



# Statement of Service - 2016

*Mission: CornerHouse assures that the voices of children and adolescents are heard.*

CornerHouse is an accredited children's advocacy center that provides forensic interviews and forensic medical services in a person-centered environment. Services are provided to children, adolescents and vulnerable adults. CornerHouse supports a coordinated multidisciplinary team response to the investigation of alleged maltreatment (including but not limited to neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, and endangerment) and when children, adolescents and vulnerable adults have been witnesses to violent crimes. This multidisciplinary team response helps minimize trauma, suggestibility and the number of interviews to which an alleged victim or witness is subjected as a part of the investigative process.

The multidisciplinary team consists of law enforcement investigators, child protection investigators, an Assistant Hennepin County Attorney, mental health service providers, medical personnel, victim advocacy staff, CornerHouse staff, and, when applicable, investigative staff of licensing agencies. Additional partners may assist with special projects or macro-level initiatives.

The [partner agency] will engage CornerHouse for the year 2016, and will pay CornerHouse a mutually agreed upon fee for services as described herein. This document further outlines forensic interview and medical services provided at the CornerHouse facility.

Critical to collaboration regarding investigations of maltreatment and violent crime is the sharing of confidential data between multidisciplinary team (MDT) members. CornerHouse will provide these services with the understanding that [partner agency] representatives are multidisciplinary team members who will keep information about the interview confidential except to the extent that sharing is allowed pursuant to Minnesota law. The [partner agency] agrees to comply with this agreement and the applicable provisions of Minnesota law.

The following outlines the process for our work together as a part of this agreement:

## INTERVIEW SERVICES

CornerHouse staff will provide forensic interviews for children, adolescents (under the age of eighteen) and vulnerable adults who are referred by the [partner agency] when there is reason to believe that the person may have been a victim of maltreatment or may have witnessed violent crime, and when case circumstances meet CornerHouse's intake criteria. The CornerHouse forensic interview process used with children, adolescents and vulnerable adults will be a coordinated, neutral and fact-finding exchange. The forensic interview is conducted as one component of an investigation. A CornerHouse Forensic Interviewer will be assigned to conduct an interview at the first available and appropriate time.

## **GOALS**

The goals of the forensic interview process are:

1. To create a safe, supportive forum for an alleged victim and/or witness to share his/her experience(s).
2. To maximize each alleged victim's or witness's competence by utilizing an approach that is tailored to his/her developmental abilities and meets her/his unique needs.
3. To maximize the information obtained from the alleged victim or witness about his/her experience(s).
4. To minimize contamination of the alleged victim's or witness's memory of the event(s).
5. To reduce the trauma of the investigation for the alleged victim or witness.
6. To minimize the number of times the alleged victim or witness is interviewed.
7. To maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the investigative process by facilitating communication among relevant parties.

## INTAKE CRITERIA

In order to provide the highest quality of services to children, vulnerable adults and families, CornerHouse staff members require referral information to determine the appropriateness of a CornerHouse interview. The following case considerations and procedures will be utilized to assess the urgency of a case for scheduling purposes.

- A. **Emergency:** CornerHouse will attempt to schedule interviews within 24 hours of receiving an intake in the following circumstances:
- **Offender Access:** The alleged victim remains at immediate risk due to alleged offender access.
  - **Non-Offender Concerns:** Non-offending caregiver of a child, adolescent or vulnerable adult is viewed by investigators as uncooperative with the investigation, or there is concern about potential contamination of the alleged victim's statement by a non-offending caregiver or other family member.
  - **Unknown Offender:** The alleged offender cannot be identified prior to the forensic interview and there is concern that the alleged victim's immediate safety may be in jeopardy.
  - **Safety of Other Child(ren) or Vulnerable Adult(s):** Alleged offender in caretaker role of, or has access to, other child(ren), adolescents or vulnerable adult(s) at risk (i.e., siblings, students, day care, foster care, group home). The existence of an effective safety plan and the presence of other protective adults will be considered when determining if the case meets emergency criteria.
  - **Witness of Violent Crime (i.e., homicide, assault):** Interview of a child, adolescent or vulnerable adult witness may be considered an emergency. Screening must occur regarding the alleged witness' trauma level and ability to be interviewed.
  - **36-Hour Arrests:** Alleged offender has been arrested on probable cause and alleged offender release is pending results of interview.
  - **72-Hour Hold:** Alleged victim is held in protective custody and return is pending results of interview.
- B. **Priority:** CornerHouse will attempt to schedule interviews within 72 hours of receiving intake in the following circumstances:
- **72-Hour Hold:** Alleged victim is held in protective custody and the hold may be extended during investigation. CornerHouse will coordinate with referring professionals to accommodate court-imposed deadlines.
  - **Perpetrator Access:** Alleged offender contact and or visits are denied pending investigation.
- C. **MultiSession:** If the following criteria are met, the interview will be routinely scheduled as a MultiSession interview:
- Age and ability of client
    - Children three years of age or younger;
    - Children four and five years of age who have disabilities or who are multi-lingual and/or need the use of an interpreter; or
    - Any child or vulnerable adult who has special needs that could best be facilitated by an extended interview process.
  - Availability of a non-offending caregiver or other adult who has knowledge about the client's abilities so the Forensic Interviewer may gather information pertinent to the unique needs of the client.

