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## Around the Corner Volume 7, Issue 5

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### Quick Links

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### Get to Know the Board and Staff



Linda

**Koblick**  
Board Member

Commissioner Linda Koblick was elected to the Hennepin County Board in 2002. She is chair of the Public Works Committee. Her areas of focus include Transportation, Women and Youth, Hennepin County-University of Minnesota Partnership, Criminal Justice and Libraries. She has served as a member of the CornerHouse Board of Directors since 2003. She currently serves on the Community Relations Committee. Commissioner Koblick is a graduate of the University of Minnesota, a mother, and a small business owner. She and her husband, Jeffrey, reside in Minnetonka and have two adult children. Commissioner Koblick has an extensive record of public service, serving as an elected official for local government for over a dozen years, and a community volunteer since

February/2008

Dear Mark,

Happy New Year to you! CornerHouse had a very busy and productive 2007 so take a look at what we've been up to lately!

### Aliens, Alligators & Allegories: Bizarre and Fantastic Elements in Forensic Interviews

By Anne Lukas Miller

*This is an introduction to a three-part article that will be published in upcoming NDAA (National District Attorney's Association) Update newsletters. Update publications can be viewed online, at the NDAA's website: [http://www.ndaa.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_index.html](http://www.ndaa.org/publications/newsletters/update_index.html)*

"Bizarre and fantastic elements"

[1](#) can be defined as any strange, ill-fitting, or improbable claims made by children during sexual abuse disclosures. There is not a large body of empirical data regarding the occurrence of fantastic elements; however, in 1996, Dalenberg examined over 600 interviews of 3- to 17-year-old children reporting sexual abuse and found an overall occurrence rate of about 2 percent.[2](#) In this study, cases were divided into groups, based upon certainty that abuse occurred and severity of the abuse reported. Dalenberg found that fantastic elements were present at the highest rate within the group of cases that had been identified as those where abuse was both most certain and most severe.

In apparent contrast, Bruck, Ceci, and Hembrooke (2002) reported that a study yielded a greater frequency of improbable information in false, rather than true, narratives by children.[3](#) It should be noted that this study involved only 16 children, and that it employed the intentional and repeated use of highly suggestive and leading interview techniques. It should also be noted that the study found implausible information in reports that were otherwise accurate, although the occurrence rate was lower than what was found by Dalenberg.[4](#)



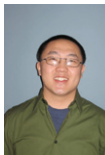
While fantastic elements may not be typical in child sexual abuse reports, they occur often enough to be recognized as an issue - and frequently, the issue is one of credibility. Historically, the appearance of improbable information has had a significantly negative impact on a child's overall report. In 1989, Everson and Boat reported that improbable elements in a child's disclosure were second only to recantation as the most common reason that child protection workers judged a child's report of sexual abuse to be false.[5](#) Dalenberg (1996) noted that when children offered implausible information, interviewers were less likely to be neutral and more likely to be skeptical or challenging in their responses.[6](#) Yet there are numerous feasible explanations for the appearance of fantastic elements

1980.



**Larry Pobuda**  
Board Chair

Larry Pobuda has been the Chair of the Board of Directors at CornerHouse since the end of 2006. He first became involved at CornerHouse though his involvement with the Minnesota Chapter of the NAIOP - the National Association of Industrial and Office Parks. This organization lead the building of CornerHouse in 1989 and members have been actively involved at CornerHouse ever since. He is a co-founder of Stewart Lawrence Group, a partnership involved in developing commercial real estate. Prior to the Stewart Lawrence Group, Larry worked with United Properties for 15 years. Larry became Chair of the Board after having served as chair of the Human Services and Finance Committees. Larry and his wife Linda live in Edina with their two children.



**Shao Lee**  
Video Technician

Technician/ Program Assistant

Shao Lee started at CornerHouse on January 22, 2008, as a Program Assistant/Video Technician. In this position he is primarily responsible for taping the forensic interviews of the children who come to CornerHouse. Shao graduated from the Minneapolis Business College with an A.A. in Computer Science in 2002. He anticipates getting his B.A. in Screen Writing in

and it is essential for interviewers to keep an open mind when such reports occur.

In 1997, Everson published an article that included an exhaustive list of mechanisms that might explain the occurrence of bizarre and fantastic elements in children's reports of sexual abuse.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on Everson's theorized mechanisms and my own clinical experience, I have tried to identify some of the most common types of improbable elements seen in forensic interviews. The following categories are examined and exemplified: Empowerment Statements, Developmental Issues, Distortion of Reality, Contamination, Exaggeration, Accurate Description of Reality, and Playful Teasing. Also offered are strategies and techniques to assist interviewers in determining how to best respond when improbable information appears. This can be a difficult task -- clarifying fantastic elements generally requires further questioning of the child; yet questions about fantasy often result in further fantasy.



