



Staff photos / R. Michael Semple

Under the direction of Keith Rising, left, the Warren G. Harding High School madrigal singers perform a song Tuesday afternoon during the 20th annual Pinwheels for Prevention ceremony at the WGH new student recreation and wellness center. Each of the 1,302 pinwheels planted on the lawn on Saturday represents a case of child abuse or neglect reported in Trumbull County last year.

Pinwheels spotlight fight against child abuse

Ceremony marks 20th year of prevention campaign

By CHRIS McBRIDE
Staff writer



Staff photo / R. Michael Semple

Bonnie Wilson, Family and Children First Council Trumbull County, gives special remarks during the 20th annual Pinwheels for Prevention ceremony Tuesday afternoon, which kicked off National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Each of the 1,302 pinwheels planted on the lawn on Saturday represents a case of child abuse or neglect reported in Trumbull County last year



Keith Easton, vice president of the Trumbull County Children Services Board, speaks during Tuesday's ceremony about the importance of community awareness and support in the fight against child abuse. April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

WARREN — Under a bright spring sky, 1,302 blue and silver pinwheels spun in the breeze, shimmering outside the former Warren G. Harding High School facade on Tuesday. Each one represents a reported case of child abuse or neglect in Trumbull County last year. The solemn display marked the 20th anniversary of the Pinwheels for Prevention campaign, an annual event organized by Trumbull County Children Services to raise awareness during National Child Abuse Prevention Month, which began Tuesday. Marilyn Pape, executive director of Trumbull County Children Services, stood before a crowd gathered to mark the day as she delivered sobering statistics. “The agency served 3,400 children in 2024, an increase of 139 referrals from the previous year,” she said. “The numbers tell a story we can’t ignore. Each of these pinwheels represents a child in our community who needed intervention, and behind each one is a family in crisis.” Officials pointed to multiple factors driving the increase, including the ongoing opioid epidemic, mental health challenges and the success of public awareness campaigns encouraging reporting. A local “See something, say something” initiative has particularly contributed to more referrals as community members become more vigilant. The agency’s response process begins with screening each referral against state guidelines for abuse or neglect. Caseworkers then meet with families to assess needs and offer voluntary services ranging from parenting classes to substance abuse treatment. In cases where children remain at risk, the agency pursues court ordered interventions. “This work is never black and white,” Pape said. “We’re dealing with complex family situations where poverty, addiction and generational trauma often intersect. Our goal Our goal is always to keep families together safely when possible.”

The event drew local leaders, including Warren Mayor Doug Franklin, Trumbull County commissioners and Warren City Schools Superintendent Steve Chiaro, who hosted the display on school grounds.

Chiaro noted the symbolic power of the pinwheels, which first appeared in Georgia before becoming a national symbol for child abuse prevention.

“Walking through this display is overwhelming,” Chiaro said. “The visual makes abstract statistics painfully real. But it also represents our community’s commitment to protecting children.”

Commissioner Denny Malloy presented an official resolution declaring April as Child Abuse Prevention Month in Trumbull County.

Keith Easton, vice president of the Trumbull County Children Services Board, accepted the proclamation and resolution.

“These pinwheels represent our children’s pain, but also our community’s promise,” Easton said, gesturing to the display. “Every one of us here today — and many who couldn’t be — are part of the safety net that catches these children when families falter.”

He added, “When that levy comes up for renewal, that ‘yes’ vote isn’t just paperwork — it’s food in a foster child’s pantry, gas in a caseworker’s car, counseling for a traumatized teen.”

Bonnie Wilson, director of the Trumbull County Family and Children First Council, discussed the importance of community support systems. She shared her personal experience as a kinship caregiver who ultimately adopted her grandson after eight years of foster care.

“There’s no darker place than a child’s broken heart,” Wilson said. “But I’ve seen how one caring adult — a teacher, a neighbor, a caseworker — can light the way forward. We all have a role to play in rewriting these stories.

The ceremony opened with a prayer from the Rev. Avan Odom of New Fellowship Baptist Church in Warren, and concluded with a prayer from Lamar Freeman, youth pastor at Pleasant Valley Church, whose congregation has partnered with Children Services to provide mentorship and support.

Pape noted that while the annual display grows more somber with increasing numbers, it also reflects growing public engagement.

“Twenty years ago, people didn’t talk about child abuse this openly,” she said. “However painful these numbers are, they show we’re breaking the silence.”

The pinwheels will remain on display throughout April at the old Warren G. Harding High School at 860 Elm Road NE.