



# CHILD ABUSE COUNCIL

EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

## 2021 Annual Report



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## Our Mission Statement

The mission of the Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County is to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect through education, child advocacy, and community collaboration.

Through our three programs, we serve over 21,000 children each year in Muskegon County.

## Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County Board Members

Doug Hughes: President	Edie Kessler	Kendrah Robinson
Thea McMullen: Vice President	Hon. Gregory C. Pittman	Amanda Tumele
Kathy Fearnley: Treasurer	Sheriff Michael Poulin	Jared Meldrum
Helen Dobb: Secretary	Kim Bourdo	
	Tanya Haynes	





# Introduction

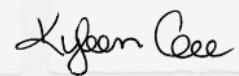
Dear Friends of the Child Abuse Council,

This past year has been filled with many successes and a few challenges. Thanks to our generous donors, board and volunteers, and amazing staff, we were able to continue our daily operations and provide much needed services to children and families in our community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our services have had to adapt to a new virtual world. Age-appropriate, personal body safety presentations were converted into video format to be shown in each classroom. Our Stewards of Children training which teaches adults in our community how to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse was converted into an online format. Individual counseling for child victims and their non-offending caregivers is available in-person and via teletherapy. These new tools have helped ensure that our message is still reaching those who need to hear it.

Funding is crucial to our ability to provide services, free of charge, to all who need them. In fiscal year 2021, our fundraising activities made up 7% of our annual budget, down from 41% in a non-pandemic year. We received federal pandemic relief funds and seen an increase in individual donations from our community members to help fill the gap. We could not have done it without you!

The pandemic is still here and the future looks as unpredictable as ever. As we look forward to 2022, we have renewed faith in our mission, our services, and our community. We are committed to furthering our mission and helping children Every Step of the Way.

~ Kylene Gee



Executive Director



# Prevention

**Debbie Anderson**  
**Prevention Director**

## Prevention Overview

According to Darkness to Light:

- Nearly 70% of all reported sexual assaults (including assaults on adults) occur to children ages 17 and under. Youths have higher rates of sexual assault victimization than do adults. In 2000, the rate for youths aged 12 to 17 was 2.3 times higher than for adults.
- Child sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem children face with the most serious array of consequences.
- About one in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children adult training program teaches the facts about child sexual abuse. It also teaches adults how to recognize signs, react to disclosures, and take action to stop potential child sexual abuse situations.

The Child Abuse Council offers online, facilitator-led Stewards of Children training and discussions to educators and other adults in our community. Putting a stop to child abuse is bigger than any one person, especially a child. Children sometimes go through the most horrible experiences. They should not have to go through it alone.

## Accomplishments of 2021

- 6,130 students received age-appropriate personal Safety Presentations, including human trafficking, personal body safety, and internet safety.
- 139 teachers, human services students, and community members received the Stewards of Children Training.



Early Childhood Personal Body Safety Puppets



# Prevention

In-person Personal Safety Prevention Programs were not possible again in 2021 due to the ongoing Coronavirus. All Muskegon County elementary schools were provided with the same evidence-based grade level programs as in previous years. However, they were pre-recorded with an introduction before and summary after from our Prevention Director to be shown by in-school staff. Middle and high school students were given the opportunity to take part in virtual prevention presentations via Zoom and Google Meet platforms.

The Child Abuse Council and the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) continue to work collaboratively to offer educators the opportunity to increase their knowledge of how to recognize, react and respond appropriately to potential child abuse. Online Stewards of Children Training is offered free of charge to teachers and staff and continuing credit units are also offered for this training.

Our hope is that by educating children about child abuse and by helping adults to know how to identify and respond to potential abuse situations, we can help to lower the risk for a wide range of problems. In turn, this could affect the life and welfare of a child. But, the fact of the matter is, that no one person or agency can reach this goal alone.

