

Grant Update

A Summary of Grant Activity

Governor's Crime Commission

NC Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Child Advocacy Center Evidence-Based Child Abuse Intervention Project

Some of the most heinous crimes are those committed against children. In rural parts of North Carolina, services provided to child victims of crime, abuse or neglect are frequently limited due to financial constraints of the family and the community. Services are stretched even further when the economy experiences a downturn similar to the one the state is now going through. Kids First, through the Child Advocacy Council Evidence-Based Child Abuse Intervention Project, provides a full range of services to children who are the victims of sexual, physical and domestic abuse or neglect. Working together in collaboration with other agencies and practitioners, Kids First is making a difference in the lives of children who are abused and neglected.



The Problem

There has been a significant increase in the number of offenses committed against children in recent months in northeastern North Carolina. The First Judicial District, comprised of Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Pasquotank and Perquimans counties, sees 10 percent more child victims than other Level I counties* in the state. The Kids First Child Advocacy Center (CAC) in Elizabeth City served 232 new child victims last year — a nine percent increase over the number of children served the previous year. Rhonda Morris, the executive director, states that the number of forensic interviews conducted in January and February 2009 increased by 95 percent compared to the same period last year and 23 medical evaluations were conducted during that time compared to 10 last year, an increase of 130 percent. There are no therapists in the area with the expertise and experience to help traumatized children other than the staff at Kids First. Prior to expanding services, the nearest facility offering a Pediatric Child Medical Evaluation Provider was located in Greenville, North Carolina. Additional services are necessary to provide a complete range of therapy and assistance necessary to help them fully recover. Without early intervention and treatment, child victims are three times more likely to be victimized or to have mental health, substance abuse or delinquency problems.

The Grant

The Child Advocacy Center Evidence-Based Child Abuse Intervention Project enables child victims to receive on-site medical evaluations conducted by a pediatrician in a local, nationally-accredited, child-friendly CAC facility. This spares children the trauma of waiting weeks to receive services at locations far away from the local area. Prompt treatment is essential in providing effective care for these victims. Children need reassurance that they are not to blame for what another person did to them. Rapid treatment can mean the difference between a fast

Kids First staff, left to right: standing - Courtney Cottrell, administrative assistant; Dr. Jennifer Brown, MD; Ida Rodgers, LCSW (therapist and forensic interviewer); seated - Executive Director Rhonda Morris, MSW and Cheryl Tate, LCSW (therapist and forensic interviewer). Below is Family Advocate Susan Heidler (advocate and forensic interviewer).



Grant Update: Kids First Inc.



Rooms throughout Kids First are colorful and bright like the play therapy room shown above or the hallway below.



recovery and working through the incident or abuse instead of spending years in recovery or potentially being victimized again.

The project increases the availability of therapy and services to treat any trauma resulting from abuse or neglect by funding additional therapists. Therapists provide individual and group therapy and administer assessments used in evaluating each stage of treatment to determine its effectiveness. A forensic interviewer conducts primary interviews and more lengthy assessments for children not seen by her in therapy. A family advocate supports non-offending caregivers by offering courtroom advocacy, identifying available resources, assisting with victim's compensation claims and other tasks, using a holistic approach to ensure the safety, well-being and healing of child victims. Volunteers also assist with courtroom advocacy and victim's compensation. An administrative assistant serves as the Volunteer Coordinator and handles clerical duties. The director manages the grant, tracks all tests, issues reports and facilitates the activities of the multidisciplinary team. The team meets regularly to review all cases investigated at the center to ensure that as many resources as possible are being offered and that the case is moving along as smoothly as possible.

Kids First collaborates with the Department of Social Services (DSS), sheriff's office, police departments, mental health facilities and the District Attorney's Office in each county. They also work with Albemarle Hopeline (a domestic violence shelter), the Dare County

Hotline, three local hospitals and private physicians in the area. All work together as a team to ensure the success of the project in an area where financial resources are limited.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the project is to reduce the trauma experienced by child victims of abuse or neglect and to increase the well-being of these children. The center plans to provide therapeutic intervention using evidence-based practices to 90 percent of the children referred for services. Other children are referred to other agencies or providers as needed for psychiatric needs or for lack of parental follow-through. All children referred to Kids First receive medical evaluations. Family and courtroom advocacy is offered to all of the non-offending caregivers and all are made aware of and receive assistance with filing Victim's Compensation forms. Forensic interviews are provided to all alleged child victims referred to the CAC by DSS or law enforcement officers in the First Judicial District.

