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Teenager who was abused talks about speaking out for herself, others
Advocates, others gather on Capitol steps to observe Child Abuse Prevention Month

An 18-year-old who came into foster care after suffering physical abuse at the hands of her biological
mother told a crowd gathered at the State Capitol that community members who know that abuse is
happening need to speak out.

“No one who knew about what was going on with me said anything to anyone who could help,” said
LaQuitha Butler, who spoke at the state’s Rally against Child Abuse. “I finally found the courage to tell
my school counselor about the abuse, but there are many children who are too afraid to tell. So you need
to be their voices.”

The rally was held at the steps of the State Capitol in observance of National Child Abuse Prevention
Month, which is recognized each April.

Butler came into the Arkansas foster care system at the age of 14. She had a 6-month old baby at the time
and it quickly became clear that it would not be safe for her and her child to return to her biological
family. So Butler became involved with the state’s transition program for older children in foster care.
The transition program is designed to provide youth who are unlikely to be adopted with the basic life
skills that most children learn from their parents and loved ones.

Through this program, Butler also learned about the state foster care system’s Youth Advisory Board,
which provides youth a voice when it comes to system rules and issues. Today, Butler is president of
what is commonly called “The YAB.” She and other board members also try to mentor and support other
children in foster care through an annual conference that is youth organized and led.

Cecile Blucker, the director of the Department of Human Services’ Division of Children and Family
Services (DCFS), said people like Butler are a good example of how children can overcome the adversity
they face as a result of abuse and neglect – if the right supports are in place.
Many, many people are needed every year to care for and support the large number of children who interact with the state’s child welfare system, Blucker said.

In State Fiscal Year 2014, there were 32,928 reports of child maltreatment accepted for investigation in Arkansas. Of those, 25% were determined to be true. At the end of the fiscal year, more than 4,100 youth were in foster care and an additional 7,000 children were receiving in-home and supportive services.

“We can all work together to help and protect children in Arkansas,” Blucker said.

To learn more about how to prevent child abuse go to www.stoparchildabuse.com. To learn more about becoming a foster parent, go to www.fosterarkansas.org.

What should you do if a child discloses abuse to you?

1. Listen. Do not fill in words for the child.
2. Allow the child to tell you what happened in his or her own words. Don’t fill in what you think the child is going to say.
3. Tell the child you are glad he told you.
4. Reassure the child that she is not in trouble.
5. If the child asks you not to tell anyone, remind him that it is your job to keep him safe.
6. Do not be overly critical of the offender. Children are protective of people they care about, even if they are being abused.
7. Tell the child you believe him.
8. Don't express panic or shock.
9. Use the child's vocabulary to the child and when reporting the abuse to authorities.
10. Do not ask probing questions.
11. Do not project your own feelings about the abuse on the child.
12. Report the abuse to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-482-5964.