

COMMUNITY NEWS

Teddy Bear Drive Kicks Off Child Abuse Awareness Month

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By



WARM GESTURE. Michelle Villa-Abrille (left) and Lauren Carroll unloaded boxes of donated teddy bears aboard the For The Child treatment vehicle last Wednesday. —Photo by Shereen Oca

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For the past seven years, area resident Sandy Komine has sought to ensure that children of abuse do not have to go through the legal process alone.

Komine, along with 14 other volunteers, is part of the Child Abuse Response Team (CART) with For The Child, an agency that provides assistance and counseling to abused, neglected and at-risk children.

CART volunteers act as advocates for children and teens who law enforcement suspects have been sexually molested. During medical exams and interviews, they try to provide youth with emotional support by coming prepared with toys, books, counseling information for parents and a teddy bear.

"Sometimes when I show up, it's just the child and the police officer," Komine said. "For me, to think about a child being there alone makes me continue to volunteer."

Oftentimes, a child comes into the agency the following day for counseling with his or her teddy bear in tow, according to For The Child Development Director Denise Dahlhausen.

"It doesn't make a difference the age of the child," Dahlhausen said. "They all take the teddy bear and hold on to it. It is something to be comforting."

In an effort to support the work of For The Child and to kick off Child Abuse Prevention Month, Lauren Carroll,

provider relations supervisor at Willow Urgent Care, spearheaded a teddy bear drive. She was able to gather nearly 200 bears last month with the help of the Lakewood Chamber of Commerce, Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce, the Undershirt, Inc., area residents and churches. The bears were delivered last Wednesday, April 1.

"It's super exciting," Carroll said of the response from the community. "It was fun for me because I didn't know this organization existed. When I mentioned it to people, everyone knew who For The Child was. They were touched there was a group out here doing this."

To raise awareness about child abuse, For The Child will conduct the Eighth Annual Children's Circle of Friends Breakfast and fundraiser this Tuesday, April 7, at the Hyatt Regency Long Beach. It also will co-host Kids' Faire 2009 with the Junior League of Long Beach Sunday, April 26, at the For The Child offices at 4565 California Ave.

CART teams respond to 115 to 150 calls annually from hospitals in Long Beach, San Pedro and Redondo Beach, including the Community Hospital of Long Beach. The next volunteer training session will take place in May.

"Some of these cases are tragic, but at least we know we did something to help," Komine said. "And the agency helps give these children their childhood back."

For more information, call 422-8472 or visit www.forthethechild.org.

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