



CCTV and Recording Technology Site Review Report Children's Advocacy Center of Southwest Florida Fort Myers, Florida March 18, 2010

The CCTV and Recording Technology Grant Program conducted a site review at The Children's Advocacy Center of Southwest Florida in Fort Myers, Florida on March 18, 2010. The following is a summary of the visit:

Jurisdictional Information

The Children's Advocacy Center of Southwest Florida is located in Fort Myers, Florida. It serves a four-county region. The most densely populated county is Lee County, with 584 people per square mile. Two of the four counties are rural; Glades is the most rural with just 13 people per square mile. The area is predominantly white, and the largest minority group is Hispanics.

Child Abuse Case Investigation

Case Overview

In 2009, the CAC served 3,042 children (1,809 female and 1,243 male). Most of the children were 0-6 years old (1,238 cases), 1,025 cases dealt with children 7-12 years old, and there were 779 cases concerning children 13-18 years old. The vast majority of cases that the CAC is involved with are sexual and physical abuse. The victims are predominantly white. In approximately 48-51% of the cases there is a finding that abuse has occurred.

The CAC works with the Prosecutor's special victims unit, which handles adult and child sex crimes. The CAC conducts all interviews with children, because the State Attorney believes that they should conduct forensic interviews, rather than the police. Detectives do not receive training to conduct forensic interviews for this reason.

All forensic interviews are recorded. There are some interviews, such as clinical interviews, that are not recorded. Law enforcement would like to move towards recording all interviews, not just the forensic interviews. They would like to have all child victims interviewed, not just sexual abuse victims, as they feel that a recorded image is important for court and prosecution.

Case Coordination

Each case is headed by a case coordinator. There is at least one coordinator on call 24 hours, seven days a week, with another back-up person. There are no regulations that children have to be seen within a certain amount of time; however staff said they try to see the victims as quickly as possible.

In total, 10 people at the CAC can act as coordinators. The coordinator communicates and works with the family members, the forensic interviewer, medical

personnel (if necessary), and other MDT professionals to decide the next course of action for the case. They also conduct forensic interviews and are in charge of the recording.

Case Progression & Forensic Interview

When police first respond to a call, they only ask a few questions to clarify whether or not a crime has been committed. Children are not allowed to be interviewed more than three times; this does not include the initial interview by police or the one done by the Department of Children and Families. Law enforcement uses the forensic interview as their interview; the other interviews are conducted by the State Attorney's Office and at the deposition with defense.

The forensic interviewer does not prepare the child for the interview, but the parent generally explains to the child where they are going. The child protection team believes that no one under four years old should have a forensic interview; however they use other techniques to speak with these younger children. Before the interview, the case coordinator speaks with the non-offending family members and law enforcement. The case coordinator sets up the equipment directly prior to the interview.

During the interview, the forensic interviewer tells the child that they are being recorded. The CAC interviewers use the APSAC protocol. They do not use anatomical dolls; instead they have Cabbage Patch dolls and anatomical drawings on paper as a last resort. The interviewer does not use an ear piece. There is case law against the use of ear pieces, because they are viewed as an extension of the police. The forensic interviewers are even careful about speaking to the police during a break in the interview.

Medical Exams

There are two full-time nurse practitioners and one part-time doctor who works up to 16 hours per week. In a year, the CAC conducts approximately 1,500 medical exams. For older children, exams are only conducted if a child discloses penetration, while younger children usually have a non-invasive exam performed.

In acute cases, an exam will be conducted immediately. In non-acute cases the forensic interview and clinical interview with family members take place before the medical exam.



Medical Exam Room

Language Needs

There are bilingual staff members who speak Portuguese and Spanish, which are the two most common languages needed after English. If there is need for a translator in another language the CAC uses a translation service through Orlando. The translators are all court certified. The CEO stated that they have not had any trouble locating a translator through this service and that they can usually get someone on the phone within 45 minutes. The police department also has employees willing to translate.



Monitoring Room A

Additional Services

There are prevention, outreach, and therapy services offered at the CAC.