We have a vision of a world free of child abuse. A world in which all children are loved, protected and nurtured, able to grow up healthy with their sexual boundaries intact. We know that ending child abuse takes a cooperative community effort. You've heard it said that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it's going to take a whole community to keep our children safe. Online training is available to anyone who would like to learn more about how to protect our children, free of charge. The information is on our website via the "Prevention" tab.

The following is an example of how well our Personal Safety Prevention Programs work from Courtney Stahl, the Principal at Edgewood Elementary in Fruitport:

"Our kids did an outstanding job. Debbie's intro before and summary after the video was very impactful. I actually had one little girl do the exact plan of say no, get away and tell a grownup right away, when a little boy was making very offensive sexual gestures and comments. She told me Mrs. Anderson helped her know what to do in that situation."



# Children's Advocacy Center

**Paige Cook**  
Clinical Director / Clinician

**Andrea Kelley**  
Family Advocate

**Christina Tulgestke**  
Clinician

**Rachael McEnhill**  
Forensic Interviewer / Victim Advocate

**Karli DeHaan**  
Clinician

**Cortney Aspinall**  
Intake Coordinator

**Vicki Price**  
Medical Coordinator

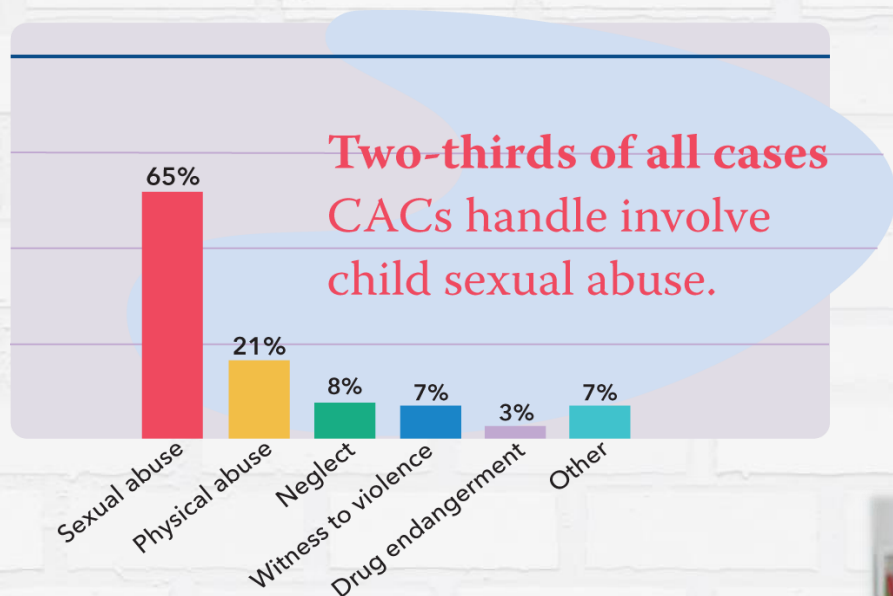
**Madison Pierman**  
Administrative Support / Clinical Assistant

**Dr. Yvonne Rekeny, MD**  
Forensic Medical Physician

## Advocacy Center Overview

According to National Children's Alliance (NCA):

- Nearly 678,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect in 2018, the most recent year for which there is national data.
- More than 3.5 million children received an investigation or alternative response from child protective services agencies.



CACs investigated 243,039 cases involving sexual abuse allegations in 2019, fully 65% of all cases NCA members carried through.

While not all these cases resulted in a disclosure, charges, or a conviction, it's an indication that the problem of sexual abuse may be much larger than federal statistics show.

