

Financed by Paterno family, program targets child sex abuse on campuses



By [Debra Erdley](#)

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If everything goes according to plan, thousands of youths who go to Indiana University of Pennsylvania this summer for sports and academic camps won't notice anything different.

But, says Rhonda Luckey, vice president for student affairs, campers will be in a more protective setting as IUP's staff works to build a culture of child sexual abuse prevention and awareness among coaches and volunteers.

IUP is one of 14 universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education piloting a child sexual abuse prevention program that Joe Paterno's family hopes will become a model for college campuses across the nation.

The Paterno family, which set up a donor-directed trust upon the death of the storied Penn State football coach, underwrote the \$230,000 cost of the training through the "Stop It Now!" New England-based nonprofit. It is part of the family's campaign to heighten awareness and battle child sexual abuse in response to the scandal that rocked Penn State when Jerry Sandusky, a former assistant football coach, was convicted of sexually molesting boys in and around the campus.

"If my father had had the training we're now doing, he'd have known what he was dealing with," Scott Paterno said.

"Stop it Now!" formed 22 years ago to fight child abuse before it happens and to raise awareness of subtle cues that may suggest it.

The organization's director, Deborah Donovan Rice, said State System campuses that collectively enroll 112,000 students are an ideal setting to test the program.

Luckey led staffers from IUP at a two-day "Stop it Now!" seminar at Slippery Rock University, where staff from State System universities gathered to learn more about child sexual abuse and to brainstorm about responses on their campuses.

Ann Franke, a Washington attorney who consults with universities on such issues, operates a program known as Wise Results. She said the Sandusky case and several other recent scandals on college campuses prompted universities to reconsider how they handle having minors on their properties.

"In the last three years, a lot of institutions have either adopted or strengthened their policies on protecting minors and applied those protections to outside groups that use their campuses," she said.

Although youth camps and outreach programs are secondary missions at colleges and universities, Franke said some schools serve more minors through such programs than their total student population.

"Rutgers counted and found they served 71,000 minors a year, and large land grant universities that are involved with 4-H can serve hundreds of thousands," Franke said.

Lisa Weintzel, who works in student services at Slippery Rock, said the Butler County school hosted 3,500 minors for a total of 11,000 nights on campus last year. IUP estimates it hosts 5,000 minors a year.

Authorities said Sandusky, who ran a charity for disadvantaged youths, used such camps on the Penn State campus to groom his victims. The school, still dealing with lawsuits and athletic sanctions stemming from the scandal, has adopted comprehensive policies for such camps. It enhanced training for staff and volunteers, and hosted national conferences on child sexual abuse.

The Paternos chose the State System to pilot a program for colleges when Marie Conley, a consultant for the family and member of the State System's board of governors, suggested it.

"The leadership was very quick to embrace it and got on board. They did not know we were the sponsors," Scott Paterno said.

Although the State System schools adopted strict standards for background checks for staff and volunteers for youth camps they sponsor and third parties who rent their facilities, Chancellor Frank Brogan said this program takes the effort to the next level.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in six boys and one in four girls may be sexually abused before age 18.

“We have an obligation to play a role in prevention and awareness,” Brogan said.

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