

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April 23 is Blue Ribbon Sabbath

IT'S TIME FOR A RENEWED COMMITMENT: Keep Kids Safe

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. It is a time for all adults to rededicate themselves, as the U. S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect urged, "to know, watch, and support their neighbors' children and to offer help when needed to their neighbors' families."

During April, many people wear or display blue ribbons to symbolize their promise to join in a community effort to protect children. A grandmother in Virginia began this custom in memory of her grandson, who died as a result of abuse. She used the blue ribbon as a symbol of her own dedication to ensuring that no child would be bruised by physical abuse, exploitation, or neglect.

Blue Ribbon Sabbath, observed this year in most churches in southern Greenville County and nearby communities in Anderson and Laurens counties on April 23 (and in other faiths in April worship services of their choice), presents a special opportunity to renew the commitment to Keep Kids Safe. More than 100 area congregations participated in Blue Ribbon Sabbath in 2005, an increase of 38% over 2004. Still more congregations are expected to observe Blue Ribbon Sabbath in 2006.

Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church was one of 34 congregations that conducted special services or activities in 2005 in addition to distributing Strong Communities' bulletin inserts and blue ribbons on Blue Ribbon Sabbath. During the month, the church sponsored a parent workshop, organized a trip to a child health and safety fair hosted by nearby Washington Baptist Church, and collected cell phones for Safe Harbor shelter and supplies for children in two preschool programs. On Blue Ribbon Sabbath, the minister's sermon focused on God's love for children and parents' responsibilities for their care. The children's and youth choirs sang and Honor Roll students were recognized.

During April 2006, several communities of faith, including some who are joining forces to labor together, are expected to launch projects to provide support to families. On Blue Ribbon Sabbath weekend, scores of volunteers plan to accomplish a room makeover at Caroline Community Center in Williamston so the space will be suitable for parent-child activities. Piedmont Emergency Relief Center volunteers will share information about their family support efforts with

fellow worshipers in their community on Blue Ribbon Sabbath and recruit new helpers for the work.

Blue Ribbon Sabbath is a time to remember the children who suffer assaults or experience deprivation that hinders healthy development. It is a time to celebrate parents and other family members, teachers at school and church, and others in the community who give special care to children and nurture them as they grow.

Perhaps most importantly, Blue Ribbon Sabbath is a time for commitment when families of faith rededicate themselves to safeguard the children in their midst and to make support for all parents and other caregivers part of the daily life of the congregation.

STRONG COMMUNITIES is a comprehensive initiative to prevent abuse and neglect of children in southern Greenville County and nearby communities in surrounding counties. Supported by a generous grant from The Duke Endowment to the Clemson University Research Foundation, STRONG COMMUNITIES unites basic community institutions, including faith-based organizations, and hundreds of volunteers to make the Golden Rule a norm of everyday life. Every child and every parent should know that whenever they have reason to worry, grieve, or celebrate, someone will notice, and someone will care.

For more information, call 688-2214.