



2023 Annual Report



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Our Mission Statement

The mission of the Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County is protect your child and your family through Education, Intervention, Advocacy and Community Collaboration.

Our Vision Statement

Protect all children and create a safe and healthy community.

Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County Board Members

Doug Hughes: President

Edie Kessler

Tanya Haynes

Thea McMullen: Vice President

Hon. Gregory C. Pittman

Kendrah Robinson

Kathy Fearnley: Treasurer

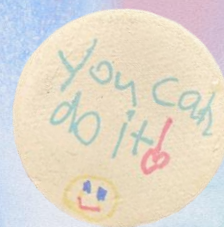
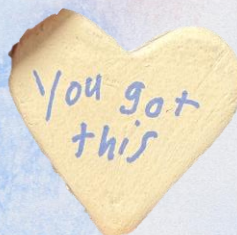
Sheriff Michael Poulin

Amanda Tumele

Helen Dobb: Secretary

Kim Bourdo

Jared Meldrum



Introduction

Dear Supporters of the Child Abuse Council,

In 2023, our agency provided services to 16,284 children and 460 community adults. These services included forensic interviews, specialized medical examinations, trauma informed therapy, court preparation and accompaniment, personal body safety lessons, anti-bullying and internet safety, human trafficking awareness, personal advocacy, and Stewards of Children training.

Children who experience abuse and/or neglect are going through one of the most difficult, traumatizing times in their young lives. We are here to help. Our intervention and treatment services help these children get past the trauma and live a safe and happy childhood.

But it's not just us that makes a difference. The kids we serve help each other on their journey of healing. They do this a couple of ways. We have Friendchips that a child will write words of encouragement on and leave for another child who needs to hear that message. You will see pictures of some Friendchips throughout this report. We have a "Grow Through What You Go Through" tree in our lobby. As kids progress through their healing, they make a heart leaf to put on the tree. These leaves are there for all who enter our facility to see and they include messages of HOPE.

The kids we have the honor of working with are strong, funny, caring, and most of all resilient.

We want to send our heartfelt thanks to all in our community who have supported us in our mission.

"You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them." —*Maya Angelou*



~ Kyleen Gee
Executive Director



Prevention

Debbie Anderson
Prevention Director

Sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem children face, with the most serious array of consequences.

Research shows that people who are sexually violated as children are far more likely to experience psychological problems often lasting into adulthood, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, delinquency, decreased school performance-related problems, and suicide. Survivors often struggle with health problems as well.

Child sexual abuse is not a problem of socio-economic status, culture, race, religion, or gender. It impacts every community and every person across the globe.

Without prevention, incidents of child sexual abuse seem to come from nowhere and blindside the whole community. Our children and their families are traumatized, and the rest of us wonder how this could happen.

Prevention education is our first line of defense. The two populations to be educated are our children and the adults in our community, whose responsibility it is to protect them.

In 2023:

- 13,488 Preschool, kindergarten and elementary-age children received personal body safety lessons.
- 2,404 middle and high school students received personal body safety lessons, internet safety, anti-bullying lessons and human trafficking awareness.
- 460 community adults were trained in the Stewards of Children training.



Prevention

Personal safety programs presented by the Child Abuse Council have been a recognized part of the curriculum in public and private schools throughout Muskegon County for the past 23 years. All Head Start through fifth grade students receive age appropriate body safety programs. These programs teach children how to protect themselves from unsafe and unwanted touches. From the early age of four, children begin to learn the concept of appropriate and inappropriate touches. They learn that their body belongs to them and that nobody has the right to do anything that makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. That they have the right to “Say No,” to get away and to tell someone. In the upper elementary, the possible danger associated with social media is discussed. This information is the building block of prevention education. Middle school students receive programming on Internet safety, including responsible Social media usage. High school students receive valuable information about Human Trafficking including possible ways to prevent it and what to do if they suspect someone is being trafficked. The majority of students receive one prevention program yearly per grade level, more if there appears to be additional programming needed.

It's clear by a quick review at the beginning of each personal safety lesson what students remember from the previous lesson. Students remember clearly the information presented the year before. This was made perfectly clear at the end of a presentation to a seventh grade class. As I was leaving the classroom, a student called out to me. She thanked me for the presentation and then proceeded to tell me that she remembered every personal safety lesson from Kindergarten on through the years. She then told me that she has used the information she received and it has helped her to stay safe in several situations. She then thanked me again for the job that I do and the lessons I teach. This student is one of many with whom I have come in contact with over the years that have told me they remember the Prevention Programs from their school years and have thanked me for them.