## Advocacy Center Accomplishments of 2021:

- 72 Children received counseling
- 317 Forensic Interviews were provided
- 34 Medical Exams were conducted





# Children's Advocacy Center

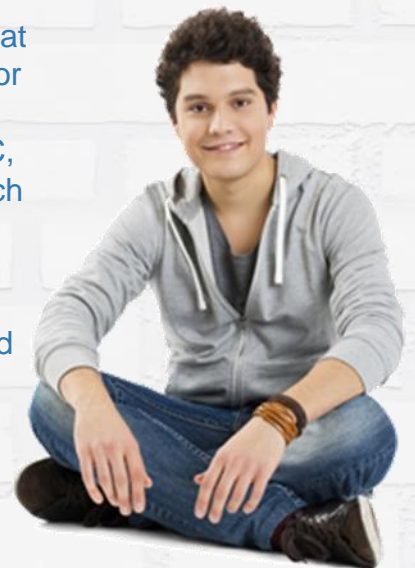
The Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) provides a safe space where children can receive all the services they may need after disclosing sexual abuse.

Names and details of this story have been changed to protect the privacy of the client and family.

Robert, who had just turned 13 years old, told his mother that her boyfriend at the time, was touching him in a way that made him feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Robert's mother made the decision to call the police. A police officer responded, but did not speak with Robert directly that day. Instead, he provided Robert and his mother a date and time to appear at the Children's Advocacy Center for a "Forensic Interview". When Robert and his mother appeared for his interview, they entered the child-friendly lobby where they were greeted by the friendly staff. There were fidgets and toys to engage Robert while he waited for his interview. A trained Forensic Interviewer introduced herself to Robert and his mother. The purpose and procedure for the interview were discussed. Robert was brought back into a private interview room where the Interviewer took time to build rapport with Robert, and he was asked open-ended, nonconfrontational questions about what had happened to him. The Interviewer even sat on the floor because that made Robert more comfortable. Robert disclosed that his mother's boyfriend had sexually abused him. Law enforcement was able to watch and hear the interview in an observation room. Robert did not even know the police were present.

While Robert was talking to the Forensic Interviewer, a Family Advocate met with Robert's mother. The Advocate provided the mother with a packet full of information and resources and walked her through all of the information. The Advocate inquired as to how Robert had been behaving since his initial disclosure. A social needs assessment was completed. Robert's mother indicated that she was having trouble with making ends meet and could use some help purchasing school supplies for Robert. The Family Advocate said that Advocacy Center would be happy to help. Afterward, the Family Advocate followed up with the family to ensure that their needs were met.

Robert's disclosure and other presenting concerns determined that counseling services were needed. Those services were offered for Robert and the family accepted the services in hopes to promote Robert's healing. When Robert first began counseling at the CAC, soon after his disclosure, he was showing trauma symptoms, such as fear of doing anything in the community and running into his abuser. Robert also reported feelings of anger, sadness and loss of interest in things that once made him happy. He was having a difficult time sleeping. He was never able to easily fall asleep, and then when he did fall asleep, he had trouble staying asleep. Robert's mother noticed that after the disclosure, Robert was moodier and was easily triggered, becoming angry and withdrawn. Robert completed a trauma symptoms assessment at the CAC where he scored very high for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Next page...



# Children's Advocacy Center

Continued...

Robert and his mother consistently and regularly attended teletherapy counseling sessions with a therapist from the CAC. This therapy was very crucial for Robert and his mother to heal from the abuse. The teletherapy option of therapy worked well for this family and gave them reassurance that they could stay extra protected and healthy from the coronavirus. Robert's mother was involved with the therapy for Robert and always asked the therapist to provide her with consistent psychoeducation and information so that she knew how to best process and manage the trauma symptoms she saw at home in Robert.

Robert has been in weekly therapy for two months now and continues to make progress. Robert has learned how to be able to identify his trauma triggers, develop his own healthy coping skills, learn skills to help reduce his anxiety and anger and reduce his fears. Talking about his abuse openly has lifted some of his fears of seeing his abuser in the community. He has also begun finding interest in the things he loves again, such as riding his bike around the neighborhood. With continued services, Robert will soon have an opportunity to be a child again and find hope in his teenage years.

