewide and nationally, citizens and professional organizations make extra efforts to reflect upon and schedule programming around the health and well being of our children by observing national Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.

"The purpose is two-fold: to raise the awareness about child abuse and neglect," said Joy Chuba, executive director, Children's Advocacy Center Osceola. "The other is to get information and education out to the community; to help child abuse from ever occurring. This is something that is preventable. Child sexual abuse is estimated to affect 10 percent of our children, nationally. It is underreported. Sexual abuse is just one form of child abuse. Child abuse and neglect is one of our largest public health concerns."

Officials highlight the fact that abuse or neglect of any kind is unacceptable.

"Sometimes animal abuse is the first visible sign of dysfunction in the family or future violent behavior," said Kim Staton, director of Animal Services Osceola.

See Center, page A-5

Thursday, April 28, 2016 • Online All The Time • www.aroundosceola.com • NEWS-GAZETTE, Page A5

Continued from Page A-1

County on the relationship between animal and human violence. "A lot of times what we find is that there is irrefutable connection between who will abuse or neglect an animal and the potential to neglect their children or be a part of a domestic violence situation. Some of the school shooters and in every case with serial killers, there were incidences of animal abuse."

One type of violence tends to other forms of violence, Stanton noted. "Oftentimes animals are used for leverage in domestic violence cases," she said. "They are used to control the behavior of other family members. For example, someone might say 'If you leave, I'll kill your dog.'"

Neglect and abuse are issues that the community-at-large needs to play a role in preventing.

"It is an issue that we need the entire community to understand, report and talk about," said Chuba, whose organization held a Child Abuse Prevention Resource Fair in late March to raise awareness. "There is a role that everyone has to report and prevent child abuse. People can help a new parent who is stressed; talk with their legislators for prevention programming; become a foster parent or mentor or help raise funds for abused and neglected children at-risk, along with raising funds or participating in prevention programming.

There are two ways to report it: 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873) or if you are observing abuse happening, call 911, said Chuba.

"This is a violent crime that is perpetrated upon minors, and it needs to be called in to the authorities," she said. "If you have the suspicion of abuse, you need to report it."