Children's Advocacy Center

Cortney Aspinall
In-take Coordinator

Andrea Kelley
Family Advocate/MDT Coordinator

Grace Strauss
Forensic Interviewer / Family Advocate

Rachael McEnhill
Forensic Interviewer / Victim Advocate

Vicki Price
CASA Supervisor / Medical Coordinator

Dr. Yvonne Rekeny
Specialized Physician

Dr. Cory Schmidt
Specialized Physician

Christina Tulgestke
Clinician

Statistics

The most recent available data (year 2022) from the Annie E. Casey Foundation:

- Michigan had 25,138 children who were confirmed victims of abuse and/or neglect.
- Muskegon County had 710 children who were confirmed victims of abuse and/or neglect in the year 2023.



"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Children's Advocacy Center

326 Forensic Interviews were conducted.....

Scared. Confused. Hurt. Worried. Sad. Angry. Betrayed. Those were the feelings that Sara was experiencing when she arrived at the CAC for her interview. All that Sara had been told was that someone was going to talk to her about what her grandpa had done the night before. He was one of her favorite people. How could he have done this? Just thinking of it brought tears to Sara's eyes. Sara did not know how she was going to be strong enough to be able to tell her story. After arriving at the agency, Sara was introduced to the forensic interviewer. Sarah felt immediately comforted by the smile on the interviewer's face and her welcoming demeanor. Sara was escorted to a room with comfortable chairs and a small table that had a fidget spinner and some coloring pages on it. The interviewer told Sara that she could sit anywhere in the room, including the fuzzy rug on the floor. In fact, the interviewer chose to sit on the rug, which made her seem much less intimidating. The interviewer took her time to get to know Sara, which calmed Sara's nerves a bit. The interviewer explained the interview process to Sara so that she would know exactly what to expect. Sara was told that she was in control and that everything would proceed at her pace. This brought some relief to Sara because it felt like the past twenty-four hours of her life had been out of her control. By the time the interviewer asked Sara what she was at the agency to speak about, Sara felt a lot more at ease talking to the interviewer. Sara felt that the interviewer cared about what Sara had to say and wanted to help keep her safe. Sara was emotional when talking about what her grandfather did to her. When Sara cried, the interviewer told her that it was okay to cry and that many kids had cried in the interview room before her. This helped Sara feel that she was not alone and that unfortunately, many children had been through similar experiences. During the interview, Sara expressed to the interviewer that she was afraid for her safety after witnessing her grandfather becoming physical with other members of her family. Sara knew that her grandfather had been arrested, but she was still concerned that he would find a way to get out and hurt her or her family. The interviewer assured Sara that the team at the CAC as well as the investigators on the case would do everything in their power to keep her safe. After the interview, the victim advocate and law enforcement personnel worked together to have Sara's grandfather's bail raised based on her brave disclosure. Sara felt proud of herself for having the courage to speak up and as a result, felt that she was able to keep her family safe from harm.

52 children received Counseling....

Miles Smith age 9 was interviewed at the Child Abuse Council because he was touched by his dad's girlfriend. Miles is a very quiet, soft spoken child and it took a few sessions before Miles felt comfortable with his counselor to open up and talk about simple things such as his favorite color and things he likes to do. When Miles first started counseling, he struggled with sleeping in his room, keeping feelings in and had anxiety that showed up as really bad stomach aches. Miles and his counselor spent a lot of time discussing and identifying feelings and emotions and where he felt them in his body. When Miles first started counseling he would only use happy and sad as feelings he felt. Miles has been in counseling for a little over a year and Miles is opening up more and is coping better. Miles utilizes coping skills that he learned in sessions such as deep breaths, distracting his mind and positive affirmations. Those skills have helped him to be able to not only sleep in his room, but he no longer needs his dad to lay with him until he falls asleep. Miles is using his coping skills to manage his stomach aches and they are no longer keeping him out of class. While Miles is still working on talking about the abuse with his counselor, he has been able to slowly open up to dad about what happened and is able to identify and express his emotions. Miles' story isn't over yet as he hasn't reached his goal, which is to be able to testify in a courtroom and openly talk about his abuse.

