



# 2024 Annual Report

*resilient*



# Introduction

Dear Supporters of the Child Abuse Council,

Resilience is the ability to thrive even in the face of challenges. The children that we serve need this critical skill. A lack of resilience can lead to the inability to handle stress or deal with difficult or challenging situations. This can leave children feeling overwhelmed, which may lead to unhealthy coping strategies, anxiety, depression and insomnia. Resilience won't magically make problems disappear, but it does give children the ability to address the problems and handle stress in a healthy way that won't have a lasting negative impact on their health and wellbeing.

The good news is that resiliency is not a fixed trait, it can be developed. At the Child Abuse Council we teach positive coping mechanisms, provide support, and encourage problem-solving for both the child victims and their nonoffending caregivers. Together, we create an environment where children feel safe to make mistakes, try again, and persevere. The more resilient a child is, the more they are able to adapt to adverse life situations.

We want to send our heartfelt thanks to everyone in our community who have supported us in our mission.

*"I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it."*

— **Maya Angelou**

~ Kyleen Gee  
Executive Director

# Prevention

**Debbie Anderson**  
Prevention Director

**Personal safety programs** presented by the Child Abuse Council have been a recognized part of the curriculum in public and private schools throughout Muskegon County for the past 24 years. **All HeadStart through fifth grade students** received age-appropriate body safety programs. These programs teach children how to protect themselves from unsafe and unwanted touches. From the early age of four, children begin to learn the concept of appropriate and inappropriate touches. They learn that their body belongs to them and that nobody has the right to do anything that makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. They have the right to “Say No,” to get away, and to tell someone. In upper elementary, the possible danger associated with social media is discussed. This information is the building block of prevention education. **Middle school students** receive programming on Internet Safety, including responsible social media usage. **High school students** receive valuable information about Human Trafficking, including possible ways to prevent it and what to do if they suspect someone is being trafficked. The majority of students receive one prevention program yearly (per grade level), more if there appears to be additional programming needed.

**Elementary school students** were the first to receive personal body safety prevention programming through the Child Abuse Council. Before that, the subject of child sexual abuse was not openly and directly discussed with the students, especially at that young age. It was not uncommon to see behavior such as hands placed over ears, ducking of heads and red faces when the subject was introduced. There was also a certain amount of uncomfortableness among some parents and even school staff.

## In 2024:

- 12,281 Preschool, kindergarten and elementary-age children received personal body safety lessons.
- 1,440 middle and high school students received personal body safety lessons, internet safety, anti-bullying lessons, and human trafficking awareness.
- 107 community adults were trained in the Stewards of Children training.



# Prevention



Over the years, these programs have proven very effective in providing children an opportunity to tell someone what's happened to them. Often, this happens after one of these presentations. It's also important that the adult with whom they choose to share their secret, knows what to do in order to help that child.

Many years ago, after a second-grade presentation, a child in the classroom asked to talk to me. She proceeded to tell me a horrific story about what her father had been doing to her. After she finished telling me, I asked her if it was still going on. She told me it was and that she had told several people about it. I asked if anyone tried to help her. She said that nobody believed her, but she thought she would try one more time and tell me. I informed the office about what the child told me and that I was going to call to report the disclosure. I was asked if I could wait until the Principal was located. While I was waiting, I was informed by the office staff that they were familiar with the child in question. They stated that she was a troubled child, on all sorts of medication, that lied all the time to get attention. I spoke with the Principal and was told the same story about the child. A school counselor who heard the conversation told me that the child told her the same story about the alleged abuses. I asked her if she had ever reported it. I was told no, that she heard it had already been reported. I informed the office that I would be making a call to Protective Services, as this was a new disclosure to me. Imagine my surprise when the worker on the other end of the line told me that no one had ever called about the issue. It turned out that everyone was guilty of assuming someone else had called and made the report. Protective Services investigated, but the father fled before he could be held accountable. The little girl, her mother, and her younger brother went into hiding from the father. After several years passed, I never knew what happened to that little girl. One day, in another school, after speaking to a fifth-grade classroom, I was approached by one of the students in the class. She asked me if I remembered her. That she was the little girl in second grade who told me about her dad and what he had been doing to her. I told her that year, I remembered her. She looked me in the eyes and wondered if she could ask me something. I told her yes, of course. She asked me "can I just give you a hug?"

This is why we keep doing these programs.

Over the years, Child Abuse Prevention Programs have become an accepted and expected part of the curriculum in our school system. There is seldom more than a week or so that goes by without someone stopping me and starting a sentence by saying, "Hey, aren't you the person who came to my school to talk about personal body safety?" The individual asking the question is not always a child. Very often, it's an adult who had the very program when they were back in school. I was recently approached by someone employed at a local store who started with, "Aren't you the...?" and I told her I was that person. She smiled and replied, "I feel like I've known you all my life. Thank you for what you do."

