

BEAR HUGS 4 kids



By Jen Peake
CIEDA
Marketing
Specialist

Trauma situations can be difficult for anyone to process, but for children, it can be a pretty scary time in their young lives. However, with the help of law enforcement, first responders and the local community, children involved in confusing circumstances can get a little comfort from a stuffed animal.

Creek Travel Plaza (CTP) is the organizer for the Bear Hugs 4 Kids program, which helps alleviate fear and anxiety in children during traumatic events, such as car accidents, domestic violence, house fires, etc. And this year, there are more animals to choose from for donating to the cause.

For \$25, you can purchase two animals — one will go home with you to keep or give to a family member or friend, and the other bear will be donated to local first responders and law enforcement officers. Or you may choose to donate both. It's your choice. CTP has added elephants, tigers, giraffes, cows and puppy dogs to the mix, as well as the Nokose bear.

All patrol officers carry the animals in their cars. When responding to calls involving children, the officers use the stuffed animals as an ice breaker for frightened youngsters.

A quick online search shows Teddy bear programs involving law enforcement and first responders date back to the 1980s. The Poarch Fire Department sees about 800-900 calls per year and they distribute the animals from CTP as well.

National statistics show about half of all American children have been exposed to at least one or more serious traumatic childhood experiences, according to a survey conducted by the National Survey of Children's Health.

So help a local child by donating a stuffed animal. It might be just what they need.

