



CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

2002 ANNUAL REPORT



children's
advocacy
center

A young girl with dark hair and bangs is shown from the chest up, reading a book. She is looking down at the pages with a focused expression. Her hands are resting on the book. The background is a soft, out-of-focus purple. The text is overlaid in the center of the image, consisting of six black rectangular boxes with white text inside. The text reads: "SOME STORIES A KID ONLY WANTS TO TELL ONCE." The font is a simple, sans-serif typeface.

SOME
STORIES
A KID
ONLY WANTS
TO TELL
ONCE.

Another year has quietly slipped away. Gratefully, few of us had a year like the 648 children who were referred to our Children's Advocacy Center because of allegations of sexual abuse, serious physical injury or because they witnessed a violent crime. They came in all sizes, ages and colors. Their stories, however, were all unique. While I know too well the tragic reasons for their appointment at the center, I wonder more and more about the lessons that they teach us about the issues and conflicts that our heads and hearts struggle to comprehend.

Some might say that a young child is the perfect victim: Too innocent to know what's about to happen; too trusting to be angry; too vulnerable to run and too powerless to stop the harm. It is because of these qualities of innocence and vulnerability that they beckon us back to our own childhood and to the children in our lives today. They teach us about love and hate, good and evil, trust and betrayal, courage and fear.

I've spent all of my professional life in work with children. By far, most were children with problems... sad children, wounded children, poor children, pregnant children, sick children and angry children. At times, I've felt helpless and joyless. And, at still others, I've felt that the possibilities and hope had no boundaries. The difference in these varied times was the presence of volunteers and community commitment... extra hands, new ideas, more resources, more voices.

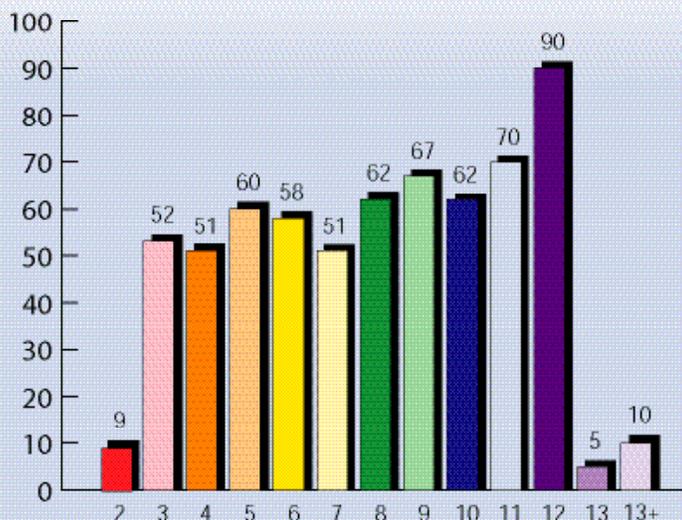
Sadly, many of the children who live within this community will not know childhood. They will, however, be well-acquainted with anger, violence, misuse, abuse and frustration. In 2003, I ask that you commit to these children, to make a difference. To send the message, "You are important. You matter... it's not your fault." They deserve our attention, our time and our resources. You may be their best and last chance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra A. Martin". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Sandra A. Martin
Executive Director

