

Op-Ed to the *Nashua Telegraph*, printed July 30, 2006

The recent case of admitted child molester Shane Vadney provides Hillsborough County Attorney Marguerite Wageling and the Nashua Police Department an excellent and deserved opportunity to highlight the effectiveness of the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) model in providing a seamless, coordinated and efficient investigation into allegations of child sexual abuse. Vadney admitted to molesting 12 children at the Circle of Learning Daycare Center: the children, who were thought to be napping at the time, ranged in age from 2 to 6 years old. The case was investigated through the Hillsborough County South Child Advocacy Center in Nashua, which conducted more than 50 forensic interviews during the course of the investigation. Given the number of charges – 41 in total, and the number of victims, one could argue that without the coordinated team approach of the Child Advocacy Center, this case could have rocked the Nashua community for years costing countless dollars and possibly resulting in no conviction. Conversely, the case was wrapped up within months and a support group has been established for the families involved.

There are more than 500 CAC programs across the county with five CACs currently operational in New Hampshire. This year marked the end of a five-year, multi-site national evaluation of the CAC model by researchers at the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. Using data from more than 1,000 cases, the study showed that communities with a CAC had significantly higher rates of collaboration among professional disciplines investigating cases of abuse. Moreover, the study found that children and families were more satisfied with the investigation than those in comparison communities with a significantly higher percentage of children receiving a referral for a medical evaluation (48% versus 21%) and mental health services (60% versus 22%).

A recent national study by the National Children's Advocacy Center in Huntsville, Alabama shows that CACs save approximately \$1,300 per child in costs associated with investigating a case of alleged child abuse. At least 400 Nashua children will receive CAC services this year (1,500 statewide). That's more than \$520,000 savings to Nashua tax payers – in just one year! An additional five centers across the state are expected to open their doors within the next several months ensuring that all New Hampshire communities will have access to the compassionate coordinated care that is the hallmark of a CAC program.

Designed to serve as the nucleus in a child abuse investigation, CACs are community-based facilities that bring together law enforcement, DCYF, the County Attorney's Office, victim advocate services and medical and mental health professionals to provide a safe, neutral environment for the evaluation of child abuse and exploitation.

The New Hampshire Association of Chiefs of Police have consistently championed the CAC model. Their enthusiasm has been infectious. Recently the Commissioner of Health and Human Services John Stephen and Attorney General Kelly Ayotte teamed up to author SB 370, legislation supporting CACs and a multidisciplinary response to child abuse investigations. Nashua Senator David Gottesman served as the primary legislative sponsor, and in May, Governor Lynch signed SB 370 into law. For the professionals toiling away in the field heroically bringing those who prey upon children to justice, this type of support and acknowledgement of their work can not be underestimated.

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