What ever happened to Robert's abuser? As soon as Robert had disclosed his abuse, his mother broke up with him and removed him from the home for everyone's safety. The man ended up being charged with a crime for what he did to Robert. Robert was required to go to the courthouse and tell a judge about what had happened to him. Because Robert had been actively engaging in therapy, he was able to talk about the sexual abuse. Robert's mother had many questions and concerns about the court process. She was introduced to the Victim Advocate who was able to explain and answer all of her questions. Robert felt supported by his therapist and the Victim Advocate who regularly attended his court hearings.



The Child Abuse Council Children's Advocacy Center is there "Every Step of the Way". From the instant that a family walks in our doors, they are greeted with a friendly and supportive staff, just as Robert and his mother were. We're here to help with state-of-the-art therapy and processes to help families through the most difficult times in their lives.



# CASA

(Court Appointed Special Advocates)

**Vicki Price**

CASA Supervisor

## CASA Overview

### From National CASA:

#### *Our model and how it works*

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for children's best interests. They stay with each case until it is closed and the child is in a safe, permanent home. We serve children from birth through the age defined by state statute as the limit to youth remaining in care.

Volunteers work with legal and child welfare professionals, educators and service providers to ensure that judges have all the information they need to make the most well-informed decisions for each child.

Our best-interest advocacy is driven by the guiding principle that children grow and develop best with their family of origin, if that can be safely achieved. Most of the children we work with are in foster care, but some are with their family of origin. And, most children who leave foster care do so to return to their family.

Children who have experienced abuse or neglect fare better with a CASA volunteer by their side. Studies have shown:

- They are more likely to find a safe, permanent home
- They are more likely to succeed in school
- They are half as likely to reenter the foster-care system

### CASA Statistics for 2021:

- 61 children were assigned a CASA volunteer.
- There are currently 19 CASA volunteers that have a combined 89 years of experience.
- CASA Volunteers spent 3,960 hours advocating for their assigned children.
- Number of children in care in our county – 425
- Number of Children on a waiting list for a CASA volunteer - 386



## CASA Makes a Difference

Details of this story have been changed to protect the privacy of the client and family.

Cheryl is a CASA volunteer and she is on her way to visit Bella and her mom. Bella was removed from her home because mom was in an abusive relationship and could not protect Bella. Today is the first overnight visitation mom will have with Bella. Mom has done so much work to be able to have Bella spend the night. She has gone to counseling for domestic abuse, attended parenting classes, and worked to get a new home for her and Bella to share.

Cheryl goes to visit Bella once every other week. Today, Cheryl wants to see how mom and Bella interact together. Cheryl has planned an exciting visit with Bella; they are going to make homemade cookies. Cheryl has brought all of the ingredients for her delicious chocolate chip cookies. Bella's mom greets Cheryl at the door and yells for Bella to come down because Cheryl is there. Bella is so excited to see Cheryl and insists on showing off her new bedroom before they start making cookies. Mom seems a little shy but interested in what they are doing.

Mom goes in the room to do something as Bella clears a space for the baking to begin. Cheryl explains that the very first step is to make sure you start with clean hands. Bella agrees and they head to the sink to wash their hands. Together, the pair begin to measure, mix, and crack the eggs. Bella is still learning to crack eggs... Cheryl remembered to bring a couple extra for this reason. Once all the ingredients are in the bowl and mixed, the pair get ready to scoop the cookie batter on to the baking sheet. About the time the first scoop goes on to the pan, Bella's mom comes into the kitchen. Bella is excited to show her mom everything that she has done. Cheryl asks mom to grab a spoon and help with the baking. At first, mom declines the offer but, with a little nudging from Bella, mom decides to jump in on the fun. Now, the trio are all in on the cookie baking. Cheryl realizes the bonding happening and gently steps back, allowing mom and daughter to make precious memories. Cheryl is quietly observing the new baking pair successfully complete a task together as a family.



As the pair complete their work, Cheryl asks about their overnight plan. The two of them are talking over each other as they explain their plans for the night. It seems that movies with pizza and popcorn are on the menu. Cheryl takes her leave and smiles to herself as she sees Bella and her mom starting a new chapter in their lives. There is still a lot of work to do, but Cheryl thinks they will be able to achieve it. Next page...



