

The Alliance is a publication for Child Advocacy Centers, allied professionals and community members committed to ending child abuse.

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Community Key in Bennington

By Patti Randall,
Executive Director
Bennington County Child Advocacy Center/SIU

Before I begin, I would like to thank Jenn Poehlmann for her work as the Director of the Vermont Children's Alliance. Jenn has worked tirelessly to ensure each CAC in Vermont is informed about new legislation, funding and training opportunities.

She also organized a legislative breakfast in January, which made it possible for the parents of two children whose lives have been affected by sexual abuse to tell their story. They shared how a gap in the law has allowed the offender who assaulted their children to go free of any repercussions because he was a juvenile when the abuse occurred and is now an adult. Senator Richard Sears was concerned about this reported loophole and his Com-

mittee is working on legislation to accommodate such situations. I would also like to thank Jenn for giving each Center the opportunity to tell a little more about their organization and how their CAC affects their community.

Now, to a brief history of the Bennington County Child Advocacy and Special Investigations Unit. In

the early 1980's, members of the Department for Children and Families and Law Enforcement recognized the need to collaborate in the interview process. In February 1989, our first multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meeting was held and is currently over 30-members strong; we still have some of the

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Representatives from the Bennington County CAC/SIU meet with Governor Shumlin and Senator Richard Sears

Note from the Executive Director

The past three months have been very busy ones for the Chapter and its member programs. We are currently nine member CACs strong, and are excited about the development of another child advocacy center to serve Orange County. We continue to grow and develop under the guidance of our parent organization, the Nation-

al Children's Alliance, thus assuring our adherence to best practice and very strict program and service standards; at the same time however, each program, as with its partner SIU, is strongly reflective of the values and needs of its community.

We would like to welcome Joseph Malgeri as the Director of

the Orleans County Child Advocacy Center and the North East Kingdom SIU. Joe takes over the position from Trevor Colby, who was elected Sheriff of Essex County last November. While "new" to his current position, Joe has a wealth of experience in the criminal justice system and brings

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BENNINGTON CTD

Cont. from page 1: original members from that first meeting.



It soon became apparent we needed a specialized facility in which to conduct child interviews and to provide support services for non-offending family members. In April of 1993, space was donated by the Bennington Superior Court; while Team members solicited donations, members of the Bennington Police Department and Vermont State Police completed carpentry work. In June of 1993, a local attorney worked pro-bono to assist us with our non-profit status, and we became incorporated as The Bennington County Association Against Child Abuse. In September of 1993 we were officially ready for interviews. We became an umbrella agency of United Counseling Services in 2005 and were renamed the Bennington County Child Advocacy Center (BCCAC). In 2007, we added the Special Victims Unit, now known as the Special Investigations Unit; we were the third SIU in Vermont. The Bennington Police Department assigned a full time detective to the BCCAC/SVU. In October of 2009, we became a free-standing agency and a fully accredited member of the National Children's Alliance.

The BCCAC/SIU outgrew our offices beneath the Bennington Superior Court, and in May of 2010 we rented a nearby space at 439 Main Street in Bennington. Currently the CAC



offices include a spacious private family room, a comfortable interview room and office spaces for our Case Coordinator, Administrative Assistant and Executive Director as well as a large office for our SIU Detectives and a DCF investigator. Our mental health provider also utilizes BCCAC space to provide therapy to CAC victims as needed.

The number of cases that have come through the BCCAC/SIU has increased steadily over the years. Our Center investigates sexual and egregious physical abuse of children as well as adult sexual assault cases. On average, we see about 120 new cases each year. Most of these cases are child sexual abuse cases.

Supporting the emotional needs of victims and their non-offending family members has always been a primary concern. Our onsite Case Coordinator makes referrals for therapy and informs the family of other community programs and services. Working collaboratively with our State's Attorney's Victim Advocate, our Case Coordinator provides support and spends one-on-one time with victims and their families. In addition, she serves as the link between the family, law enforcement and prosecution from the time of disclosure to the time the case is heard in court and is a consistent presence for the victim during that time.

