

UNION COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Child Advocacy Center Annual Report 2014



A MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING PROSECUTOR

(PICTURE)

Crimes against children are among some of the most heinous and disturbing that we in law enforcement come across. When it was established in 1995, the Union County Prosecutor's Office Child Advocacy Center had 10 staff members assigned to the building handling a continually growing caseload.

Today, 27 staff members work at the center, tending to the more than 1,000 people who visit and utilize the Center's resources each year. The current state-of-the-art facility adequately meets the sensitive needs of these vulnerable children and their families. The facility also now has sufficient space to properly conduct investigations and individual/family counseling.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation raised funds to support the construction of the new Child Advocacy Center. The "one-stop" service center is the location at which police, prosecutors, child protection workers, nurses, physicians, and therapists work with the sexually and physically abused children of Union County. At the Center, the young victims disclose the details of sexual and physical abuse in a friendly environment where they receive appropriate referrals for medical and psychological follow-up.

We have adopted the multi-disciplinary team model for the Child Advocacy Center, whereby detectives interview children regarding the details of the abuse in a comforting setting. A therapist meets with the family following disclosure to perform crisis counseling, stabilize the family, and make future counseling recommendations. Finally, a Deputy Acting Assistant Prosecutor then begins the yearlong process of shepherding the family's case through criminal litigation. A social worker coordinates additional medical, child protective, and psychological services for each family.

Thank you for your continued diligence in addressing crimes against children and your support for this center.

UNION COUNTY CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

For three decades, the Union County Prosecutor's Office has consistently dedicated every available resource to protecting survivors of sexual abuse and holding perpetrators fully accountable for the bodily and psychological harm of children, teens, and adults. Referrals come from all 21 municipalities. In February 2013, the Child Advocacy Center staff and the Sex Crimes Unit of the Office merged to form a single Special Victims Unit. At that same time the Special Victims Unit (SVU) assumed responsibility for interviewing all children, from infant to 17, who disclose sexual penetration. The SVU staff includes nine detectives, five assistant prosecutors, two clerical support staff members, a multidisciplinary team coordinator, two part-time on-site therapists from Trinitas Regional Medical Center, six intake workers from the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP), and a forensic sexual assault nurse examiner.



The SVU members shepherd each child's case through the criminal justice system. Each case moves from initial disclosure to continued investigation, complaint authorization, updated safety and mental health assessments, Grand Jury presentation, plea or trial, and finally to criminal sentencing. Essential to the investigatory process is the building of a rapport with each child, respecting the child's evolving capacity to both disclose and heal, and stabilizing parents in acute

crisis. Detectives who are trained as forensic child interviewers then seek to interview the child in an open-ended format. Often, sexual abuse disclosure is an event that is painful for a child. The digitally recorded interview process eases disclosure and prevents multiple re-interviews. The Union County Multi-Disciplinary Team meets monthly to assess the status of all necessary and appropriate investigative, legal, therapeutic, and medical services for each family. The MDT members routinely review family case plans and services to meet the evolving, complex, and ongoing needs of families recovering from sexual and physical abuse.

SVU members are jointly involved with municipal police detectives in the initial stages of investigations into the sexual abuse of adults. The SVU supervises the investigation and reviews witness interviews, suspect statements, and evidence analysis, and it obtains search warrants, court orders for phone records, and biological evidence. The Unit investigators work with municipal officers in providing field support. Assistant prosecutors direct the investigations and provide legal advice at each critical stage of the proceedings. The assistant prosecutor will make a determination of probable cause or close the investigation due to insufficient credible evidence. After the signing of complaints and arrest of a suspect, the assistant prosecutor will build a rapport with the victim, present the matter to a Grand Jury, negotiate a plea, or prepare for trial and sentencing.

