

# What *Can* a Children's Advocacy Center Do For Me?

BY NANCY SEGER, LGSW, FORENSIC SERVICES DIRECTOR, CORNERHOUSE

I know. You're swamped. Your investigators are treading water, just trying to keep up with their current caseload. It's hard enough to slow down just to take a breath, much less to partner with any community agencies. And child abuse cases? Nobody wants to touch those with a 10-foot pole.

But the calls keep coming in: 9-year-old Sally says her Uncle Willie touched her private parts again after her birthday party; 11-year-old Devon told his mom about what his coach did to him after practice last night; 13-year-old Bella refuses to go home from school because she's afraid she'll get whooped by her mom again.

And because you care about the safety of these kids, and every other child in your jurisdiction, you take the reports. You assign the cases for investigation, and you do the best you can to keep up. Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) provide a non-intimidating, safe space for alleged victims to talk about what happened in a way that minimizes their potential trauma. CACs work with multidisciplinary teams to prosecute offenders and to help victims heal.

Children's Advocacy Centers can aid your departments in the pursuit of justice by:

## **Coordinating the efforts of all involved parties, thereby saving time.**

- Multidisciplinary teams are more successful in eliminating duplication, assuring that children do not fall through the cracks, and bringing more cases to a successful resolution.<sup>1</sup>

## **Increasing the accountability for offenders.**

- Research indicates that alleged perpetrators convicted of sex crimes against children were sentenced to longer prison terms when they had been investigated using the CAC multidisciplinary model.<sup>2</sup>

## **Improving the cooperation and satisfaction of caregivers.**

- The non-offending parents and caregivers of alleged child victims seen at CACs were more satisfied with the investigation process than those whose children were not served by CACs.<sup>3</sup>

## **Promoting promising practices.**

- CACs share relevant research, provide training and make other valuable resources available to all components of the multidisciplinary teams.

## **Fostering recovery of victims.**

- Young people seen at CACs are more likely to be referred for medical services, mental health services and behavioral health assessments.<sup>4</sup>

## **Saving money.**

- A cost-benefit analysis shows that traditional investigations cost 36% more than CAC collaborative investigations.<sup>5</sup> An investigation using a CAC can save as much as \$1,000 per child!

When your investigators bring an alleged victim to a children's advocacy center, they are making a whole package of vital services available to that child, adolescent or vulnerable adult. Not only will that individual receive a high-quality forensic interview with a very skilled and compassionate interviewer, but their whole family will also receive support and guidance through a time of profound crisis. They will receive referrals for necessary medical and mental health services and will have an active supportive partner as they prepare for trial. Forensic interviewers from a CAC will also provide testimony at trial regarding the interview, which frees your investigators from having to speak to that aspect of the investigation on the stand.

You can be assured of high-quality services at a CAC. Every accredited Children's Advocacy Center must meet the standards found on the following page, established by the National Children's Alliance (<http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org>):

<b>MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM (MDT)</b>	A multidisciplinary team for response to child abuse allegations includes representation from the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement</li> <li>• Child protective services</li> <li>• Prosecution</li> <li>• Medical</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Victim advocacy</li> <li>• Children's advocacy center</li> </ul>
<b>CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND DIVERSITY</b>	Culturally competent services are routinely made available to all CAC clients and coordinated with the multidisciplinary team response.
<b>FORENSIC INTERVIEWS</b>	Forensic interviews are conducted in a manner that is legally sound, of a neutral, fact finding nature, and are coordinated to avoid duplicative interviewing.
<b>VICTIM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY</b>	Victim support and advocacy services are routinely made available to all CAC clients and their non-offending family members as part of the multidisciplinary team response.
<b>MEDICAL EVALUATION</b>	Specialized medical evaluation and treatment services are routinely made available to all CAC clients and coordinated with the multidisciplinary team response.
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>	Specialized trauma-focused mental health services, designed to meet the unique needs of the children and non-offending family members, are routinely made available as part of the multidisciplinary team response.
<b>CASE REVIEW</b>	A formal process in which multidisciplinary discussion and information sharing regarding the investigation, case status and services needed by the child and family is to occur on a routine basis.
<b>CASE TRACKING</b>	Children's advocacy centers must develop and implement a system for monitoring case progress and tracking case outcomes for all MDT components.
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY</b>	A designated legal entity responsible for program and fiscal operations has been established and implements basic sound administrative policies and procedures.
<b>CHILD-FOCUSED SETTING</b>	The child-focused setting is comfortable, private and both physically and psychologically safe for diverse populations of children and their non-offending family members.

