

## **Child sex abuse training breaks taboos**

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In the US, statistics show that one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

No statistics exist in the Cayman Islands, but according to someone that works on the frontline against the problem, those figure seems to hold.

Cayman Islands Crisis Centre Outreach Coordinator Carole Graham says there is no doubt child sexual abuse is a problem in Cayman, as it is virtually everywhere else in the world. "This problem crosses all socio-economic barriers, all races, creeds and colours," she says.

In Cayman, she believes child sexual abuse has been a taboo subject but slowly, she senses, things are changing.

Part of the reason for that change lay in a training programme the CICC have been running throughout this year. Created by the Darkness to Light Organisation in the US and funded in Cayman by Hedge Fund Care, Steward of Children is a prevention training programme that educates adults to prevent, recognise and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

Unlike most other programmes, it places responsibility for preventing child sexual abuse squarely on the shoulders of adults.

"We teach children strategies about how to protect themselves ... but we can't expect a six year-old to put structures in place to protect themselves alone. We have to have an expectation that adults will provide structures that provide safety for children," says Graham.

The training sessions are being offered free every Saturday throughout October and are open to all members of the public (see below for more details).

Those that have taken the training have described it as an eye-opening experience and a call to action.

One of those is Sharon Smith, vice-president of Reliable Industries Ltd.

"I have always been actively involved in my youth group and with children so I decided to do the training. When I got there the morning of the training I thought, 'four hours, gee, that's a long time', but I did it and I was so excited and so motivated afterwards."

"This training is wonderful because it teaches you to be mindful, to pay attention to detail. A lot of children that are being sexually abused – if you knew what to look for, you would be able to recognise it. But because you don't know what to look for, it can be happening right under your nose and you don't have a clue."

Such was the effect of the training on Mrs. Smith that she decided to get behind the programme by offering the company's state-of-the-art conference room for training workshops. The Cayman Islands Medical and Dental Society and Fosters Food Fair-IGA are two other organisations that have recently come on board with support.

Devised by US not-for-profit Darkness to Light, the Stewards of Children Programme is a programme described as a revolutionary, evidence based sexual abuse prevention training programme that educates adults to prevent, recognise and react responsibly to child sexual abuse. "The programme believes and teaches that child safety is an adult's job."

In time, Ms Graham would like the training to become mandatory for all organisations – including schools – that serve children.

Montessori by the Sea and the KEAYS foundation are two organisations that have already implemented that policy.

Mrs. Graham says she is finding the training is also helping some attendees come to terms with sexual abuse that they, or others close to them, have suffered.

“We have disclosures at the end of each session and I have people saying ‘this is the first time I feel I have been able to talk about this’. It helps them move on and start healing and that’s incredible.”

Ms Graham says it is exciting that the programme seems to be bringing the often taboo subject out into the light. “This is a wonderful, empowering training session – everybody can benefit from it.”

“This is about facing – and resolving – child sexual abuse with courage.”

## **FYI**

CICC will offer free training courses from 9am to 1pm at Reliable Industries on the following dates:

- 06 October
- 13 October
- 20 October
- 27 October

Places are limited to 20 per group. To register, call 949–0366.

**The Cayman Islands Crisis Centre will offer free training sessions on protecting children from sexual abuse every Saturday in October. Pictured here is CICC Outreach Coordinator Carole Graham, right, and Sharon Smith of Reliable Industries, who has recently thrown her support behind the programme. Photo: James Dimond**

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