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## Hundreds listen to teens' stories at JFS candlelight vigil, walk

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*The Eagle-Gazette Staff*

LANCASTER - It was not so long ago when 17-year-old Kayleigh Stockmaster was living in a home of abuse and neglect.

And on Thursday night, before a audience of approximately 400 residents, she shared her story.

"My dad mentally abused me to where I thought everything I did was wrong," Stockmaster said as her foster parents, Jim and Vesta Bailey, looked on.

Stockmaster said the abuse also became physical. She eventually turned to drugs.

But Stockmaster's life turned around when she moved into Jim and Vesta Bailey's home.

"You guys are the true definition of foster parents," Stockmaster said. "I'm so glad God sent you into my life."

Stockmaster was one of two teens to share her story during the Fairfield County Job & Family Services candlelight walk Thursday evening.

Residents walked from Job & Family Services to the bandstand in downtown Lancaster, each carrying a candle or pinwheel to signify the average number of child neglect or abuse calls the agency receives every month.

At the bandstand, 160 small tealights bearing the names of children in protective custody, flickered in the sunlight.

"Sometimes when you say, we receive 5,000 calls a year, people don't really understand what that means," said Child Protective Services Director Rich Bowlen. "This is a way for them to visualize that number."

Child Protective Services currently has 160 children in protective custody, Bowlen said.

He said the event is a good way to raise awareness of child abuse.

"Our economy is not doing well and that increases stress for a lot of families," Bowlen said. "The best way to prevent child abuse is when folks get together and work to raise awareness."

Vesta Bailey said she and her husband have four foster children in their home, including Kayleigh.

She was proud of how Kayleigh agreed to share her story about living in an abusive home.

"You ask why I (became a foster parent) - this is why," Vesta Bailey said with a smile.

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