

Child Witness Centre supports Dress Purple cuts the ribbon on Child and Youth Advocacy Centre

October is Child Abuse Prevention Month. On October 24, communities and schools across Ontario will "Dress Purple" to show their commitment to the rights of children and youth when it comes to their safety and well-being. From 9:30 to 11:30am on October 24, a community walk will take place through Victoria Park in Kitchener, followed by a reception at Victoria Park Pavilion. Members of the Kitchener Rangers will be kicking off the event to show their support.

"We need to help raise awareness about the importance of calling Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region if anyone is concerned about the safety and well-being of a child or youth," Kitchener Rangers' President of the Board of Directors Shawn McKelvie said. "These rights are basic needs. They allow a child or youth to survive and grow to reach their full potential. It's every citizen's duty to speak up for kids."

Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region's focus on in-home, early intervention services – including counselling, parenting programs, sexual abuse treatment and more – means 97% of the families it works with get the help they need to care safely for their children at home. Only 3% of the time, Family & Children's Services must remove children from harmful, unsafe conditions and take them into foster care – although of those kids who come into foster care, 80% will go home within one year or go with other family members.

"We're highly focused on protecting children and supporting their families to stay together," Karen Spencer, Executive Director of Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, said.

Helping to prevent and heal

While long-term child abuse prevention is the ultimate goal, the reality is that children and youth in the Waterloo Region report physical or sexual assault more than once a day, on average. Sexual assault specifically is reported less than 10% of the time. This prompted the development of and official opening of the Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC), also on October 24, which brings together the Waterloo Region Police, Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region and the Child Witness Centre as the core partners to help child and youth victims and witnesses of abuse in our community.

The CYAC is located at 400 Queen St. S. in Kitchener in the Carizon Family and Community Services building.

"In the past, investigations and support for these young people and their families was often fragmented and intimidating but today, the CYAC provides seamless wraparound support for children, youth and their families, in a coordinated and collaborative way," Laura Muirhead, Executive Director of Child Witness Centre, said. "Investigations take place in a comforting, confidential, child and youth friendly space, reducing the number of times and places the young person tells what has happened to them. Our hope is that with this new approach, more children, youth and families will feel more comfortable coming forward to break the silence, and that they feel supported at every step along the way."

Waterloo Region Police Chief Bryan Larkin says he's proud to partner with the many stakeholders that have made the CYAC a reality.

"This collaborative approach speaks to the care and vibrancy we have come to expect from our community," he said. "It provides wraparound service to our youth and the necessary support and attention to their current and future needs."

If you suspect child abuse, call Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region at 519-576-0540 or the Waterloo Region Police at 519-653-7700.

"We're encouraging community members to come to help us raise awareness of child abuse on October 24, dress purple, have their own walks or join ours and use the hashtag "ibreakthesilence on social media," Spencer said. "It takes a village to keep children and youth safe."

Media Contact:

Tanya Sood

Senior Manager of Communications

Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region

(519) 576-0540 ext. 2692

tanya.sood@facswaterloo.org