# CASA

Continued...

Cheryl thinks back to when she first started volunteering for the CASA program and how nervous she was about working with people she really didn't know and going to court. She very much wanted to make a difference. The CASA program training was really interesting, and so helpful. She learned how to interact with different people, how to write a court report, how to work with other professionals on the case, and what was expected from her in court. Cheryl knew when she started her first case that she was prepared and if she needed help, her supervisor was there to help in any way that she could. As Cheryl looks in the mirror while she pulls away from the house, she thinks of all of the hard work that has gone into this case to get to this moment. She smiles to herself and thinks *it was worth it*. Nothing was as great as seeing the excitement and smile on Bella's face today.



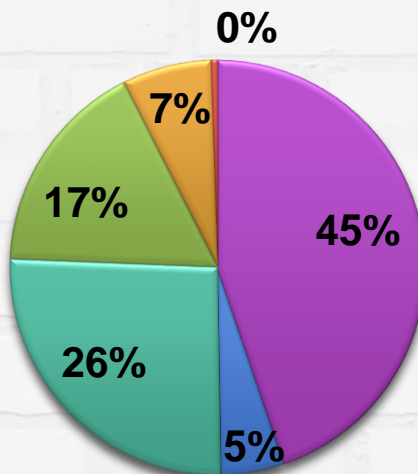
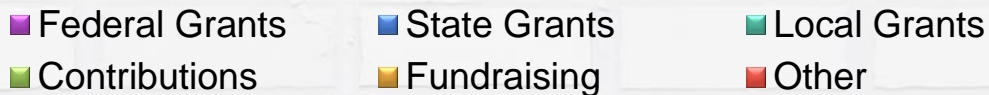
# Financial Information



## Revenue Sources

Federal Grants	\$292,411
State Grants	\$30,267
Local Grants	\$171,498
Contributions	\$107,956
Fundraising	\$47,314
Other	\$1,420
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$650,866</b>

## Revenue Sources





Fiscal Year 2020-2021

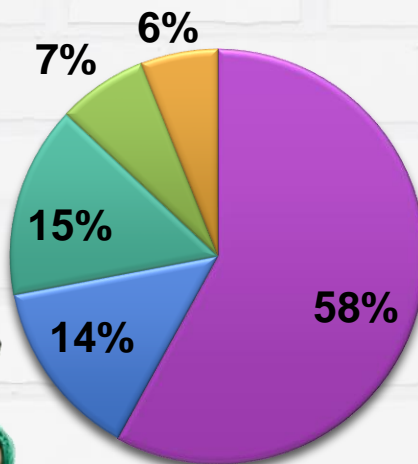
# Financial Information

Expenses	
Children's Advocacy Center	\$406,962
CASA	\$99,764
Prevention	\$102,337
Management/General	\$44,369
Fundraising	\$43,943
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$697,375



## Expenses

- Children's Advocacy Center
- Prevention
- Fundraising
- CASA
- Management/General



# Thank You

The Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County would like to **THANK** everyone who supported our cause in 2021. With your help, we were able to further our mission.

If you are interested in becoming a CASA Volunteer, are wondering about upcoming events, or want to donate, please visit [www.childabusecouncil.org](http://www.childabusecouncil.org). Be sure to join the Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County group page on Facebook, like and follow our Facebook page, and follow us on Instagram. We also have a YouTube channel with prevention resources for children and more.

## Child Abuse Council Staff



Back row (L-R): Karli DeHaan, Kyleen Gee, Paige Cook, Cortney Aspinall, MSW Interns: Amanda Seaver, Hannah Kenny  
Front row (L-R): Vicki Price, Christina Tulgestke, Deb Anderson, Grace Strauss, Sabryna Benmark, Andrea Kelley, Madison Pierman, Rachael McEnhill