In cases where Emergency criteria and MultiSession criteria co-exist, efforts will be made to utilize the MultiSession process to the greatest extent possible.

- D. **Other:** The following circumstances may require further evaluation by CornerHouse intake staff:
- **Recantation:** Recantation is always a possibility. Concern that the alleged victim will recant allegations, in the absence of a clear indication of recantation, is not criteria for an emergency interview. It is appropriate to refer an alleged victim to CornerHouse even if they recant prior to the forensic interview appointment.
  - **Language Skills:** The referring professional will need to assess the alleged victim's language skill level at the time of intake and indicate any developmental delays or need for interpretive services or adaptive technology. CornerHouse will provide interpreter services (at no charge to investigators or families) as needed for children, vulnerable adults and accompanying caregivers who speak any language other than English in the home.
  - **Under the age of 3:** If a child being referred for a forensic interview is between the ages of two-years, eight-months and three-years-old, the following questions will be asked of the referent at the time of intake or referral:

- specifics of disclosure and words used by the child in the disclosure;
- questions asked of the child; and
- child's ability to communicate.

If these questions cannot be answered at the time of intake or referral, the investigator will be requested by CornerHouse staff to observe and/or screen the child and report back. The above three items will be considered in staff member's decision to interview children under three. Routinely, children under three will be scheduled for a MultiSession Interview.

▪ **Follow-Up Interview**

- In cases where CornerHouse has completed an initial interview, referents may request a Follow-Up Interview. Typically, a change in the case circumstances prompts the investigator to request a Follow-Up Interview. The investigator is expected to assess the individual's willingness to return to CornerHouse. CornerHouse will evaluate these requests on a case-by-case basis to determine whether a Follow-Up Interview is in the best interests of the individual involved.

▪ **Adjusted Interview**

- Adjusted interviews are scheduled when the interviewer or team determines the need for an additional session *during* the initial interview session.

E. **Declined referrals:** The following case circumstances do not meet intake criteria for a CornerHouse forensic interview. Investigators may request a letter from CornerHouse detailing the reasons why the referral is declined. In these cases, CornerHouse may recommend a referral for a psychosocial evaluation:

- **Too Young:** Children under the chronological age of 32 months (2 years, 8 months) are not developmentally capable of a forensic interview.
- **No Disclosure:** Children, adolescents or vulnerable adults who demonstrate sexualized behavior (i.e., unusual masturbation, age-inappropriate sexual knowledge, peer sexual contact) in the absence of disclosure indicating maltreatment (i.e., who did what to whom) are not typically eligible for an interview at CornerHouse.
- **Previously Interviewed:** Children, teens or vulnerable adults who have been previously interviewed (asked details of incident by an investigative professional) regarding the same incident or allegation will not be re-interviewed at CornerHouse. CornerHouse acknowledges the need for screening of children, adolescents or vulnerable adults by investigators, but respectfully requests that investigators collect only minimal facts prior to an interview. CornerHouse recognizes that multiple interviews have been linked to fact contamination and emotional trauma of children. Recognizing that disclosure is a process, a therapeutic referral is generally preferred when additional details of the same event surface after a forensic interview has been conducted. As needed, individual case circumstances may be discussed to determine if a forensic interview is in the best interest of the alleged victim.
- **Alleged Perpetrators:** CornerHouse interviews alleged victims and witnesses only. At times, an individual with history of perpetration will be referred to be interviewed about their alleged victimization. In these cases, CornerHouse takes care to keep these individuals entirely separated from any other clients who may be in the facility at that time, while providing appropriate supervision.

On rare occasions, at the request of investigators, CornerHouse may agree to conduct forensic interviews with clients who do not meet the usual intake criteria.

