

a community guide to preventing CHILD ABUSE

Candlelight Vigil: Is enough being done in prevention?

By DANA LARSEN
Pilot-Tribune Editor

The toll is enough to break your heart. Children beaten to death by a mother's live-in lover. One burned to death in a fire set by her older sister after she was sexually abused by her father. A baby dropped into a toilet as the mother gave birth; left to drown. Children neglected, abandoned, tortured, murdered.

As Judge Mary Timko read the list at this year's Child Abuse Vigil held on the courthouse green this week, members of the crowd stepped forward to lay a red rose at the feet of each cardboard cut-out child, representing the children who have died in the past year in Iowa due to abuse.

The message is especially poignant in Storm Lake, where two well-known cases of abandoned infants found dead and never identified have ripped the community's collective heart.

Shari O'Bannon, a longtime volunteer with the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program in the county, opened the Vigil with a prayer to "light a candle of hope" for the victims and in the hopes that "maybe someday children will live in a world where they are safe from this abuse."

Judge Rick Kimble, a former assistant county attorney who specialized in juvenile cases, noted the small turnout for the event, with only a scattering of about two dozen citizens beside a crisp line of police officers and firemen in their dress uniforms.

"I believe there are about 12,000 people in Storm Lake, and we don't have very many of them here today," the keynote speaker said, urging the community to get involved in the prevention efforts.

Kimble said that he grew up in a sheltered world, and only when he started working juvenile court cases in Buena Vista County did he come to appreciate how good his own parents were.

"I hadn't realized the problems we were facing. I knew there were rules for removing children from homes in Iowa, but surely removals wouldn't happen very often," he said.

Soon, a call came in from a detective - an abused teenager with a harrowing story to tell. Then two younger siblings who had been sexually and physically abused. And the caseload just kept growing.

There are many misconceptions. "People think it happens in certain families, with certain types of people. Not so - it is truly across the board," he said. "In the nice homes on the south side of the lake or in the trailer park or in the little houses



At the local Child Abuse Vigil, a young volunteer helped to place the roses at cutouts representing children lost to child abuse in Iowa in 2005. / Photo by Dana Larsen

just down from the courthouse."

He recalls one hearing in which a father finally admitted having beat his son repeatedly in the face, then ordered him to go to school and tell them he had fallen down a flight of stairs. It was

a "good" family, and no one questioned the story. Another time, he threw a baseball into his son's face and injured him, and concocted a story of how the boy had been hurt missing a catch in a baseball game.

A Prayer for the Children

The following prayer was read to open the 2006 Child Abuse Prevention Vigil in Storm Lake this week. We share it here in the hopes that it will remind others to take special care of the children.

Compassionate and Gracious One

We pray this day for the children who sneak popsicles before supper. For children who erase holes in math workbooks, who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those who can't run down the street in a new pair of sneakers. For children who never go to a circus and live in an x-rated world.

We pray for children who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions, and hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.

And we pray for those who never get dessert, who have no safe blanket to drag behind them, who don't have and rooms to clean up, whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser, and whose monsters ARE real. We pray for children whose nightmares come in the daytime. Who aren't spoiled by anyone; who are hungry when they go to bed and cry themselves to sleep. Who live and move, but have no being.

We pray for children who want to be carried and for those who must be carried. And for those who will grab the hand of anyone kind enough to offer.

And now Lord, we turn the hearts of those who abuse and assault children, unto You, that their living may be changed by Your forgiving love; and their abusive actions and oppressive ways brought to an end.

The Numbers

There were 33 confirmed cases of child abuse in Storm Lake in 2005, a decrease from the high of 46 cases in 2004.

The state estimates that over 20 children per 1,000 suffer some form of abuse.

Still no clues in Child of God, Baby Doe cases in Storm Lake

Another year has passed, and the community is no closer to closure in the heartbreaking deaths of infants known only as "Child of God" and "Baby Doe." No matter how much time has gone, however, local law enforcement continues to keep both cases open, and hope that one day a clue will lead to the identity of the two babies.

The Child of God

It was May 30, 2002 when workers found the child of undetermined race in a shredder at the Harold Rowley Recycling Center.

At the time of death the male child was about 24 hours old. The infant's remains were found in the trash chute on the conveyor where recyclables were separated. The infant's body had been damaged by the shredder, according to Buena Vista County Sheriff Chuck Eddy.

