

EDITORIALS

Turn Polk County blue for prevention

April is Child Abuse Prevention month. Though journalists aren't typically the kind to jump on an "awareness" month bandwagon, Child Abuse Prevention is something we feel strongly about here at the *Itemizer*.

Child abuse is one of those things that sticks around like a bad gene in a DNA sequence. It can get started somewhere along the generational line, and, like a freight train, slam through generation after generation until it feels normal.

People who grow up in abusive homes may turn into abusers themselves — and may not even realize that their behavior is not normal — or they may turn into victims who then seek abusers as partners, because being a victim is what they know. It's what's comfortable.

Even when someone has the realization that they are being abusive, or being abused, it is difficult to get out of the situation and throw the breaks on that freight train, but help is out there.

Polk County offers resources for parents, from the Indoor Play Park to Mid-Valley Parenting classes to the twice-a-month respite care offered by Family Building Blocks. If you need help to be a better parent or partner, seek it now. But what if you're not a parent, or the child isn't yours?

Sure, you can volunteer at a variety of agencies or hotlines, but the first — and perhaps simplest — step is to put your cellphone in your pocket or purse and listen to what is going on around you. Befriend your neighbors. Don't be quick to judge someone's actions, but listen to what he or she is going through.

When someone is in an abusive family — children or adults — it can feel isolated and alone. From the outside, the escape route seems clear: Leave your abusive spouse. Take the kids and leave. From the inside, it can feel like being locked up in Alcatraz.

Reach out a hand to a stranger and offer to listen without judgement. Let them know there are resources available through Polk County programs. Be the light in someone's darkness. When it comes to preventing child abuse, it starts with us adults.

PUBLIC AGENDA

Public Agenda is a listing of upcoming meetings for governmental and nongovernmental agencies in Polk County. To submit a meeting, send it at least two weeks before the actual meeting date to the *Itemizer-ObsERVER* via email (ionews@polkio.com).

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

- **Monmouth Planning Commission** — 7 p.m., Volunteer Hall, 144 Warren St. S., Monmouth. 503-838-0725.
- **Polk County Board of Commissioners** — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, first floor conference room, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- **Independence City Council** — 6:15 p.m., Independence Civic Center, 555 S. Main St., Independence. 503-838-1212.

THURSDAY, APRIL 6

- **Ash Creek Water Control District Board of Directors** — 7 a.m., J's Restaurant, 220 N. Pacific Highway, Monmouth. 503-838-1212.

MONDAY, APRIL 10

- **Hops and Heritage Festival Commission** — 6 p.m., Independence Elks Lodge, 289 S. Main St., Independence. 503-838-1212.
- **Dallas School Board** — 6:30 p.m., Dallas School District office, 111 SW Ash St., Dallas. 503-623-5594.

TUESDAY, APRIL 11

- **Independence City Council** — 7 p.m., Independence Civic Center, 555 S. Main St., Independence. 503-838-1212.
- **Polk County Board of Commission work session** — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, BOC office, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12

- **Monmouth Tree Advisory Board** — 7 p.m., Monmouth Senior Center, 180 Warren St. S., Monmouth. 503-838-0725.
- **Independence Heritage Museum Commission** — 4 p.m., Independence Heritage Museum, 112 S. Third St., Independence. 503-838-1212.
- **Monmouth Library Advisory Board** — 7 a.m., Monmouth Public Library, 168 Ecols St. S., Monmouth. 503-838-0725.
- **Monmouth Parks and Recreation Board** — 7 p.m., Volunteer Hall, 144 Warren St. S., Monmouth. 503-838-0725.
- **Polk County Board of Commissioners** — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, first floor conference room, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- **Polk Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors** — 6 p.m., 580 Main St., Suite A, Dallas. 503-623-9680.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the biplane pilot on March 28

Who was that lunatic in the yellow biplane who

buzzed/terrorized south Monmouth for an hour around 8 a.m. on March 28? He or she must have made 40 to 50 runs across town at treetop level — every one

louder than a muffler that would have gotten a ticket on a street. Is that legal?