Please consult the list on the right to find the children's advocacy center closest to you! If you are interested in establishing a new CAC in your area, please contact Marcia Milliken at 612-615-4605.

CornerHouse is an accredited CAC that assures the voices of children and adolescents are heard. CornerHouse is a world-class leader in forensic interviewing. It provides forensic interviews and medical services to children, adolescents and vulnerable adults in Minnesota (mostly Hennepin County) that may be victims of abuse or witnesses of violent crimes. CornerHouse also offers family services to support families and caregivers with education counseling and crisis management. In addition, CornerHouse provides internationally-recognized, state-of-the-art training in forensic interviewing throughout the world. Founded in 1989, CornerHouse turns 25 this year. [www.cornerhousemn.org](http://www.cornerhousemn.org)

- 1 Smith, D.W., Witte, T.H., & Fricker-Elhai, A.E. (2006). Service outcomes in physical and sexual abuse cases: A comparison of child advocacy center-based and standard services. *Child Maltreatment*, 11 (4), 354-60.
- 2 Walsh, W.A., Lippert, T., Cross, T.E., Maurice, D.M., & Davison, K.S. (2008). How long to prosecute child sexual abuse for a community using a children's advocacy center and two comparison communities? *Child Maltreatment*, 13 (1), 3-13.
- 3 Jones, L.M., Cross, T.E., Walsh, W.A., Simone, M. (2007). Do children advocacy centers improve families' experiences of child sexual abuse investigations? *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 31, 1069-1085.
- 4 Walsh, W.A., Lippert, T., Cross, T.E., Maurice, D.M., & Davison, K.S. (2008) Which sexual abuse victims receive a forensic medical examination? The impact of Children's Advocacy Centers. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 31, 1053-1068.
- 5 Formby, J., Shadoin, A.L., Shao, L, Magnuson, S.N., & Overman, L.B. (2006). Cost-benefit analysis of community responses to child maltreatment: A comparison of communities with and without child advocacy centers. (Research Report No. 06-3). Huntsville, AL: National Children's Advocacy Center

**CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTERS IN MINNESOTA**  
(<http://www.mrcac.org/statechapter/minnesota/>)

**Minnesota Children's Alliance**  
(coordinates activities among all MN CACs)

15225 Square Lakes Trail N  
Stillwater, MN 55082  
marcia.milliken@gmail.com  
Marcia Milliken, Executive Director  
P: 612/615-4605  
[www.minnesotachildrensalliance.org](http://www.minnesotachildrensalliance.org)

**Family Advocacy Center of Northern Minnesota (Associate)**

North Country Health Services  
1300 Anne Street, NW  
Bemidji, MN 56601  
Aria.Trudeau@sanfordhealth.org  
Aria Trudeau, Director  
P: 218/333/6011  
F: 218/333-5880

**First Witness Child Abuse Resource Center (Accredited)**

4 West 5th St  
Duluth, MN 55806  
beth@firstwitness.org  
Beth Olson, Executive Director  
P: 218/727-8353  
F: 218/727-3747  
[www.firstwitness.org](http://www.firstwitness.org)

**Red River Child Advocacy (Accredited)**

100 S 4th St, Suite 302  
Fargo, ND 58104  
annarrcac@yahoo.com  
Anna Frissel, Contact  
P: 701/234-4580

**CornerHouse (Accredited)**  
**Interagency Child Abuse Evaluation and Training Center**

2502-10th Avenue So  
Minneapolis, MN 55404-4510  
patricia.harmon@childrensmn.org  
Patricia Harmon, Executive Director  
P: 612/813-8300  
F: 612/813-8330  
[www.cornerhousemn.org](http://www.cornerhousemn.org)

**Mayo Clinic-Rochester (Associate)**

200 First St SW  
Rochester, MN 55905  
schmidt.koreen@mayo.edu  
Koreen Schmidt, Contact  
P: 507/266-0443

**Midwest Children's Resource Center (Accredited)**

Gardenview Medical Building Suite 401  
347 N Smith Avenue,  
St. Paul, MN 55102  
Carolyn Levitt, Executive Director  
P: 651/220-6750  
F: 651/220-6770

**Matty's Place**

Tau Center, Suite 309  
511 Hilbert Street  
Winona, MN 55987  
cmeiners@fccnetwork.org  
Carrie Meiners, Executive Director