

## Sarasota's Child Protection Center

### Helping abused and neglected children for 30 years

This is a good news/bad news story. Good news: The Child Protection Center (CPC) is 30 years old and thriving. So much so that it's moved into much larger and much more modern new office space in downtown Sarasota. The CPC has a long track record of helping families – specifically, children who have been abused or neglected. They will celebrate their new home with the entire community at its official grand opening on April 22—timed for April when it's Child Abuse Prevention Month.



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Then there's the bad news, unfortunately. The CPC states there are 7.5 cases of child abuse reported every day in Sarasota County. According to Graci McGillicuddy, board member and major donor to the CPC's building campaign, "Abuse is the leading cause of death for children under age four." Where does Florida rank within that grim statistic? A study by the National Child Advocacy Group shows that Kentucky leads the way in child abuse deaths with South Dakota, Florida, Nebraska Missouri not far behind. Statistically, a "child fatality" is the death of a child caused by an injury resulting from abuse or neglect, or where abuse or neglect was a contributing factor. Statistics, however, only go so far. Some reports expose its raw horror graphically. For example, The State Child Abuse Death Review Team's 2004 report coldly states, "1-month-old female, cause of death: asphyxia; 1-month-old male, cause of death: blunt force to head/body trauma/shaken; 6-month-old male: cause of death: malnutrition.

**"The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children."**

**—Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Research indicates that very young children (ages 3 and younger) are the most frequent victims of child fatalities. Children younger than 1 year accounted for 42.2 percent of fatalities, while children younger than 4 years accounted for more than three-quarters (75.7 percent) of fatalities. These children are the most vulnerable for many reasons, including their dependency, small size, and inability to defend themselves.

The mission of the Child Protection Center is child abuse—prevention, intervention and treatment. Their goal is a community where children are safe from abuse and free to thrive. In addition to its vital intake responsibilities, CPC offers an extensive and comprehensive array of services including personal safety education for children and parents, medical assessments, a supervised visitation program, a sexual abuse treatment program for child victims and their non-offending caregivers, and a Kid Kindness Program which include a customized mix of individual, group and family therapy sessions designed to help each child identify and control his/her sexual impulses and behavior.



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Hal Hedley is the well-liked and respected CEO of the CPC who has been with the organization over 14 years. Many of his dedicated staff have been with CPC for many years as well. CPC's new facilities occupy what was the office of the Kirk Pinkerton law firm. CPC purchased the spacious parcel (which includes another separate building), for \$2.25 million after the previous developer that purchased it from Kirk Pinkerton went into foreclosure. The building needed considerable retrofitting to make it less of an office and more of a one-stop facility for all of CPC's various programs. For example, Medical Director Katherine Keeley, M.D., who performs exams of abused children, needed smaller scale exam tables designed for children and babies. Another room is where children can recount their experiences in a relaxed setting while in an adjoining space staff and police observe and record their testimony.

Also with kids in mind, there's an enclosed playground in the back of the building that was donated by the Junior League of Sarasota which, coincidentally, helped to launch CPC 30 years ago. The CPC needs Sarasota to help them finish paying for their beautiful and important new facility. Graci, a board member chairing major gifts, said the goal is \$4.8 million. She and her husband Dennis gave a major lead gift of \$1 million to the campaign. Now Sarasota needs to step up and show. "It shouldn't hurt to be a kid," Graci states. "It's everybody's job to keep children safe." 🗣️

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#### save the date:

The Child Protection Center's Grand Opening Celebration is scheduled for **Thursday, April 22** at 4:30 p.m. The public is invited to attend and tour the facility.

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