Conference details and information about scholarships can be found on our Web site at www.ndaa.org and or call us at 703.549.9222. For information about courses e-mail us at ncpa@ndaa.org.

INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF CHILD FATALITIES AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

FEBRUARY 1-5, 2010 SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

This five-day course offers participants the knowledge necessary to confront conflicting medical opinions and overcome untrue defenses through presentations by national experts in medicine, forensic investigation and prosecution. For more information, visit our Web site at www.ndaa.org.

EQUAL JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN: INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF CHILD ABUSE

MAY 17-21, 2010 CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Equal Justice is a five-day comprehensive course designed to meet the needs of front-line child abuse professionals, including prosecutors, law enforcement, medical and mental health professionals, SMESARAT teams, emergency response teams, child protection and child advocacy center staff, social workers and victim witness advocates. Conference participants will be taught by and have the opportunity to interact with many of the nation’s foremost child abuse experts.

For more information about these conferences, see our Web site at www.ndaa.org.

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model a step further by incorporating child abuse services and investigations and focusing those resources on the whole family. The Family Justice Center Alliance accredits organizations that provide services to victims of a wide range of family violence: domestic partner violence, child abuse, and computer-facilitated crimes against children, etc. Family justice centers recognize the well-established connection between domestic partner violence and child abuse.20

One example is in Harford County, Maryland. The Harford Family Justice Center houses, within one building, office space for local law enforcement, prosecuting attorneys who handle domestic violence and child abuse cases, children’s protective service workers, forensic interviewers and even the Federal Bureau of Investigation. While at the Harford Family Justice Center, a family that is subjected to domestic violence will be provided services ranging from assistance with petitionering for a personal protection order to forensically sensitive interviews of children to mental health services. This partnership enables child abuse prevention professionals in that county to coordinate closely and monitor their investigations. The process improves the services to the community and creates stronger cases for the judicial system, while reducing stress and trauma on families during the investigative process.

How MDT/CACs Make Justice for Abused Children More Effective and Efficient

MDTs are effective because they marshal the limited resources toward the common goal of child protection. According to Tanya Berlin’s article on evaluating multidisciplinary child abuse training, “[a]pproaches to multidisciplinary teams has a shared purpose, clear goals, standards for performance [and has] a collaborative climate, external support and recognition and fair and impartial leadership.”21 Such collaboration is improved when CACs are the facilitators, expanding the collaborative climate, external support and recognition and fair and impartial leadership.22 Studies demonstrate that collaborative efforts at child protection and prosecution produce positive results: timelier charging of suspects, more effective involvement of law enforcement and child protective services, greater vitality in child protective proceedings and child abuse prosecutions, reduced stress on victims and families, and an increased likelihood of longer sentences for those convicted of abusing children.

The MDT/CAC model strengthens cases as they proceed through the criminal justice system. Cross, et. al. found that the Dallas MDT/CAC was able to obtain convictions “more often at trial than in the comparison communities” that did not coordinate their efforts in the same manner. The comparison community that did not use a MDT/CAC model had to rely on pleas or plea bargains at a greater percentage.23 This suggests that when cases are charged following a coordinated MDT/CAC investigation, the coordinated MDT investigation presented a stronger case enabling prosecutors to avoid accepting plea bargains. This finding is bolstered by the fact that those convicted of child sexual abuse crimes following a MDT investigation are incarcerated for substantially longer periods of time—an average of 331 months for the MDT/CAC communities as opposed to an average of 157 months for the non-MDT/CAC communities.24

In addition to strengthening investigations and prosecutions, communities using the MDT/CAC approach to child abuse investigations also find that victims families forced to endure an investigation are far more satisfied with their treatment during the process. A recent study found that caregivers were significantly more satisfied with the investigation and interview process in MDT/CAC communities when compared to non-MDT/CAC communities.25 Seventy percent of caregivers in CAC communities reported high levels of satisfaction versus 54 percent of the caregivers from comparison communities.26 The level of satisfaction with the interview process is even greater for the MDT/CAC communities where 83 percent report high satisfaction.27 In addition to increased levels of satisfaction by caregivers, CAC communities are positioned to support children with mental health services at a higher rate. MDT/CAC communities referred abuse victims for mental health services at a rate of 72 percent as compared with a referral rate of 31 percent for the comparison communities.28 In addition to increased level of satisfaction by non-offending caregivers, MDT/CAC communities have the ability to reduce the trauma to families by facilitating the speed at which

11 Grace Machel is the chancellor of the University of Cape Town; has spent much of her life working with child victims of armed conflict and is the wife of Nelson Mandela. This quote comes from her report at the International Conference on War-Affected Children, Winnipeg, Canada, September 2000.


16 Id. at 67.

17 Id. at 61.

18 Id. at 64.

19 Walsh et al. at 3.


22 Cross, et. al. at 6.

23 Id. at 6.

24 Cross, et. al., at 6.

25 Cross, et. al., at 6.

26 Id. at 5.

27 Walsh & Lippert, Cross, Maurice D. & Davison K, How Long to Prosecute Child Sexual Abuse For A Community Using a Children’s Advocacy Center And Two Comparison Communities?, 13 CHILD MALTREATMENT 3, 8 (2018).

28 Cross, et. al. at 6.