

**CCTV and Recording Technology Program Site Visit Report
Advocacy Center for the Children of El Paso (ACCEP)
El Paso, Texas
May 15, 2008**

The CCTV and Recording Technology Program project team recently conducted a grantee site visit of the Advocacy Center for the Children of El Paso, Texas (ACCEP). The following is a brief summary.

Jurisdictional Information

The city of El Paso sits on the extreme western edge of Texas, and is within minutes of both Las Cruces, New Mexico and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The population of El Paso is about 600,000, but the metropolitan area of the three cities is over 2 million. El Paso is home to the federally recognized Native American Tigua Tribe along with Army base Fort Bliss.

Child Advocacy Center

Susan Oliva has been Executive Director of ACCEP since 1997. ACCEP is housed on the grounds of the Lee & Beulah Moor Children's Home in a renovated building that was also used to house foster youth. Under Ms. Oliva's leadership many positive changes have occurred. Over a decade ago, child victims were waiting six months for medical and counseling assistance; the Sheriff's deputy carried a giant camera on a tripod set up in the middle of the police substation for the interview; and the closest child advocacy center was three hours away in Alpine, TX. Starting from an empty space, today the hallways are filled with colorful pictures painted for free by a sign painter for Coca-Cola, and the playroom/waiting rooms are comfortably filled with inviting toys and books for the children. Successful fundraising has allowed for the expansion of the building in 2002.

Currently, ACCEP houses 13 detectives, two sergeants, a lieutenant, a clerk from the El Paso municipal Police Department, and three officers from the Sheriff's Department Sex Crimes Unit, who handle all sex crime victims, including adults. Also housed in the building are three CPS investigators; a County Attorney and a District Attorney (three days per week), three Assistant District Attorneys; and two investigators from Child Care Licensing who investigate child care center child abuse cases. They hold monthly staff meetings to report on and discuss approximately 45 cases per month. In addition, a large classroom that seats 60 is used for trainings by ACCEP for new interviewers, refresher courses, and for foster parent trainings. The community has access to the facility free of charge as long as the trainings are child-related.

Equipment Set Up

There are two interview rooms dedicated to older and younger victims. The Maui Room is used primarily for older children. It has a rattan chair and love seat, pine trees, a one-way mirror, and two cameras. One camera is hidden "in plain sight," but visible, on a small bookcase. The second camera (with pan-and-zoom capabilities) is hidden behind a birdcage in the corner by the door. There are anatomical dolls, crayons, and paper, in the event a child wants to demonstrate abuse or draw. The microphone is hidden "in

plain sight” as well, just under the one-way mirror, but painted over so it is not obvious. The Rainbow Room, for younger children, is brighter. The cameras are obscured by design; one is in the monitoring room in the mirror, and the other is hidden behind a “smiley face” cutout on the wall. A cloud blanket covers the comfortable couch, and there is a primary-color picnic table for drawing.

The monitoring rooms are small, with one monitor, one set of headphones, and two DVD recorders (although only one is used if CPS is not involved). There are seats for up to six people to monitor the interview, either through the mirror or by watching the monitor. If the interviewer takes questions from observers, they have the option of using an earpiece, or leaving the room and coming into the monitoring room. ACCEP had contractors provide additional sound-proofing to the space. Parents are not allowed to view the interview or DVD.

Between the front hall entrance and the conference room is a child’s playroom/waiting area. When a child is finished with their interview and prior to leaving, they are invited to come back to this room and pick a toy from the toy closet to take home. Other rooms include a storage room filled with clothes and diapers donated by the community. The clothes are available for children for a number of reasons, such as rapid removal, removal from school directly to foster care, or for children whose clothes are dirty or who need new items. There is also a conference room, kitchen, a bathroom, and offices for all of the agencies who house staff there (law enforcement, district attorney, county attorney, CPS).

Data Collection

Since its inception, ACCEP has interviewed 6,000 child victims, averaging 40-45 victim interviews per month. Due to the fact that 85% of El Paso residents are Spanish-speaking, and 30% of those speak only Spanish, all interviewers are bi-lingual. They also have interpreters for hearing impaired victims on-call.

Protocols

Victims are not told they will be taped, but if asked, the interviewer will tell them they are being taped.

The Tigua Tribe has no formal Memorandum of Understanding with ACCEP, but they are allowed to use it for their interviews. Cases involving either Tigua Tribe members or military families from Fort Bliss are handled by the FBI, and sometimes CPS. Similarly, if a case is from the local bordering area of New Mexico, ACCEP can provide a courtesy interview for any law enforcement agency and send them the recording.

Physical examinations are not provided at the center but coordinated through the local hospital or the facilities at Texas Tech. Approximately 54 child victims annually get a rape exam at the local hospital. Texas Tech conducts exams on physical abuse, as they have a special pediatric unit.

Contact Information

Please feel free to contact Susan Oliva at the Advocacy Center for the Children of El Paso, Texas for additional information, at 915-545-5400, s_oliva@juno.com.