

Luminaria in Northampton shines light on child abuse prevention

April 12, 2022 | Ryan Feyre

rfeyre@thereminder.com



The Children’s Advocacy Center of Hampshire County hosted their second annual “The Little Light of Mine” luminaria display on April 8.

Reminder Publishing photo by Ryan Feyre

NORTHAMPTON – The Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) of Hampshire County spearheaded their second annual “The Little Light of Mine” luminaria display at multiple locations throughout Northampton on April 8 to commemorate Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month.

On that night, 2,200 luminarias were lit to represent the number of child abuse survivors the CAC has served since their inception in 2006.

According to Kara McElhone, the executive director of the CAC, their organization provides coordinated care for children who disclose abuse. In 2021, the CAC began this event to mark April as a month that spotlights Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention.

Additionally, the event also gives the CAC an opportunity to make sure the children they served over the years are remembered through a visual representation. “Each light represents a child who’s received services from us since we moved into our facility on Elm Street in Northampton,” said McElhone.

Lights were on display at Childs Park, the CAC, the old Hampshire County Courthouse, and homes and businesses throughout the Hampshire County community. Aside from being an awareness-raising event, “The Little Light of Mine” is also the CAC’s largest fundraising event.

The funds raised during the event will help to ensure all child survivors in the community receive a coordinated, culturally competent, multidisciplinary team response to allegations of child abuse.

The luminaria event started after the CAC reported a low volume of children who were reaching out in need of their services during the height of the pandemic in 2020. According to McElhone, this was mainly because of a lack of access in a time when social distancing and quarantining became the norm.

“Our reports were really low, and we knew that wasn’t because kids were safer,” said McElhone. “It was because kids didn’t have access to trusted adults and mandated reporters like when they were in school.”

On the flip side, in 2021, the CAC experienced the highest number of children in need of their services over a one-year period, including a 40 percent increase of children reaching out.

“The numbers have skyrocketed, and we know that will continue,” said McElhone. “We’ve had a huge surge in the number of kids coming through in the past year since things have opened up a little bit more and kids are back in school.

“We really wish we didn’t exist, but the reality is, that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before they turn 18 years old ... and the vast majority never tell anyone,” added McElhone. “When they do [reach out], the CAC brings the best of the best professionals to address the concerns and help the child heal from the trauma they endured.”

To learn more about the CAC and what they do, people can visit the website here: <https://cachampshire.org/>.