

Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County

Recommendations and

2006 - 2007 Report

Submitted to the Board of Supervisors

Napa, California

December 18, 2007

2006-2007 Report

Child Abuse is a Personal and Societal Tragedy

The Center for Disease Control has deemed child abuse and neglect a worldwide epidemic. In the United States, one out of every four children is affected by violence and statistically, violence is the leading killer of children in California.

What we know is that child abuse and neglect spare no community or family regardless of economic status. According to the most recent data from Napa Children's Welfare Services, there were nearly 1,200 reports of abuse this past year in Napa county. Currently in Napa we have 89 children in Out-of Home Care i.e. with foster families, in group or relative homes.

It is a tragedy for any child to fall victim to abuse or neglect. These children's coping mechanisms will be put to the test and their ability to develop into healthy productive adults will be challenged. According to Dr. Bruce Perry's research on early childhood brain development, children's chronic exposure to violence places a negative and long-lasting impact on developing brains.

The estimated cost for untreated or under-treated victims of child abuse is close to 94 billion dollars a year for social services, the criminal justice process, health and mental

health care, and other system interventions. Preventing child abuse is cost-effective. For every dollar we spend on prevention, four dollars are saved. Investment in prevention is vital in reducing the demands on our overburdened response systems.

The Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County

The Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County (CAPC) is a countywide collaborative program leading the effort to prevent abuse by supporting family-oriented, community-based prevention, awareness, education, and training programs. It is also mandated to recommend and improve services to meet victims' needs.

CAPC is state directed by the Welfare and Institutions Code and has been in existence for over thirty years where Cope Family Center has served as the administrator and lead agency. CAPC's qualifications lie in the Steering Committee and Council itself, whose members work to identify goals and act on them. The Director, in partnership with the CAPC Steering Committee, is responsible for monitoring and/or carrying out the objectives as set forth by CAPC.

The Council network consists of over 30 Napa organizations and professionals working to implement and support child abuse prevention programs in our community. We are also part of a thriving network of CAPCs located in every county of California, supported by the state Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP). The Council is an active member of Prevent Child Abuse California and Prevent Child Abuse America.

Accomplishments for the 2006-2007 year

CAPC:

- Utilized the statewide Safe from the Start program to train 160 Napa professionals on the effect of chronic violence on early brain development;
- Collaborated with state and local entities to develop protocol in Child Death Review cases;
- Participated in the County's Child Welfare Services Needs Assessment;
- Advocated at the state level for child abuse prevention support;
- Conducted the Blue Ribbon Awareness Campaign in April 2007, specifically highlighting Family Resource Centers, Internet Safety and Shaken Baby Syndrome;
- Disseminated Mandated Reporter materials and other prevention materials in English and Spanish throughout the Valley; and,
- Coordinated 2 regional professional trainings that included 500+ attendees from the Greater Bay Area.

Recommendation

Introduction

Once upon a time, a child who was a victim of abuse was often unknowingly revictimized by the agencies and people who were supposed to help. Professionals from the child protection, investigative, legal and medical systems would interview the child separately and repeatedly in police stations and other environments designed for adults. Many times, these interviews were done solely to meet the diverse and sometimes conflicting requirements of the agencies involved, rather than the needs of the child. Successful prosecution was rare and the victims and their families seldom received the support and services needed.

More than 10 years ago, Napa County recognized the need for a different way to address the problem and began coordinating efforts to investigate, prosecute and treat abuse by forming the Napa Multi-Disciplinary Review Team and creating a Multi-Disciplinary Interview Center. The Team is made up of professionals from Child Protective Services, Law Enforcement, the District Attorney's Office and Sexual Assault Prevention Services. The Center has since provided a service to meet their collective needs while being child-focused and child-friendly.

Critical need for an Enhanced Children's Advocacy Center

For the past three years, CAPC has recommended to the Board of Supervisors that dedicated building space is needed to house an updated Children's Advocacy Center. The Napa Multi Disciplinary Review Team (MDRT) has created a proposal to secure the needed support. The MDRT and CAPC are committed to creating a Children's Advocacy Center as soon as feasibly possible.

A Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) provides a one-stop shop for investigators to interview abused children and for service agencies to confer on the needs of that child and their family. Such Centers are on the cutting edge across the nation and are widely recognized as "best practice" in the child abuse prevention field. With use of CAC's, prosecution rates increase and money is saved by agencies collaborating to provide services.

The current Napa county investigation site is at Child Welfare Services (CWS) at Health and Human Services Agency. While CWS continues to strive to conduct interviews in a manner that matches the goals of a Multi Disciplinary Interview Center, there are significant associative and technical drawbacks for having the interviews located on CWS grounds.

The benefits a Child Advocacy Center will provide:

- A place where children who may have been abused or who are witnesses to violent crime will feel welcomed and supported in a neutral setting;
- Ample meeting space for trained forensic interviewers, investigators, law enforcement and medical personnel team to make decisions about investigation, treatment and prosecution of child abuse cases;

- Modern technical capacity and soundproofed rooms to obtain high quality digitally recorded forensic interviews;
- A separate room and medical equipment to perform forensic medical exams, and;
- A designated private meeting space for waiting families and the opportunity to provide specific support and resource referral.

Conclusion

The impact of child maltreatment is far greater than its immediate, visible effects. Experiences in a child's life can affect their development and have consequences that last years, even lifetimes. A child that has been abused or is a victim of violence cannot speak on their own behalf. As adults and community leaders, it is our responsibility to provide a voice for vulnerable children. It is for this reason that we set forth our recommendation that the County Board of Supervisor endorse the creation of a stand-alone Child Advocacy Center.

Thank you,

The Child Abuse Prevention Council Steering Committee

Monique Langhorne-Johnson
Court Commissioner
Co-Chair

Joelle Gallagher,
Executive Director
Cope Family Center

Gary Lieberstein,
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Paul Gero,
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Mary Butler,
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