

# April Is National Child Abuse Prevention Month

It is a common misconception that child abuse is something that happens in other places and to other children. Unfortunately, the Treasure Coast is not immune to cases of child abuse and neglect. Since 1985, Hibiscus Children's Center has been providing safety, shelter, prevention and recovery programs for children right here in St. Lucie, Martin, Indian River and Okeechobee counties. To increase awareness of child abuse prevention in our community, Hibiscus Children's Center is joining the nationwide effort of acknowledging April as National Child Abuse Prevention month.

April is devoted to celebrating everything we can do to transform our communities into places that care about and actively support families and children. "At Hibiscus Children's Center, we not only repair the lives of abused and neglected children, we also aim to reduce the incidence of child abuse

by making sure parents in our communities have access to educational resources, mental health programs, prevention services, residential and foster care services as well as other in-house services and support in times of crisis," said Hibiscus Children's Center CEO Tom Maher.

In 2009, Hibiscus Children's Center provided services to more than 900 children and families each month – ranging from mental health services to a foster care program and a state-of-the-art Child Development Center. In many cases, these prevention services are exactly what are needed to keep a family together. "Every year we help over 100 families resolve conflicts, stay together and avoid the child dependency system. Ninety-five percent of the time there are no further incidences of abuse or neglect after counseling," Maher said.

Hibiscus Children's Center is not alone in the mission to reduce child abuse – as the old adage goes, it takes a village to raise a child. There are several ways to support April as Child Abuse Prevention Month and help ensure that every child has the tools that they need to thrive:

- **Be a nurturing parent.**

Children need to know that they are special and loved.

- **Help a friend, neighbor or relative.**

Being a parent isn't easy. If a parent seems to be struggling, offer to baby-sit or run errands, or just lend a friendly ear.

- **Advocate.**

Let your elected officials know how important child abuse

prevention is to the community.

- **Volunteer and/or Donate.**

There are several local organizations that provide services for children. Hibiscus Children's Center has many ways for you to get involved. Contact Rossana Gonzalez at (772) 263-2650 to find out how.

- **Report suspected abuse or neglect.**

If you have reason to believe a child has been or may be harmed, call (800) 96-ABUSE.

For more information about Hibiscus Children's Center, visit [www.hibiscuschildrenscenter.org](http://www.hibiscuschildrenscenter.org).

### **About Hibiscus Children's Center**

*Hibiscus Children's Center, founded in 1985 by LaVaughn Tilton, is a nonprofit organization serving Martin, Indian River, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties. Hibiscus operates a shelter in Jensen Beach and a Village of eight homes in Vero Beach providing a total of 108 beds for children in need. Hibiscus addresses the problem of abuse, neglect and abandonment throughout the Treasure Coast with an expanded foster care program, parental support and counseling for children and families in crisis.*

*Hibiscus Children's Center Thrift Store in Jensen Beach was opened in 1997. All proceeds from the thrift store are used to offset costs for children's programs.*

*For more information about Hibiscus Children's Center call (772) 334-9311, Ext. 201 or visit [www.hibiscuschildrenscenter.org](http://www.hibiscuschildrenscenter.org).*