

LIGHT

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abuse prevention. The task force includes officials from Families First, Department of Human Services, Grant County Health Department, Prevent Child Abuse Oregon, Community Counseling Solutions, Heart of Grant County and local schools.

Lisa Weigum with Community Counseling Solutions said the task force saw a need for the Darkness to Light training in Grant County.

"We're seeing these trends of mental health struggles, substance abuse, child abuse and neglect," she said.

The school, city, county court, parks and recreation and others, she said, have "all been eager to do their part in raising awareness."

Wade Cates of Boise, who is a 2013 Grant Union graduate, has been working with members of the task force to advocate for others who have experienced this type of abuse.

"As a survivor of childhood sex abuse, my goal is to highlight the ways in which adults can be better informed in their interactions with youth," Cates said. "We do a great job in our community of stepping up for children, but all of us can take it a step further by being informed, learning prevention strategies, knowing how to identify the signs of abuse and acting responsibly when child abuse is suspected or confirmed."

Cates said the training is an excellent opportunity for everyone in the community to learn how to be better youth mentors and to show they are committed to the safety of children.

"I cannot think of a valid reason for a child to be abused, ever," he said. "It is the responsibility of the adults to take this issue seriously."

ABUSE

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class attendance, in all of my relationships with the people around me, in my self-confidence, in my mental health and even in my physical health. I had worked so hard to keep my abuse a secret, ashamed and feeling like I was somehow responsible for what had happened that I began accepting less from myself and from the people around me. I strayed so far from the future that I had set out to achieve for myself that I did not even recognize my own life.

Just before my 21st birthday, I realized that holding in the abuse, as I had constantly been pressured to do by my offender, was tearing my life apart. Finally, for the first time, I knew that I needed to tell someone. I chose to tell the person who I was dating at the time, not even realizing the abuse was as severe as it was until I began to talk about it. The more I said, the more we were both shocked at the breadth of the situation.

During that same year, I told my parents and my sister. Word of the abuse quickly spread among my extended family. I was fortunate that the people around me all took my story very seriously and believed every word I said. None of them blamed me for anything that happened to me in the ways that I had blamed myself.

Eventually, after a great deal of soul searching and talking with friends and family close to me, I knew that I needed to come forward and pursue legal action in order to ensure the safety of all children who were certain to be exposed to interaction with my offender.

I made contact with an Oregon State Police officer who took my statement about the abuse. In doing so, I was not even aware of the journey that I was about to embark on. Many would refer to it as a battle, but for me it was one of the first steps in my continued path toward healing



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter
Pinwheels are the symbol of children during April's Child Abuse Prevention Month.

and in finding my voice again. I received and continue to receive counseling and mental health support at no cost to me, as a survivor of a violent crime.

The process of prosecution and the mental health battles have not been easy, and I will never try to make it sound easy, but it has changed my life for the better. The disentanglement of my emotions included revisiting a time in my life that I was ashamed of, felt guilty for and wasn't easy to talk about. Despite the overwhelming difficulty of the process, I know that because I came forward about the abuse and continue to honor the process, I am happier and more successful in life than I have ever been. Whereas I had spent nights alone, crying, since I came forward, I am not alone with the burden anymore.

What do you think people should know about this type of abuse?

Abuse thrives in silence. Child sexual abuse is naturally difficult for anyone to discuss, whether someone has been abused or not. The unfortunate fact is that the solution lies in every person being informed and having uncomfortable conversations about it. If we continue to make the topic taboo, abused children will feel how I felt: that it is unacceptable to talk about what is happening or has happened to them. In order for someone to disclose that they have been sexually abused, they must feel safe, that they are supported and that they will be believed.

Abuse of this nature has the potential to impact far more people than just an abuser and a survivor. In my situation, the list of people hurt by what happened to me goes well beyond myself, and there is only one guilty person.

Especially in a community as small as ours, people must consider that a single person is responsible, that it doesn't reflect on anyone else and that any other line of thought victimizes a group of people who are entirely innocent.

How do you think prevention and response to child sexual abuse can be improved?

There are countless ways that prevention of sexual abuse and response to sexual abuse could be improved, and every single person has a responsibility to take part in working to keep children safe.

When, still today, one in 10 children are sexually abused before they turn 18, something has got to change.

The first step to improving both prevention and response is to be informed on the facts. The next step is to have open, honest conversations about sex abuse with adults

and with children. Abuse thrives in silence. It would stop dead in its tracks if everyone were willing to have these difficult conversations, if we could talk about this crime as seriously as we do others, if perpetrators were living among an informed, vocal society.

It is important that anyone who says that they have been abused is believed and taken seriously, that every person works to make survivors of sexual abuse feel safe and supported and that abuse is reported to the proper authorities immediately so that offenders can be prosecuted and be made to register as sex offenders.

Is there anything you would tell other victims?