*Truman Price
Monmouth*

A WORD FROM INDY POLICE

Report suspected abuse

April is Child Abuse Awareness month here in Polk County.

I hope that the information provided as follows will help educate individuals regarding the types of child abuse, general facts pertaining to child abuse, as well as the prevention of child abuse.

Most importantly, I hope that this information will

also empower those in our communities to report any sign of child abuse, as reporting is the most

crucial (and often underutilized) aspect of child abuse.

The following information is drawn from my own personal experiences as a patrol officer, as well as a general detective, and includes the ongoing training I have received while employed by the city.

I should note that I am currently assigned to "Detectives" and although I will investigate any type of crime, the vast majority of my cases consist of child abuse and sex abuse (often sexual abuse of children).

To start, I think it is important to know what constitutes child abuse, and what is prosecutable by law.

For the purposes of this article, I will only focus on what information law enforcement can use to build an investigation, however, it is important to note that other agencies, such as DHS, may have different protocols or standards.

For law enforcement to investigate claims of child abuse, the alleged abuse must consist of child sexual abuse, child physical abuse, or child neglect.

Child sexual abuse and physical abuse are often difficult to detect, as many children react differently when victimized in this way.

Some children may have noticeable injuries, while others will show no physical or emotional signs of abuse.

Most often, the perpetrator or alleged offender is known to the child — it is very rare that the offender is a stranger.

Those who offend often prey upon children whose life circumstances make them more vulnerable. Offenders may be either adults or older children.

Many offenders will take advantage of their unsupervised access to the child, and can even be vested members of our community; church members or leaders, coaches, daycare providers, and school volunteers are only a few examples of members in our community that may take advantage of their role to victimize a child. Other times, the offender is a family member, or someone else who has access to the child within the home.

To create an even bigger challenge, children rarely tell others that they have been or are being abused.

Furthermore, when children do tell, they often initially only tell parts of the abuse, and the entire event(s) are gradually disclosed over time. Children who are removed from the alleged perpetrator are also more likely to make disclosures.

Per Oregon law, child neglect occurs when a child is left unattended in a place for such a period of time that the health and welfare of that child is endangered.

Child neglect can also occur when a child is left at, or allowed to stay in, a place where drugs are sold, delivered, or manufactured.

Child neglect can also occur when a child is left at, or allowed to stay in, a home that is not fit for use (no power, water, etc.).

It is not uncommon for children victimized in this way to miss several days of school, unexcused, or to appear unreasonably hungry, tired, or unkempt.

Some children, however, are able to adapt to their circumstances, and show no signs of neglect at all.

All of the above information can seem discouraging

and overwhelming, yet there are preventative measures that can be utilized by any community member.

First, become aware of the facts; child abuse is prevalent in all communities, and often unreported.

If officials do not know about the alleged abuse, no action can be taken. Reporting is the simplest preventative measure that can be taken, however, reporting must be done upon the first sign of abuse, or initial disclosure by a child.

Reporting may be done, even anonymously, by calling 1-855-503-SAFE, or by calling your local law enforcement agency or Department of Human Services representatives.

Once reported, law enforcement and DHS can work collaboratively on the investigation.

Simply being present in youth activities, such as volunteering in churches, schools, and sports, or dropping by unexpectedly when your child is spending time with older children or adults, are all ways to become a positive mentor, and proactive in reporting any signs of child abuse.

Monitoring devices such as computers, tablets, and phones, is also important, as the exploitation of children on the internet and social media is rising.

In closing, some adults may find themselves in a position in which a child is reporting abuse directly to them.

It is imperative that the adult does not question the child at all, but simply listens, and displays minimal emotional responses.

Although it may be challenging, confronting the alleged suspect is never a good idea, as it can interfere with the potential investigation.

It is important to remember that children rarely lie about such matters; if a child mentions any form of abuse or neglect, the disclosure must be reported to law enforcement or DHS immediately.

— Detective Sarah Scharf

How to Contact Officials

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