

CCTV and Recording Technology Site Visit Report Western Kansas Child Advocacy Center's Mobile Child Advocacy Center in Denver, Colorado October 13 – 14, 2008

The Western Kansas Child Advocacy Center's Mobile Child Advocacy Center (Mobile CAC) is a fully functional child advocacy center. The redesigned recreational vehicle is comprised of three rooms, much like a free-standing center. It is equipped with recording and closed-circuit equipment, a forensic interview room, an MDT room, and a child-friendly waiting area. This prototype CAC received funding from the ABA, under its BJA cooperative agreement, to augment its equipment with CCTV. This allows the WKCAC to provide a mobile auxiliary room with the capacity to transmit a child's court testimony from the mobile CAC into an adjacent courthouse anywhere in Western Kansas.

Grant Information

The Western Kansas Child Advocacy Center was awarded \$53,908.00 to add closed – circuit broadcasting equipment to their mobile unit and to train their employees



Jurisdictional Information

The combined population of the 29 counties that the WKCAC serves is approximately 227,338.¹

Twenty-one of these 29 counties are considered frontier counties; they have a combination of low-population density and long distances to service or market areas. The population density of the frontier counties ranges from 1.9 – 7.6 people per square mile (the national average is around 80 people per square mile).²

The majority of the population is Caucasian, and Hispanics are the largest minority. There are also small communities of German and Mexican-German Mennonites, Somalis, African-Americans and Pacific-Islanders.

Child Advocacy Center

The Western Kansas Child Advocacy Center (WKCAC) is comprised of traditional CAC buildings in three locations and one mobile CAC, based in Scott City, Kansas. The three stand-alone Centers are located in Thomas, Scott, and Haskell Counties. The Mobile Child Advocacy Center (MCAC) serves approximately 30% of Kansas which holds 6% of the population. The area that the WKCAC serves is the most rural part of the state.

¹ "Kansas QuickFacts". US Census Bureau. 2008. <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/20000.html>>

² National Center on Frontier Communities. 2008. <<http://www.frontierus.org/index.htm>>

The MCAC staff currently consists of two Forensic Interviewers and one Child/Family Advocate. Since its inception 20 months ago, the MCAC has traveled over 25,000 miles to 33 counties. The staff often drives several hours at a time to conduct interviews near the homes of the child victims. The works schedule is unpredictable; on occasion the staff work during the weekend and into the night.

They currently serve 29 counties in Western Kansas and have 21 interagency agreements. Each agreement is signed by the county attorney, law enforcement, and CPS in the county. They have also conducted courtesy interviews for Arizona, Oklahoma, Colorado, Nebraska, Louisiana and Texas. Courtesy interviews are forensic interviews conducted outside of the MCAC's service area. These interviews may be requested by law enforcement or CPS from another Kansas county or state.

When there is a request for an interview, the staff will schedule it within a week of the call, if possible. If they travel to a more rural area, they try to schedule interviews with several victims on the same day. Even when they schedule multiple interviews in one day, they try to focus on one family at a time. When they meet with a family, they generally park near a public library, school, park, or the victim's home.

After a child has been interviewed, they receive an age-appropriate goody bag. These bags hold quilts made and donated by several local women's groups, educational books, games and colored pencils.

Latino children comprise 10-12% of the interviewees. Most of these children are second- or third-generation Americans who speak fluent English. Many of the parents, however, do not speak English; the Child/Family Advocate speaks fluent Spanish. She educates the families on the criminal justice system and refers them to organizations where they can receive assistance and services.

Since the Mobile CAC has been operating, they have doubled the total number of children interviewed at all of the WKCAC sites. The WKCAC staff mentioned several reasons for this: the children seem to feel more comfortable in the enclosed space; the parents have fewer objections because the interviews are recorded; and the time and cost of traveling long distances is eliminated for the victims' families. When parents are informed of the CCTV option if the case goes to trial, they respond favorably. The parents reportedly believe the use of the equipment could minimize the trauma and fear associated with testifying.

Child Abuse Case Processing and Data

Since the Mobile Child Advocacy Center's inception there have been 136 interviews in total, all of which have been recorded. Six of the interviews have been viewed in court. They have also conducted 12 extended forensic interviews; each of which consists of 6 sessions; all are recorded and entered into the case record. In 2007, there were 9 cases prosecuted and in 2008 there have been 11 cases. No cases, thus far, have gone to trial, but there have been 6 convictions. The closed-circuit TV equipment has been requested 3 times, but has not been used to date.

From July 1, 2008 to September 30, 2008, the MCAC conducted more interviews than

any of the stand-alone centers. The MCAC interviewed 19 children, while the CACs in Scott and Thomas Counties interviewed 11 children each, and Haskell County's CAC interviewed 4 children. Of the 45 children interviewed by all the CACs, 64% were female, 36% male, 90% Caucasian and 10% were Hispanic.

Protocols

There is a written protocol on how to request CCTV equipment and what laws pertain to it. This document defines CCTV, outlines what should be presented in a motion hearing, how to make a pre-trial record of the child's trauma, and the criminal procedure codes relating to the use of CCTV.