# Children's Advocacy Center

Cortney Garza  
In-take Coordinator

Andrea Kelley  
Family Advocate/MDT Coordinator

Grace Strauss  
Forensic Interviewer/Family Advocate

Rachael McEnhill  
Forensic Interviewer/Victim Advocate

Taylor Gee  
Advocacy Assistant

Vicki Price  
CASA Supervisor/Medical Coordinator

Dr. Yvonne Rekeny  
Specialized Physician

Dr. Cory Schmidt  
Specialized Physician

Christina Tulgestke  
Clinician

## Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County Numbers

- 278 Forensic Interviews were conducted
- 27 Medicals were conducted
- 513 Counseling sessions were conducted
- 149 families received case coordination and personal advocacy



***"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."***

***Martin Luther King, Jr.***

# Children's Advocacy Center



**Annie:**

Hello. My name is Annie. I am 6 years old. I am special because I have both a mom's house and a dad's house. My stepdad lives at my mom's house, which is great because I love him and he teaches me lots of new things. He also has a kid that I get to play with when they visit. I also just learned that we are going to have a new brother or sister soon!

A few weeks ago, my mom and dad took me to the Children's Advocacy Center. That place was awesome! There were books and toys in the lobby and even a pet turtle! A nice lady came out and introduced herself to me and my parents. She told me that we were going to go back and chat for a bit and that my parents would be waiting for me in the lobby. The lady said that her job was to listen to kids. She asked me about what I liked to do. I told her that I love to play with my stepbrother. She also told me that it was her job to find out if anything happened to children's bodies. At first, I was scared to say anything about what had happened to me. My stepdad had been doing some things that I knew he shouldn't. I was afraid to tell the lady about it because I knew my mom would be upset and my dad would be angry. I was also worried that I wouldn't get to see my stepdad or stepbrother anymore if I told. The lady talked me through my worries and said that I was in a safe place. She told me that she talks to kids about all kinds of things and that she would not be shocked or embarrassed by anything I told her. I remembered that during our talk I had promised to tell the lady the truth, so I did. I felt SO much better afterward. The lady just asked me a few more questions and then I got to go back out to my mom and dad who gave me big hugs.



# Children's Advocacy Center

## **Melissa:**

Hello, I am Melissa, Annie's mom. I recently experienced one of the worst days of my life. I went through my husband's cell phone where I found shocking proof that he was molesting my daughter. I contacted the police and they told me that I needed to bring Annie to the Children's Advocacy Center for an interview. I had no idea what to expect, but we were greeted by friendly smiles and a warm environment. Each step of the process was explained so I felt comfortable with them talking to Annie. I met with a Family Advocate who answered my questions and talked to me about the services offered by the Children's Advocacy Center. I found out that Annie and I could both receive counseling services to work through our shared trauma. I felt so relieved by that since I had no idea how to deal with everything that was happening. They even offered Annie a specialized medical exam by a doctor from Devos Children's Hospital. The exam would happen onsite at the Children's Advocacy Center in an environment that my daughter was already familiar with. They also let me know that they would support Annie and me through the court process and would help Annie prepare to testify if necessary. When we left, I knew that Annie and I would have a long road ahead, but I felt that we had the support of the members of the Children's Advocacy Center. My family advocate does monthly check-ins to see how counseling services are going and if there's anything else my family needs at that time. They also adopted our family for Christmas to ensure we were able to enjoy the holiday season!

## **Annie:**

I was excited to start counseling, especially after I found out there was a dog at the office. On my first day of counseling, I ran right into the office and began playing with fidgets and asking questions about the room. My clinician explained her role and what I could expect for our time together. My clinician explained that she works with kids of all ages about the bad things that have happened to their body and helps kids process feelings and emotions about what happened. I continued attending counseling appointments where I talk about my feelings and how I feel now that my stepdad had to leave the house. I recently started opening up about what happened and talked about feeling guilty because I liked it and wanted it to happen. I said, "I didn't know he wasn't supposed to do that with me." I have also recently opened up about how scared I am to go to court and have to see my stepdad again. My clinician explained that it's normal to be scared to go to court and that there are a lot of people that care about me. My clinician also let me know that it's okay to miss him and that all of my feelings are okay to feel. I feel guilty about it happening because now my happy family isn't happy anymore. My clinician and I will continue working on processing what happened and get ready for court if it comes down to it.







# CASA

## (Court Appointed Special Advocate)

Vicki Price  
CASA Supervisor

### CASA Statistics for 2024:

- 67 children were assigned a CASA volunteer
- 4 new CASA volunteers were trained
- 4 In-Service Trainings were held for all existing CASA volunteers on topics relevant to their role as CASAs.
- CASA volunteers donated 3,216 hours advocating for their assigned children
- Number of children in care in our county – approximately 400
- Number of Children eligible for a CASA volunteer – 346
- 26 CASA Volunteers Total
- CASA volunteers served on 32 cases in 2024

Mandy was placed into foster care two years ago when her mother passed from substance abuse and her father was arrested. Due to this, Mandy had nowhere to go. She had no other family that were fit to take her in.

