



## Jim McClure: Darisabel case must move us to action

JIM McCLURE

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Two groups of York Daily Record/Sunday News journalists have viewed the documentary "Carrying Darisabel."

Both times, the end of the film brought a long silence filled with emotion.

Those journalists, accustomed to dealing with painful and traumatic stories, were moved.

That reaction is a snapshot of this special video's impact on the community.

People have responded with dozens and dozens of e-mails, Internet comments and requests for copies of the DVD.

One question the film, produced by York Daily Record/Sunday News photographer Jason Plotkin, raises is what the community should do in the aftermath of the violent beating death of 2-year-old Darisabel Baez.

We've had plenty of warnings about domestic violence.

At least 11 York County homicide cases have stemmed from violence in the home since 2008.

And before there was Darisabel, there was Aleta.

Five-year-old Aleta Bailey died in 1982 at the hands of her mother's boyfriend.

Aleta had been beaten beyond recognition. At first, police couldn't determine her race.

That case changed state law. Before that, child welfare officials kept families together, even if abuse was occurring.

But a change in the law didn't change hearts.

In 2009, YorkCounts released a slew of revealing indicators to measure progression, or regression, on key community issues - for instance, the number of violent crimes, driving under the influence and bias-related cases.

The community is making progress on many of these issues, so improvement is possible.

But regression would be the right word for child abuse in York County.

The report rightly said that child abuse is particularly heinous because it affects the most vulnerable. And when children are abused, those wounds often last. Some abused youngsters become abusive parents themselves.

While numbers of child abuse cases statewide declined, local cases went up. "The measurements for this Indicator," the report

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stated, "are among the most troubling in the entire report."

Numbers available since the YorkCounts 2009 compilation show the county is down a bit and the state is up some. But the county numbers are still higher than five or six years ago.

Darisabel's death should prompt a community change of heart.

It has energized local representation in the statewide movement, Prevent Child Abuse Pennsylvania.

A group met last week on domestic violence, studying the "psychology of abusers and the women who protect them."

Part of the solution is increased awareness by all 400,000-plus York countians to signs of abuse.

The stats clearly show that other counties have found at least partial solutions to reduce child abuse.

We can, too.

Indeed, we must.

The Jason Plotkin-led "Carrying Darisabel" team created one of the best pieces of journalism our news organization has done in 20 years.

It offers great insight into the heroic efforts of

early responders - police and emergency medical workers - in such a horrid child abuse case and, really, every day.

And as Scott Blanchard, an editor on the project, wrote in a note to our newsroom, the film shows how the emotions of such cases no doubt reside forever in the lives of these public servants who see humanity at its worst.

Darisabel's death moved these early responders.

And her story on film stirred a roomful of journalists and deepened their understanding of child abuse.

As Blanchard further wrote to our newsroom: ". . . I believe everyone who worked on it hopes it moved you in some way."

The question for the community is whether Darisabel's death will move us to seek solutions to our child abuse problem, epidemic in York County.

### Remembering Darisabel

History could remember the death of 2-year-old Darisabel Baez at the hands of her mother's boyfriend as the case of a youngster beaten to death with a video game controller cord.

One of the early responders to the scene, York City Police Officer Lisa Daniels, believes that the name of young Darisabel should not be forgotten.

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"Everybody should know Darisabel Baez's name," she said in a captivating special video presenting the often-emotional views of early responders to the West Philadelphia Street scene of the young girl's death.

"Everybody."

"And everybody should know that if you see a child who you suspect has been neglected or abused, that is the name that should just enter into your mind."

"You should think about her story, think about what she went through. And so that people know that this child's life didn't just go, is gone - that it meant something."

Indeed, history should remember Darisabel's name, rather than the weapon that ended her life.

Officer Daniels also stated: "There should be a Darisabel Baez annual something to memorialize this child."

Anyone accepting the challenge?

James McClure, editor of the York Daily Record/Sunday New, blogs daily at [yorktownsquare.com](http://yorktownsquare.com), in which parts of this column first appeared. To contact him, e-mail [jem@ydr.com](mailto:jem@ydr.com).

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