



2-year-old's death prompts summit on child abuse

By MIKE ARGENTO
Daily Record/Sunday News

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- Watch "Carrying Darisabel," a video documentary done by Daily Record/Sunday News photojournalist Jason Plotkin. Not long ago, members of YorkCounts screened a video about the death of 2-year-old Darisabel Baez that documented the frustration, anger and sadness of those who investigated the child's murder at the hands of her mother's boyfriend in 2008. The film, produced by York Daily Record/Sunday News photographer Jason Plotkin, sparked something. YorkCounts had been concerned about child abuse. Its 2009 annual report, detailing the steady climb in substantiated reports of child abuse in York County during the past decade, was cause for alarm. The report labeled the climb, contrary to the statewide trend, "among the most troubling in the entire report." "I'm a believer in using a film, particularly one as powerful as this one, to get people thinking about an issue," YorkCounts spokesman Dan Fink said. To that end, YorkCounts, along with the Daily Record/Sunday News, is sponsoring a summit of state and local officials to find solutions to the county's high rate of child abuse. The summit, titled "After Darisabel:

Reducing Child Abuse in York County," will be June 10 at the York Jewish Community Center. "Everything about that case just pulls at your heart," said Deb Chronister, director of York County Children and Youth Services. "It's tragic that an incident like this has to occur to bring the community together on this issue. But it would also be tragic if it didn't." The latest figures on child abuse in the county show that the number of substantiated cases continues to rise even as child-welfare advocates and law-enforcement officials have worked to reduce the number of cases. The child-abuse rate in the county rose from 33.3 cases per 100,000 people in 2003 to 37.1 in 2007, according to YorkCounts' 2009 report. During the same period of time, the statewide rate dropped from 36.7 per 100,000 to 33.5. The increase can be attributed, partly, to an increase in awareness of child abuse and in the number of cases being reported. It's difficult to assess just how much of the increase can be attributed to that factor. Still, Fink said, the increase is troubling. "The numbers are still the numbers," Fink said, "and they're going the wrong way. We thought it would be a good idea to start a conversation to bring these figures down." Regarding the figures, Chronister said, "Sometimes, it looks like you're going backwards before you go forward." The numbers, though, don't provide solutions. It takes education and creating a message that prompts the community to take action. "You can go out and ask anybody

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what 'Click it or ticket' means, and they'll know," said Angela Liddle, director of the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance. "Then ask them what the message is of their child protective system. There is none." And that's key, she said. "You will never convince me that someone didn't hear that little girl," she said, referring to Darisabel. "Every single citizen has a role to play in child protection." **If you go** **What:** "After Darisabel: Reducing Child Abuse in York County," a summit to find solutions to the rising number of child-abuse cases **When:** 6 p.m. June 10 **Where:** York Jewish Community Center, 2000 Hollywood Drive **Cost:** Free, but registration is requested **Details:** e-mail events@yorkcounts.org or call Dan Fink at YorkCounts at 650-1460 **Panelists:**

- Richard Gold, deputy secretary of the state Department of Public Welfare and director of the Office of Children, Youth and Families
- Angela Liddle, director of the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance
- Deb Chronister, director of York County Children and Youth Services
- Deb Harrison, executive director of the Children's Advocacy Center in York

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