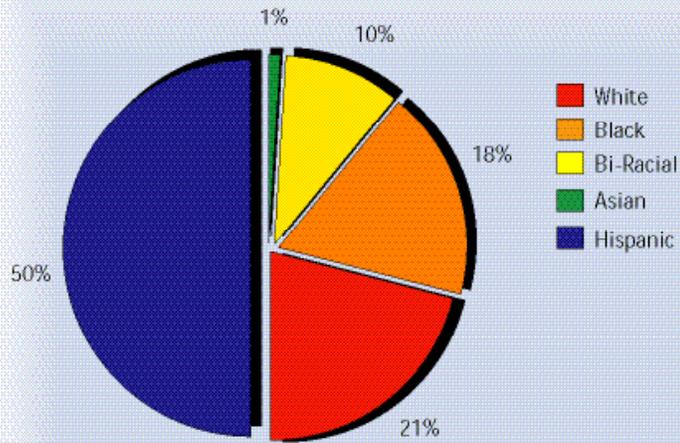
Interview Demographics By Age



- The number of children receiving initial interviews at the point of investigation continued to rise in 2002. 648 children came to the Center for forensic interview services. This is a 3% increase from the previous year (630) and an 11% increase since 2000 (586). In the last five years, children served during the forensic interview increased 22% (1998-530).
- Multidisciplinary Team Staffings, the foundation of our strong interagency collaboration, saw its most significant increase in the Center's history. 248 children were impacted by the benefit of having their case staffed by CPS, law enforcement, prosecutors, counselors, medical professionals and Center staff. This increase, by 258%, was the result of a process change made by the Child Protection Team in 2001. Cases having dual criminal and civil components were identified as team cases and put into a rotation that allows for multi-system assessment and planning.
- Court School, an orientation to the court system for young victims and their families increased 38%, serving 40 children in 2002. 518 individual and family therapy sessions reflect a continued increase from the previous year.
- Overall, the Center provided 2,320 services to children in the criminal and civil justice systems. This reflects the full complement of services provided by the Center. Some children receive several services including forensic medical exams, developmental assessments by a nurse practitioner and medical case management.

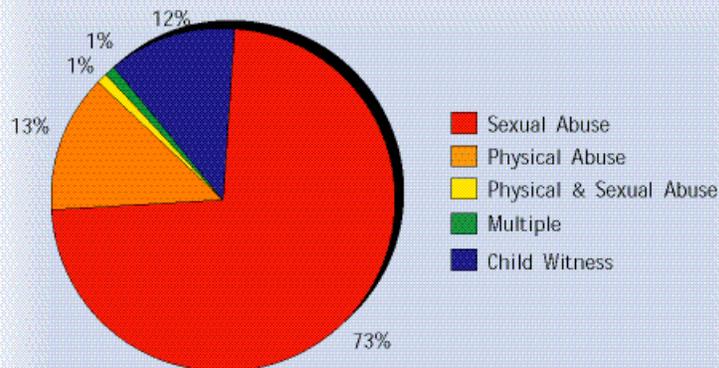
- A disturbing statistic is ever present in these cases. Parents, caregivers, family members and friends continue to be the alleged offender in a staggering number of cases. 34% of children receiving interview services were victimized by a parent, step-parent or parent paramour. 6% were siblings and 52% were related to the victims in some way. Only 10% of alleged offenders, an increase from 2001, were strangers, unknown to the victim.