However, with an awareness of the potential origins for implausible information, interviewers can ask elucidating questions that minimize the risk of further fantasy. For example, developmentally based improbable elements can be generated by "Metaphorical Communication."<sup>8</sup> Utilizing metaphorical communication, a young child may provide descriptive information as if it were factual. The child says, "An alligator was biting my pee-pee," when it would be more accurate to say, "It felt like an alligator was biting my pee-pee." Recognizing a developmental miscommunication, the interviewer can attempt to clarify the information with *sensory questions* - developmentally appropriate questions that seek firsthand information about what the child saw, heard, felt smelled or tasted (e.g., "When that alligator bit your pee-pee, did you *feel* it, or *see* it, or something else?").

This is just one example of the practical suggestions that are the focus of this article. It is hoped that the possibilities offered will remind interviewers that there are numerous explanations for the appearance of unusual information and that seemingly bizarre or fantastic elements should not be viewed as justification for the dismissal of a child's disclosure.

#### References:

1. Everson, M. (1997). Understanding bizarre, improbable and fantastic elements in children's accounts of abuse. *Child Maltreatment*, Vol.2, No. 2. May 1997 (pp.134-149). Sage Publications.
2. Dalenberg, C. (1996). Fantastic elements in child disclosure of abuse. *APSAC Advisor*, 9(2), 1, 5-9.( p. 7).
3. Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Hembrooke, H. (2002). The nature of children's true and false narratives. *Developmental Review*, 22, 520-554.
4. Dalenberg, supra note 2.
5. Everson, M.D. and Boat, B.W. (1989). False allegations of sexual abuse by children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28, 230-235.
6. Dalenberg, supra note 2.
7. Everson, supra note 1.
8. Bourg, W., Broderick, R., Flagor, R., Kelly, D.M., Ervin, D.L., & Butler, J. (1999). *A child interviewer's guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

#### For Professionals

Please use the links below to access articles authored by CornerHouse Staff:

Best Practices In Child Forensic Interviews:  
Interview Instructions And Truth-Lie Discussions  
[http://www.hamline.edu/law/journals/law-policy/articles/Russell final edits .pdf](http://www.hamline.edu/law/journals/law-policy/articles/Russell%20final%20edits.pdf)

2008. He has a broad employment background with emphasis in technology. Shao lives in St. Paul where he is an active volunteer in his community. In his spare time he uses his knowledge in filmmaking and computers, to make videos and clips of his community and the people in it. He believes that through media and technology, if used in an ethical manor, you can effectively change the world for the better.

**Save the Date**

[Eagle's Golf Tournament](#)  
**July 26, 2008**

[Twins Event](#)  
**July 29, 2008**

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- \*Gift Certificates for Volunteers
- \*VHS Tapes (6 hours)
- \*Napkins and Paper Towels
- \*Window Washing
- \*Magazine Subscriptions (for family area)
- \*Printing of Brochures
- \*Copier Toner (please call for details)
- \*General Office Supplies

Forensic Interviews of Children Who Have Developmental Disabilities Part 1 of 2  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_vol\\_19\\_number\\_1\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update_vol_19_number_1_2006.pdf)

Forensic Interviews of Children Who Have Developmental Disabilities Part 2 of 2  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_vol\\_19\\_number\\_2\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update_vol_19_number_2_2006.pdf)

Indicators of a Healthy Multidisciplinary Team  
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Key Factors in Forensic Interviews with Native American Children  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_vol\\_18\\_number\\_6\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update_vol_18_number_6_2005.pdf)

Forensic Interview Room Set-up  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/han\\_newsletter\\_fall\\_2004.pdf](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/han_newsletter_fall_2004.pdf)

Drawings in Forensic Interviews of Children  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_volume\\_16\\_number\\_3\\_2003.html](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update_volume_16_number_3_2003.html)

Using Interpreters in Forensic Interviews  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_volume\\_15\\_number\\_12\\_2002.html](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update_volume_15_number_12_2002.html)

The Use of Anatomical Diagrams in Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interviews  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_volume\\_15\\_number\\_5\\_2002.html](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update_volume_15_number_5_2002.html)

Using Anatomical Dolls In Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interviews  
[http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update\\_volume\\_13\\_number\\_8\\_2000.html](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/update_volume_13_number_8_2000.html)

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ComerHouse Staff

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