

Preventing Child Abuse on College Campuses

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HARRISBURG, DAUPHIN COUNTY -- It's called "Circles of Safety for Higher Education" (<http://www.stopitnow.org/node/1744>) and it's goal is to have "go to" people on every college campus trained to protect children.

As financial backer Sue Paterno explains, "They're the future of our country. They're going to be the Little League coaches. They're going to be the Girl Scout leaders."

Sue Paterno personally funded this \$220,000 pilot program currently at 14 campuses across Pennsylvania.

"If you ever look into a child's face I don't know how anybody would try to hurt them. That's just a problem for me, " according to Paterno.

This first-of-its-kind, campus-wide, multidisciplinary team approach to the prevention of child sexual abuse is designed to train individuals and teams who then train others until a "circle of safety" is in place.

Project director Deborah Donovan Rice explains it this way. "This program is about helping people have the courage, the comfort, and the confidence to take those initial conversations when they happen to see something that looks even vaguely like a warning sign."

"If somebody's harming a child is such a difficult thing to accept and you can't believe anybody would, " adds Paterno.

Results of the program show early success.

Donovan Rice cites, "Not only did they learn about child sexual abuse and how to prevent it, they were also able to come up with a plan that identified the risk in their settings their particular settings, and also how to address the risks to make sure the children that come on the campus can be safe from sexual harm."

The next step for organizers and backers including Sue Paterno?

"I think that there's a huge opportunity to have this become a part of every higher ed system in the country, " states Donovan Rice.

Penn State University is not among the 14 pilot schools. Officials say they have their own child abuse prevention program already in place.