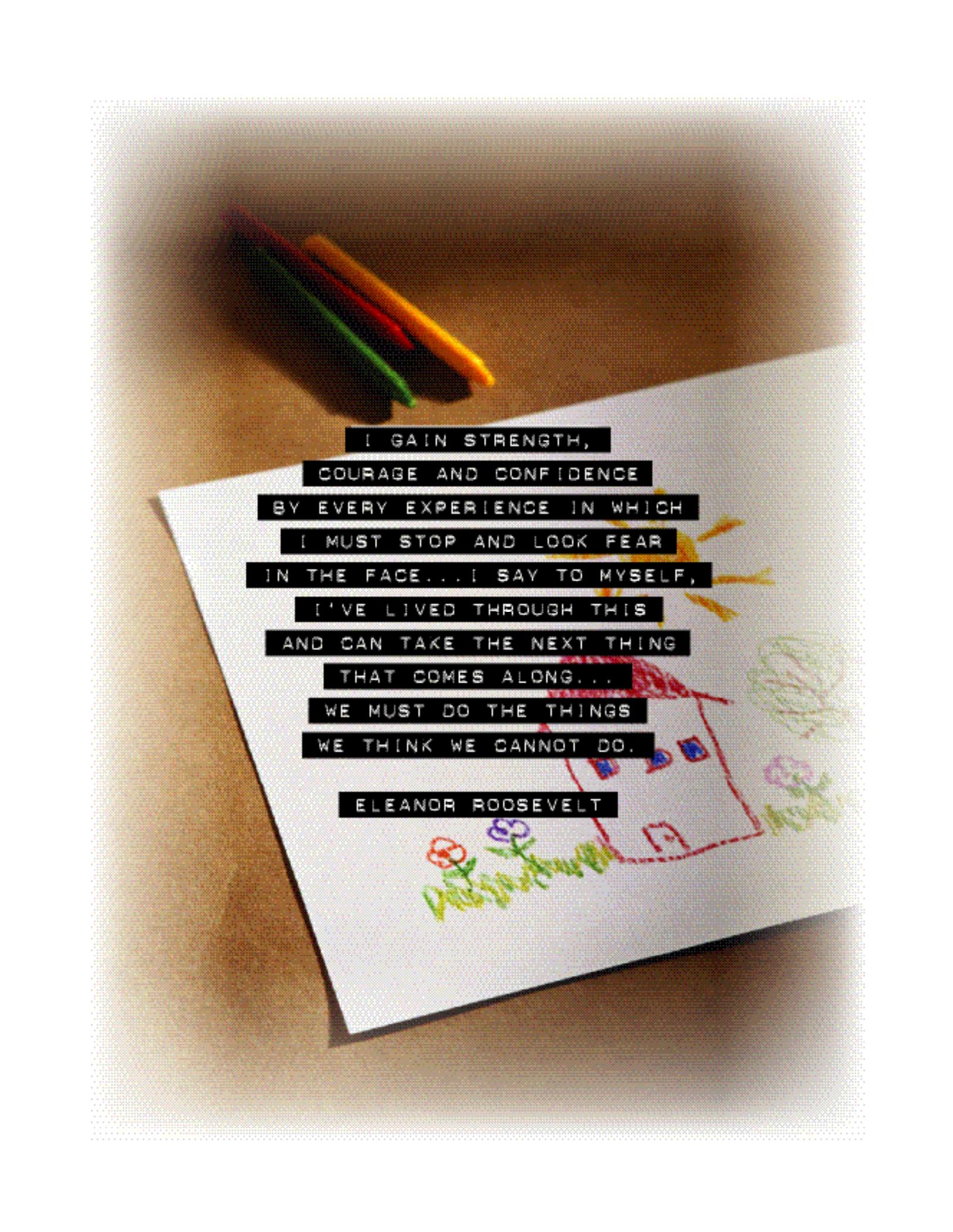
Interview Demographics



- The effectiveness of a collaborative approach benefits children receiving services at the Center. Communication between professionals results in stronger, timely assessments for children already traumatized by life changing abuse. Of those caregivers completing a survey at the point of initial interview, 97% reported a better understanding of their child’s case as a result of the intervention at the Center. This has a deeper impact in that. Caregivers are better prepared to support and advocate for their child when the system is less confusing to them. Further, 93% reported that their circumstances improved as a result of the intervention. Finally, 97% noted that they got the help that they needed while at the Center. Support, resources and system orientation bring families back to the Center while their cases travel through the system and beyond.

Interview Abuse Types





I GAIN STRENGTH,
COURAGE AND CONFIDENCE
BY EVERY EXPERIENCE IN WHICH
I MUST STOP AND LOOK FEAR
IN THE FACE... I SAY TO MYSELF,
I'VE LIVED THROUGH THIS
AND CAN TAKE THE NEXT THING
THAT COMES ALONG...
WE MUST DO THE THINGS
WE THINK WE CANNOT DO.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

