



Community Renewal Team
Changing lives... Creating opportunity!

MEDIA RELEASE

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Mayor's Office, CRT Teamed Up to End Child Abuse on South Green *Children's March and Flag-Raising Raises Awareness in downtown Middletown*

MIDDLETOWN – The message of child abuse prevention is often a difficult one to spread, but the impact it can have on keeping our children safe is vital. In observance of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, Community Renewal Team (CRT) and several prominent advocates urged a crowd on the South Green in Middletown April 12 to make a pledge to end the abuse forever at the 4th Annual Child Abuse Prevention Day.

“Keeping children safe and letting them know that it is OK to tell an adult that they think something is wrong is so incredibly important,” said CRT’s Disability and Mental Health Manager Bethanne Vergean. “Our statistics say that 70% of children who are abused never come forward, so we have to work on prevention and on ways we can empower children to speak up against abuse.”

Led by remarks from Middletown Mayor Daniel Drew and Amy Platt, a child abuse survivor who told her personal story of abuse and perseverance, supporters raised a flag symbolizing child abuse prevention to commemorate the event.

"It's incredibly important that people defend the ability of helping children that might be in a difficult position, because those children many times can't speak out for themselves," said Mayor Drew.

As the flag went up, more than 100 preschoolers from CRT classrooms arrived with self-made flags featuring their handprints in blue paint, with blue as the symbol of child abuse prevention. Vergean and the other organizers timed the children's arrival so their ears would not hear Platt's traumatic story, which described how she was molested as a child by both of her grandfathers.

"We were an average family until one day my life's plan was changed," she said at the top of her story.

Platt suffered for years in silence, and she told the crowd that she hoped no one will have to

endure the pain and discomfort she felt for so long.

"You have to be able to speak up, and if one person doesn't listen where you're trying to tell somebody something, then you have to go to another," she advised the crowd. "It's important to have a network of people you feel can support you."

Other speakers at the event included State Senator Len Suzio, Children's Trust Fund Director Karen Foley-Schain, Child Advocate Mickey Kramer and CRT's Early Care and Education (ECE) Director Emilie Montgomery.

At the event, stacks of "end child abuse" pledge cards were available for people to add their name to the list of supporters who want to see an end to abuse. Vergean said that she hopes to receive at least 5,000 pledge card signed by the end of April.

Vergean has also organized volunteer-reader days later this month where adults will read the age-appropriate book *My Body Belongs to Me* by Jill Starishevsky in all 72 of CRT's ECE classrooms. In Hartford the reader day will be April 20.

President Barack Obama proclaimed April as National Child Abuse Prevention month in 2009. The event is part of CRT's ongoing Campaign To End Domestic Violence. For more information, or to make your pledge today, visit <http://www.crtct.org/EndDomesticViolence>.

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Community Renewal Team, Inc. is the designated Community Action Agency for Middlesex and Hartford Counties and is the largest non-profit provider of human services in Connecticut. The agency's mission is Preparing Our Community to Meet Life's Challenges. The mission is achieved each day by helping people and families become self-sufficient while making sure basic needs are met. CRT's programs include Head Start, Meals on Wheels, energy assistance, supportive housing and shelters, and many others, serving people in more than 60 cities and towns in both our core catchment area and throughout Connecticut. www.crtct.org