

PRESS RELEASE

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Keeping Children Safe – The Message of *Hands Around the Courthouse*

Macomb, Illinois, April 8, 2010 – *Hands Around the Courthouse* on April 22 will be a reminder to Macomb residents that they share the responsibility for standing united against child abuse.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and in a public display of concern, WIRC-CAA Victim Services is sponsoring *Hands Around the Courthouse* at the McDonough County Courthouse in Macomb on Thursday, April 22, at 12:15 pm. Everyone concerned about the welfare of children is invited to participate and will be asked to hold a continuous blue ribbon around the courthouse building. A representative from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will speak briefly about the problem of child abuse locally and regionally.

Victim Services assisted 491 children in 2009 that had either directly experienced sexual or domestic abuse or had witnessed domestic violence. The program serves children and their families in Hancock, Henderson, McDonough and Warren counties. “Coming together as a community for *Hands Around the Courthouse* reminds us that we all have a responsibility to keep children safe,” said Diane Mayfield, Director of WIRC-CAA Victim Services.

Statewide, the Illinois DCFS hotline will handle nearly 125,000 reports of child abuse and neglect this year. Child abuse is the mistreatment of a child under the age of 18, most often by a parent, caretaker, someone living in their home or someone who works with or around children. Child abuse can be physical (such as burns or broken bones), sexual (such as fondling or incest) or emotional. Neglect happens when a parent or responsible caretaker fails to provide adequate supervision, food, clothing, shelter or other basic needs for a child.

Nationally, according to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, there were 906,000 substantiated reports of child abuse in 2008. The rate of victimization is 12.3 per 1,000 children. Children ages 0-3 are the most likely to experience abuse. “The most vulnerable segment of our population, the children, are at risk of abuse on a daily basis. We ask everyone who witnesses child abuse to call the Child Abuse Hot Line at 800-25-ABUSE or 217-525-2606,” said Victim Services Legal/Child Advocate Josh Mercer.