

Brother, sister from Palisade start new non profit to advocate for abused children

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 15 May 2014 15:01 -



Dave Vrbas checks out his newly bald head in his bathroom mirror at his Lincoln home Tuesday morning. The co-founder of Nebraska Kids TRUTH launched a Facebook campaign and vowed to shave his head and take on an orange sprayed-on tan if the organization's Facebook page reached 1,000 likes by Sunday evening. By Sunday night the page had nearly 1,200 likes. (Courtesy Photo)

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

Sometimes the best way to combat a difficult situation is to stop obsessing about it and do something. This is the motto Dave Vrbas and his sister, Missy Blackman, took on when their father, Jerald Vrbas, was indicted on child pornography charges earlier this year.

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“I don’t understand it, and I will probably never understand it. It’s really one of those things that left so many of us just completely dumbfounded,” explains Vrbas. “And when I realized the fallout from it was making me miserable, I knew I had two choices: let it destroy me or do something to make up for it.”

Vrbas and Blackman decided the best thing to do was to start a non profit organization with the initial goal of creating a statewide coalition of advocates to help abused children.

The organization is staffed 100 percent by volunteers, no salaries will be paid to organization employees. It’s philosophies and initiatives were derived from countless conversations between their siblings, Heidi Adams and Joe Vrbas, and their spouses Jared Blackman, Sarah Vrbas and Amy Vrbas. The group also sought counsel from several social workers and child psychologists when developing their mission.

“We wanted to empower adults to take action when they see abuse,” Vrbas explains. “As adults, we have to take ownership of the situation.”

Nebraska Kids TRUTH (Tell, Respond, Understand, Treat, Heal) Campaign has taken on a four-phase approach of advocating for Nebraska children who suffer from any type of abuse.

The TRUTH acronym was designed to address the goals of the organization.

Tell—The co-founders want children to feel safe to tell an adult when they are being abused.

Respond—Adult allies will pledge to respond with love, compassion and discretion.

Understand—Adult allies will understand the importance of standing up for children in abusive situations and help them understand that abuse is not their fault.

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Treat—Co-founders Vrbas and Blackman believe in treatment for those abused as well as the abuser. They want to empower them to receive the counselling needed and offset the associated costs if needed.

Heal—Vrbas and Blackman acknowledge that no one fully heals from abuse, but hope Nebraska Kids TRUTH Campaign can help children on a path to a bright future through the counseling and scholarship programs they plan to establish.

Phase one: call to action to adults

Co-founders Vrbas and Blackman want children in abusive environments to hear two very important messages. First, that there are adults who will help them. Second, that they are loved. The organization plans to distribute “You Are Loved” teddy bears across the state to people who work one-on-one with kids in crisis situations.

They are also reaching out to adults across the state, asking them to sign a pledge to stand up against child abuse, neglect and exploitation. The pledge form can be found at causes.com/campaigns/77403-build-a-nebraska-wide-army-of-allies-for-abused-children.

Vrbas and Blackman hope the publicity and donations received through the first phase of the organization’s implementation will help fund the next three phases of their approach.

Phase two: create a curriculum

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The second phase of the Nebraska Kids TRUTH Campaign is to reach out to experts in child psychology and design across Nebraska with the goal of creating an interactive curriculum for pre-Kindergarten and elementary students that focuses on the TRUTH (Tell, Respond, Understand, Treat, Heal) model.

Vrbas and Blackman will distribute the curriculum statewide.

Phase three: raise funds for mental health care

At the same time that Nebraska Kids TRUTH Campaign leaders are working to develop curriculum in phase two, they will begin phase three.

The third phase of their approach involves fundraising to gather donations to begin a program aimed to help income-qualified families pay for mental health care needed to overcome abuse.

Phase four: scholarships for victims of abuse

The final phase of the group's plans involves establishing scholarships for victims of abuse.

The group's website states, "If we're talking about building a brighter future for these children, we have to give them the education they need to prosper beyond their youth."

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The final phase will involve development of a scholarship program for victims of abuse so they can go to college and work to make their futures brighter.

They plan to structure the scholarships with a scholarship or tuition reimbursement program for Nebraska high school seniors who promise to attend a Nebraska college and then work within the state in the field of child psychology.

Get involved

Those who would like to learn more about the organization should visit their website at nebraskatruth.org or call 402-470-1880.

Adults who wish to pledge to be an ally for abused children can do so at causes.com/campaigns/77403-build-a-nebraska-wide-army-of-allies-for-abused-children.

Those who wish to contribute to the cause may do so at startsomegood.com/nebraskatruth. An account has also been set up at the Pioneer Community Federal Credit Union in Palisade.