December, 2002

This month I had the honor and privilege to meet a little girl - your typical three-year-old girl in every way except her appearance. In fact, I can't even say that I honestly know what she looks like. This is because when I saw her, both her eyes were swollen and purple, her cheeks black. She had been beaten badly. Her head was covered with large bald patches, caused by her hair being forcibly yanked out in chunks to control lice. I had been warned about her appearance before she came in, but nothing can totally prepare you for such a sight. She was still wearing the hospital bracelet around her little wrist from where she had spent the last few days. I was attending to the little girl in the playhouse area while the interviewer, caseworker, detectives and Assitant District Attorney were staffing the case before her interview. Although I did not let my emotions show to her, and although I see many children every day who have also been brutalized, there is something about being able to physically see the damage done. One is less able to distance oneself from it emotionally when it is so visible - it is impossible to ignore. While she and I colored with crayons and paper my brain raced with thoughts, "Who could do this to a three-year- old girl?" "Why didn't somebody know this was going to happen and prevent it?" "Why, why, why?" Quite frankly, I try not allow myself to ask these kinds of rhetorical questions, because they would render me totally useless and I would no longer be able to do my job effectively and help clients. A certain level of emotional denial comes along with doing this kind of work. But this sweet little girl forced those questions to my mind. She deserves an answer that she may never get. But what she will get, I hope, is justice. And knowing, that in doing my job, I may have had some small thing to do with helping this little girl get justice, I am proud beyond words, and feel some measure of peace to be a part of the important work done at the Center.

Forensic Interviewer
Children's Advocacy Center

THE FACES OF CAC...

In 2002, our wonderful volunteers contributed over **7,685 hours of service**. If calculated at the hourly rate of \$16.05, provided by the Independent Sector's Giving and Volunteering in the United States national survey, the actual contribution to the Children's Advocacy Center comes to **over \$123,300** worth of valuable time.

They come from all walks of life and with a multitude of reasons for volunteering, but the thing they have in common is their commitment and dedication to make a difference in the life an abused child. And make a difference they did.



SUE ROUSE **CHILD & FAMILY CRISIS SUPPORT SPECIALIST**

Support Specialist, formerly known as Family Greeter, volunteers provide a support system for child victims as they enter the investigation process. Without the caring and compassionate support of volunteers like Sue, professional staff would be called into action to fill this role where focus and time would be taken away from their professional roles at the Center. These volunteers have provided great relief to the Center staff, allowing them to concentrate on services provided to children and families. The commitment and dedication of these volunteers allowed the Center staff to be prepared for the increase in clients the Center served in 2002.

MARK FUGINA **PARENTING EDUCATION CLASS PROJECT MONITOR**

Mark and the many volunteers who helped with the Center's Parenting Education Classes and Protective Parenting Groups have made it possible for the Center to provide a much-needed service to the Austin community. Many times families in crisis have to be put on waiting lists of up to one year. The Children's Advocacy Center conducts weekly classes that not only have no waiting list and no cost to the families, but allows the entire protective family to participate. The classes have grown increasingly popular because parents and/or protective caregivers are encouraged to bring their children, allowing them to securely focus on the classes while their children are being cared for by caring adults like Mark.



BARBARA BROOKS **FRIENDS OF CHRISTOPHER GUILD VOLUNTEER**

The Friends of Christopher Guild was established as a service and support volunteer group of women. Barbara Brooks has not only been a member since the Guild was created, but also was one of the Center's first volunteers along with her husband, Wayne. She has provided assistance and support with many aspects around the Center. Barbara has helped bring beauty to the Center, adding to the comfort level of the children and families that use our services, by decorating the family rooms using skills and talents that she uses every day at her decorating firm, Barbara Brooks Interiors. She has also been an advocate for abused children by enlisting the help of family and peers. Barbara's son, Andrew, a personal chef with Spirited Food Co. has provided his culinary talents for the Center's end of year event, A Taste of the Season. Her involvement with the Austin Society of Interior Designers (ASID), forged a partnership that raises resources through the annual Chairs for Chair-ity silent auction.



Prudential volunteers have given assistance to the Center in numerous ways, from their hard work in beautifying the Center's grounds to providing much needed supplies and resources to the Center's clients. But it is their work with the 2002 Luxury Car Raffle that we wish to spotlight. These volunteers took time out of their busy professional schedules to work raffle shifts at our booth at Barton Creek Mall. Special event volunteers are generally those that work behind the scenes but their talents, expertise and enthusiasm not only raise funds, but also awareness. Without volunteers who are willing to spread the word and create resources, our Center would not be available for children.

