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## Community Meeting Teaches How to Spot Signs of Abuse



Monument Park resident Sherri Kreissig addresses the crowd who attended a community meeting Friday to learn the signs of child and adult abuse and information about how to contact authorities with their concerns.

Residents of the Monument Park neighborhood in Perris—where 13 siblings were subjected to years of neglect and abuse—attended a community meeting Friday to learn how to spot signs of endangerment and prevent the tragedy from being repeated.

About 75 residents braved the cold to take part in the meeting, which featured Perris elected officials, law-enforcement officers and representatives of Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services and the Department of Public Social Services who answered questions from the audience.

Organized by the Monument Park Neighborhood Watch, the meeting also sought to salve the pain caused by the aftermath of the abuse on Muir Woods Road and the subsequent constant, intense, and, in some cases, sensationalized media reporting that cast the Monument Park community and the entire City in a negative light.

"Like you, we were appalled at the tragedy and saddened for the victims," Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez told the crowd. "But the actions of two people do not reflect the other 74,998 residents of the City and who you are as a community. We're here to support you so this doesn't happen ever again here or anywhere else."

Other Perris administrators and staff include Assistant City Manager Darren Madkin, Assistant City Manager Clara Miramontes, Economic Development Director Grace Williams and Economic Development Principal Management Analyst Michele Ogawa.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas, Mayor Pro-Tem Malcolm Corona, City Councilwoman Tonya Burke and City Councilman David Starr Rabb attended the outdoor meeting to show their support for the victims, who range from 2 to 29 years old and for the Monument Park community.

"Do not feel this is your responsibility," Vargas said. "It could happen anywhere. We're here to prevent this from happening ever again—anywhere."

A GoFundMe page created by the City reached its \$10,000 goal in less than a day, receiving contributions from Perris residents, employees and concerned people around the nation and as far away as the United Kingdom. The City of Perris also is creating a public service video outlining signs of adult and child neglect and agencies to contact.

"Today is about moving forward," Corona said. "This community got bombarded with attention it did not want or deserve. This is a great community. This is not a time for blame. We're here to support the community, the victims and the victims you never hear about. A community that comes together will be stronger than ever."

Burke praised Monument Park residents for attending the community meeting. Later, a candlelight vigil took place outside the home where the abuse took place. Authorities noted that the parents arrested in the case went out of the way to maintain a secretive lifestyle and seldom allowed the victims outside the home.

"Although this tragedy has happened, we have become more aware about the importance of working together to make sure it never happens again and to work to rebuild the lives of the victims," she said. "The meeting tonight says a lot about the character of this community."



Monument Park resident Joshua Tideman-Bell said the recent tragedy of 13 siblings who were neglected for years will forge a stronger bond with community residents and make it "an even better and more outstanding place to live."

### See something, say something

Riverside County Sheriff's Caption Greg Fellows, who functions at Perris Police Chief under a contract to provide law-enforcement services to the City, said people should never hesitate to call police if they see suspicious activity or people.

"Never feel you are wasting police time—you're not," Fellows said. "Even if that person is gone by the time police arrived, you have created a record that may help us solve a future crime."

Fellows said extra police patrols will be conducted over the next few days in the Monument Park community. Representatives of adult and child protective services detailed warning signs of abuse of the young, adults and the elderly.

Those include unexplained scars, bite marks evidence of malnutrition, evidence of sexual abuse, unkempt appearance, dirty clothing, poor hygiene, frequent absences from school, low self-esteem and passive or aggressive behavior. Child abuse often takes place at home but it can also occur at school, a park, in a car or even grocery store.

Signs of adult neglect include unexplained bruises or welts, sprains, broken eyeglasses, signs of being restrained like rope burns and the caregiver's refusal to allow neighbors to see the adult or elderly person. Financial abuse involves stealing money from the victim. Most instances of abuse, whether child, adult or elderly, is the result of actions by parents, step-parents or caregivers.

Reports of abuse can be made anonymously 24-hours a day. The hotline to report child abuse in Riverside County is **1-800-442-4918**. The 24-hour hotline to report adult or elderly abuse is **1-800-491-7123**.

### Candlelight vigil

Following the community meeting, several Monument Park residents made the short walk to the scene of the abuse where a candlelight vigil took place. They prayed for the victims and sang songs.

Joshua Tideman-Bell and Sherri Kreissig, Monument Park residents who organized the meeting and attended the vigil, said they hope the community and people everywhere will take the advice of law enforcement and abuse experts and make the call to notify authorities if they see or suspect abuse of any sort.

"This is an important wake-up call for us all," Kreissig said. "Don't be afraid to talk to people and get involved with what's happening in our neighborhood. We can come together as a community. And this is a good community."

Kreissig said she was pleased so many Perris officials supported the event and Monument Park.

"The support from the City was wonderful," she said.

Tideman-Bell attended the vigil with fellow Monument Park resident Salynn Simon. Both carried red balloons they left at the site where the neglect took place. Tideman-Bell and Simon are organizing a duffle-bag collection drive for the 13 siblings who face years of recovery. The duffle bags will contain socks, blankets toiletries articles like combs and shampoo and goodies like Girl Scout cookies.

Tideman-Bell said he believes the ordeal spawned by the neglect case and its aftermath will spur Monument Park residents to forge an even closer-knit community.

"We are strong community with a common goal to make our community an even better and more outstanding place to live," he said.

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