Since the case was outside the Storm Lake city limits, Buena Vista County Sheriff Chuck Eddy headed up the investigation. The infant's body was taken to the state

medical examiner's office in Des Moines. The child was ruled out as being African-American. Due to the condition of the child's remains, it was



impossible to determine whether it was born alive.

There were few clues to go on in determining where the child had been disposed.

There were time cards and

some infant clothing found near the child and the sheriff's office hoped they could provide clues in determining where the child had been disposed. In addition to the Buena Vista County Sheriff's office, there was assistance from the Storm Lake Police Department and the Iowa DCI.

"I don't know if we had a warm lead even from the start," Eddy said. It still remains undetermined whether the parents were from Storm Lake, another community using the recycling center, or totally outside the area.

Lost Baby Cases / See Page 2B

CASA volunteers represent children's needs

Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers, CASAs for short, act as the voice of the child who has been abused or neglected and become part of the child welfare "system".

The system can be intimidating to adults, let alone to children who may be physically, sexually, or emotionally abused or neglected and find themselves taken from the parental home and placed in foster care or another care facility. Among the myriad parties' interests, the child's needs may be forgotten. That's where CASAs come into the picture.

Kathy Fritz, CASA coordinator for Buena Vista, Cherokee, and Ida Counties, recruits and trains CASA volunteers who act in the best interests of children. And CASAs are needed now more than ever.

Becoming a CASA volunteer requires a criminal background check both state and nationwide. The prospective CASA is investigated for any sexual abuse offenses and also checked against the child abuse registry. Fritz interviews each volunteer who is also fingerprinted. Every step is of course not intended to intimidate the prospective CASA volunteer but to ensure the safety of any children with whom the CASA might have contact.

Once the background check is approved, the CASA waits for training to come to his or her area. A total of 30 hours of training is required, usually condensed into a weekend of training. The sessions include an overview of the child welfare system and now the CASA works within that system. Fritz also trains CASAs outside the formal sessions.

Each CASA takes just one case, which could

be either a child or a sibling group. Fritz said CASAs need to make sure they talk to people involved with the child. She said the CASA can in fact talk to anyone with whom he or she wishes. The CASA then reports on findings and makes recommendations.

In many areas, the child's attorney is the same as the guardian ad litem. However, Fritz said that is not the case locally where the child's CASA acts as the guardian ad litem.

Iowa Code requires that a CASA make one visit a month. The CASA contacts parties involved in the child's life. In addition to the child, that might include biological parents, foster parents, teachers, daycare providers, the child's attorney, and social workers. The CASA then writes a report to the judge outlining any concerns about the child's care or treatment. Fritz asks CASAs to be objective in their reports, still looking out for in the child's interests.