In an effort to protect child victims from further trauma, our CAC applied for and was awarded a grant through the American Bar Association to

fund the purchase and installation of closed circuit television equipment. In December 2010, the Bennington Superior Court Criminal Division became one of only a few in the state to have closed circuit television equipment in the courtroom. This technology enables child sexual abuse victims to testify at court without having to be in the same room as the offender.

Community awareness is an important part of prevention. Our Case Coordinator works with our Detective and they jointly present "Safe and unsafe touching" to local schools in our area. We also participate in our local middle school's Safety Fair with an interactive display and activities to educate students about Internet safety, healthy relationships and abuse prevention. Members of our MDT make presentations to local religious groups and other community organizations to raise awareness of sexual abuse and the role of a child advocacy center. Community awareness and fundraising often go hand-in-hand; we are fortunate to have the support of local businesses and organizations like The Elks, who recently hosted a poker tournament fundraiser for us, and a local restaurant, Madison's Brewery, will host a dinner for us in April and donate 10% of all proceeds of that evening to our Center.

The success of the BCCAC/SIU would not be possible without the coordinated efforts, energy and passion of our many community partners and team members. As I close, I would like to say how proud I am of Bennington County's response to sexual abuse and sexual assault cases. Our entire team is dedicated to improving how child abuse, child sexual abuse and sexual assault cases are handled.

Parnitzke: Finality at Last by Kristine Bickford

The courage that a 15 year girl had went with her. It is with her still.

She is well mannered and thoughtful and yet her determination is what fuels her. She was the victim of repeated sexual assaults by her biological mom, her mom's boyfriend, and other men here in Vermont and in England for several years. She was told to watch pornographic movies and then imitate what she had seen. The child finally revealed her experience after she felt safe living with her biological dad and stepmom once she moved to California.



This case was a difficult one. There was no physical evidence that would prove rapes took place, and rapes *do not always* leave physical finding but Susan Hardin, the prosecutor explained that pedophiles assault children without leaving a lasting mark and no child would ever know the graphic sexual details revealed in court unless she were truly a victim. The child testified on opening day. The details were shocking and her testimony distressing.

This was not the first trial, it was the third.

The first trial of Parnitzke and Casey ended with jurors deliberating for days and not reaching a verdict. The second trial ended with a guilty verdict after eight hours of deliberation. Judge Michael Kupersmith overturned the guilty verdicts in the second trial, ruling that a prosecution witness may have been too subjective and tainted the jurors' opinions with his testimony.

The last trial lasted over a week and the deliberations were difficult.

Susan Hardin, our prosecutor is

skilled and thorough. Without her determination and the courage of our victim this third trial would not have happened.

A plea agreement was made with Stacey Parnitzke, the mom. She will be deported to England. Shane Casey was found guilty on all counts and will be sentenced in the coming month.

If nothing else, this case shows that with perseverance from everyone involved there continues to be hope in finding justice.

US Supreme Court hears child interview case

On March 1, 2011, the United States Supreme Court heard arguments in a case involving a dispute over when children can be interviewed about allegations of sexual abuse without a warrant and without a parent present.

The case began when Nimrod Greene, an Oregon man, was arrested on charges that he drunkenly fondled a boy. The boy's parents suspected Greene had also abused his own children. Bob Camreta, a child-care worker, went to a school to speak to Greene's 9-year-old daughter. He was accompanied by a police officer. Greene pleaded guilty to lesser charges, and his wife, Sarah, sued the two investigators. In a 2-1 decision, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the "removal and examination" of the child "violated Sarah and the girl's constitutional rights."

The decision of the federal court was appealed to the high court by two Oregon state officials. Twenty-seven states also joined in asking the Supreme Court to resolve the significant issues present in the case.

