



COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN TO STOP CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Summit Report
March 23, 2018



A community response to a community crisis.

There are 154,000 children living in Kent County in 2018.

Over 15,000 of them have been or will be abused by their 18th birthday.

If this were polio or whooping cough, we would leave no stone unturned to find each victim, treat him or her, and find a cure. Such an effort would require more than just the Children’s Advocacy Center of Kent County, which investigates and treats sexually abused children. The entire community would need to be involved to take on a problem of this magnitude, which is clouded by cultural stigma and misinformation.

Planting a seed.

As movements often do, this one began with a few people sitting around a table. They:

- Talked about the high incidence rate of kids being sexually abused.
- Noted studies that show the rate declining—from one in five to one in ten children over the past 20 years.
- Agreed the rate is still too high and an epidemic by anyone’s math.
- Explored reasons behind the decline—and the possibility of reducing it another 50%.
- Determined that a community response was integral to further progress.

This led the Children’s Advocacy Center to organize a community Summit. On March 23, 2018, 120 Kent County leaders gathered for the first time ever to develop a plan to stop child sexual abuse in Kent County.

- It was a gathering of like-minded leaders from 10 major sectors of the community.
- Education, government, law enforcement, media, medical, non-profit, legal, faith-based, philanthropy, and businesses were all represented.

There was lot of talking . . . and a lot of listening:

- From experts to survivors, we heard their stories.
- Actions were identified—ideas to take back to their own organizations and sectors to help stop the assaults on our children.

NATIONAL FACTS

Child sexual abuse is likely the most preventable health problem children will experience

...

1 in 10 children will be sexually abused by the age of 18

...

Only 38% of sexual abuse incidents/cases are identified, and even fewer are reported

...

Only 4% to 8% of reports are fabricated

Source: Darkness to Light

LOCAL FACTS

99% of children know their abusers, and 50% are family members

...

Of the 1,000 children we see annually at the CAC, 33% are under the age of 6

Source: CAC of Kent County

What we learned

Child sexual abuse is pervasive and beyond the imagination of most of us. It goes against all we want to believe about our fellow human beings.

Why adults don’t report child sexual abuse.

A major topic of discussion: the responsibility of adults to report child sexual abuse. Less than 38% of kids tell someone and much less is reported to authorities.

One of the main reasons adults say they do not report is that they are not 100% sure that sexual abuse has occurred. However, it is not our job to determine if it happened. That is the job of law enforcement and child protective services. These professionals are trained to seek the truth. The rest of us must report our suspicions. Otherwise, the abuse continues, and the child is further traumatized. Moreover, the abuser often goes on to hurt other innocent children.

Why the rate is declining.

Another much-discussed topic: the rate of child sexual abuse has declined over the past 20 years.

In the past 20 years, studies show that the rate of child sexual abuse has decreased from 1 in 5 children to 1 in 10.

What has contributed to this 50% decline over the past two decades?

It could be:

- Greater awareness thanks to mandated reporting rules and high-profile investigative journalism like that of the *Indianapolis Star* and *Boston Globe*.
- Body safety programs—like our Kids Have Rights program—that go into schools and teach children about good touches and confusing touches, and how to identify the safe people in their lives.
- The opening of almost 900 Children’s Advocacy Centers across the U.S. that employ a multidisciplinary approach to the investigation and treatment of sexually abused children.
- The international Darkness to Light movement, which has helped more adults understand and report child sexual abuse.

The truth is, we do not know all the answers. But we do know that we have the power to make change. And it will take more than just the partners of the Children’s Advocacy Center of Kent County. It will take the entire community.

What it feels like to be a kid with an unthinkable secret.

Randy & Me: A Prosecutor’s Tale of his Childhood Sexual Abuse

Kevin Mulcahy recounted his story of sexual exploitation at the hands of his soccer coach, Randy. He described the deliberate grooming process his assailant used to gain his trust, love and silence. He told the impact the abuse has had on him, the hurt and horror and the long road to recovery. He spoke of the investigator on his case (who was great), the prosecutor (he was terrible), and the forensic interviewer (Kevin did not have one). But this was not a mere retelling of the past. Instead, this powerful presentation wove Kevin’s experiences as a victim together with the insights he’s gained as long-time prosecutor of child exploitation cases to reveal valuable lessons for the effort to stop and prevent child sexual abuse.

What we want the future to look like.

Imagine this headline appearing five years from now: *Kent County has reduced child sexual abuse by 50%. And by another 50% a few years later, and on and on until we eradicate child sexual abuse.*

We need to think both big and small about what needs to happen to make that goal a reality. For making this our children's reality.



MORE MUST BE DONE

Summit participants identified numerous actions toward the goal of eradicating child sexual abuse. Here are the top priorities.

Education

Education was mentioned by nearly every sector, including general public awareness for employees, volunteers, church members, philanthropic groups and children.

- **Action:** Expand Kids Have Rights to more schools and to cover K through 12.
FOUNDATIONS
- **Action:** Provide child sexual abuse information to caregivers in pediatric visits and school based health centers.
MEDICAL
- **Action:** Provide training such as Darkness to Light to employees, church staff and volunteers, and government child-serving activities such as libraries, parks, and recreation.
FAITH-BASED, BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT, EDUCATION
- **Action:** Use professional role to raise awareness.
LEGAL

Policies

At least half of the sectors recommend developing internal policies regarding employees, volunteers, and general operations, particularly for those organizations serving children and reporting child sexual abuse.