PRUDENTIAL



ONE OF CAC'S MANY CORPORATE & GROUP VOLUNTEERS



AMBER MISCHNICK JUNIOR LEAGUE & CASE-TRACKING VOLUNTEER

Amber serves as one of the Center's case-tracking volunteers. Her willingness and persistence to enter data into a system that allows team members to have a functional, up-to-date database. This system enables Child Protection Team members to efficiently serve and track clients at any stage of the investigation process.

CELINA ARTUSI

SUMMER ADMINISTRATIVE VOLUNTEER

Deciding to spend part of her vacation at the Center tackling the not-so-popular tasks of filing, copying and sorting, 11-year-old Celina proved that people of all ages can make a difference in the life of an abused child.



MAYRA ARTUSI

CHILD ASSESSMENT PROGRAM VOLUNTEER

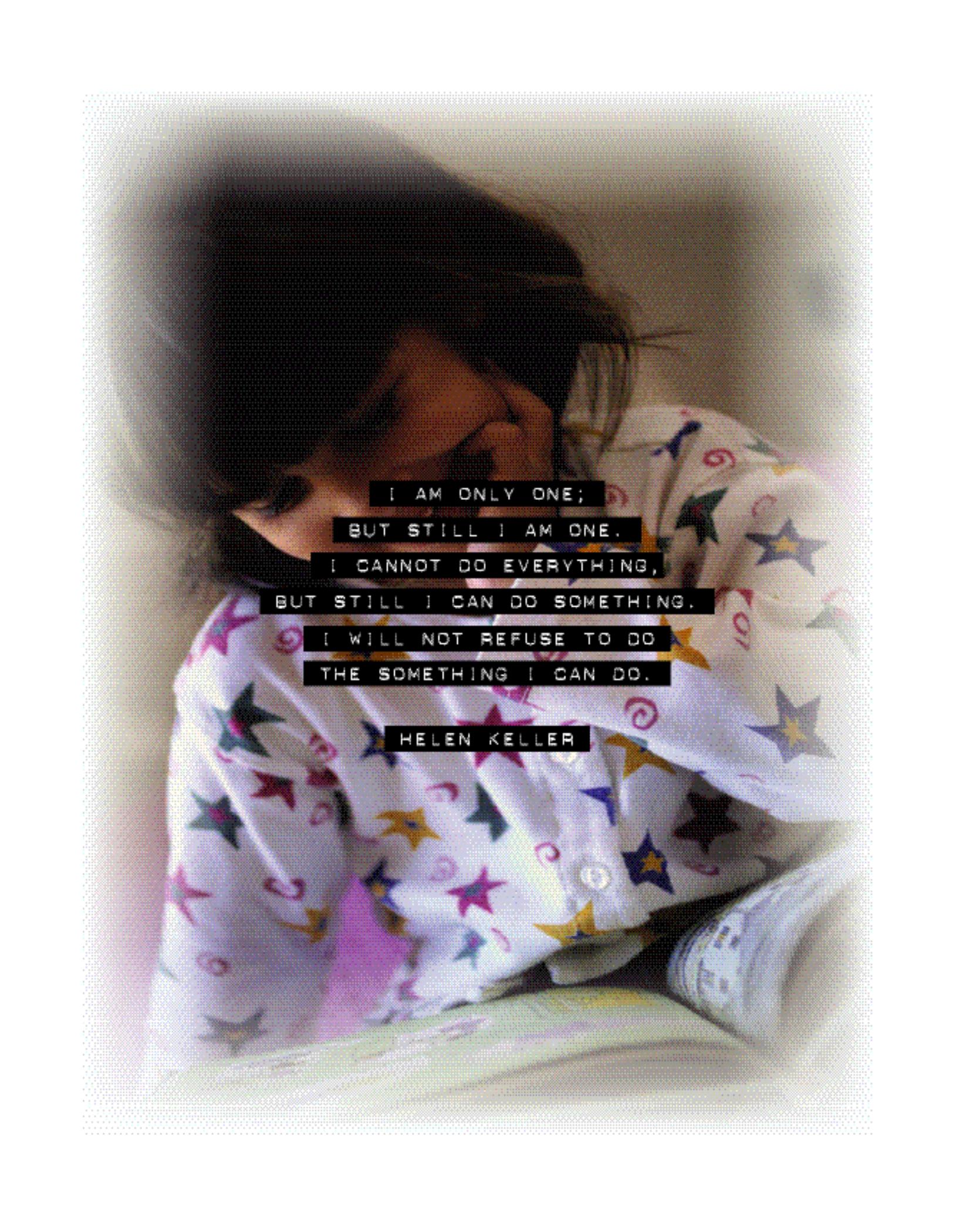
In the Child Assessment Program, child victims of sexual and physical abuse are referred for medical exams to gather evidence in child abuse investigations. Many children arrive feeling scared or uneasy about the procedure they are about to undergo. Mayra's role is to provide support and comfort to the children, enabling the child to feel safe enough for Dr. Beth Nauert to conduct exams. Mayra's example and spirit extends the importance of giving and philanthropy to the next generation- her children.