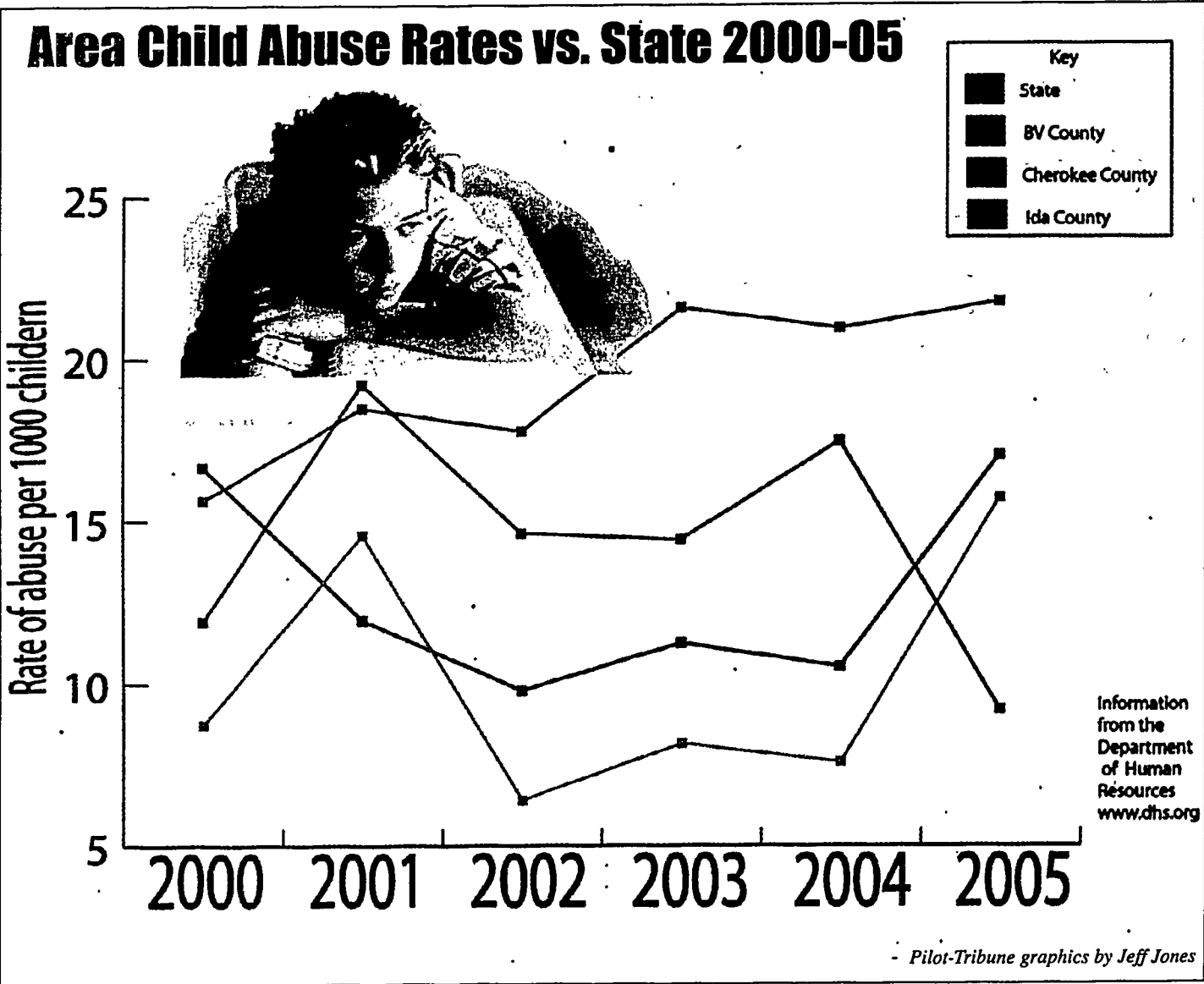
There are about 30 volunteers assigned to cases in the area. The program is funded through the State of Iowa executive branch. The program is directly supervised by the CASA and Foster Care Review Board which falls under auspices of the Child Advocacy Board which is in turn supervised by the Department of Inspections and Appeals.

Fritz is still actively looking for CASA volunteers. So what are the qualifications?

"Anyone who is concerned about children and childcare issues," Fritz said. "I am definitely looking for volunteers."

Fritz said there are monthly CASA training sessions throughout Iowa. For further information, call CASA at 712-749-5184.

The Pilot's Community Guide to Preventing Child Abuse



Vigil: 'No magic solutions'

Continued from page 1B

"The people in that man's church thought they knew him very well. They came and testified for his character. During cross examination I had to tell them, 'Does it surprise you that your pillar of the community beats his child and then makes him lie about it?'"

While the cardboard cutouts are a stark reminder of deadly abuse, the names come from other parts of the state, Kimble said.

"People think it can't be going on around this town. I used to think that. Now that I think more about it, it was going on around me even back in my own sheltered upbringing," he said. "There are numerous cases and lots of removals."

There is no magic solution when it comes to preventing child abuse, he said.

"DHS is not going to save us. We have a good juvenile court system here, but it is not going to save us. We have to have people's involvement. We are not all the way there yet. People have to do what they can."

"The only way we can even approach an answer is if the entire community gets involved."

This means reporting suspected abuse when we see and hear it, he said.

"We have to get serious about what is going on," he said.

After the vigil ended for another year, a child helped to gather up the roses and pull up the cutout children to be stored away for another year. The crowd shuffled away, a few stopping to pick up wristbands reading "protect the children" or a blue ribbon.

But the people who see the impact of abuse first hand wonder if it is enough.

"Hopefully we can do something for the children before their names show up on our cardboard cutouts," Judge Tikmo mused.

"You wonder what it is going to take to get people to wake up and get involved," O'Bannon said.

And with that, a gust of chilly wind blew the last candle out.