Children's Advocacy Center

275 families received case coordination and personal advocacy and 33 children received a Specialized Medical Examination

Chrissy Newman is a 9-year-old girl who recently had a Forensic Interview at the Child Abuse Council for allegations of her step father sexually assaulting her. After her disclosure, her mother Sarah reported that it seems as though a weight had been lifted from Chrissy but she is still struggling with her emotions and think counseling could help with this. Sarah was unsure if Chrissy would be willing to participate in counseling so she planned to have that conversation over the long weekend and discuss it with the Family Advocate (FA) during follow-up. There is a team meeting held every Monday where recommendations and/or referrals are made for the prior interviews held. During that meeting it was recommended based off her disclosure that Chrissy should receive a medical exam and be offered counseling services. During the follow-up call, the FA chatted with mom about how Chrissy has been doing since the interview and if she had any concerns. Sarah told the FA that Chrissy has been sleeping a lot, not eating much and staying in her room for most of the day, only coming out to use the restroom. Chrissy feels guilt because they have to find another place to stay as their current home belongs to the alleged perp. Sarah ensured Chrissy, they would be fine. They have a lot of support within the family. Chrissy is also contemplating giving up dance. Sarah said and she loves dancing. She has cut off communication with her close friends and is doing poorly in school. The FA asked Sarah if she had the opportunity to speak with Chrissy about counseling services and Sarah had. Chrissy is open to anything that would help to start to feel normal again. The FA completed the counseling request form with Sarah, indicating all the areas Chrissy is struggling in. The FA then asked Sarah about a medical examination that is offered at the CAC as well. Sarah said she is interested in the medical examination but per Chrissy she would like her mother to be present. The FA confirmed that Sarah could also attend the medical with Chrissy. The FA scheduled the medical and let Sarah know that the medical coordinator would also be in contact with her to get some paperwork to her that needs to be done at the time of the medical examination. The FA asked Sarah if there are any other concerns she would like to address and Sarah said she thinks she would also like someone to talk to. The FA asked Sarah if she would be open to a referral and Sarah is okay with being referred out but wanted Chrissy to have counseling at the agency. The FA submitted the counseling request form to the clinical team. A few weeks later, Chrissy had completed her medical and Sarah had completed the intake process for Chrissy to begin counseling. The FA let Sarah know that she would be following up with her on a monthly basis to check in with her and Chrissy. During the FA monthly check in with Sarah and Chrissy, Sarah reported that she can already see a change in Chrissy's behavior and grades. She mentioned that Chrissy is starting see her friends more and she's been spending less time in her room and more time out with the rest of the family and she is back dancing. Sarah reported that Chrissy enjoys her weekly counseling at the CAC and she is so happy that she met such a great group of people at one of darkest times in life.



CASA

(Court Appointed Special Advocate)

Vicki Price
CASA Supervisor

CASA Statistics for 2023:

- 66 children were assigned a CASA volunteer
- 13 new CASA volunteers were trained
- 4 In-Service Trainings were held for all existing CASA volunteers on topics relevant to their role as CASAs.
- CASA volunteers donated 2,880 hours advocating for their assigned children
- Number of children in care in our county – approximately 400
- Number of Children eligible for a CASA volunteer - 346

Myles and Sierra were removed from their parent's care due to substance abuse. Their mother had recently overdosed on illicit drugs and dad used casually. After a few months, dad demonstrated that he can be a responsible adult and parent and maintain the home alone. At that time, mom was not allowed contact with the children until the next court hearing. During the hearing, mom was granted supervised visits at the agency and the children were returned home to dad. Before the hearing concluded, the judge ordered a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) to join the case. The CASA made sure dad fully understood the no contact between mom and the children unless in the supervised setting described in the court order. Dad confirmed he understood.

The children were not meeting age-appropriate milestones. Sierra who was 6 had never attended school and Myles was delayed for a 10-month-old. Dad assured the CASA that he would be getting Sierra enrolled in school within the next week, however dad appeared to lack motivation to complete many of the tasks set for him. The CASA observed Myles spending a lot of time in either his highchair or crib playing alone. Sierra watched tv most of the day when she was not caring for Myles. The CASA was concerned the children's best interests were not being met.

Story continued on next page....



