

'Beards for Kids' brings in thousands for Safe Haven

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BARDANE -An innovative campaign that saw deputies with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office forgo shaving for the entire month of November to help child victims of crime has turned into the most successful fundraiser the area's local Safe Haven Child Advocacy Center has ever seen.

Launched last month by the Jefferson County Deputy Sheriff's Association, the "Beards for Kids" fundraising campaign helped raise more than \$4,000 for the advocacy center, which is a child-focused program that encourages a multi-disciplinary team approach to the investigation of crimes against children.

Safe Haven representatives were invited Wednesday to the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, where they were presented with the proceeds from the fundraising campaign, which also included a one-time \$1,000 donation from the Ryneal Medical Transport ambulance service.

Article Photos



Journal photos by Edward Marshall

Deputies with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office who participated in the departments "Beards For Kids" fundraising campaign pose for a picture Wednesday with staff from the Safe Haven Child Advocacy Center, for whom deputies raised more than \$4,000.

"I think that the Sheriff's Department did a phenomenal job of raising funds. I don't think they even knew how much they were raising and the sort of power that they have to be able to bridge a connection for us to the community," said Victoria Slater-Madert, Child and Family Services Supervisor at Safe Haven. "I'm still floored about how much money they raised with this. I don't think they had any idea we were going to come close to thousands of dollars."

Lt. David Colbert of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office said that every year deputies get together and put some of their own money toward a worthy, community-oriented program, mainly those that help children.

After a bit of brainstorming, Colbert said deputies decided this year that they would make a proposal to Sheriff Pete Dougherty asking that, in exchange for donating their own money to a department-wide pool, normal department policy requiring deputies to be clean shaven be waived for the month.

"Through that also we decided that we would see if anyone else was willing to donate within our own office. The word was spread and several friends, family, local businesses, prosecutors, magistrates and several other people participated and were generous in their donations," Colbert said.

The rules were simple. For a donation of \$25, deputies were authorized to grow a full beard during the month of November. Only full beards were allowed and if a deputy at any time shaved his beard, he was required to donate an additional \$5 to the fundraising campaign for Safe Haven.

The public was encouraged to donate to the campaign by supporting their favorite participating deputy. What started as an intra-departmental effort soon drew support from the surrounding community.

"We as a department are always looking for a way to make a difference to help children. We work with the Child Advocacy Center on a regular basis. We work hand-in-hand with them, and we just felt that there wouldn't be a better thing to donate to than helping them out," Colbert said.

Besides just raising money for the local agency, Colbert said another goal of the campaign was to try to help raise awareness about the important work that the Child Advocacy Center does in the hope that others might also be encouraged to donate to Safe Haven.

"It's just an amazing resource right here that a lot of people don't know about. We really want to raise awareness that it's here, that it's a resource and it's a great thing to try to donate to and help out," Colbert said.

Safe Haven's multi-disciplinary team includes prosecutors, law enforcement officers, child protective services workers, mental and medical health professionals, and victim advocates.

Safe Haven is a nonprofit program and operates in Martinsburg under the umbrella agency of Children's Home Society of West Virginia. It receives referrals from law enforcement, prosecutors, child protective services and local hospitals.

The child-friendly facility provides a safe environment for child victims of abuse and its services are provided to agencies in Jefferson, Berkeley and Morgan counties. One of its goals is to minimize the amount of trauma child victims may suffer through the investigative process.

"I think because we do so much work with local law enforcement we were genuinely sort of flattered that they were going to give back to us in a way that we are often trying to do by fundraising ourselves. It was really just sort of an appreciative feeling for us to know that they are really invested in the program," Slater-Madert said.

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