Lost Baby Cases: Police, sheriff keep cold cases open, long for clues to infant identities

Continued from page 1B

The case stirred controversy nationwide when the sheriff's department sought to obtain records on recent pregnancies from the Planned Parenthood clinic in Storm Lake, and that effort was eventually dropped.

A few women who were suspects were asked to provide blood samples for DNA comparison. However, Eddy said there was no match.

Anyone possibly having information on the Child of God case may contact the Buena Vista County Sheriff's Department at 712-749-2530.

Baby Doe

rip for seeds to ash bud t

Storm Lake Public Safety Director Mark Prosser says, "Any crime against a person we take personally. We take this very personally."

Prosser was speaking of the death of Baby Doe, a two-day-old baby boy whose body was found wrapped in a sweatshirt Oct. 17, 1995 in an abandoned mobile home at 502C West Eighth St. in Storm Lake.

The child died of "exposure associated with neglect" Prosser said. "It's currently the only unsolved homicide we have. We followed a large amount of leads" over a three-year period, with the last active lead in November 1998, Prosser said.

Baby Doe was found when Storm Lake police officers noticed that the mobile home appeared as

though it had been broken into. Upon entering the home, they found the baby.

"There was no reason for that death," Prosser said. "That child was an otherwise healthy child."

In addition to checking on local suspects, Storm Lake police even checked on leads of possible parents who may have been visiting Storm Lake. Blood samples were taken of any suspects, some giving samples voluntarily and others under court order.

"The way that baby died alone and wrapped in a sweatshirt just makes it very sad," Prosser said.

Both of the babies brought out the compassion of the community, and were buried with a community memorial and donations. Baby Doe, buried at Buena Vista Memorial Cemetery west

of Storm Lake, still does not have a headstone or a name.

Prosser said that mothers have other options that abandoning a child, such as was the case of Baby Doe. Girls who have an unwanted pregnancy can talk to a school counselor or put the child up for adoption.

"Our medical center here is a safe haven," Prosser said of Buena Vista Regional Medical Center. "They are equipped to take care of that child."

Anyone with any information about the case may contact the Storm Lake Police Department at 712-732-8010.

SCHEDULE FOR BUENA VISTA COUNTY IMMUNIZATIONS CLINICS

1709 E. Richland Street, Storm Lake, Iowa 50588 • 712-749-2548

April 11th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	15th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
25th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Sept. 12th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
May 9th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	26th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
23th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Oct. 10th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
June 6th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	24th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
20th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Nov. 14th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
July 11th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	28th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
25th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Dec. 5th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Aug. 1st:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	19th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
8th:	1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.		

- Our clinics are walk-in with no appointments necessary.
- Children must be accompanied by an adult to sign necessary papers.
- No prescription is necessary but you must bring your immunization record with you.
- Bring Title 19 card.
- A \$5.00 donation per vaccine is suggested to help defray costs - No one is ever turned away for inability to pay.
- Immunizations can be given if child has slight cold or is on

- antibiotics.
- Boosters for children entering school may be given any time after four years of age.
- TB Mantoux is NOT a part of immunizations. There is a charge of \$10.00 per test.
- We are unable to give immunizations to those who are on Hawkeye Insurance.

Buena Vista County Public Health may give immunizations according to the VFC Schedule to any children; infant through 12th grade who are: • enrolled in Medicaid or • whose health insurance does not cover 100% of the cost of vaccinations (that includes children who have to meet a deductible before the vaccines are paid by insurance or • who have no health insurance at all or • who are American Indian or Alaskan native.

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What is Family STEPS?:

Family STEPS is a family support program. We believe that a child's first and best teacher is his or her parent. Family STEPS offers support and education for all families with a child ages 0 - 5 or expecting a child in Crawford, Sac, and Buena Vista Counties.

Family STEPS offers home visits to parents to help provide a healthy start in life, and also to reduce the stress associated with the birth of a baby. Your family support worker can help give you and your child the most valuable gift of all - loving and nurturing parents. Your family support worker will become a friend you can count on to help you decide what you want for your child, and then help you get it.

What can Family STEPS assist with me?:

You decide what you may need from your family support worker. Some areas you may be interested in include: • Preparing for your baby • Prenatal support • Caring for your baby's needs and still taking care of yourself • What to expect as your baby grows • Locating quality child care • Building parenting skills and confidence as a parent • Linkage to a medical provider; transportation when needed • Referrals to community resources.

There is no charge for any family.