**PROCEDURES**

A. **Coordinated Approach:** When both a [partner agency] representative and a child or adult protection representative are involved in the investigation, CornerHouse will accept a referral from either party with the understanding that the [partner agency] and child/adult protection representatives will coordinate the scheduling of the interview to ensure greatest participation from both parties. Whenever possible, all investigative parties and an assistant county attorney shall be present during the forensic interview process. At least one investigator must be present for the interview to be conducted. In the rare case in which a multidisciplinary team ("MDT") member is unable to attend the interview, s/he will have access to the video-recorded interview and a written interview report. Additionally, the missing member is responsible for communicating with the other team members if further information or clarification is required. This coordinated approach seeks to minimize the number of interviews conducted with the alleged victim, reduce

possible trauma, and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the investigative process. Alleged perpetrators shall not transport clients or be present at CornerHouse during an interview.

- **Pre-interview Meeting:** An MDT meeting will be held prior to the CornerHouse interview. This meeting will be facilitated by the CornerHouse interviewer and may include the following team members: child/adult protection investigator(s); law enforcement investigator(s); assistant county attorney (as assigned); CornerHouse medical personnel; Minnesota Department of Education investigator(s); Minnesota Department of Human Services investigator(s), and other professionals identified as necessary by the team. Participation in the Pre-Interview Meeting is generally limited to those professionals involved in the initial investigative stages. The purpose of this pre-interview team meeting is to ensure accuracy of intake information, share information about the alleged victim's abilities and convey additional basic, relevant information (such as events that have occurred since intake, results of other interviews or interrogations of suspects) to ensure that the interviewer can best conduct the forensic interview.
- **Post-interview Meeting:** An MDT meeting will be held immediately following the CornerHouse interview. The meeting will be facilitated by the interviewer and, in addition to team members participating in the pre-interview meeting, may also include CornerHouse Family Services staff as requested by the team. At the post-interview MDT meeting, information will be shared pertaining to the future direction of the investigation(s), services to the alleged victim and family, and medical and therapeutic recommendations.
- **Multi-victim Cases:** When more than one victim is at CornerHouse to be interviewed regarding the same case, an effort will be made to utilize different interviewers for each interview. Whenever possible, all interviewers involved in a given case will be involved in the pre-interview MDT meeting, as well as MDT meetings held in between interviews. Essential information may be relayed to the subsequent interviewer between interviews. Interviewers involved in related cases will not observe the related interviews.
- **Cases involving Multiple Jurisdictions:** The preferred procedure in these cases is for all involved jurisdictions to be notified of the interview appointment so that each jurisdiction can send a representative to CornerHouse to observe the interview and participate in the pre-interview and post-interview team meetings. This level of coordination helps CornerHouse achieve its goals of 1) maximizing the information obtained from the alleged victim or witness about his/her experience, 2) minimizing the number of times the alleged victim or witness is interviewed, and 3) maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the investigative process by facilitating communication among relevant parties. In the event that all jurisdictions cannot be represented at the interview appointment, those jurisdictions present are expected to communicate with those not present to share relevant case information.
- **Interview Observation:** Investigators and the assistant county attorney will observe the interview in progress through closed-circuit television. The CornerHouse staff video-recording the interview will also observe. Others are prohibited from observing the forensic interview except by permission from the MDT. Caregivers do not observe forensic interviews.
- **Team Participation in the Interview:** Towards the end of the interview, investigators and the assistant county attorney may call the interview room to communicate additional questions to the interviewer. Ultimate discretion rests with the interviewer as to whether to ask additional questions.

#### B. Pre-Interview Contact with Caregiver(s) and Alleged Victim

- **Caregiver Meeting:** The interviewer may meet briefly with a caregiver (in person or via telephone) outside the presence of the alleged victim to briefly review the interview process and to gather information about the overall development and unique needs of the alleged victim. This information may include the alleged victim's current comfort level and knowledge about why she/he is at CornerHouse.
- **Pre-interview Contact with Alleged Victim:** The interviewer will have minimal contact with the alleged victim outside of the interview room off of video. If developmentally appropriate, the interviewer may show the alleged victim the interview technical room en route to the interview room. Conversation will be limited to that which is necessary to facilitate the client's transition into the interview room. Under no

circumstances will the interviewer initiate conversation relating to the maltreatment allegation prior to the formal interview.

