

THE CIRCLE

SPRING 2023

The Newsletter of the Children's Advocacy Center

APRIL IS NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

GFN4Kids | Children's Advocacy Center recognizes the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect. At GFNF CAC, our purple STOP signs are a symbol that the best way to STOP child abuse is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Join us in our fight to STOP child abuse and neglect.



EDUCATION IS KEY TO STOPPING CHILD ABUSE

The Monique Burr Foundation for Children (MBF) is named after Monique Burr, a young woman who tragically lost her life to an act of violence. Her family created comprehensive, evidence-based prevention education programs as a way to honor her legacy of child protection and child advocacy. MBF education programs have impacted over 4.5 million children throughout Florida and the United States.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION EDUCATION PROGRAM

The GFNF4Kids **Stopping Abuse Before it Happens** prevention education program uses the **MBF Child Safety Matters** curriculum in daycares, after-school programs, and other youth-serving organizations in St. Lucie and Indian River County to educate and empower children and adults with information and strategies to prevent, recognize, and respond appropriately to the four types of child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect), exploitation, bullying, cyberbullying, human trafficking, digital abuse, and other digital dangers.



Research shows that 95% of sexual abuse is preventable through education. The **Stopping Abuse Before it Happens** prevention education program presents lessons in a fun, engaging, and age appropriate way. There is not a child in the 19th Judicial Circuit who would not benefit from this education program.





LETTER FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Caroline Vinyard

Greetings,

April represents a commemorative and active month at Guardians for New Futures Children's Advocacy Center. Not only is it National Child Abuse Prevention Month, but we also recognize April as Sexual Assault Awareness and Volunteer Appreciation Month! We will give special thanks to our volunteers, donors, stakeholders, and partner agencies at our inaugural Champions for Children BBQ held on April 15th. On April 18th, the CAC will participate in the annual Sexual Assault Response Team Symposium "WALK THE JOURNEY OF A SURVIVOR," an interactive walk-through journey through the mind of a sexual assault survivor.

April 30th marks one year since we celebrated the opening of the Children's Advocacy Center, serving victims of abuse and non-offending caregivers, as a multidisciplinary team in Circuit 19. Time flies! Since then, we have seen over 400 children come through our doors.

In the state of Florida there were 329,774 allegations of abuse reported in 2022. Of those allegations only 28,304 alleged victims were seen at a CAC. Certified forensic interviewers conducted a forensic interview on 11,013 children and an additional 609 were conducted off-site by a law enforcement agent or outside interviewer.

Our focus now includes widespread community awareness and prevention efforts because stopping child abuse before it happens is the key to treating this "silent epidemic."

Blessings,

Caroline Vinyard

Caroline Vinyard, MBA, LMHC
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. I invite you to help us put an end to child abuse. Join our Circle of Care monthly donor program, attend our Children's Healing Garden BBQ on April 15th, and sign up to attend one of our "A Walk in Their Shoes" tours.

Performance Spotlight

Reporting Period: July 1st - Mar 31st

Data contains preliminary baseline numbers completed by the CAC

Total number of children served at the CAC during the reporting period:
448

Gender of children:
Male **161**
Female **287**



Age of children at first contact with center:
0-6 years **159**
7-12 years **134**
13-18 years **155**

Types of abuse reported:

Sexual Abuse **224**
Physical Abuse **126**
Neglect **103**
Witness to Violence **3**
Drug Endangerment **15**
Other **57**

Relationship of alleged offender to child:

Parent **220**
Stepparent **28**
Other Relative **67**
Parent's boyfriend/girlfriend **32**
Other known person **27**
Unknown **83**

Age of alleged offenders:

Under 13 **8**
Age 13 to 17 **11**
Age 18+ **362**
Unknown **74**

Total number of alleged offenders:
455



Cases accepted for prosecution:
30



Law Enforcement Disposition-Number of cases where charges were filed:
41



Referral to in house Mental Health Provider: **120**



Medical Exam/Treatment: **222**



Transportation services provided to victims and non-offending caregivers by the CAC: **69**



Onsite forensic interviewing: **369**



Disclosure rate for victims presenting for Forensic Interview: **70%**

Disposition of Child Protective Services Information:

- **Unfounded/Ruled Out:** **130**
- **Founded/Reason to Believe:** **98**
- **Unable to Determine:** **125**



In 2019, **Economist Impact** released the first **Out of the Shadows Index** (OOSI, a global benchmark looking at how countries are addressing child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). Data was used from 60 countries, and since this release, **World Childhood** and **Economist Impact** have released a new report, building on the global report, but focused on the United States, with data gathered from 12 states. The report, titled ***Out of the Shadows Index: Shining a Light on Prevention of and Response to Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the United States*** is available online.