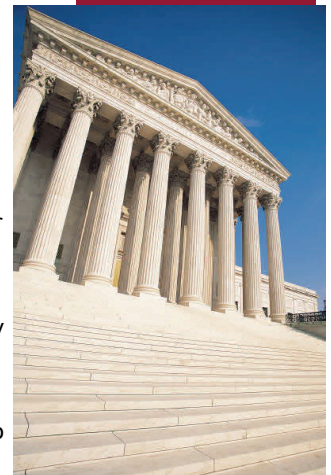
During oral argument, Oregon's attorney general and an Obama administration lawyer urged the justices to overturn the ruling. Child-protection workers would "face an enormous burden" if they had to get a warrant before speaking to a child at school, said John Kroger, Oregon's top lawyer. "It is impossible to establish probable cause to get a warrant without first speaking to the child, because the child is usually the only witness."

While the Supreme Court has not yet ruled on the issue, the justices were reported as taking sharp exception to the idea that a warrant or a parent's consent was required; comments and questions raised by the justices, indicated the Court was leaning toward setting aside the 9th Circuit's decision.

New courtroom equipment holds promises for child victims

Thanks to a \$20,000 grant from the American Bar Association, a high tech "evidence presentation system" was installed in the Bennington County Superior Court Criminal Division in February 2011. Now, the juror box has eight black monitor screens where evidence can be displayed. Screens have also been fixed to the tables where the prosecutors and defense attorneys sit, in addition to the judge's bench. Another screen sits on wheels and can be pointed anywhere in the courtroom.

The Bennington County Child Advocacy Center applied for and received the grant a couple of years ago, the primary purpose of which was to allow child victims of sexual assault to testify from another room; a room where they will not be forced to see the defendant. While Vermont law has allowed for this possibility since 1985, the law has been little used because the technology simply has not existed. Under the law, in order to utilize the system, the state must file a motion, which must be granted by a judge to allow an alleged victim to testify outside the courtroom.



CAC News from Across Our State

The Chittenden Unit for Special Investigations and the Children's Advocacy Center are delighted to welcome back Lieutenant Kris Carlson as the Director of CUSI.

This is not a first round for Kris at CUSI. He was here from May of 2002 to January 2007 as a Detective. Kris was then promoted to Sergeant in October 2006 and from January 2007-May 2008 he served as the Director of CUSI.

During that time he was, and he continues to be the Commander for the Vermont Internet Crimes against Children (ICAC).

He left in May of 2008 and assumed a patrol supervisor position. He was promoted to Lt. in November of 2009 and was then assigned to a number of various posts until coming back to CUSI in December 2010. These posts include Officer in Charge/Supervisor for patrol operations, Supervisor of BPD Airport Operations and the Street Crimes Unit as well as continuing to run the Vermont ICAC. We are proud to have Kris at the helm once again!

Recently, CUSI was proud to host staff from Senator Patrick Leahy's office. Maggie Gendron met with Director Kris Bickford and got an inside look at the CAC model in action. We are thankful to have the support of Senator Leahy and his devoted staff!

The Child Advocacy Center at NUSI is proud to announce that it was recently re-accredited by the NCA under their new standards, effective January 2010.

This was the culmination of a lengthy and intensive process, and NUSI is the first CAC in Vermont to be so honored. Any program undergoing re-accreditation or accreditation is encouraged to contact NUSI directly for assistance.

Child First Advocacy Center/ Rutland Office for Special Investigations welcomes Trooper Detective Todd Wilcox! Trooper Wilcox has six years of law enforcement experience, four with the Vermont State Police. Trooper Wilcox will be based out of the CAC.

Child First Advocacy Center/ Rutland Office for Special Investigations encourages businesses and schools to participate in "Blue Day" April 21st! Wear blue to work or school in recognition of child abuse awareness and keeping kids safe. Participating schools will win a pizza party for the class wearing the most blue!

The **Bennington County Child Advocacy Center** was awarded a NCA Program Improvement Grant and Children's Justice Act funds. NCA Program Improvement Grant funds will be used to train additional SANE and Pedi-SANE. We recently expanded to include another suite, which we refer to as our Investigative Branch, and Children's Justice Act funds will help cover that additional rent expense.