LAUREN PETERS

BOARD MEMBER



Lauren Peters brings her leadership and expertise to the board of directors. The service provided by Lauren and her team at PetersGroup Public Relations, is pro bono services to help raise community awareness of the complex issue of child abuse and the understanding of what the Children's Advocacy Center does to support abused children. Since PetersGroup took on the Center as their clients, there has been regular media coverage regarding the issue of child abuse and continual promotion the Centers special events helping to raise the financial resources needed to continue the Center's services to children. The media now sees the Advocacy Center as a valuable resource to provide information and expertise on the issue of child abuse.



I AM ONLY ONE;
BUT STILL I AM ONE.

I CANNOT DO EVERYTHING,
BUT STILL I CAN DO SOMETHING.

I WILL NOT REFUSE TO DO
THE SOMETHING I CAN DO.

HELEN KELLER

The most helpless citizens living in our community are the children. If the sobriquet “citizen” seems strange when used in conjunction with children, I’ll parse Webster’s definition of the word. “Member of a state” and “entitled to protection from it”, are in my dictionary.

The second part of the definition is where the Child Protection team fulfills its mandated obligation to its smallest citizens. Why, you might ask, does the state have to take on this obligation? In an ideal world, the state wouldn’t need to. Children look to their caretakers for protection, but all too often that protection is not provided and abuse and neglect are provided instead. This imposes devastating havoc on the child and, indirectly, on our community. This is where community board members and volunteers extend a strong hand of support to the Child Protection Team as they help injured children.

Since 1989, when our Travis County District Attorney brought forward the idea to institute a collaborative effort now known as the Child Protection Team, thousands of children have been served. And major progress has been made in the efficiency in handling these cases. But the instances of child abuse in our community have not diminished, and much more needs to be accomplished. As you read this report, you will note our progress, but our work is not finished.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Mistretta', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Charles Mistretta
President, Board of Directors

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10TH ANNIVERSARY OF SERVING CHILDREN

The Children's Advocacy Center was founded in 1989 and so began the journey to do a better job of protecting the most vulnerable members of our community, our children. Working together with the Austin Police Department, the Travis County Sheriff's Office, Child Protective Services, the Travis County District Attorney's Office, Children's Hospital of Austin and the community's representative, the Children's Advocacy Center, the Child Protection Team was formed. In 1992, the first child visited the Children's Advocacy Center, a child-friendly two-story house in East Austin where agencies that are a part of the child abuse investigation come to the child, rather than the child visiting each of them. Since then thousands of children have been referred by law enforcement or Child Protective Services to the Center for a forensic interview or forensic medical exam.

RECORD NUMBERS OF CHILDREN NEEDING FORENSIC INTERVIEWS

Traditionally, there have been dramatically fewer referrals to the Center for forensic interviews during the summer months. Children are away from school and many of them travel during this time. During August 2002, 59 children suspected of being abused were referred to the Center for forensic interviews. To put this in perspective, an average of 50 children are referred for interviews during a month other than June, July or August. There was another spike in referrals in October 2002. In that month, 72 child victims or witnesses to violent crime were brought to the Center to begin the investigation process. Behind these statistics are real children who experienced abuse or neglect or witnessed violence.

