

NOVEMBER 2020 ISSUE

Keeping Up With Advocates

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

This is a time like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to produce uncertainty, stress, and trauma in our communities. Advocates services are in high demand as we offer family support through our grief groups, parenting, and housing programming. We are seeing first hand the impact of this pandemic as the victims of abuse we interviewed in October doubled! Despite the challenges we are all facing every day, this is also a time that is bringing out the best in many people. We thank you for being there for us with donations of food, cleaning supplies, time, and many other resources. As we help the community, your encouragement, kind words and support help us manage day by day. We could have not persevered without your continued support.

Warmest regards,
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President and CEO

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See Something, Say Something Reporting Abuse Matters

In the state of Georgia, 1 in 100 children sustain incidents of child abuse every year.

The Children's Advocacy Center, or CAC, is a site for children such as these. The CAC conducts forensic interviews for children who have made allegations of sexual or severe physical abuse, and it is one of the many programs Advocates for Children has under its umbrella of services. The reporting process implemented by the CAC is designed to be a single event overseen and followed up by a multidisciplinary team that includes trained forensic interviewers, law enforcement, medical personnel, and child protective services. Forensic interviews conducted by the CAC are documented in such a way to reduce the need for a child who has witnessed or experienced traumatic events to tell his or her story repeatedly. However, the ultimate goal is to provide safety, comfort, and love to children and families who are in dangerous situations.

Sadly, many cases of child abuse go unreported. The truth of the situation is that children who experience abuse or neglect must be seen or heard by someone who can report their abuse in order to receive the help they desperately need.

Isolation is one of the key risk factors for abuse because it provides abusers more opportunities to abuse without being discovered. In September 2020, the CAC of Bartow County conducted 61 forensic interviews—double their average amount. Montana Wilson, trained forensic interview at the CAC, believes that the spike in cases is due to the return to school after the closure and self-isolation period caused by COVID-19. Teachers are the number one reporters of child abuse, and Montana explained that "School is a safe place for many kids. There they are seen every day. For months they were not seen—they were not able to report things happening in their houses...child abuse never decreased, we simply didn't know it was happening."

The influx of new cases pouring into the CAC has definitely taken a toll on the staff. It is extremely difficult to bear witness to a child's pain, but the dedicated interviewers at the CAC carry on regardless. Montana has worked at the CAC for 3 years and has conducted over 500 forensic interviews in her time there. In her experience, the number one thing that community members can do to support the center is to report suspected child abuse. "Without a report or referral, there isn't much we can provide for a child or family. That's why we need community members, coaches of sports teams, youth leaders, to be aware of the signs and to not be afraid to report."

To learn more about reporting child abuse, contact Amanda Tant at amanda@advochild.org



Growing Hope

Flowering Branch Achievement Story

Hank, 17, had only been a resident at the Flowering Branch Children's Shelter for 10 days, but he was loved already by the other residents and direct care staff. Respectful, caring, and bright, it was hard not to like him immediately.

Sadly, Hank was in the shelter for the same reason as many others: he had been abused and need support. After an incident with their alcoholic grandfather, his family became homeless. Because of stress and financial struggles, Hank's mother "fell off the wagon" shortly after, and his situation became abusive.

Child Protective Services placed Hank with his biological father, but when his father abandoned him, Hank decided to set off on his own. Hank couched surfed and stayed in hotels on his own for a while, but after the emergency housing funding ran out, his social worker reached out to the Flowering Branch Children's Shelter.

When Hank got there, he was behind on 148 school assignments, but with the help of the shelter's education director, he finished 107 assignments in only 4 days.

Since becoming a resident, Hank has been connected with mental health services, learned how to create a resume and budget, and cooked a meal for the shelter residents. He said that one of the best things about being at the shelter was going from eating one meal a day to eating a hearty three meals a day.

"I realized that going through bad things isn't fun, but ultimately how you handle the bad situations is what makes you different from everyone else."



Hank is turning 18 soon, and will have to leave the shelter, but his positivity has never wavered. His case manager, Tracey, has connected him with the Georgia Hope Program, and Hank's own goals are to graduate high school so that he can join the Navy.

When asked about how he feels about leaving the shelter and the path that he has before him, Hank said, "Before my pride got in the way, but living here allowed me to put my pride aside and admit that I need help—and also taught me to find that help!"



To read more about Hank, visit advochild.org/hank

National Adoption Month

November is National Adoption Month! This initiative was created by the Children's Bureau with the goal to "increase national awareness of the need for permanent families for children and youth in the U.S. foster care system."

This year's theme is "Engage Youth: Listen and Learn." Because of their age, teens are less likely to get adopted and more likely to age out of foster care without strong or stable family support.

Advocates for Children would like to encourage everyone to learn more about this heartbreaking issue. For more information about National Adoption Month, please visit childwelfare.gov and visit the National Adoption Month webpage.



COA Accreditation

In August 2020, Advocates for Children achieved national accreditation through the New York-based Council on Accreditation (COA). COA accreditation is an objective, independent, and reliable validation of an agency's performance. The standards driving accreditation ensure that services are well-coordinated, culturally competent, evidence-based, outcomes-oriented, and provided by a skilled and supported workforce. COA accreditation demonstrates accountability in the management of resources, sets standardized best practice thresholds for service and administration, and increases organizational capacity and accountability by creating a framework for ongoing quality improvement.

It took our dedicated staff 12 months to prepare and implement the policies and procedures needed to achieve accreditation. Advocates for Children chose to pursue accreditation to demonstrate the organization's implementation of best practice standards in the field of human services over the past 37 years and to ensure quality service and standards in the years to come!



**Advocates
for Children**

P.O. Box 446
Cartersville, GA 30120



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**Be a Champion for
Children. Give Today.**

Sign up at advochild.org

Upcoming Events

Drive-In Movie presented by Harbin Clinic

Friday, November 13th, 2020

Parking opens at 5:30 p.m.

Feature presentation at 7:00 p.m.



Annual Christmas Cookie Competition

Vote for your favorite team by texting **COOKIE** to **71777**

Come to the Cartersville Christmas parade December 3rd to see the winner announced!

**Christmas
COOKIE COMPETITION**

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