We also had turnover in law enforcement staff. Bennington Police Department Detective Mike Plush was promoted to Sergeant, and we are ecstatic to welcome Detective Larry Cole back to our SIU.

Here at **Windham County Safe-Place CAC/SUSI**, we have begun to lay the foundation for a more

inclusive MDT monthly meeting than the model we had previously used. We talked with as many organizations in Windham County who work with children and families as we could, including schools, consulted with Bunny Thompson from Bennington, and set the date for our first meeting in January. We really didn't know who would show, and were delighted when 16 people came. In February there were 18 people, including Bunny Thompson and Lori Vadakin who came from Bennington to share their wisdom from many years of conducting a wide-net MDT process. March winds blew 17 participants in from a wet, sleety day, with school providers making a good showing. We are very encouraged by the level of interest thus far, and the focus and concern that participants have brought to the meetings. We believe these meetings will result in a wealth of shared information to help us better serve the children of Windham County. We'll keep you posted.

The **Windsor County SIU** is extremely pleased to announce that Dartmouth College has selected The Family Place in Norwich, VT as this year's recipient of the Presidents' Community Partner Award. This award recognizes a non-profit organization that has enhanced the quality of life in the community in meaningful and measurable ways and its developmental, engaged work with Dartmouth students. While this award recognizes many collaborations between the agency and the college, one endeavor was specifically designed to reach cultural competency standards for our CAC.



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his long established network of relationships with him. We look forward to seeing the progress in the region in the months to come.

The VCA recently obtained another grant from the NCA, this one for \$105,000. The funds will be used to support the Chapter and to provide direct support to five of our Centers. While we are fortunate to have the support of these federal dollars, many of our programs continue to provide services without any federal or even state support. Moreover, future funding seems precarious as the federal government is contemplating cuts to the Victims of Child Abuse Act; President Obama's budget currently reflects a cut to this line for FY '12. If we do not see at least a return to level funding for FY '12, the impact on CACs in Vermont and elsewhere, and on the programs CACs partner with in support of children, will be significant. For more information on what you can do to support level funding for

services for abused children, please contact VCA Director Jennifer Poehlmann at 802-735-7984.

Our Chapter just completed its application for national accreditation as a recognized Chapter of the NCA. In order to even be considered by NCA, the process the Chapter has had to go through thus far has resulted in tremendous growth within our infrastructure. We are significantly better equipped to support our member programs, and have a clear vision for what is required of us in order to deliver the level of service and response each child in our state deserves. The Chapter is extremely fortunate to have such a committed and skilled Board of Directors at its helm, without whom none of the recent growth would have occurred.

In January we held our annual Legislative Breakfast. We had significant representation from all of our CACs and many allied stakeholders also attended in support. Legislators were very

interested in learning more about the child advocacy centers themselves and what is needed to support the work. We are particularly grateful to Senator Richard Sears and Senate President John Campbell, who took a chunk of time out of their busy schedules to meet with all present. Program staff also got a special treat, as Governor Peter Shumlin and some of his staff unexpectedly took time to speak with them and to pose for photographs.

The past has provided us with much to celebrate; while the coming months pose many challenges, the arrival of Spring reminds us that potential and possibility are everywhere, and opportunities we may not have seen or been aware of have actually been there all along. Wishing you all a Happy Spring!



Senate Bill Rectifies Jurisdiction Gap

The Vermont Senate recently passed a bill designed to eliminate existing confusion concerning court jurisdiction when an individual is charged with a crime after attaining the age of 18, but where the crime was alleged to have been committed when the accused was a minor.

The situation was brought to the attention of Senate Judiciary Chair, Senator Richard Sears, after a district court judge determined that he could not hear a case alleging the sexual assault

of two young boys by an 18 year old man, as the person charged was 13 when the assaults were alleged to have occurred. When the state subsequently brought the matter forward in family court, the juvenile judge also declined to hear the case, as the individual charged was 18 and therefore no longer within the jurisdictional reach of the family court. In both situations, the cases were dismissed by the court, leaving the state without recourse.

