



# CHILD ABUSE COUNCIL

EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

## 2020 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

Hon. Gregory C. Pittman

Rick Bleich

Matt Gongalski: Vice President

Sheriff Michael Poulin

Jared Meldrum

Kathy Fearnley: Treasurer

Kim Bourdo

Ron Madison

Helen Dobb: Secretary

Tanya Haynes

Edie Kessler

Thea McMullen

Amanda Tumele

Kendrah Robinson



# Introduction

In 2020 we learned more than ever how important it is to protect our children. School personnel are a primary source for child disclosures of abuse. With in-person school being cancelled for much of the year, disclosures were down.

The Darkness to Light Organization offers these protective steps parents and caregivers can take to keep a child as safe as possible:

- Talk to your kids. These conversations build a trusting relationship and enhance a child's sense of safety and reliance.
- Talk to organizations that are taking care of your child. Learn about their safety procedures and sexual abuse protection policies.
- Prevent isolation while someone is caring for your child. Keep doors open at all times; encourage group activities and discourage individual activities; consider making certain areas of the house off-limits while you're away (basements, bedrooms).
- Keep situations interruptible. Make sure the caregiver knows that you will be checking in with the kids. Ask a neighbor or family member to drop by unannounced. Confirm boundaries with your kids and remind them they can tell you if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Set expectations. Ask the caregiver to come over early and speak to them about your expectations. Inform the caregiver that your kids know about body safety and boundaries and not to keep secrets from their parents. Being upfront with this information can often be a deterrent to inappropriate behavior.

The Child Abuse Council will never turn away a child or family due to their ability to pay. All of our services are free to those who need them. We have adapted our services to virtual formats wherever possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic so that we may continue to serve our most vulnerable population, the children in Muskegon County.

A special thanks to our grantors and donors who support us throughout the year.

~ Kyleen Gee

Executive Director



# Prevention

**Debbie Anderson**  
Prevention Director

## Prevention Overview

Everyone plays a role in supporting families in order to prevent child abuse and neglect. According to Kids Count, there were 205,631 children ages 0-17 years old that were the subject of an investigation into abuse and/or neglect in the year 2020 in Michigan. Of those children, 27,894 were confirmed as victims of abuse and/or neglect. Our prevention education strives to lower those numbers. In addition to age-appropriate personal safety education, our program also addresses topics such as child abuse prevention, personal safety, conflict management, bullying prevention, education on healthy relationships, and the realities of human trafficking.

### Accomplishments of 2020

- ◆ 1,209 students received education about Human Trafficking in 2020.
- ◆ 725 students received internet safety training.
- ◆ 9,996 children received age-appropriate Personal Body Safety programming.



**11,930** children received age appropriate Prevention programming in 2020.

Stewards of Children, an adult based sexual abuse prevention program, was presented to **796** community adults in 2020.



 **DARKNESS to LIGHT'S**  
**STEWARDS**  
**of CHILDREN®**



# Prevention

The year 2020 turned out to be dramatically different from any other year in the Child Abuse Council's Prevention history. For over 20 years, all Head Start through elementary students, as well as middle and high school students have received Personal Body Safety Prevention Programs.

That all came to a screeching halt in mid-March with the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Schools shut down and mandatory quarantine became an uncomfortable way of life.

As the numbers of reported child abuse cases plummeted in Michigan, we started to expand our thinking on the vast impact of the Virus on the children and families in our community. The hidden challenges for the child welfare community were the conditions that thrived in the necessary isolation and additional stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic. The unprecedented risks to students had gone unchecked by the usual safety net provided by their school environment for several months.

As schools prepared to deal with the challenges of providing a safe, dependable network to return to when community health standards allowed, the Child Abuse Council stood ready to assist educators with trainings on how to recognize, react, and respond to potential child abuse cases that may present in students.

Through a collaborative effort between the Child Abuse Council, the Muskegon Intermediate School District (MAISD), and the Darkness to Light Organization, educators have the opportunity to participate in a Stewards of Children Training free of charge. This training was made possible through a grant awarded to the Child Abuse Council from the Women Who Care Organization. It is our hope that by identifying and responding to potential child abuse situations, we can work together to address the effects of adverse childhood experiences and help lower the risks for a wide range of problems, which in turn, could affect a child's success in schools.

As students were returning to their classroom after what had been an extraordinary event in the life of families in our community, the Child Abuse Council reemphasized its mission to provide area schools, students, and their families with assistance relative to the prevention of child abuse.

Personal Safety Programs that had been presented every year to students by an outside volunteer were not possible. Schools were then provided with the same evidence-based prevention programs as before, but were prerecorded to be shown by a teacher in the classroom or with virtual students. Middle and High School students also had the opportunity to take part in virtual prevention presentations via Zoom and Google Meet technology.

Are there problems to be worked through during this Pandemic? Yes. But it's our hope that, working together, we can accomplish our mission to protect the children in our community and help them work through any problems created by the unusual circumstances we find ourselves in.