The report begins with “The U.S. does not have a holistic, consistent, child-centered vision for how to prevent and respond to CSEA.” The report attempts to develop this much needed, holistic, coordinated approach, using 182 individual metrics aggregated into 22 indicators and four pillars:

- Pillar 1: The child comes first.
- Pillar 2: Child sexual exploitation and abuse is a public health problem.
- Pillar 3: Ensuring response preparedness and support.
- Pillar 4: Child sexual exploitation and abuse does not exist in a vacuum.

According to the report, “Every state in the pilot study has substantial gaps in its system to protect children from CSEA. These gaps differ from state to state, but there is a common thread: the prevention and response system does not consistently place the interests and needs of the child at its core.” Additionally, the report notes that “The core of the emergency and long-term response are CACs, Child Protective Services, and child welfare workers...with much of the burden on CACs to provide holistic, trauma-informed support to victims throughout the investigation, recovery, and compensation process.” The report also notes, “Child sexual exploitation and abuse can be solved; but it will require a holistic approach that puts the needs of children at the center. The approach must consider CSEA as a public health problem, both in terms of prevention and response efforts and the broader socio-ecological environment in which such exploitation and abuse is occurring.”

In the News

PROTECTING SURVIVORS



President Biden signed the Respect for Child Survivors Act (Senate Bill 4926) into law on January 5, 2023.

This legislation requires the FBI to use multidisciplinary teams, comprised of mental health professionals, medical personnel, child advocacy center personnel, prosecutors, and others when investigating cases of child sexual abuse, child sexual abuse material, and trafficking. Investigations would be regularly reviewed by the team to share information about the case, address any investigative or prosecutorial barriers, and ensure victims receive the support and treatment they need.

This is a testament to the credibility of the CAC multidisciplinary team model being the gold standard for child abuse investigations across our network of CACs.

“It takes tremendous courage for young victims of sexual assault to tell their story and overcome the fear that they may not be taken seriously, may be ignored, or may be wrongfully blamed.”

- **Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas**

WE LOVE OUR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the backbone of the incredible work done at GFNF4Kids Children's Advocacy Center.

From organizing donations, filling children's snack boxes, data entry, organizing fundraisers, speaking at community events, or serving on our board of directors or advisory council, our amazing volunteers do it all! Call the office for more information on volunteering with GFNF CAC.



Jennifer Guadagno, Gloria Santavicca, and Liz Pagan



\$12

For less than 40 cents per day you can protect children and help those who have been victimized by abuse in our community. Why 12? Because we estimate the Children's Advocacy Center will serve 1,200 children each year. Join our Circle of Care Monthly Donor Program and help us fight to end child abuse.

To join our Circle of Care, Please Visit: [GFNF4KIDS.ORG/CIRCLEOFCAREPROGRAM](https://www.gfnf4kids.org/circleofcareprogram)

Stay Tuned:

CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN

— HEALING GARDEN GROUNDBREAKING —

BBQ

SATURDAY APRIL 15TH @4-6PM

To RSVP, please call Melissa Winstead at 772.807.3868 x 102 | MWINSTAD@GFNF4KIDS.ORG

8561 S. COMMERCE CENTRE DRIVE, PORT ST. LUCIE, FL 34986



TOUR DATES

April 7th, 2023

April 14th, 2023

April 21st, 2023

April 28th, 2023



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and to shine a light on the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect, GFNF4Kids | Children's Advocacy Center is offering A Walk In Their Shoes tour each Friday, from 9am-10am.

To RSVP, please call Melissa Winstead at 772.807.3868 x 102 | MWINSTAD@GFNF4KIDS.ORG

THANK YOU TO OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS!

Volunteers use their time and talents to make the world a better place – and our GFNF CAC volunteers are the GREATEST VOLUNTEERS IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD!

Board of Directors

Debbie Butler | Eric Garza | Lauren Hahn | Ruth Stromak | Linda Chastain | Dr. Brandi Rials
Rowan McGarry | Dorothy Malik | Kristine Erice | Sue Mogavero | Amparo Gomez | Doris Plym
Peter Jones | Wendy Zuniga

Advisory Board

Tom Bakkedahl | Lacey Buxton | Carol Deloach | Dan DuLac | Barbara Faulkner | Amy Gregory
Pilar Harris | Debbie Hawley | Maryanne Kehlenbach | Maryanne Ketchum | Lori Matlin
Bob McPartland | Heather Parker | Sabrina Sampson | Aaron Scranton | Jeanette Smett | Noel Stephen
Garry Wilson | David Walters | Adam Williams

Administrative Volunteers

Corbin Greger | Jennifer Guadagno | Liz Pagan | Gloria Santavicca

GFNF CAC Event Volunteers

Dejah Burch | Jennifer Guadagno | Brandie Harris | Linda Rifkin | Gloria Santavicca