First, there are not words for me to express how sorry I am that you are carrying the burden of being abused and that your heart is filled with the immeasurable pain that abuse leaves behind. What we experienced was not natural and so it does leave a mark on our hearts.

Second, you are not alone no matter how alone you may feel right now. One thing I know for certain is that there are trustworthy, compassionate people all around us, who we don't even realize care.

The things my abuser said to me had me unwilling to trust the people around me, always fearing that people would not believe me, worrying about the many impacts my truth would have on the people around me. He took my voice away.

No matter what you experienced, no matter how small you may feel that it was, it did happen and it was inhumane of your abuser to strip your voice away.

The most powerful feeling I have ever experienced was the moment I decided to take my voice back and vowed to help others do the same.

You're already a warrior to have survived the abuse. Now, go get your voice back!

GUNS

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some training and perhaps start working for the district by late August, Shelley said.

But there are pros and cons to hiring an SRO, he said. One of them is the distance from Humbolt Elementary and Grant Union

Junior-Senior High School to the school in Seneca.

"One officer can't be everywhere," he said.

The school board took input on the subject at their April 18 meeting in Seneca. Williams said his goal is to make school safer, whether it was with an SRO or by arming teachers or staff. He said he believes the local community

is comfortable with firearms.

Shelley said he had been polling teachers and staff and noted there were "lots of things to look at." Who would be armed? Would they receive extra pay? How would they be trained?

"I want to start the discussion early," he said.

Shelley said he sought an opinion from Rebekah Jacobson, a Salem attorney the district has consulted with in the past, and Matt McGowan, a sales executive with Payne West Insurance, was on the speaker phone.

Taking public input

M.T. Anderson, a rancher from Izee whose children will attend district schools for eight more years, told the board he had thought a long time about the subject, spoken

to parents at Seneca and Grant Union, looked at statistics and thought it through carefully.

"As a parent, I would be comfortable with the idea," he said.

He emphasized that arming teachers should be voluntary and not limited to teachers — all school staff should be eligible, but the school board must ensure that teachers and staff receive proper training.

Anderson noted that school shootings are typically over in about three minutes, so the weapons should not be locked up. He recommended teachers carry concealed weapons on their person.

He also warned the board that if a public forum is held to discuss the issue, about 80 percent of the people would support arming teachers or staff, but the minority could be very vocal and influence the

perceived results. He also expected to hear strong opposition from people without children in district schools — even people who were not residents.

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer noted that the board had discussed the subject in the past.

"I'm glad you're talking about it again," he said.

Palmer noted that schools have fire extinguishers and hold fire drills, so it made sense to prepare for school shootings, too. He advised the board to hire a consultant for advice and to look at other schools for ideas.

Palmer suggested the district begin with a selection process to determine which candidates were most comfortable handling a gun. He also offered to make available a computerized training program for active shooter situations.

"It's kind of fun, actually," he said.

Palmer emphasized that arming teachers or staff would be a preventive measure — a shooter might avoid going to a school that was known to have armed teachers or staff.

A myriad of issues

"You're on the right track," McGowan told the board over the phone.

Gathering public input was an important first step, he said, but many insurance policy questions needed to be answered.

A person carrying a weapon, for example, might not be covered. He also suggested securing guns in a safe with a "thumb lock" to allow quick access.

McGowan noted that another school district in Oregon was leading the way in

this approach to school safety and was considering working with law enforcement to deputize teachers or staff.

"You're not the only people talking about this," McGowan said.

Cori Anderson noted that current training calls for teachers and students to hide from a shooter, but she would prefer to have them protected by someone with a gun.

Shelley agreed, saying it would be better to fight back than cower in a corner.

Several board members asked about other preventive measures, in particular recognizing ahead of time when people with mental health problems posed a threat.

"It needs to be part of the discussion," board member Amy Stiner said.

Board member Haley Walker said she'd like to see some data from previous shooting incidents to understand what could have been done to prevent the shooting. She also noted that teachers or staff might need special training so they could handle the emotional trauma from taking a human life.

Josh Walker, who has children at the Seneca School, said he didn't want to make a fear-based decision, and he believed there was a "slim chance" of a shooting happening here, but he supported the idea of arming teachers or staff.

"I don't see a downside to this," he said.

Palmer noted that support for the idea exists among the public — one person told him he would be willing to donate one or two guns to help the school district address costs.

Discussion on the subject will continue at 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 25, at the Grant Union Junior-Senior High School. The meeting will be open to the public.

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FRI - SUN (4:00) 7:30
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ISLE OF DOGS (PG-13)
Set in Japan, Isle of Dogs follows a boy's odyssey in search of his lost dog.
FRI & SAT (4:20) 7:20 9:40
SUNDAY (4:20) 7:20

MON-WEED 7:20

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A woman wakes from a fall believing she is the most beautiful and capable woman on the planet.
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SUNDAY (4:10) 7:10
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