

UNION COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Child Advocacy Center Annual Report 2015



A MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING PROSECUTOR



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 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 its 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 organization raised funds to support the construction of the Child Advocacy Center. The "wraparound" 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 abuse in a friendly environment where they receive appropriate referrals for medical and psychological follow-up.

The Child Advocacy Center utilizes the multi-disciplinary team model whereby detectives first interview children regarding the details of the abuse in a comforting setting. A therapist then meets with the family to perform crisis counseling, stabilize the family, and make future counseling recommendations. Finally, an Assistant Prosecutor begins the process of

shepherding the case through the criminal justice system. A social worker coordinates additional medical, child protective, and psychological services for each family.

SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

The Union County Prosecutor's Office historically has dedicated every available resource to protecting survivors of sexual abuse and holding perpetrators fully accountable for the physical and psychological harm of children, teens, and adults. Referrals to the Office's Special Victims Unit (SVU) come from all 21 municipalities. The SVU staff includes 10 detectives, five assistant prosecutors, two clerical support staff members, a multidisciplinary team coordinator, two part-time, on-site therapists from Trinitas Regional Medical Center, five intake workers from the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), and a forensic sexual assault nurse examiner.

The SVU members steer each case through the criminal justice system from initial disclosure to complaint authorization, safety and mental health assessments, Grand Jury presentation, plea or trial, and finally to criminal sentencing. Essential to the process is the building of a rapport with each victim, respecting children's evolving capacity to disclose and heal, and stabilizing parents in acute crisis. Detectives who are trained as forensic child interviewers interview each victim. Sexual abuse disclosure is a painful event, and the recorded interview process prevents the need for multiple interviews.

SVU members also become involved with municipal police detectives' investigations into the sexual abuse of adults. The SVU supervises each investigation and reviews witness interviews, suspect statements, and evidence analysis, and it obtains search warrants, court orders for phone records, and biological evidence.

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 over 3,300 children ages 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 close to 600 families. Last year marked the third full year of operation for the new "wraparound" service model at the new Center located at 240 West Jersey Street in Elizabeth. This has allowed total investigative, prosecutorial, and therapeutic review time of all new sexual abuse referrals to be reduced dramatically.

In 2015, over 590 referrals of child abuse involving children under the age of 17 were received. A total of 317 were referrals for sexual assault and 111 were referrals involving physical abuse. In all, 32 criminal investigations were opened and 31 criminal complaints were signed. The vast majority of complaints were signed for first- and second-degree sexual assaults. Detectives from the Office completed 474 interviews of sexually abused children, teens, and witnesses, and with the help of the clerical staff, they obtained 26 typewritten statements from witnesses. One hundred and twenty-three suspect interviews also were conducted by investigative staff. The child and teen sexual abuse clearance rate in 2015, *i.e.*, those formal investigations that resulted in a criminal charge, was 96 percent, a single-year Unit record.

Ninety children and families also were screened and provided with mental health services by the Child and Adolescent Outpatient Unit of Trinitas last year, with other children and families receiving mental health services from additional providers. Additionally, the Child Abduction Response Team (CART) assisted the SVU in locating 17 children and teens who were reported missing and/or endangered.

Last year, the SVU investigated and prosecuted a number of high-profile cases. For instance, SVU received a referral from the Garwood Police Department regarding a possible sexual assault upon a 13-year-old male by a 44-year-old female he met online who resided in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The victim's mother found out about the relationship and reported it to authorities. Detectives obtained a sworn statement from the victim by which he disclosed engaging in conversations with the 44-year-old woman over the Xbox gaming system, which began when the victim was just 11. During the course of playing online games, the victim developed an online relationship with the woman through her son. The relationship developed into texting and conversations over the phone (cell and landlines), which eventually led to exchanging naked photos of one another.

The defendant ultimately drove from Michigan to Garwood to meet the victim and attend his middle school play. During the course of the online relationship, she sent gifts via mail and also brought the victim gifts; these gifts included but were not limited to clothes, debit cards, e-cigarettes, and jewelry. Detectives recorded a conversation over Xbox between the victim and defendant, during which the defendant made admissions of their relationship over the years and her travelling to Garwood to see him.

Complaints were signed and SVU detectives travelled to Michigan and arrested defendant at her place of employment, a nursing home. During a search of defendant's home, numerous items of evidentiary value were located, including but not limited to the victim's framed picture, journals, photo collages, paperwork connected to the victim, items purchased for the victim, and the Xbox gaming system. Defendant was interviewed by SVU detectives and provided a full confession.

Also in 2015, SVU received a referral from DCP&P) regarding a 16-year-old girl who disclosed to school staff that she had been sexually assaulted by her stepfather since she was 8 years of age. SVU Detectives took a videotaped sworn statement from the victim in which she disclosed sexual abuse, including penetration, as recently as March 2015. The victim also disclosed that from the age of 13, her stepfather encouraged her to have sex with boys, going as far as to walk her to a 12-year-old boy's house and encourage the two to have sex. The victim and the boy engaged in sexual acts while the stepfather was present. He then made the victim engage in sexual acts with a 14-year-old boy multiple times in the rear of his van while he remained in the van.

The victim said the suspect encouraged her sexual relationships with boys to cover up evidence of his sexual abuse of her. SVU Detectives took statements from the two boys, who corroborated the victim's account and the encouragement from her stepfather to engage in sexual acts with the victim. The boys also confirmed that the suspect repeatedly drove them around Elizabeth in his van while they had sex with the victim. The stepfather was charged with

multiple counts first-degree aggravated sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a child. Defendant is currently lodged in the Union County Jail pending court hearings.

Lastly, in 2014 the Child Advocacy Center's staff charged a Boy Scout leader with allegedly sexually assaulting two minors over the course of five to six years. The victims also disclosed that they observed the defendant naked and masturbating while viewing images of child pornography on his 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 U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark for prosecution. In 2015, defendant pled guilty in both cases. He was sentenced to 96 months in federal prison and is pending sentencing in Union County to five years in New Jersey State Prison, to run consecutive to his federal sentence. **Friends of the Child Advocacy Center of Union County**

The Friends of the Child Advocacy Center was established to raise money to assist in paying for 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 and in preparation for trial. In April 2015, the first annual Race 4 The Children 5K and two-mile walk was held at Warinanco Park and raised close to \$25,000 for mental health services for abused children. The Friends are continuing their efforts to raise funds to support the needs of child victims of abuse throughout Union County.



Pictured from left to right are Union County Freeholder Christopher Hudak, Friends of the Child Advocacy Center Board President Andrew Ertman, Sheriff Joseph Cryan, Acting Union County Prosecutor Grace H. Park, Union County Public Safety Director Andy Moran, and Union County Freeholder Chairman Bruce Bergen.

2015 CAC Statistical Outcome Report

Intake Assessment/Mental Health Screening by Child and Adolescent Outpatient Unit, Trinitas Hospital	90
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Children 12 and Under

Child Abuse Referrals (DCP&P/Police/Hospital/School)	398
Referrals for Sexual Assault Nurse Exam	10
Criminal Investigations Initiated	23
Criminal Complaints Authorized	23
Clearance Rate (Investigation/Arrest)	100%

Children 13 to 17

Adolescent Child Abuse Referrals	195
Referrals for Sexual Assault Nurse Exam	20
Criminal Investigations Initiated	9
Criminal Complaints Authorized	8
Clearance Rate (Investigation/Arrest)	89%



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