When the team is called for an interview they have at least one advocate and one interviewer together. The advocate's role is to comfort and explain to the family what is happening while the interview is taking place. The interviewers only tell children 5 and older that their interviews are being recorded. If the child wants to see the equipment they will allow them to look at it before the interview takes place. The interviewers use the CornerHouse RATAC Protocol; they have not made any changes to it.

Children are not permitted to translate for their parents. The advocate speaks to the parents in Spanish, if that is their native language, or the CAC tries to find an interpreter from the local area. Locating an interpreter may take some time; however they are usually able to find someone.

Equipment Set Up and Demonstration

The MCAC was bought and renovated for \$110,434. The inside of the MCAC was refitted by a company that builds custom horse trailers in Dighton, Kansas.

It is divided into three rooms, an observation room in the front, a waiting room in the middle, and an interview room in the back. There is also a bathroom and refrigerator in the waiting room.

The observation room is in the driving compartment. There are curtains that go around the windshield of the MCAC to make the room more appropriate for monitoring a child victim's interview. There are four built-in seats, the driver and the passenger seats swivel, and there are two stationary seats on either side of the driving cabin. If needed, there is enough room to fit in two more folding chairs. There is a TV screen above the passenger's seat, and adjacent to it is the DVD and VHS recording equipment. There is also a controller for the cameras' zoom mechanisms; this is portable and can be picked up and used anywhere in the observation space. The screen has picture-in-picture capabilities.



The middle room is a child-friendly waiting area. This can be used as a play room for children before their interview or for their parents to wait in during the interview. There are a number of soft toys, magazines, two stationary chairs, and murals on the walls. There is a door between this room and the observation room and two doors between it and the interview room. There is a sound-masking machine in this room, which creates a low humming noise through out the MCAC. The MCAC expands an additional 4 feet in this room with a moveable wall, which is retracted when traveling.

The interview room has a bench in one corner for the child and forensic interviewer to sit. The ceiling is outfitted with two cameras (this enables picture-in-picture capabilities) and a microphone. To assist in the interviews, there is an anatomically correct doll and a large drawing pad. There are also pictures of puppies and kittens to help put the child at ease. While the interview is taking place, the interviewer uses an earpiece to allow the MDT to communicate and ask for clarifications.



All interviews are recorded directly onto a DVD. There are two original copies made of the DVDs; one is stored at the Scott City CAC and the other is given to law enforcement and CPS. They will make copies if one is requested by a lawyer. The advocate keeps track of who has been given a copy of the interviews. On occasion they are asked to make a VHS copy of the interview. If they know in advance, they can make an original copy in VHS.

The WKCAC has purchased a generator for times when they cannot plug into a near-by building. This allows the staff to use the heating and air-conditioning when needed and to use the lights and equipment at all times.



The CCTV has not been used at trial yet; however there was a test of its capabilities in Scott City. When the MCAC is set up for CCTV, there is a phone in the interview room to allow the defendant to contact his attorney. There is also a TV screen showing the judge. The closed-circuit set-up is made possible through the use of a 500-foot fiber-optic cable; this can be plugged into the court or into any other near-by building.

To protect the MCAC from the elements, they bought warehouse space. This ensures that the MCAC is secure and that it is not affected by frost, winds, snow, or any other types of weather.

Example of Trauma Reduction

The WKCAC staff only mentioned two times when a child felt uncomfortable with their interview being recorded. One child did not want the MDT to observe the interview while it was taking place. Once the interviewer was aware of this, she asked the MDT to leave the MCAC. After the child could hear that everyone had left, she was able to disclose. The other time this happened, the interviewer put the child at ease by filming his feet, rather than his face.

The MCAC described a recent case demonstrating the importance of the mobile unit. The situation involved a four-year-old boy who witnessed the murder of both of his parents. To interview the boy, the staff drove 1½ hours on a Saturday morning. The Family Advocate had to speak Spanish to the child because he did not speak English. Law enforcement left the boy with the CAC staff during the day. They were able to comfort and calm him down enough for him to sleep, eat and play. They were also able to locate a Spanish-speaking sketch artist to speak with the child and create a picture of the murderer.

Another time, the MCAC staff drove two hours to speak with a 15-year-old girl. She disclosed abuse by her father and feared for her life. The mother also said she was scared of her husband. The MCAC staff coordinated an MDT to help the family. They interviewed the girl's siblings and coordinated a strategy with the MDT to file a Protection from Abuse order and to relocate her family. The mobile CAC left at 7:00 a.m. and the staff did not return to their homes until 2:00 a.m.

Challenges/Technical Assistance Needs

The WKCAC staff has many plans for the future, but there are two things standing in the way of expansion: staff restrictions and funding. In the future, they would like to purchase a second, smaller mobile unit, without the observation room. The observation room for the MDT would be in an adjacent building with portable equipment (wireless or fiber optic). This may be a law enforcement center, courthouse, or any other available office. They could use this for extended forensic interviews as well as regular interviews. This would allow them to serve more areas by having two smaller units available at any time.

The WKCAC staff mentioned a need to have someone assist with the general administrative work and to hire staff to help with the technical side of the CCTV and with the driving. At the moment, there is only one staff member who is able to drive and set up the CCTV system.