# Children's Advocacy Center

**Paige Cook**

Clinical Director / Child Therapist

**Andrea Kelley**

Family Advocate

**Mariah Adamy**

Child Therapist

**Cortney Aspinall**

Intake Coordinator

**Macey Balavitch**

Forensic Interviewer

**Vicki Price**

Medical Coordinator

**Dr. Yvonne Mallon, MD**

Forensic Medical Physician

**Tabitha Morrison**

CMA

According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) a child is sexually assaulted in the United States every nine minutes. Thirty-four percent of those children are under age twelve; sixty-six percent are age twelve to seventeen.

Children who are sexually abused as a child are:

- 4 times more likely to develop symptoms of drug abuse;
- 4 times more likely to experience PTSD as adults;
- 3 times more likely to experience a major depressive episode as adults.

Our Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) is designed to be a child-friendly, safe place for a child to tell his or her story. The child is interviewed one-on-one by a forensic interviewer trained in the State of Michigan Forensic Interviewing Protocol. The forensic interview is the first step on the road to healing for the child victim.

Our CAC offers trauma-informed, evidenced-based therapy to the child victim and their non-offending caregiver.

Our CAC partners with prosecutors, law enforcement, and protective services to coordinate the investigation of child sexual abuse. We provide support to child survivors of sexual abuse so that those kids can get back to being kids.



**56**

Children received counseling services in 2020.

**249**

Forensic Interviews were conducted by the CAC this past year.

**40**

Medical examinations were conducted in 2020.

# Children's Advocacy Center

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

Reyna is a 12-year-old girl who told a friend at school that her father had been touching her in an unsafe way since she was six years old. Reyna's friend convinced Reyna to tell a teacher who she trusted at school. The teacher filed a report to child protective services (CPS) and the CPS worker set up a forensic interview for Reyna at The Child Abuse Council of Muskegon. At first, Reyna was nervous to tell someone what her dad was doing to her because she was worried about what could happen to him. However, Reyna knew what her dad did was wrong, so she bravely met with the forensic interviewer and told her everything.

After her forensic interview, Reyna faced a lot of unexpected challenges. Reyna's mom did not believe that the abuse happened. This created an unsafe environment for Reyna, so Reyna moved in with her grandmother. Due to this change, Reyna also had to move to a new school that was away from her friends and teachers. After her forensic interview, Reyna was brought back to The Child Abuse Council of Muskegon for a medical examination to check for evidence and to keep Reyna's body safe. While this made Reyna anxious, she continued to be brave. After observing the many changes in Reyna's life, Reyna's grandmother knew she and Reyna would need additional support. Reyna's grandmother remembered that the family advocate at The Child Abuse Council of Muskegon shared that they have counselors for kids to talk to, so she called to set up an appointment.

When Reyna began counseling, she was not sure what to expect. The counselor ensured Reyna that counseling was a safe space for kids to talk about their thoughts and feelings. As she began to feel comfortable with her counselor, Reyna shared that she was feeling down or nothing at all most days. Reyna's grandmother reported that Reyna frequently isolates herself. Reyna explained that it was best to stay away from people and places because most things reminded her of the abuse. Additionally, Reyna felt like she always had to be on the lookout for danger and felt really jumpy, especially at night. Reyna completed a trauma symptoms assessment with her counselor where she scored in the severe range for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Reyna and her grandmother have attended counseling consistently since Reyna first visited The Child Abuse Council of Muskegon for her forensic interview. Despite the many changes and challenges Reyna has faced from the disclosure, she has been brave and strong throughout the entire process. Reyna has been working through the trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) model in counseling. Through this, she has learned how to notice signs of distress in her body and practices different methods of relaxation to decrease the distress. Reyna also understands the many dynamics of sexual abuse and knows that none of what happened to her is her fault. Reyna is also building confidence in her new environment and has made many new friends at school, while staying connected to ones at her old school. Reyna has faced a number of challenges after reporting the abuse to her friend, but with the support of her grandmother and the CAC team, Reyna feels empowered to begin her healing journey.



# CASA

## (Court Appointed Special Advocates)

Vicki Price  
Advocate Supervisor

A CASA volunteer is a trained community volunteer, appointed by a judge, that advocates for the best interest of a child who is involved in neglect and abuse proceedings in court.

Research shows that having a stable relationship with a supportive adult can help children do well, even when they have faced significant hardships.

CASA volunteers are trained to understand the impact of trauma on children. They spend time with children and the people in their lives. They talk to service providers, teachers and social workers to gather information that will help them make informed recommendations to the court. Based on what they learn, CASA volunteers also advocate for services that promote healing, that help children develop resilience without causing additional trauma. They encourage services that strengthen parents' relationships with their children.

CASA volunteers work to ensure young children are in placements with loving, consistent caregivers. For infants and young children, a strong, nurturing and consistent relationship to caregivers is key to healthy development.