- **Action:** Examine policies of libraries, parks, and other child-centered programs.
GOVERNMENT
- **Action:** Promote stronger background checks for sports personnel and volunteers.
LAW ENFORCEMENT
- **Action:** Develop policies that protect children from sexual abuse in faith-based settings. Include background checks of all staff and volunteers.
FAITH-BASED
- **Action:** Review policies to provide paid time off for families.
BUSINESS

Culture

Several sectors discussed changing our culture of toxic male socialization, which can increase the likelihood of sexual abuse. Several others mentioned the need to create a culture of reporting child sexual abuse to help counter systems that turn their backs or don't believe children.

- **Action:** Research models that address toxic male socialization in other communities.
NON-PROFIT, MEDICAL
- **Action:** Promote reporting of suspicions.
ALL SECTORS

Collaboration

Several sectors called for collaboration within their professions. The media in particular talked about less competition in creating awareness campaigns.

- **Action:** Create an interfaith collective to share resources and advice and promote reporting and preventing child sexual abuse.
FAITH-BASED
- **Action:** Create a community wide awareness campaign.
MEDIA

Funding

There was a call to identify funding sources for sustaining and growing prevention programs.

- **Action:** Identify funding, and possibly a countywide millage, for sustaining and growing prevention programs.
FOUNDATIONS
- **Action:** Increase opportunities for employee contributions to the CAC.
BUSINESS

Leading the effort against child sexual abuse.

A Summit in and of itself will not make change happen. The “boots on the ground” within institutions and sectors must answer the call to action to make a difference. It is recommended that each sector reconvene to select at least one action to focus on for the coming year.

The Children’s Advocacy Center has several resources to help sectors get started:

- We offer a nationally recognized education program called Darkness to Light (D2L) that trains adults (think church volunteers, PTOs, pediatrician offices, sports organizations) on how to identify and report child sexual abuse and to prevent it.
- We can meet with organizations to help them develop policies and procedures to protect children.
- We can host your staff at the CAC or your offices with a Walk in Their Shoes tour to illustrate how the multidisciplinary process works.
- Organizations can utilize the CAC’s community space for planning meetings and education.
- We can attend your first organizing meeting to offer resources and answer questions.

Keeping us on track.

The CAC will issue quarterly updates to Summit participants and other community leaders, informing them about initiatives to end child sexual abuse being implemented by the various sectors. It will be a means of watching the action steps come alive and to share lessons learned.

Summit 2019

Ninety-six percent of Summit attendees who completed an evaluation indicated that they would attend a follow-up gathering a year later to check progress and plan for the next steps. Many suggested seating attendees in cross-sector groups to encourage more community-wide discussions and action. The CAC will convene a committee of community leaders to plan the 2019 Summit.

SUMMIT STORY

Police Chief Hegarty

Then Grand Rapids Police Chief Bill Hegarty was walking in the lobby of the Hall of Justice 27 years ago when he spotted a young girl in a yellow dress—alone, wet from the rain, her face stained with tears. He asked why she was there, and she told him “the man hurt me real bad.” He knew she would have to retell her story of sexual abuse as many as eight times, to police, ER doctors, Child Protective Services, prosecutors, social workers, and others who did not coordinate with one another on the investigation or necessarily find services to help her heal. Thinking there had to be a better way, the Chief called together a group of professionals to find a coordinated response—and two years later, their efforts led to the opening of the Child Advocacy Center of Kent County, with the mission to “hear the story, heal the pain, and halt the cycle” of child sexual abuse. Over the past 25 years, the Center has served 20,000 children.

How to get involved.

If you were not able to attend the 2018 Summit, there is still opportunity to get involved. Just send an email to Susan Shannon, at sshannon@cac-kent.org. Tell us which sector you represent and how you’d like to be involved. Or go to our website at www.cac-kent.org and click the get involved button.



“This cannot be an event; this needs to be a movement.”

—Summit Participant





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Ambassadors

BUSINESS

John Boeschstein
Custom Profile

Gail Scott
MorningStar Health

EDUCATION

Ron Caniff
Kent ISD

Tom DeJonge
GR Christian

FAITH BASED

Rev. Nathaniel Moody
Brown Hutcherson
Ministries

Monsignor Bill Duncan
Diocese of Grand Rapids

MEDIA

Mary McLoughlin

MEDICAL

Tasha Blackmon
Cherry Health

NONPROFITS WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Lucy Dyer Joswick
Camp Blodgett

Rick Huisman
Boys & Girls Clubs
of Grand Rapids

FOUNDATIONS

Kate Pew Wolters
The Kate and Richard
Wolters Foundation

GOVERNMENT

Wayman Britt
Kent County Admin
and Controller

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Chief Jim Carmody
Wyoming Police
Department

Sheriff Lawrence Stelma
Kent County Sheriff

LEGAL

Chris Becker
Kent County Prosecutor

Tessa Hessmiller
Asst. U.S. Attorney

Planning Committee

Deb Bailey
Deb Manning
Mary McLoughlin



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