Press Release

Release Nr: 2304-02

April 14, 2023

Fort Drum Public Affairs

Blue Bike Project raises awareness for Child Abuse Prevention Month

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Oftentimes people will see an array of blue pinwheels spinning around during Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The Fort Drum Family Advocacy Program staff wanted to go a little bigger this month – and take a different path entirely – so they collected some old children’s bicycles to paint blue for static displays at Clark Hall.

“The bikes represent childhood, and childhood lost to child abuse,” said Tom Wojcikowski, FAP educator. “We chose Clark Hall as it is one of the high-volume traffic areas on post. When someone sees clusters of bikes, it draws their attention and brings them over to read what is posted on them.”

What people will read about is healthy parenting practices to engage and interact more positively with their children, as well as how to identify child abuse and report it.

Whether someone is there for an audiology or identification card appointment, or perhaps attending a Transition Assistance Program class, the colorful and informative displays at Clark Hall are hard to miss. Walking up the stairs to the second-floor offices, there’s an even larger display of blue handprints that children helped to create during a recent Pop in and Paint event.

“I am so incredibly pleased with how the handprint display turned out,” said Nicole Wetzel, FAP educator. “I love seeing the canvases stretched out across the landing. I think it is a good anchor for the entire display in Clark Hall.”

Additional handprints were collected from the child development centers and Robert C. McEwen Library, so it truly became a community project.

“The bikes and the statistics make us all think of children in the general and national community, but the actual handprints of children on post gives the whole project a personal sense of Fort Drum community,” Wetzel said.

More than 1.6 million military children serve alongside their family members across the armed forces. According to the Department of Defense’s 2021 Report on Child Abuse and Neglect and Domestic Abuse in the Military, neglect accounted for 52 percent of the reports of child maltreatment. Physical abuse made up 28 percent of the reports, emotional abuse accounted for 16 percent and four percent was reported as sexual abuse.

“Per Army Regulation 608-18, Soldiers are mandated to report child abuse,” Wojcikowski said. “If they suspect child abuse, the appropriate action is to report to law enforcement and call the New York State Child Abuse Hotline.”

The NYS hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To speak with a child abuse expert, call 1-800-342-3720. Fort Drum Military Police can be contacted at (315) 772-5156.

At Fort Drum, the Soldier and Family Readiness Division provides a wealth of services that support everyone from expectant parents to families, small and large. Whether it’s FAP, the New Parent Support Program, Relocation Readiness or the Exceptional Family Member Program, there are educators and specialists whose mission is helping to build strong and resilient Army families.

“The idea of ‘readiness’ is really the cornerstone of what we are all doing at the SFRD,” Wetzel said. “We are constantly thinking of new ideas and opportunities to connect with Soldiers and families and give them resources they need to enrich their lives and make them feel ready for whatever chapter they are dealing with.”

Wetzel said that organizing community events that are fun, informative, and inclusive – such as Baby Palooza, a Pop in and Paint class, or the Summer Safety Luau – allows SFRD representatives a chance to introduce families to the services they provide.

“The more comfortable people feel with us, the more they are willing to seek us out for additional help or services,” she said. “When we talk to Soldiers, families or even command teams about our services, we emphasize normalizing asking for help or seeking to learn something new. We invite leaders to sit in and experience our classes, so they can tell others what they are like.”

Wetzel said that the FAP classes tend to be conversational in nature, so no one feels like they are in a classroom.

“We want people to feel comfortable and like they are connecting with others and not being lectured or talked at,” she said. “Most people tell us our classes are not what they expected, but in a good way. We’ll take that as a win!”

To learn more about the Fort Drum FAP, call (315) 772-5914 or visit [www.facebook.com/FTdrumFAP](http://www.facebook.com/FTdrumFAP). FAP representatives will be available to speak with during the annual Baby Palooza event from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 27 at the Fort Drum Exchange.

For further information regarding this release, contact Public Affairs at katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil or 315-772-9043

Photo Captions:

The Fort Drum Family Advocacy Program’s Blue Bike Project hopes to draw the attention of Soldiers and family members at Clark Hall and to raise awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)