CASA Makes a Difference

Sierra and Myles' mother missing her scheduled supervised visits made the CASA suspicious if mom was seeing the children during another time. The CASA decided to do an unannounced visit to the dad's home. Upon arrival, the CASA noticed dad's vehicle was not home but that is not uncommon as he often picks up extra shifts. The CASA rang the bell several times before deciding to knock. When the door opened, it was the children's mother who answered it. The CASA proceeded to her car when she noticed dad arriving to the home. The CASA continued with her visit with the children and left the home. The CASA reported her observation to the children's attorney and case worker. An investigation took place where it was discovered that dad was allowing unsupervised contact with mom and the children were removed once again. The children were placed in a licensed foster care home. During the short time in foster care, the children became up to date on their vaccinations and dental checkups. Sierra was enrolled in school and Myles was placed in daycare and started working with Early On services to help him get on track with other children his age. The children started to thrive in this placement and appeared much happier. Both parents appeared less interested in following the service plans and their participation declined as weeks progressed.

After several months of working with this family, the parents became non-compliant and the goal for permanency was changed from reunification to adoption. The CASA knew the current foster family was not interested in adopting the children but their adult daughter, Hilary expressed interest. Hilary had been living in the home with the children helping her parents care for them. Hilary passed all necessary background checks and the adoption process began. The CASA was pleased with the outcome and ready to start the next case.

*If you are interested in becoming a CASA volunteer and being a voice for a child,
contact Vicki Price at vprice@childabusecouncil.org or 231-728-6410 ext 1100.*



Fiscal Year 2022-2023

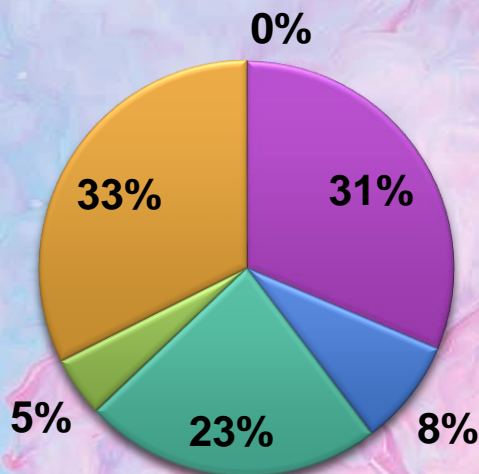
Financial Information



Revenue Sources

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Federal Grants | \$315,358 |
| State Grants | \$82,938 |
| Local Grants | \$238,250 |
| Contributions | \$46,575 |
| Fundraising | \$321,530 |
| Other | \$4,667 |
| TOTAL REVENUE | \$1,014,484 |

Revenue Sources



Fiscal Year 2022-2023

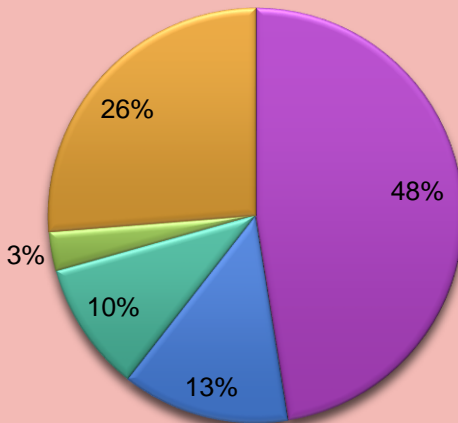
Financial Information

| Expenses | |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| Children's Advocacy Center | \$465,754 |
| CASA | \$130,534 |
| Prevention | \$99,413 |
| Management/General | \$31,753 |
| Fundraising | \$258,575 |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$985,759 |



Expenses

■ Children's Advocacy Center ■ CASA ■ Prevention ■ Management/General ■ Fundraising



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Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness

There is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it.



Hope is the only thing that can help us get through the darkest of times

Children are one third of our population and all of our future

Left to Right

- Madison Pierman – Marketing & Fund Development Assistant
- Vicki Price – CASA Supervisor
- Kyleen Gee – Executive Director
- Andrea Kelley – Family Advocate/MDT Coordinator
- Cortney Garza – In-take Coordinator
- Christina Tulgestke – Clinician
- Rachael McEnhill – Victim Advocate/Forensic Interviewer
- Debbie Anderson – Prevention Director
- Grace Strauss – Family Advocate/Forensic interviewer

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