### C. Forensic Interview Process

#### a) Guiding Principles

The CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol™ is:

1. Person centered; individuals are:
  - a. Treated with dignity and respect;
  - b. Recognized as the expert regarding their own experience; and
  - c. Afforded the opportunity to communicate about their experience in their own way.
2. Semi-structured
  - a. Each interview is tailored to meet the developmental and emotional needs of the individual;
  - b. The progression of each interview is guided by the individual, and is not limited by stages, process, or techniques.
3. Forensically sound
  - a. Inquiry is intended to elicit accurate narrative. When direct prompts are necessary, interviewers will return to open-ended inquiry as soon as possible;
  - b. An unbiased perspective is maintained throughout;
  - c. Leading and suggestive techniques and situations are avoided.

#### b) The CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol™ consists of the following stages:

##### **Build Rapport**

- Purpose To establish a foundation for the interview process by
- a. Orienting the individual
  - b. Learning about the individual
  - c. Facilitating the individual's best possible functioning
- Approaches
- Utilize orienting messages
  - Engage in narrative practice
  - Conduct a general assessment of functioning
  - Adjust the interview based on the individual's presentation

##### **Seek Information**

- Purpose To provide an opportunity for the individual to report his or her experience
- Approaches
- Choose a forensically sound strategy for approaching the topic of inquiry, fully utilizing indirect prompts
  - Incorporate interview tools in an intentional manner, when appropriate.

##### **Explore Statements**

- Purpose To allow the individual to share details of his or her experience

- Approaches
- Listen to the individual
    - Utilize *Invitation and Inquiry*
      - Encourage narrative
      - Ask follow-up and clarifying questions as needed
    - Consider the individual's developmental abilities
    - Maintain an open mind
  - Utilize interview tools as beneficial, to maximize the individual's ability to communicate his or her experience
  - Return to Seek Information as appropriate
    - Explore alternative explanations and/or additional forms of maltreatment

### End Respectfully

Purpose To provide a respectful closure to and transition from the interview by attending to the individual's

- a. Presentation
- b. Communicated experience
- c. Observed needs

- Approaches
- Explore resources, reinforcing information the individual shared, as appropriate
  - Provide a developmentally sensitive and individual-centered transition

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c) **MultiSession Interviews:** CornerHouse will utilize this extended interview process for children, adolescents and vulnerable adults who meet the relevant criteria (as described above). MultiSession interviews allow for one interview to be divided into two or more sessions in order to better meet the needs of young children, children who have disabilities, and/or young children who are multi-lingual or need the use of an interpreter. This process may also be used with adolescents and vulnerable adults. This process generally includes a meeting (in person or by telephone) with non-offending caregivers, or another adult who has knowledge of the alleged victim's abilities, to gather information about the individual's communication, development and functioning pertinent to conducting the interview in a manner that meets the unique needs of each client. While investigative partners are not required to participate in this caregiver meeting, CornerHouse relies on investigators to schedule the time of the meeting in coordination with intake staff and the caregiver. CornerHouse depends on multidisciplinary team partners to gather accurate information that will help determine whether a MultiSession interview is in the best interest of the individual, and if so, whether one or more interview sessions are necessary.

D. **Documentation:** Each forensic interview will be memorialized by video-recording on DVD and by written forensic interview report. A copy of the recorded interview will stored in a secure digital archive as well. Children aged five years and older who are interviewed at CornerHouse will generally be informed by the interviewer that the team is watching and that the interview is being recorded. CornerHouse will provide a video recording of the interview on DVD to the [partner agency] representative. CornerHouse will provide a written report of the interview to multidisciplinary team members. Upon request and as necessary, CornerHouse may provide additional copies of the video-recording to multidisciplinary team members. CornerHouse will not provide copies of the video-recording, written report or other client records to parties outside of the multidisciplinary team unless required by law and pursuant to a signed court order and protective stipulation. Requests for information may be referred to the [partner agency] for consideration. CornerHouse staff members are available to [partner agency] to consult in regards to the potential consequences of such release of information on a case-by-case or other basis as requested by the [partner agency]. Recorded interviews and client files will be securely stored at CornerHouse until 10 years after the client reaches the age of majority (or 10 years after the date of the interview for vulnerable adults), at which point they will be destroyed in a secure manner.

- E. **Sexually Exploited Youth:** Since the passage of MN Statute §145.4716, CornerHouse has recognized sexually exploited youth as alleged victims who are eligible for our services. At the request of [partner agency], CornerHouse practices may be modified to meet the needs of these youth and the investigators.

## **MEDICAL SERVICES**

### **INTAKE CRITERIA**

CornerHouse offers non-acute forensic medical examinations to all individuals who are referred for forensic interview services. Medical examinations are available to all clients, regardless of their ability to pay. The sexual abuse forensic medical examination and supporting laboratory work will be conducted pursuant to Minn.Stat. §609.35 without cost to the child or family. Minn.Stat. §609.35 mandates that the cost will be paid for by “the county in which the criminal sexual conduct occurred.”

