

• Story

Pinwheel initiative represents child abuse awareness in Boulder County

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From right: Kim Heard, Longmont Ending Violence Initiative co-coordinator, and Trish Wood, Blue Sky Bridge Prevention Education Associate, place pinwheels for child abuse awareness month outside the

Longmont Public Safety building on Thursday. According to Project Pinwheel two children are abused in ...

Photos: Project Pinwheel for Child Abuse Awareness Month



How to participate this April

- Accept a pinwheel this Sunday from Blue Sky Bridge members passing them out at the [Tulip Fairy & Elf Festival](#) from 1 to 5 p.m. at Boulder's Pearl Street Mall
- Visit the pinwheel gardens at Roosevelt Park in Longmont and Central Park in Boulder. Trees in those parks and Waneka Lake Park in Lafayette also will be wrapped in blue yarn and informational signs.
- Wear blue on Mondays
- Sign up at vfccasa.org/events/light-of-hope by Saturday for CASA's Light of Hope fundraiser and luncheon 11:30 to 1 p.m. April 20 at Touchdown Club at Folsom Field, 1100 Stadium Drive
- Attend a free Stewards of Children training:
 - 6 to 8 p.m. April 4 or 4 to 6 p.m. April 19 at the Longmont Safety and Justice Center, 225 Kimbark St.
 - 4 to 6 p.m. April 10 or noon to 2 p.m. April 24 at Blue Sky Bridge, 2619 Iris Hollow Place in Boulder

A garden of colorful pinwheels spun in unison during a brief breeze at noon Thursday in front of the Longmont Safety and Justice Center in the first of several displays across Boulder County.

Blue Sky Bridge spokeswoman Faith Motter said she hopes passersby will reflect on how child abuse remains a widespread problem in Colorado, and their awareness of it makes an impact.

"It is prevalent, but it doesn't have to be," Motter said.

April is both Child Abuse Prevention Month and Sexual Assault Awareness Month, recognized by agencies centered on the issues with various events as well as the Pinwheel Project.

In Roosevelt Park in Longmont and Central Park in Boulder, Motter said, 320 pinwheels each will be set up next week, representing the number of forensic interviews Blue Sky Bridge conducted in cases alleging child abuse in 2016.

"We have seen some slight increase and decrease, but generally it's anywhere from 300 to 350 children a year that come for our forensic interview program," Motter said.

"We estimate that one in 10 children are victims of sex assault before their 18th birthday, but sadly only 10 percent of those children will tell an adult."

The other nine that don't report struggle in silence, she said.

On Thursday, Trish Wood, of Blue Sky Bridge, and Kim Heard, of the Longmont Ending Violence Initiative, knelt in a planter to the left of the center's front doors, where they pushed around 100 pinwheels into the dirt.

They said this coming month is about reminding people that the sad reality of child abuse is preventable. Wood said it's estimated that two children are abused every day in Boulder County.

"I was just reading about one case yesterday," Heard said. "It breaks my heart."

The committee also will pass out window decals to businesses who want to participate in the awareness month.

Also in Boulder's Central Park, members of the Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA) will be wrapping trees with blue yarn for the second year near the pinwheel garden, displayed from April 6 to 13.

Trees will also be wrapped and ornamented with informational signs about child abuse in Longmont's Roosevelt Park and Lafayette's Waneka Lake Park from April 9 to 17.

CASA Executive Director Nia Wassink said last year, they paired each of 160 children with a volunteer, which is an increase from previous years.

She said at the 16th annual Light of Hope luncheon April 20, attendees can donate to the organization and sign up to be a volunteer. She said they want to help more children — more than their current reach of one-third of children in the system.

"I think folks don't realize that these kids kind of have a hard road. It isn't just getting them out of that unsafe environment," Wassink said, adding that the intervention is followed by years of healing. "It's years and years before some of them can be in a better, safer place."

Motter said a study by the National Children's Advocacy Center shows that since awareness of child sexual abuse rose in the 1990s, there has been a 50 percent decline in the occurrence of sexual abuse across the country.

"We believe that there really is power in prevention," Motter said.

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Nearly 100 pinwheels are pictured outside the Longmont Public Safety building on Thursday. (Matthew Jonas / Staff Photographer)

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