

## 2,166 pinwheels help visualize each Montgomery County child abuse case from past year

By Jose R. Gonzalez, Staff writer Updated 12:59 pm CDT, Wednesday, May 1, 2019



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Yesenia Garcia gathers pinwheels as volunteers installed 2,166 pinwheels which represent the 2,166 children who walked through the doors of Children's Safe Harbor in Montgomery County last year in front of the...

The bright pinwheels on the south Montgomery County Courthouse annex front lawn contrasted with Tuesday morning's overcast skies as 2,166 of them were being placed, each representing an individual child abuse case handled in the past year by victim advocacy center Children's Safe Harbor.

Montgomery County officials and volunteers were participating in the sixth annual event that closes out National Child Abuse Prevention month.

The event "really shows the magnitude of what it takes, number one, to keep our children safe," Precinct 3 Constable Ryan Gable said.

The number of cases represented are an increase to previously recorded rates. Two years ago, for instance, there were nearly a thousand fewer child abuse cases.

Children's Safe Harbor executive Victoria Constance attributed the jump in cases to greater willingness within the community to report abuse. But a boost in reporting, she added, also stems from more predatory behavior eased by the use of cell phones.

Among the services available to child abuse victims at the Children's Safe Harbor are a forensic interview and counseling. The center serves more than 200 children a month. Its volunteers, donors and investors contribute a lot to the abused children and their families, she pointed out.

"They are supporting healing and justice for these families," she said.

This is the first year the event was held somewhere other than the Alan B. Sadler Commissioners Court Building in Conroe. Constance said it was moved this year to more widely spread awareness throughout Montgomery County. It will change locations within the county every year.

"We're gonna go ahead and move it around," she said of the pinwheel installation

About a half dozen members of the Bikers Against Child Abuse group, lent a helping hand. They go by "road names" as part of a pseudonymous environment they uphold to protect the identity of abused children they help.

A woman with the biker name Wings said she was present to help empower child victims.

"Every one of these pinwheels is the story of a child that somebody wasn't there for, so it's important that I be here for them," the woman said. "The children need a voice."

Constance found parallels between the breeze running through which gently spun the pinwheels and the children who find comfort and care at the Children's Safe Harbor. She likened the post-traumatic state children are in and how counseling helps them.

As the children talk, "the air starts coming back to them and they realize they're safe ... they begin to heal and they graduate from counseling, they know they can breathe fully," Constance said. Like pinwheels, "God lets the wind blow and they move."