COMPLETION OF THE ANNEX RENOVATION

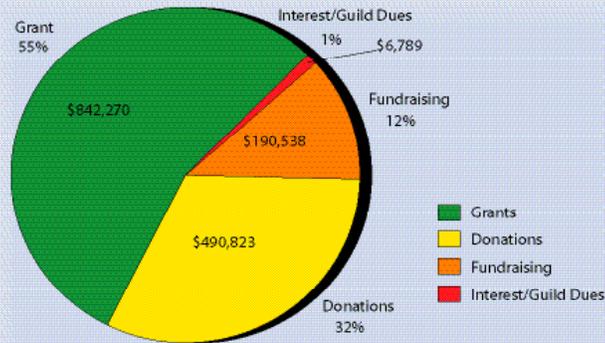
Like a child quickly outgrowing its shoes, the explosive growth of the Center and the number of children being referred for services demanded that action be taken quickly. The renovation of the Center's annex provided additional space necessary to better meet needs of children. Transformation of the small, single-story building into an expanded two-story one now allows for multiple services to children and their protective caregivers. One such renovation was the **Medical Exam Area**. A cheerful waiting room allows children a space that is "just for them" and it is far different from the drab, multi-purpose area of the past. The actual exam area has been rebuilt to specifications, rather than a makeshift room without even a sink. Bright colors, toys and stuffed animals along with the kind reassurance of Austin Diagnostics pediatrician Dr. Beth Nauert and volunteers ease the trauma of the medical exam. The medical exam area also serves as the Child Assessment Program (CAP) clinic, so that children do not have to experience the trauma of an emergency room waiting room to receive a comprehensive assessment. Through the addition of a **third interview room** in the renovated annex space, up to three forensic interviews may be conducted simultaneously at the Center. In doing so, child victims of crime continue to have a safe place to talk about what happened to them without the need to wait for their stories to be heard.

ADDITION OF A 4TH FORENSIC INTERVIEWER

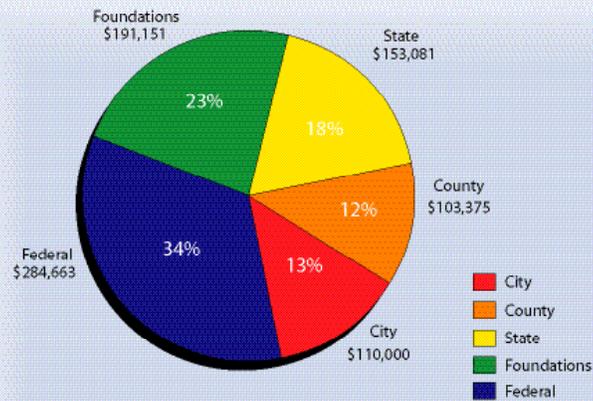
With the addition of a fourth Forensic Interviewer, the Children's Advocacy Center has been able to serve the increasing numbers of children under the age of thirteen who are alleged victims of sexual abuse, severe physical abuse or witnesses to violent crimes receive a forensic interview without devastating delays for an appointment. The individuals who perform the forensic interviews are trained professionals with special skills. Because a child's ability to tell what happened is critical, the interviewer plays a pivotal role. Three of the current four interviewers are fluent in Spanish, allowing us to immediately address the needs of Spanish speaking children and their protective parents or caregivers.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

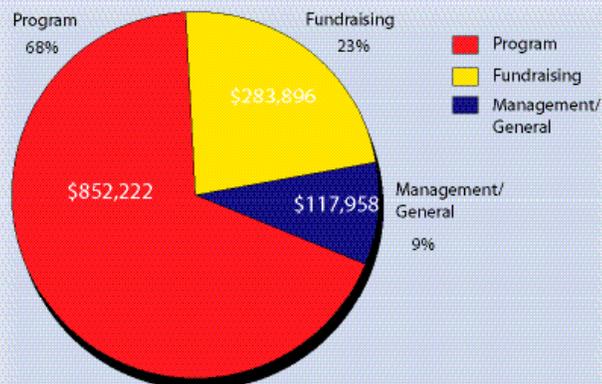
Source of Revenue



Sources of Grant Funding



Functional Expense Percentages



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