Under the bill which passed the Senate, crimes committed by someone younger than 18 would first be heard in family court, even if the person was 18 years or older when charged. The Family Court may transfer the case to Superior Court if the crime was one of fifteen specified acts and the Court finds good reason for the case not having been brought when the defendant was a juvenile; the bill is intended to take effect on passage. The Bill has been referred to the House Judiciary Committee and is awaiting further action.



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The Vermont Children's Alliance

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Coming Events

The coming months feature more events and educational opportunities than usual, with April's designation as **Child Abuse Prevention Month** and **Sexual Violence Awareness Month**; **Crime Victims Rights Week** is also held in April, this year from April 10-16, 2011.

For more information about activities in your area, please contact Prevent Child Abuse Vermont, the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, or the VT Center for Crime Victim Services.

On April 15, 2011, the Center for Crime Victim Services will be hosting "**Trauma Stewardship: Caring for Self While Caring for Others**" Contact willroberts@ccvs.state.vt.us for more information.

Vermont's Child Advocacy Centers and Affiliated SIUs

The Bennington County CAC/SIU
P.O. Box 163
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 442-5107
Bccac.patti@gmail.com

The Child Advocacy Center at CUSI/ CUSI
50 Cherry Street, Suite 102
Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 652-0391
kbickford@bpdvt.org

Northwest Unit for Special Investigations/CAC
5 Lemnah Drive
St. Albans, VT 05478
(802) 524-7961
whiter@dps.state.vt.us

Child First Advocacy Center/ ROSI
59-67 Merchants Row
P.O. Box 6822
Rutland, VT 05702
(802) 747-0200
susan@childfirstadvocacycenter.org
Childfirstadvocacycenter@myfairpoint.net

The Orleans County Child Advocacy Center
55 Seymour Lane
Newport, VT 05855
(802) 334-6002
Joe.malgeri@gmail.com

OUR House of Central Vermont, Inc. CAC/SIU
38 Summer Street
Barre, Vermont 05641
(802) 476-8825
davidfrey@ourhousevt.org

Windham County Safe Place CAC/ SUI
114 Main Street
Suite 1, 2nd Floor
Brattleboro, VT 05301
(802) 579-1358
connie@safeplace.comcastbiz.net

The CAC at the Family Place/ WNSI
319 US Route 5, South
Norwich, VT 05055
(802) 295-3882
julieg@the-family-place.org

The CAC at the Springfield Area Parent
Child Center
2 Main Street
North Springfield, VT 05150
(802) 886-5242
cindym@vermontel.net
betyk@vermontel.net

The Shield Our Children From Harm conference will be held on April 26, 2011 at the Quechee Club in Quechee, Vermont. This year the focus will be on the physical abuse of infants and young children, and is geared for health care professionals, child protection workers, law enforcement and others who care for children and work in the fields of preventing and responding to child abuse. For more information, contact Joan Devine at 603-650-3428.

There will be two **advanced forensic interviewing trainings** held in May. The first will be from May 10-13, 2011 in White River Junction and the second from May 16-19 in Rutland. These courses will be led by Linda Cordesco-Steele from the National Child Advocacy Center, and are open to DCF workers and law enforcement

personnel who have already had basic training in forensic interviewing. A basic course will be offered in the Fall of 2011; details to follow. For more information contact whiter@dps.state.vt.us.

Rutland Regional Medical Center, in collaboration with the Vermont Network and CFAC/ROSI is sponsoring a **Pediatric Nurse Training Seminar** June 6-10th. Space for this training is limited and open only to nurses interested in certification as a pediatric SANE. Interested individuals should contact Joan Carson at joan.carson@vtmednet.org.

The Annual Spring Conference of the **Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Association** will be held from April 8-10th at the Sheraton In Burlington. For more information go to <http://vfafa.org>