

## Child Abuse Prevention Month: Wear a blue ribbon

In 1989, a grandmother from Norfolk, Va., tied a blue ribbon around her car's antenna. It was Bonnie Finney's way of remembering her 3-year-old grandson, Michael Wayne "Bubba" Dickerson, who was beaten to death by his mother's abusive boyfriend.

Finney's efforts to understand how such a tragedy could happen to her family grew into a personal crusade to end child abuse. Others in Norfolk and around Virginia picked up the blue ribbon as a symbol of child abuse prevention.

Today, it has become part of a nationwide campaign designating April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. In this community, 9,000 suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect were reported last year.

The more you know about child abuse and neglect, the more abhorrent its existence becomes:

Nearly 80 percent of deaths related to child abuse and neglect in America occur to children 3 and under.



Abused children are 33 percent more likely to be arrested for a crime, both as a juvenile and as an adult, and are more than twice as likely to attempt suicide.

Michigan residents can help fight child abuse while paying taxes. Line 30 on your Michigan return allows you to donate a minimum of \$5 to the Children's Trust Fund. Donations help fund local councils, including the Child and Family Resource Council here in Kent County. Donations on the 2005 state tax return are tax deductible in 2006.

According to a study by Michigan State University, costs related to child abuse and neglect — in Michigan alone — total about \$1.8 billion a year.

The cost of child abuse prevention is less than 3 percent of the cost of treating the effects of abuse and neglect.

Roughly 25 percent of children from abusive households in Michigan will require special education services.

It's estimated that up to 85 percent of all incidents of child abuse and neglect could be prevented if communities worked together to address their root causes.

You can do your part. It might start with a simple gesture, as it did in Norfolk. Wear a blue ribbon this month, publicly showing your commitment to children. Support one another as parents and caregivers. Report concerns. Contact your elected representatives on the national, state and local level and encourage them to promote child-friendly policies.

SOURCES: KENT COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, MICHIGAN CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE, NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT INFORMATION.