



Bob Wellinski/For The News-Dispatch

Lisa Bachman pulls a few strand of hair out her 7-year-old son Robbie's head as he works on recording his fingerprints as part of the Kinderprint Program.

Attorney, wife help provide area with child-safety kits

By ERICA WORT
For The News-Dispatch

LA PORTE — Parents of local kindergartners and first-graders received a "gift of safety" this school year.

Northwest Indiana injury attorney Kenneth Allen and his wife, Nina, have underwritten the purchase of Kinderprint Child Identification kits for students in La Porte, Lake and Porter counties.

"If we can protect one child, we can protect them all," Kenneth Allen said. "Advocacy for child safety is a big part of what we do here and what my career has been devoted to."

The gift provided 25,000 kits, 13,000 of which have been distributed thus far. The kits are the centerpiece of a child-safety campaign in Northwest Indiana sponsored by the Allens.

Each kit contains instructions and supplies to collect a child's fingerprints, dental records, personal information, recent photo and DNA sample so parents will have all of it in one place. In the instance a child goes

missing or is kidnapped, panicked parents will know immediately where to find their child's information to help police begin a search.

"If we as parents can have something readily available when we're not in the mindset to look for photographs, having this kit could make the difference between saving our child's life and protecting them from harm," Allen said. "It's something we can do to help. If we can save one child from harm, that's the greatest reward."

According to United Way President Sharon Kish, several area elementary schools were approached to participate in the program, including Crichfield, Hailman and Kingsford Heights in the La Porte area, and Coolspring, Joy, Marsh, Mullen and Springfield in Michigan City.

"Hopefully, the parent will never have to use it, but it is there like an insurance policy," Kish said. "We are very grateful that Ken Allen has made this gift."

Allen, who received

the child safety advocate award from the IU School of Medicine Auto Safety Program, approached United Way with the intention of establishing something geared toward childhood safety on a regional level, Kish said.

The Kinderprint Child Identification Kits are a nationwide program available through United Way of America.

"We're so pleased that Ken and Nina had brought it to this area," Kish said.

Kingsford Heights received the kits at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Principal Marcia Alexander said the school ordered the packets for kindergarten and first grade.

"Parents need to have that information gathered in one place, just in case, heaven forbid," Alexander said. "We felt it was a service to our parents. I appreciate that those were available. Hopefully, parents never have to use the kits, but having the information on hand will surely provide some peace of mind."