CASA volunteers advocate for appropriate educational placement and services. Children in foster care are more likely to struggle academically, or to be identified as having a disability.

CASA volunteers help youth set and achieve post-secondary and career training goals. Many must depend fully on themselves, but also often lack the preparation others their age have had for independent living.

CASA volunteers  
advocated for the  
best interest of  
42 children in 2020.

CASA volunteers  
donated 5,254 hours  
of their time  
advocating for  
children in  
Muskegon County  
in 2020.

7 new CASA volunteers  
were sworn into the  
CASA program in 2020.



*If you are interested in becoming a CASA volunteer and being a voice for a child, contact Vicki Price at [vprice@childabusecouncil.org](mailto:vprice@childabusecouncil.org) or 231-728-6410 ext 1100.*

# CASA Story

## CASA Makes a Difference

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

Two siblings, ages 4, and 1 ½ were removed from their father's care due to failure to protect and improper supervision. The oldest of the two children was severely burned on her arm while in the care of both her father and her step-mother. Both adults were substantiated for child abuse and neglect. The children were placed in a nonrelative foster home.

After an extensive investigation, it was discovered that step-mother had intentionally set the small child in a hot bath. The father denied the claims and supported the step-mother during her trial on child abuse. The step-mother's criminal case is still pending. The father continued his journey working with foster care to be reunified with his children.

A CASA volunteer was assigned at this time in the case. The father continued to work to regain custody of his children by gaining employment, getting stable housing, and complying and benefiting from services. The children were returned home briefly after seven months in care but the foster care case remained open.

The children were once again removed from the father's care due to improper supervision and excessive physical discipline, this time being placed in the home of a maternal aunt and uncle.

The father was ordered by the court to not have any contact or allow the children any contact with the step-mother. During a scheduled parenting time, the CASA discovered that the father had been allowing the children to talk to their step-mother via telephone calls from the jail. The children would tell the CASA about their conversations with their step-mother. The father denied the allegation and even asked for a different CASA to be assigned to the case. This allegation changed the course of the case and the goal was changed to adoption and a termination trial was set.

During the investigation for trial, a large number of jail calls were discovered between the father and the step-mother. There were also about a dozen calls where the children talked the majority of the time with the step-mother. The father's parental rights were terminated and the children were put up for adoption.

The children were successfully adopted by their maternal aunt and uncle in January of 2020. This CASA's due diligence helped these children gain permanency. The children are doing extremely well in their adoptive home.

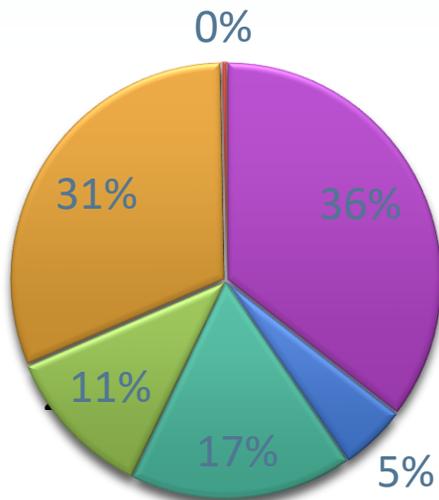


# Financial Information

Revenue Sources	
Federal Grants	\$326,648
State Grants	\$45,784
Local Grants	\$154,770
Contributions	\$105,398
Fundraising	\$286,594
Other	\$2,716
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$921,910</b>

## Revenue Sources

- Federal Grants
- State Grants
- Local Grants
- Contributions
- Fundraising
- Other

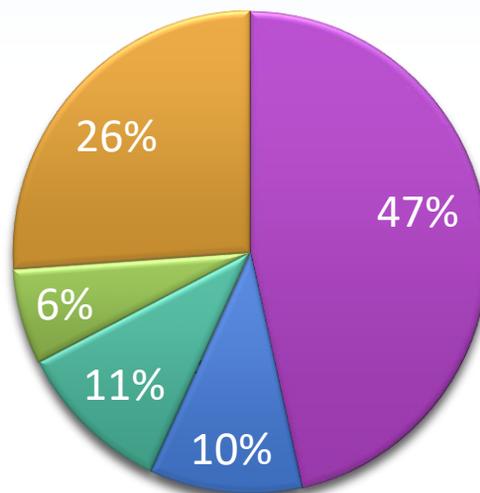


# Financial Information

Expenses	
Children's Advocacy Center	\$416,674
CASA	\$92,674
Prevention	\$94,965
Management/General	\$57,527
Fundraising	\$233,810
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$895,650</b>

## Expenses

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



# Thank You

The Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County would like to thank everyone who supported our cause in 2020. 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.



Back row (L-R): Kyleen Gee, Cortney Aspinall, Paige Cook, Mariah Adamy  
Front row: Vicki Price, Andrea Kelley, Sabryna Bemark, Macey Balavitch  
Not pictured: Debbie Anderson