Therapy is available for families, individuals, adult sex offenders, and juvenile sex offenders. There are also specialized programs for parents and for teen girls who have experienced trauma.

Child Advocacy Center

The Child Advocacy Center was established 29 years ago. There are currently 70 staff members.

Building

The CAC is housed in a 22,000 sq. ft. building, which staff moved into in April 2009. Prior to April, the CAC was located in a strip mall and only had about half the space. In contrast to the new building, the old location incorporated a number of different spaces; there were only two interview rooms and one monitoring room, and there was a problem with sound bleeding through the walls. Now, all of the services are housed under one roof.

The building is divided into several sections: therapy, forensic interviews, and medical. To enter each separate portion of the building, one must have a key to maintain safety and confidentiality. The CAC received a number of grants to furnish the building. Most of the rooms have large couches, wall furnishings, and tables. There is art on the walls of each room, painted by local artists.

In the therapy section, there are three therapy rooms for children, teens, and adults. This is the only section in which one needs a key to get in and out of the section of the building, because it is used for offender services. There are also services offered to members of the community in this area.

There are three forensic interview rooms, each with a themed mural. Each room has a combination of couches and chairs. There is a clock in the interview room as well as baskets under the coffee table in each room which contain anatomically correct dolls.

The interviews are viewed in one of two monitoring rooms. The larger monitoring room has an L-shaped couch facing the flat screen TV and equipment. The smaller room has four chairs, two facing back-to-back. There are two flat-screen TVs on opposite sides of the room. Each TV features a different interview room (the equipment for each of the rooms are in opposing corners).

There are three medical exam rooms and three waiting rooms for family members. Each of the exam rooms has paintings on the walls and above the exam tables. The waiting rooms are family-friendly, for both adults and children.

There is a storage room with donated clothes and toys for the child victims. There are also quilts and stuffed animals that have been donated for the children who undergo medical exams.



Monitoring Room B



Forensic Interview Room



Video Storage Room

Equipment

In each of the interview rooms there are two cameras, one located on a wall near the room's light switch and one looking down onto the interview area. There is also a microphone embedded in the wall. There are picture-in-picture capabilities, so both camera views are visible at all times. From the monitoring room, the primary view can be switched between the two cameras. The case coordinator usually decides which camera will have the larger picture. There is no zoom function.

In the monitoring room, there are two internal DVD drives and one exterior burner, which creates three original copies of each interview. The interviews are also saved on a hard drive, remaining there for 90 days.

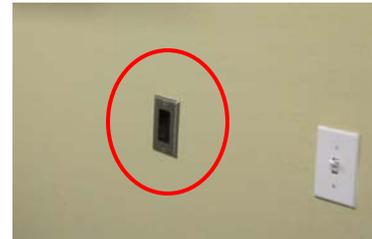
In one monitoring room, it is possible to view two interviews at the same time; for this reason observers listen through headphones to maintain confidentiality.

The CAC chose to purchase their equipment from iRecord. The equipment used to make a humming noise, but this problem has been fixed. They frequently have requests from other CACs to view their equipment.

The CAC is required by the Department of Health and Human Services to keep tapes for 7 years. Currently, they have tapes going back 10 years, stored in a separate locked room. The newer DVDs go into the case file. Tapes were shredded in the previous year. The CAC plans to do this again periodically. They do not know how the other copies are destroyed, because they are not in the possession of the CAC.



Monitoring Room B Equipment



Camera in Interview Room



Microphone in Interview Room

Funding

The Child Advocacy Center of Southwest Florida receives funding from 27 different private and governmental sources, such as the Florida Department of Health, Medical Value Options, United Way, Children's Network of Southwest Florida, and the Bobby Nicholas-Fiddlesticks Charity Foundation. They have a dedicated development staff person who locates new funding opportunities.

They have created partnerships with local groups, including a minor league hockey team, which donates stuffed animals; a golf club, which gives a substantial annual monetary donation; and an advertising agency, which funded several strategically placed billboards advertising the CAC's services and mission.

Contact Info

To learn more about the Child Advocacy Center of Southwest Florida, please go to their website: <http://www.cac-swfl.org/>.