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Staff/Jon-Michael Sullivan

Executive Director Jinger Robins, left, and Ed Lee, president of SafePath board, give Georgia first lady Sandra Deal a tour of the SafePath offices on Whitlock Avenue.

ON THE RIGHT PATH



Robins shows Deal a pair of shoes that were donated by the Junior League of Cobb-Marietta during her tour.

Nonprofit focusing on safety

By Talia Mollett

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MARIETTA - SafePath Children's Advocacy Center in Marietta is offering a class to teach adults how to protect their children from molesters in the community.

The Stewards of Children program teaches adults to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse. The program is conducted at the requesting organization's site, such as a church or private school.

The two-and-a-half-hour program integrates the principles of choice, consciousness and personal power to promote an understanding of the nature and impact of sexual abuse. Using these principles, it offers a context for empowered action and holds each adult responsible, while providing assistance for making a personal change, according to the Stewards of Children workbook.

"The program focuses on adults resolving child abuse in the community and puts the responsibility on the adults, rather than the children," said Jinger Robins, executive director of SafePath. "The bottom line is adults are responsible for the safety of children."

Adult responsibility is something Marietta Police Chief Dann Flynn agrees with.

In Marietta last week, Michael Brown of Union City was arrested for allegedly molesting a 13-year-old girl at the Marietta Boys and Girls Club on Manget Street. In response to the arrest, Flynn said parents should not be afraid to send their children to the Boys and Girls Club. Flynn said historically, child molesters could show up at all sorts of activities where children meet and the best way to protect children is attentive parenting.

A goal of the Stewards of Children program is to help adults get comfortable discussing a traditionally taboo subject with children.

"I think parents sometimes start out well with their children with toilet training, for example, but then they let the gaps go until all of a sudden their child is 15 or 16 and wants to date," Robbins said.

Robbins said parents often leave a gap in educating their children about their bodies between the toddler and teen ages, and this is one of the worst things a parent can do to protect their children.

"Some parents get very uncomfortable about going beyond the ears, nose and eyes, but we should educate the kids on which parts of their bodies are private and which are not. Don't just leave it to chance because that's where pedophiles and molesters get in," Robbins said. "Child sexual abuse is one of the biggest secrets and we owe it to our children to protect them."

Debbie Jones, supervisor of student support for the Cobb County School District, said assistant administrators and associate principals for all Cobb elementary schools were recently trained on the Stewards of Children program.

"It's a really good, interactive program. The program takes you through step by step with discussions after each step," Jones said. "I think it really empowers the people because it's a topic people don't like to talk about. We got excellent feedback from our teachers."

Vicki Howell, of the Atlanta Youth Project, also said the Stewards of Children program benefited the nonprofit organization she volunteers for.

"They were able to give us a great deal of resources of people to contact if we thought anything suspicious was taking place. They also told us about the warning signs of sexual abuse," Howell said. "I've done training in the past and it's a very touchy subject, but it's also empowering when you know what to look for."

Robbins said SafePath's goal is to train one million people on Stewards of Children by 2010. Training can be provided at a minimal cost and some scholarships are available for the Stewards of Children Program, Robbins said.

SafePath is a nonprofit organization that offers a comprehensive approach to the intervention, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of alleged sexual and severe physical abuse of children.

For more information on the Stewards of Children Program, contact SafePath at (770) 801-3465.

SAFER WALK: A ribbon-cutting ceremony dedicating the new SafePath Garden was conducted at the SafePath Children's Advocacy Center on Monday. The new, child-friendly garden, complete with a picket fence, arbor and fun yard art, **far right**, is the result of a community service project of Cobb County Government's 2010 EXCEL Management Development Class. In attendance were Thomas Beusse of Congressman Tom Price's Office, Chief Deputy Clerk Angie Davis, County Manager David Hankerson, Judge Maria Golick, Representative Judy Manning, Sherriff Neil Warren, State Court Clerk Diane Webb and Sen. John Wiles. SafePath Executive Director Jinger Robins and members of the EXCEL class, **right**, helped cut the ribbon to officiate the new garden.

Photos special to the MDJ





Photo: Trish Nicolas

Lower School Chorus Performs for SafePath

The Walker School's Lower School Chorus warmed up the crowd at the kick-off of Cobb County's SafePath Children's Advocacy Center's Child Abuse Prevention Month activities this past April. Many attended the event including parents, police officials and politicians. After the chorus opened with a song, a succession of speakers delivered messages, including SafePath Board President Ed Lee, WSB-TV anchor Linda Stouffer and state Rep. Stacey Evans. Sonya Peebles, music teacher and director of the chorus, stated, "The Lower School Chorus volunteered its voice to help raise awareness of child abuse and the organizations that help those children affected."

SAFEPath CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER



Special Joseph Bronzino Harry's Farmers Market and Chef **Justin Balmes**, who was also a recent contestant on Food Network Star, participated in a dinner fundraiser Aug. 15. The meal included a three-course meal with menu selections from Local Georgia Farms. A portion of the proceeds will benefit SafePath Children's Advocacy Center, Inc. Above: From left are **Jinger Robins**, executive director of SafePath; **Katie Herman** and **Hana Laine**. Right: Robins and Balmes pose together at the event.



Above left: Robins speaks with Chef **Alex Reethof** of Reethof Hospitality. Above right: Balmes preps food at the event.