The SVU works closely with the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), the Union County Prosecutor's Office Forensics Laboratory, and the New Jersey State Police Laboratory. In June 2001, the Prosecutor's Office, following two years of collaborative efforts with Runnells Hospital, the Rape Crisis Center, and emergency room staffs at Trinitas, Muhlenberg, and Overlook hospitals, established a special team to address the needs of survivors of sexual assault. If a survivor reports a sexual assault that occurred within the last five days, the survivor is offered special medical and therapeutic services. The Prosecutor's Office, in close collaboration with the Rape Crisis Center and local hospital emergency rooms, meet every eight weeks as the Sexual Assault Response Team Advisory Board to review and improve patient care at the point of first disclosure.

The Union County Child Advocacy Center is an integral part of the SVU team. Since 1995, the Union County Child Advocacy Center's detectives have interviewed 3,093 children aged 12 and under regarding sexual abuse. Since 2006, Trinitas mental health staff members have provided services in the form of group and individual counseling and out-of-county mental health referrals to over 480 families. 2014 marked the second year of operation for the new "wraparound" service model at the new Union County Child Advocacy Center located at 240 West Jersey Street in Elizabeth. Colocation has allowed total investigative, prosecutorial, and therapeutic review time of all new sexual abuse referrals to be reduced from five business days to one business day.

In 2014, the misery index for children in Union County was high. Over 554 referrals of child abuse involving children under the age of 17 were received, 53 criminal investigations were opened, and 53 criminal complaints were signed. Regardless of the opening of a criminal investigation, all families were offered community-based resources for follow-up. The vast majority of complaints were signed for first- and second-degree sexual assaults. Detectives from the Office completed 298 interviews of sexually abused children, teens, and complaint witnesses,

and with the help of the clerical staff, they obtained 165 typewritten statements from related witnesses. Seventy-one suspect interviews also were conducted by investigative staff. The child and teen sexual abuse clearance rate in 2014, *i.e.*, those formal investigations that resulted in a criminal charge, was 94 percent. This figure is a single-year Unit record. Eighty-one children and families were screened and provided with mental health services by the Child and Adolescent Outpatient Unit of Trinitas Regional Medical Center, with other children and families receiving mental health services from additional providers. Additionally, legal and investigative staff members are assigned to the Child Abduction Response Team (CART) and assisted in locating numerous children and teens who were reported missing and/or endangered.

In 2014, the SVU prosecuted a 27-year-old martial arts instructor who met his 13-year-old victim when she was a martial arts student at his studio in the Township of Springfield. The defendant began a friendship with the victim and her family and gained their trust, then had sex with the victim on two occasions in the karate academy. When arrested, the defendant gave a full confession and admitted to the sexual relationship. The defendant pleaded guilty and is serving a seven-year New Jersey State Prison sentence subject to the provisions of the No Early Release Act.

Also in 2014, the Child Advocacy Center's legal and investigative staff investigated a case involving a stepfather sexually assaulting two of his teenage stepdaughters. One of the victims provided a sworn statement detailing over 50 incidents of sexual assault during a three-year period while she was in middle school. The investigation also revealed that the defendant would force his biological son to take photographs of him naked. The son indicated that if he refused, the defendant would beat him. The case is pending post-indictment litigation.

Lastly, in 2014 the Child Advocacy Center's legal and investigative staff charged a Boy Scout leader with sexually assaulting his two biological sons over the course of five to six years. The victims also disclosed that they observed the defendant, their father, naked and masturbating while viewing images of child pornography on the defendant's computer. The statements of the victims led to the seizure and search of the defendant's computers, on which a large amount of child pornography images and videos were discovered. This child pornography portion of the investigation was referred to the United States Attorney's Office in Newark for prosecution. Plea negotiations in both State and Federal court are ongoing.

As we have reached the middle of 2015, the Misery Index for children is increasing. Over 369 referrals of child abuse involving children under the age of 17 were received in the first seven months. Regardless of the opening of a criminal investigation, all families were offered community-based resources for follow-up.