Mandy was placed in three different foster homes when she met her own CASA volunteer, Ms. Caylee. Ms. Caylee was there for Mandy; she could tell everything to Ms. Caylee. Ms. Caylee explained to Mandy what her job was and answered all of Mandy's questions. Ms. Caylee told Mandy that she talks to the Judge on her case and relays what Mandy wants to tell them. Ms. Caylee made sure Mandy understood that just because she talks to the judge it doesn't mean it would happen. Ms. Caylee told Mandy that they needed to do what was in her best interest.

Each week Ms. Caylee would visit Mandy for a couple of hours. They would talk and often do an activity together. During one of the visits, Ms. Caylee brought a bracelet making kit and Mandy was ecstatic. Sometimes while they were doing their activities, Ms. Caylee would have to have serious talks with Mandy. During this particular visit, Mandy was asked who she wanted to live with. Mandy explained to Ms. Caylee that she had this Aunt Bree. Aunt Bree wasn't Mandy's biological aunt but was her mother's best friend. Mandy said she would like to live with Aunt Bree but wasn't sure how to contact her or even knew where she lived. Mandy went on to explain that her mother and Aunt Bree had a falling out because her mom started having substance abuse issues. Ms. Caylee told Mandy she would do everything she could to help find Aunt Bree but she couldn't promise anything.

Story continued on next page....

## CASA Makes a Difference

Ms. Caylee talked to the foster care worker about finding Aunt Bree. It took a couple of weeks but they were finally able to find her and asked if she would be willing to take in Mandy as a fictive kin placement. Ms. Caylee and the Foster Care Worker explained to Aunt Bree that Fictive Kin is an individual who is like biological family but they are not related biologically in anyway. Aunt Bree said she would do anything to help Mandy. Mandy was placed with Aunt Bree and has been with her ever since. Today marks the day of making it forever.

Mandy sat on the bench in the courthouse hallway watching all of the adults walk back and forth talking on their phones. She was waiting for Ms. Caylee but every time she thought she was going to walk out the elevator it wasn't her. Just when Mandy started to doubt that she was coming, Ms. Caylee came out of the elevator. Mandy was so excited to see her!

Ms. Caylee apologized profusely for running late. Mandy gave her a hug and told her she was happy to see her. They sat down together and Mandy told Ms. Caylee that she was scared. Ms. Caylee let Mandy in on a little secret, she was a little scared too. Ms. Caylee reassured Mandy that it was okay to feel scared and it is intimidating being in a courtroom with a judge. Ms. Caylee explained what was going to happen and that the judge might ask Mandy some questions but to not be scared. Mandy asked Ms. Caylee if she would ever see her again once this is all over. They had a discussion during one of their activities that Ms. Caylee had to help other children that were in the same situation as Mandy. Ms. Caylee assured Mandy that she would be in her life as a friend for however long Mandy wanted her to be. Mandy took a deep breath and walked into the courtroom to get her happily ever after with Aunt Bree.

*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.*



Fiscal Year 2023 - 2024

# Financial Information

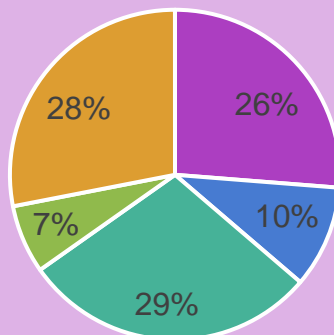


## Revenue Sources

Federal Grants	\$301,151
State Grants	\$114,619
Local Grants	\$332,743
Contributions	\$76,740
Fundraising	\$321,754
Other	\$2,423
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$1,149,430</b>

## Revenue Sources

■ Federal Grants ■ State Grants ■ Local Grants  
■ Contributions ■ Fundraising ■ Other (.2%)



Fiscal Year 2023-2024

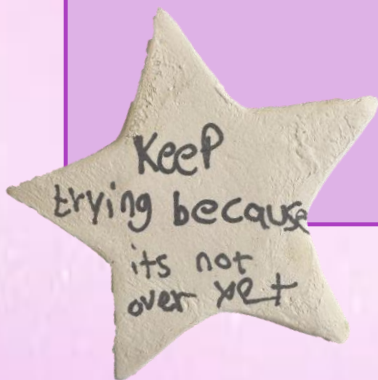
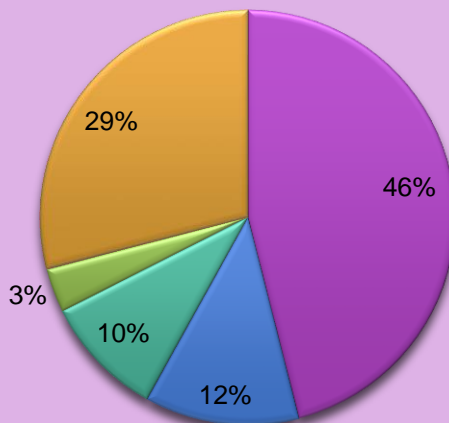
# Financial Information

## Expenses

Children's Advocacy Center	\$515,022
CASA	\$130,284
Prevention	\$105,519
Management/General	\$38,042
Fundraising	\$325,627
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,114,494</b>

## Expenses

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



# Child Abuse Council Team

