

Published author tackles difficult subject of child abuse

By Clayton Hardiman

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Mary Muhammad book signing held at the Muskegon Heights Public Library was about literature and more.

Muhammad who has recently published a trio of books, including a debut book of poetry, was at the Muskegon Heights branch Library to sign copies of her books. She was also joined by representatives of the Child Abuse council of Muskegon, to draw attention to a generation of children under siege.

"The message from our perspective was tips to families about how to prevent child abuse. Spoke Mrs. Colella, the executive director of the Child Abuse Council. It was the first book signing for the budding new author. Muhammad's poetry collection, titled "Echoes of an Era," features free style poetry, which covers a variety of topics including poverty, spirituality, addiction and love from a child's eyes. Another book called "The Story Box" A Collection of Adventure" is a "Fun book." Muhammad says, a collection of short stories for children. But the third book titled Hugs and Kisses," was written in story form, as a tool to help parents talk to children about sexual abuse, and the facts say that is a growing seriousness and alarm. Consider these statistics from Darkness to Light, a non- profit resource organization seeking to fight child abuse through raising public awareness and education.

*One in four girls are sexually abused before age 18

*One in six boys are sexually abused before age 18

* Nearly 70 percent of all reported sexual assaults occur to children

More than 30 percent of the victims never disclose the experience to anyone.

Most children don't tell even if asked. Colella appeared at the book signing, with other Child Abuse council representatives, to help educate families about how to prevent abuse.

The organization utilizes a seven step system offered by Darkness to light. It is available online at the organizations web site at D2L.org

Among the steps are "Learn the facts", Minimize opportunity and talk about it.

Ms. Muhammad's book "Hugs and Kisses" emphasizes the third step. It tells the story of two young girls who are friends. One of the girls has been sexually abused. In the story she confides in her friend.

"I wrote it in story form so it could be read to the child. ' Muhammad said. Born in Berrien Springs and raised in Benton Harbor Muhammad now resides in the West Michigan area.

She is the mother of three daughters herself. She said she decided to write about child abuse because "it's happened to so many children.

Muhammad's book signing was arranged through the Friends of the Muskegon Heights Public Library. Muhammad said she wanted to raise awareness about the specter of child abuse.

Books: “Echoes of an Era” a collection of poetry, “The Story Box” A Collection of Adventure, A collection of short stories for children, and “Hugs and Kisses” A book written to help speak to children about sexual abuse.

Executive director Jeannie Colella and other representatives of the Child Abuse Council of Muskegon, addressed steps parents can take to deal with child abuse.