

# Imagine...A Brighter Future for our Children

*River Bridge Regional Center calls attention to April being National Child Abuse Prevention Month*

By Mary Cloud, Development Director, River Bridge Regional Center



GLENWOOD SPRINGS - Child abuse is a sensitive topic that few people are willing to discuss, let alone think about. Fortunately, for over 245 children each year from Garfield, Pitkin, Eagle, and Rio Blanco counties, River Bridge Regional Center has a committed team working to provide support and address this issue. This team includes victim advocates, forensic interviewers, mental health therapists and medical providers,

working tirelessly to support child victims and non-offending family members in accessing the necessary services to facilitate healing.

“Many children live in abusive situations, not knowing life is any different. It’s not until they get older that they understand what happened to them was wrong,” says Kat Stenquist, Program Director and forensic interviewer for River Bridge. Kat emphasizes the importance for the community to recognize that there are many reasons why a child may not disclose abuse immediately. Cases frequently arise at River Bridge where the children reveal abuse months to years later. “Education on the signs of abuse and abuse prevention is the best way to support children who may be the victims of abuse.” Each year, River Bridge presents to over 700 community members including: parents, educators, law enforcement, caseworkers, prosecutors, medical providers, and other mandatory reports. A mandatory reporter is required by law to report suspected situations where a child is being neglected or abused. Through educating the community about an issue that affects our children, “we can provide support and services to negate the negative effects that child abuse can have in life – and hopefully we can put an end to child abuse altogether”. Kat also suggests that having conversations with the children that we love and care for about body safety, appropriate touches, respect, consent and social media safety can play a crucial role in preventing child abuse or encourage children to speak up sooner. These conversations can also help prevent problematic sexualized behaviors in young children which have become more frequent in recent years.

victims of sexual assault are able to receive a comprehensive medical forensic exam, treatment, and evidence collection. Whether an adult victim decides to file a police report, it’s crucial for them to meet with a medical provider for a comprehensive examination and testing. This is necessary to prevent future health complications. Joni Owens, Medical Program Coordinator states, “The recovery a person goes through following a sexual assault is a very individualized process. We know that receiving care via a medical forensic exam and getting connected to community resources is a critical piece of that recovery and from moving from being a victim to being a survivor.” You may access more information about MWSA and how one can request a SANE exam on the River Bridge website.

Funding for River Bridge comes from grants and state and local victim services funds, donations, and an annual fundraising event. The event, called Imagine!, is on Saturday, April 13th and will be held at Spring Creeks Ranch in Carbondale, from 6-9pm. The evening will feature food, beverages, a silent and live auction, a live painting experience featuring Aspen artist Isabella Garaffa, and live music and dancing to A Band Called Alexis. Thanks to ACE Hardware of Carbondale, Alpine Bank, Bighorn Toyota, Gould Construction and Roaring Fork Furniture for being leading sponsors of the 9th annual event.

Executive Director Blythe Chapman said she hopes that in addition to raising funds for child abuse treatment and prevention, Imagine! will continue to help raise community awareness. “Child abuse is an unfortunate reality in our valley and we know it’s a difficult issue for people to acknowledge or even talk about,” she said. “But the good news is that River Bridge is here to help children and families, from the very beginning states of disclosure through treatment and into recovery.”

Imagine...a community free of child abuse and sexual assault. Imagine...all children growing up to be happy, healthy and safe. Imagine...providing hope and support for the children, families, and adults that will come to River Bridge and/or MWSA this year. For more information about River Bridge or to make a donation to support their work with victims, please visit, [www.riverbridgerc.org/](http://www.riverbridgerc.org/).

#### IF YOU GO....

What: Imagine! The 8th annual fundraiser benefiting River Bridge Regional Center  
When: 6-9pm. Saturday, April 13  
Where: Spring Creeks Ranch, 622 Cowen Dr. Carbondale  
Cost: \$100 per person, 21+ years old only  
More information: Visit [imagine9.eventbrite.com](http://imagine9.eventbrite.com), or call 970-945-5195



April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month and River Bridge encourages our community to show support for the children that are affected by abuse and/or neglect, support the everyday workers who engage with the children and families that need supportive services, and to educate yourself and the children you care for, about abuse prevention.

Efforts to engage with the community start with planting pinwheels at the Garfield County Courthouse, downtown Glenwood Springs. The blue pinwheel is the symbol of Child Abuse Prevention Month. River Bridge will plant 204 pinwheels, one for each child they served in 2023. All are welcome to come to Veterans Memorial at the Courthouse at noon on Sunday, March 31st to help plant pinwheels and receive free resources. River Bridge will also be at the Glenwood Springs Walmart on Saturday April 6th, providing free resources and treats for children and families.

While the child advocacy center is the primary mission of River Bridge, we also operate the adult and adolescent sexual assault program, Mountain West SANE Alliance (MWSA), as a secondary mission. SANE stands for “Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner.” Supported with the help of our local hospitals,

When I came to your place, you all helped me so much. You all got me out of the horrible situation I was living in. My family is so supportive now. I feel so much better. Getting out of that environment has helped me so much with everything. You all still caring for me means so much to me, and I'll never forget you all. You've all helped me out more than I can possibly say, and I hope that this letter conveys that properly. I can't wait to live the rest of my life. Thanks for helping me feel that feeling.

  , eternally grateful