A referral for a forensic medical examination may be appropriate if the alleged victim has disclosed:

- Skin-to-skin contact
- Exchange of bodily fluids
- Possible risk of a Sexually Transmitted Infection
- Genital trauma, discharge, bleeding
- Concern about pregnancy
- Expression of pain, concern, or anxiety by child or caregiver

### **PROCEDURES**

Non-acute sexual abuse forensic medical examinations are generally provided at the recommendation of the multidisciplinary team, an investigator, the forensic interviewer, or at the request of a caregiver. The purpose of the medical exam is to:

- provide an overall assessment of an alleged victim’s health and safety and recommend appropriate follow-up and treatment
- document additional statements and/or physical evidence in circumstances of sexual abuse, and
- provide reassurance to an alleged victim and the caregiver(s) about the alleged victim’s body.

A [partner agency] or child protection representative will be responsible for communicating with caregivers as appropriate regarding the scheduling of this appointment. Investigators are not required to be present for the medical exam, though we request that investigators help ensure that every child has a support person to accompany them to the medical exam. CornerHouse staff will also provide support to the alleged victim and medical personnel before and during the examination. CornerHouse will provide a copy of the medical report to investigators.

When there is a need for an acute sexual abuse forensic medical exam or a medical evaluation of physical abuse, CornerHouse will generally refer clients to Hennepin County Medical Center or the University of Minnesota Masonic Children’s Hospital.

## **ADDITIONAL SERVICES**

### **A. Testimony**

If a CornerHouse forensic interview or medical exam results in a criminal, juvenile delinquency, child protection, or administrative hearing, CornerHouse staff and/or medical personnel will provide testimony pursuant to subpoena. Expert testimony in regards to cases where CornerHouse has not provided interview services are outside the scope of this agreement; these services are available for an additional fee.

### **B. Case Review**

CornerHouse will provide case review opportunities on a monthly basis (typically the second Friday of every month). All multidisciplinary team members are invited and encouraged to attend. The CornerHouse Case Review Team is a subcommittee of the Hennepin County Multi-Disciplinary Team established under MN Statute §626.558, pursuant to the letter of Deborah Huskins, Area Director Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department, dated October 13, 2008.

The Case Review process assures the effectiveness of the multidisciplinary team by:

- Reviewing cases on a monthly basis, attending to both micro and macro level issues
- Sharing facts and observations in a confidential environment
- Ensuring that each discipline is represented and heard
- Bringing the knowledge, experience and expertise of team members together to maximize each person's ability to fulfill his or her role
- Highlighting best practices
- Maintaining collaboration among the agencies involved
- Following through on recommendations from the team
- Increasing team members' understanding of the complexity of cases involving the maltreatment of children, adolescents and vulnerable adults
- Providing support to team members

Any team member who wishes to suggest a case for case review will notify the Forensic Services Director at least seven working days prior to the scheduled case review meeting. Any team member may suggest a case for follow-up discussion. Client information that is disclosed during case review is to be kept confidential pursuant to professional ethics, agencies' policies, and relevant state statutes regulating child protection case review teams (MN Statute §626.558).

### **C. Training**

- On a quarterly basis, CornerHouse will provide orientation training for [partner agency] employees. CornerHouse strongly encourages all new investigators to attend, as the orientation provides valuable information about effective multidisciplinary team coordination. There is no charge to attend orientation, but pre-registration is required.
- CornerHouse staff are also available to provide customized community education on many topics at no charge to MDT partners and their constituents upon request.
- Forensic interview training is also available to investigators and prosecutors. There is a fee to attend forensic interview training, but grant funds may allow for scholarships. Pre-registration is required.

### **D. Family Services**

CornerHouse will provide Family Services to clients and families to the extent resources are available and services appropriate. Family Services include in-person crisis support, referrals for therapeutic and other services, follow-up support through phone contact and in-person meetings, targeted home visiting with select families and support groups for youth and caregivers. Family Services are 100% funded through grants and donations and operate in a manner independent of CornerHouse Forensic Services.

### **E. Courtesy Interviews**

At the [partner agency]'s request, CornerHouse will provide courtesy interview services for another law enforcement agency when a [partner agency] representative is investigating the case on behalf of the other law enforcement agency. The [partner agency] investigator must be present for the courtesy interview and must take responsibility for transferring the information [i.e., the DVD and written report] to the other law enforcement agency. The [partner agency] is also responsible for informing the other law enforcement agency that CornerHouse will require reimbursement for any related court testimony.