

Line in the Sand

Center's campaign aims to educate bystanders on witnessed abuse

By Hannah Bealer

PERSONAL TRAUMA WAS NEVER the catalyst for Abigail Wexner's passion for philanthropy.

A lawyer and community activist, Wexner, also founder and chairwoman of the Center for Family Safety and Healing, was especially drawn to societal issues that involve children.

These were issues that she simply could not turn her back to, she says.

"Over the years, many people have asked me if I've had some personal experience with family violence, and I have not," Wexner says. "When a friend introduced me to this issue, it became a question of, 'How could I not get involved?'"

So in 1999, when Karen Days first accepted the position of president of the Center for Family Safety and Healing, Wexner offered her some advice.

"She said to me, 'If we only raise awareness, we have failed. We have to do more than just raise awareness,'" Days says. "That's something that's been kept in my mind since 1999. Everything we did needed to have a purpose."

The center's "Where's the Line?" campaign launched in January with that motive in mind.

"The 'Where's the Line?' campaign, which focuses on encouraging bystanders to seek help, is the first of its kind," Wexner says.

With so many comparable campaigns missing the group of people who witness abuse, Wexner and Days knew they had to tackle the issue of familial abuse from a different angle.

"We needed to get bystanders involved," Days says. "Bystanders are sometimes in the lives of victims, formally or informally."

The campaign addresses all shapes and forms of abuse rather than one subset – from child to elder, teen dating to domestic, emotional to verbal.

Wexner adds that, in the U.S., five children a day die from child abuse or neglect. One in four women will experience abuse in their lifetime.

"This is astounding to me," Wexner says. "Family violence is cyclical, so when we began this work about 18 years ago, we knew we were in it for the long haul."

The title for the campaign was born from the idea of bystanders asking the important question, "How do we know if someone has crossed the line?" After all, a parent spanking a child typically wouldn't be considered abuse. But how does one know when it has gone too far?

"Bystanders didn't turn their heads (in the past)," Days says. "They didn't know what to do. (They didn't have the opportunity to) get their questions answered confidentially. ... What we want bystanders to do is risk being right. Call in and



say they witnessed something, ask if it crossed the line."

Since its launch, Days says, about 160 calls, instant messages and texts have been received. When someone calls in, a resource coordinator on the other line assures the bystander everything they say

is confidential and anonymous. "Where's the Line?" is not a crisis line, Days says.

"(The coordinator) will ask about the situation, and what's going on," Days says. "She'll have resources for not just our county, but for the rest of central Ohio."

As for its impact on the community at large, Days says, conversations surrounding familial violence have flourished in recent months.

"It's starting a dialogue," she says. "For example, people are asking others if they ever spanked their kids."

For more information, visit www.family-safetyandhealing.org. **CS**



Abigail Wexner (left) and Karen Days

Hannah Bealer is an assistant editor. Feedback welcome at gbishop@cityscenemediagroup.com.

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Where's the Line?

All correspondence is confidential and anonymous.

Call: (844) 234-LINE

Text: 87028

"Where's the Line?" is not a crisis hotline. Rather, bystanders can expect to receive information on familial violence as well as appropriate referrals to area agencies.