Friends of the Child Advocacy Center of Union County and Public and Private Grants

Efforts to equip the new Child Advocacy Center were greatly aided by The Friends of the Child Advocacy Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. In 2012 the Friends of the Child Advocacy Center generously purchased and donated \$146,000 worth of new furniture and framed artwork for all four floors of the 11,000-square foot building. The furniture and artwork provides a serene setting for families. The Friends of the CAC also agreed to assist in paying for a majority

of the costs associated with mental health intake evaluation and treatment for children at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and depression following the disclosure of sexual abuse. Through a \$3,800 micro grant from the Union County Commission on Missing and Abused Children, the CAC was able to offer four professional development training seminars to DCPD and CAC staff on the importance of discharge strategies for vicarious trauma for child abuse professionals, understanding and engaging non-offending parents of children victimized by sexual abuse, and understanding and interviewing adolescent victims of sexual abuse.



Infrastructure Reform, Community Education, Primary Prevention

Staff from the Child Advocacy Center recently participated in numerous state and county initiatives to reduce child abuse. Staff participated in the important work of the Metro Child Fatality Review Board, which examines public and private entities that respond to suspicious child deaths in Union and Essex counties. The local and then full Child Fatality Review Board makes recommendations for system-wide improvements in its annual report and issues inquiry letters to service providers when there has been a deficit in service. CAC staff members also provide training and technical assistance to the Rahway and Linden public school systems as well as the Union County School Nurse Association to educate school personnel on the need for prompt reporting of abuse. In addition, CAC staff provided training on juvenile sexual assault reporting protocols during the Union County Prosecutor's Office's annual Forum for School Administrators. This training was attended by approximately 100 people, comprised of superintendents of Union County schools systems, principals of local schools, school staff, and

law enforcement from Union County.

During the month of May 2014, the New Jersey State Police provided training to the Union County Child Abduction Response Team (C.A.R.T.) at the Child Advocacy Center and the John H. Stamler Police Academy. The UCPO is required under New Jersey law to lead all investigations concerning child abductions in Union County where the abducted or missing minor is 17 or younger. Training was provided to outline when CART would be activated and what investigative tactics would be utilized, what legal remedies are available, and what decisions need to be made based on an ongoing analysis of all incoming data from all agency partners. The goal outlined was to have a pre-determined, multi-agency team that is fully trained and available to expeditiously complete each search and investigation for abducted or missing minors in Union County. The training further facilitated prompt communication and established clear lines of responsibility prior to the report of a missing and/or abducted child. Tabletop exercises were presented and groups worked together to solve the “missing child fact patterns.” During the year CAC staff assisted the local police departments in locating numerous missing and endangered children and safely returned them home.



CAC Statistical Outcome Report 2014

Child Abuse (Age: infant-12) Referrals: 360
(DYFS/Police/Hospital/School)

Multi-Disciplinary Case Review: 335
(DCPP/Child Protection Center/Trinitas
and Prosecutor's Office)

Intake Assessment/Mental Health
Screening by Child and Adolescent
Outpatient Unit, Trinitas Hospital: 81

Referral for Sexual Assault Nurse Exam, 8
Infant-12 yr old

Children 12 and Under

Children 12 and under interviewed 129
regarding sexual and physical abuse:

Criminal Investigation Initiated for
children 12 and under: 56
Criminal Complaint Authorized: 46
Clearance Rate (Investigation/Arrest): 94 %
Trials: 1
Trial Conviction Rate: 100%
(1 guilty verdict)

Children 13 to 17

Adolescent Child Abuse Referrals: 195
Criminal Complaint Authorized: 19
Trials: 1
Trial Conviction Rate 0%
(1 not guilty verdict)
Referral for Sexual Assault Nurse Exam, 24
Age 13 to 17



The Union County Prosecutor's Office Child Advocacy Center

240-242 West Jersey Street
Elizabeth, NJ 07202
Phone: (908) 965-3890
Fax: (908) 965-3872
Email: ucpo@ucnj.org