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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and this Saturday, Kansas Children's Service League will host a special event at Liberal's Country Club.

The third annual 'Chair'ish the Children fundraiser will begin with a social hour from 6 to 7 p.m. Saturday, and the event, said Jeff Pfungsten, helps provide resources for KCSL children and families in Liberal.

Pfungsten, who is the development manager for KCSL's west region, said the social hour is simply a chance for everyone to walk around and view chairs created by artists for the event.

He said there will be other activities later in the evening.

“At 7, we’ll have a pasta bar, and at 8, we’ll have a live auction,” he said.

KSCB radio personality and Liberal Mayor Joe Denoyer will serve as the auctioneer for the live auction. Pfingsten said thus far in the event’s short history, ‘Chair’ish the Children has been very successful.

“People in Liberal have been really generous and seem to enjoy the event,” he said.

Regional artist Bradley Chance Hays, who recently exhibited some of his art at Liberal’s Baker Arts Center, has painted one of the chairs for Saturday’s festivities, and Pfingsten said the artist will likewise be on hand at the Liberal Country Club.

“He’s going to paint a picture at the event that we’ll finish our auction off with at the end of the night,” Pfingsten said.

He added the ‘Chair’ish event has brought in between \$3,000 and \$4,000 in each of its first two years.

“This is becoming an event that I think Liberal is really enjoying,” he said. “I could definitely see it becoming much, much bigger. It seems like every year, people get a little more excited about it, and we get a good crowd. We have artists who’ve started to ask us if they can paint a chair. This year, we’re actually doing 12 chairs and two tables. I think it’s serving a niche that maybe some people in Liberal wanted to see.”

KCSL has Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Liberal, and Pfingsten said the number of children in those programs has risen rapidly recently.

“We went from 134 kids to 175 kids in Liberal,” he said. “That’s just in two years. The need’s

there. Our Head Start program does a community needs assessment every year, and we try to put our resources where the need is in Liberal for early childhood resources.”

In 2013, thanks to a lack of a budget, the federal government was shut down for a short period of time, and Pfingsten said in spite of seemingly good funding, KCSL did have some cuts due to the sequestration.

“We had to close down three communities,” he said.

That cut took more than 5 percent of the organization’s grant total. Pfingsten said, however, that money could be coming back to KCSL.

“It looks like they want us to take some of that money back and renew those resources in the communities that we shut down,” he said.

Pfingsten said as of right now, Liberal has solid funding for its KCSL programs.

“One of the things we do need to do with our grant is raise 25 percent of our grant in in-kind donations,” he said. “This is one of those things that help offset that in-kind match.”

Pfingsten said with overall government funding a bit unstable and unsure, KCSL is looking for more personal donations and community donations to help keep resources in individual communities.

“Some of the other things that KCSL does in Seward County besides Head Start and Early Head Start is Kansas Children’s Service League is in charge of the bullying prevention hotline and the parent resource hotline,” he said. “They’ve been there for a little while.”

Pfingsten said with more resources available to KCSL, it will take more funding to keep them in place

“It all kind of goes hand in hand,” he said.

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