Program Evaluation

In July, a new medical examination room was completed, allowing Dr. Jennifer Brown, a pediatrician with 23 years of experience, to conduct forensic examinations on-site in a child-friendly, non-threatening environment. Local doctors can now refer children to her and the center for examination and evaluation when abuse or neglect are encountered or suspected. Previously children suffering from sexual, physical or domestic violence had to travel at least four hours to see a specialist and had to go from agency to agency to receive services and treatment. Therapists and advocates are available at Kids First and also travel to DSS offices within the region to provide services at the local level. Therapists, trained and certified as forensic

Working together for the sake of victims has been a priority in our community. It is even more important during this time of economic hardship in our country and communities. The tragedy in this situation is that when stressors like economics are higher, abuse increases as well, and we need even more resources.

— Rhonda Morris
Executive Director
Kids First Inc.

Grant Update: Kids First Inc.

interviewers, can interview children in a secure environment, while other team members (law enforcement, child protective services, mental health, prosecutors, victims' advocates and other team members as needed) are able to observe the interview in a non-intrusive manner and gather information. The center provides legally-defensible, fact-finding interviews that are coordinated to avoid putting a child through multiple interviews.

Two full-time therapists at Kids First provide a full range of treatment, from art therapy to cognitive-behavioral therapy. They are also trained in Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, one of the most effective forms of therapy for abused and neglected children. Where therapy in a private practice would cost approximately \$120.00 an hour, Kids First provides it at no charge to victims and non-offending caregivers. Each therapist is also a specialized forensic interviewer and provides courtroom support to clients when necessary. Family advocates assist non-offending caregivers and support them through the long process of prosecution and court.

Kids First is listed as a service provider for child victims of federal crimes such as kidnapping and human trafficking in northeastern North Carolina. Currently they are serving several victims connected to federal pornography cases and have provided assistance to kidnapping victims.

Accomplishments

In the first three months of the grant, July 1 through September 30, 2008, Kids First assisted 22 children who had suffered physical abuse, 76 who experienced sexual abuse, 16 child victims of domestic violence and 16 other victims. Crisis counseling was provided to 477 individuals and 135 follow-up contacts were made. Children, individuals and family members participated in 507 intensive psychological and psychiatric therapy sessions. Information and referrals were provided to 137 individuals. Twenty people received advocacy and support during the criminal justice process and personal advocacy was provided to an additional 14 individuals. Telephone contact was made with 36 victims to identify available services and support. An additional 40 services related to the Victims of Crime Act were provided. Staff assisted three victims in filing compensation claims.

Summary

Through the collaborative effort of Kids First and other agencies in the community, treatment and advocacy are available for child victims and non-offending caregivers that are frequently not available even in larger, more affluent areas. Executive Director Rhonda Morris sums up the impact of the grant best. "Over the past decade alone, Kids First has been an essential port in the storm for over 2,500 child victims. The support of the Governor's Crime Commission has been absolutely essential in making it possible for those children to receive healing and hope for a bright future rather than being chained to silent suffering."

* Under the Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Social Services counties are classified according to population levels. Level I counties are smaller, rural or less populated counties. All counties included in this grant are Level I counties. For comparison, Alamance, Edgecombe, Sampson and Wilkes counties are classified as Level II counties, while Buncombe, Guilford, Mecklenburg and Wake counties are included in Level III counties.

I have personally been in this agency for nearly a decade. I have seen one child go on to medical school, many kids go on to become social workers, and so many former clients simply carry on with their lives as healthy adults contributing to their community.

— Rhonda Morris
Executive Director
Kids First Inc.

The examination room is decorated with birds, bugs and butterflies hidden in the borders for children to find.



Child Advocacy Center Evidence-Based Child Abuse Intervention

GRANT SUMMARY

Area Served: Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Pasquotank and Perquimans Counties

Implementing Agency: Kids First Inc.

Project Director: Rhonda Morris, Executive Director

Funding: Total: \$112,500.00 Federal Funds: \$90,000.00

Overview: To decrease the trauma experienced by child victims of abuse and/or severe neglect and to increase the overall well-being of the child victims.

Objectives: To provide therapeutic intervention, using evidence-based practices (trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy and parent-child interaction therapy) to 90 percent of the children referred for services. Others will be referred out due to psychiatric needs or due to lack of follow-through by parents.

To provide medical evaluations to 100 percent of the cases referred for child medical exams.

To provide family advocacy and courtroom advocacy to 100 percent of non-offending caregivers who request those services from the Family Advocate.

To provide forensic interviews to all alleged child victims referred to the Child Advocacy Center by the Department of Social Services and law enforcement in the First District.

Accomplishments: Kids First is providing evidence-based services to 65 percent of the children referred for services. The remaining children receive promising practice services due to the nature of their symptoms.

Medical evaluations have been provided to 100 percent of the cases referred to the agency. The number of anticipated cases for the year has already been reached.

Family and courtroom advocacy is offered and is provided to all who request it. All clients are apprised of their rights and the availability of assistance.

All alleged child victims referred to the Child Advocacy Center by law enforcement and the Department of Social Services receive forensic interviews which are audio and videotaped.