



## Child Advocacy Center

As SCAN continues to grow and expand, the strategic direction is periodically reviewed by Board and staff members. In 2002, during the strategic planning process, SCAN identified unmet needs of families that have experienced child abuse and neglect in the Richmond area. By researching national trends and gathering feedback from other local service providers, SCAN identified the need for a local Child Advocacy Center (CAC). SCAN opened the area's first and only CAC in November 2004 in the Old City Hall building conveniently located in downtown Richmond.

Typically, children who are sexually abused or severely physically abused are subjected to multiple interviews and examinations by multiple service providers. This is detrimental to the mental health of the child because it causes him or her to continuously relive the trauma of the abuse with each interview. This outdated method leaves the child angry and confused, which results in a wide range of problems including nightmares, insomnia, aggression, poor academic achievement and is correlated with future negative effects. This method can also contribute to children altering their stories with each subsequent interview, which has a profoundly negative impact on the investigation and subsequent prosecution of cases.

The CAC provides a comprehensive intervention system designed with the victimized child as its primary focus. Specifically, the CAC provides the following services:

- **child forensic interviews**
- **investigation**
- **mental health treatment**
- **medical services**
- **prosecution**
- **victim advocacy**
- **multidisciplinary case review**
- **case tracking**

The CAC creates a system that protects children through coordination of services. The key to the success of the CAC is the flow of services through a multidisciplinary team. The multidisciplinary team consists of all service providers involved in cases of severe physical and sexual abuse, including law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, mental health, medical services, and victim advocacy. The team conducts regular case reviews and provides a coordinated response to cases.

This team approach improves every aspect of a case. It reduces the number of interviews a child has to endure by increasing joint interviews and/or by replacing multiple interviews with one comprehensive forensic interview. A highly trained professional conducts the interviews in a physically and psychologically safe environment specifically for children. One effect is often an increase in full disclosure from the victim regarding his or her abuse. The team further improves the investigation of a case through increased collaboration and information sharing among team members. The team improves treatment by immediately linking children and their non-offending parent(s)/ caregiver(s) to ongoing therapeutic services, which are available onsite at the CAC. Ultimately, the team improves the prosecution of a case by producing more reliable evidence and a victim capable of being a stronger, more cooperative witness.

### Outcomes

The main goals of the CAC are to:

1. Reduce trauma to abused/neglected children by minimizing the number of interviews and by providing a friendly and non-threatening environment for the interviews
2. Increase immediate crisis support and ongoing counseling available to victimized children and their



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families by providing intensive, on site mental health services

3. Increase communication and collaboration among the disciplines involved with cases (medical, mental health, attorneys, law enforcement, and Child Protective Services) through regular case reviews
4. Improve the substantiation and prosecution of child abuse/neglect cases (i.e. hold more offenders accountable)
5. Increase parenting skills of non-offending parents/caregivers through support and education groups and individual therapy.

For more information about SCAN's  
Child Advocacy Center  
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