

THE BILL BLACKWOOD  
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS

Policy and Procedures  
With Relevance to Child Abuse  
and the Usage of Advocacy Centers

A Policy Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Professional Designation  
Graduate, Management Institute

by  
Joel A. Blair

Terrell Police Department  
Terrell, Texas  
September, 1996

# 376

## ABSTRACT

Each law enforcement department must deal, almost on a daily basis, with child abuse. In addition to gathering evidence for lawful arrests and jurisprudence, police departments are now interacting with child advocacy centers. The purpose of advocacy centers is to bring together police, protective service workers, medical and legal teams to study a case of child abuse and prepare the case for court action. Police are heavily involved in the advocacy procedures because it is up to law enforcement to pursue arrests, searches and seizures of evidence, and to preserve physical evidence for court.

While the City of Terrell and the county of Kaufman do not currently have a children's advocacy center, it is highly likely that one will be established within the next five to ten years. The purpose of this paper is to look at policy and procedures pertaining to future usage of an Advocacy Center. Each agency has its own policies to follow, so the establishment of protocol is essential.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

| <b>Section</b>                   | <b>Page</b> |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Abstract                         |             |
| Introduction                     | 2-3         |
| Historical and Legal Context     | 3-4         |
| Review of Literature or Practice | 4-6         |
| Relevant Issues                  | 6-7         |
| Conclusion / Recommendation      | 7-8         |
| Bibliography                     | 9           |
| Example 1                        | 10          |
| Example 2                        | 11          |
| Example 3                        | 12          |
| Example 4                        | 13          |

## **Introduction**

Children's advocacy centers are being established nationwide to promote speedy, yet thorough, child abuse investigations and prosecutions. Advocacy centers are geared for children's comfort by the presence of toys, teddy bears, soft furniture, and low-key staff, including police, prosecutors, child protective services, and medical personnel.

The overall goal of the advocacy center is to unite all involved parties in a thorough investigation of the abused child while causing the least amount of trauma to the child. As part of an investigative team, it is up to individual police departments to establish policies and protocol in the usage of these centers and child abuse investigations. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the possibility of involvement in such a center by the Terrell Police Department.

There is an agency in Austin, Texas, whose primary goal is the establishment of advocacy centers in Texas (example 1). The Children's Advocacy Center of Texas aids in establishing centers and in the developing a united protocol for parties involved. When first developed, advocacy centers established interagency memos of cooperative working relationships between child protective services, law enforcement, district attorneys, medical personal, and other social service agencies.

These memos detail: (1) developing corporative, team approach to investigations; (2) reduction in the number of interviews required of a child abuse victim; (3) developing and maintaining an environment that utilizes the best interest of the children (Children's Advocacy Center of Texas; funding notice; 1995).

The primary issues of children's advocacy centers are the location, teams, and funding. Children's advocacy centers must operate in a neutral and physically separate space from the day to day operations of any of the agency partners (Children advocacy Centers of Texas, Inc. 1995). A listing of current advocacy centers in Texas is available in Example 2. Centers have their own staff consisting of executive directors, volunteer coordinators and sometimes, a specified interviewer for taped interviews of victims. Housed neutrally advocacy centers give

representative agencies a place to operate where the child/victim is placed first, and agency turf questions are not involved. A picture of the Dallas Advocacy Center is shown in Example 3.

Multidisciplinary teams are community teams composed of representatives of the agencies that investigate child abuse, provide services to victims and families, and conduct civil and/or criminal prosecution of cases. At a minimum, centers include a partnership of child protective services, law enforcement, and district attorneys (Children Advocacy Center of Texas, Inc. 1995).

While working together in an advocacy center environment requires teamwork, each agency must be clear about its role. It could be an understandably or confusing situation to the victims of abuse if he/she were not clear about the roles of each professional (Hagans and Case; 1988). These teams meet weekly to address new abuse cases received; meetings are held at the advocacy centers.

Advocacy centers are nonprofit. They are funded through donations, special appeals and events, limited state funds. Each of the team agencies pays its own staff who participate in these centers.

The audience for this paper will be to address Terrell Police Department's future role in an advocacy center. Several books about child abuse are reference, in addition to information from the National Children's Advocacy Centers, the Dallas center, and the Collin County center. The intended outcome of this project will be to list both advantages and disadvantages for future Terrell Police Department interaction in an advocacy center.

### **Historical and Legal Context**

In 1987, the National Network of Children, Advocacy Center was founded by Congressman Bud Cramer of Madison County, Alabama (National Network of Children's Advocacy Center, 1986). The original center was set up in Huntsville, Alabama. Currently, there are two members on the national board of directors who are involved with advocacy centers in Texas; Detective Mike Johnson, Plano Police Department, Plano, Texas; and, Lt. Bill

Walsh, Dallas Police Department. Lt. Walsh and Det. Johnson are both founding members of their respective advocacy centers. Appointments such as these point to the successful marriage between advocacy centers and other agencies, especially law enforcement.

The primary legal factors regarding the involvement of Terrell Police Department's participation in an advocacy center is the agreement into a multiagency pact. The Terrell Police Department must be willing to enter into a cooperative, working relationship with other agencies, such as child protective service, in regard to timing of interview of victims. An officer might get a call on night patrol that child protective services establishes as priority 2 (giving them 10 days to respond); however, the officer is already on the scene. Understanding each other's roles can lead to better communication and participation.

An understanding of each party's limitations also will make an advocacy center successful. Child protective services might not be able intervene legally with a family, just as police department may not always have the criminal evidence needed for charges. It must be restated that the delicate handling of a child should be the primary goal; an agency's success rate and/or egos involved must rate lower on the scale. The most significant opportunity is the ability to impact a child's life in a positive manner. A secondary opportunity is important for the agencies involved and funding.

A successfully operated advocacy center will merge several agencies into a common goal, a child. Success will make it easier to approach the community for funding and donations; it will also be good public relations tool for each of the agencies.

### **Review of Literature/Practice**

In fiscal year 1994, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services received for investigation 109,375 reports of child abuse/neglect; of these reports 55,607 were ruled with substantiated (positive) results. It is important to note that some children "slipped" through the system. For example, child protective services may have responded to a matter, placed a child

into a protective environment, prior to notifying law enforcement. Therefore, evidence has the ability to be lost or mishandled.

Jan Bell is a former employee of child protective service with over 11 years experience. She worked briefly in Dallas county, then Collin county, where she had an opportunity to interact with a large advocacy center and a rural based advocacy center. In Dallas it was hard to interact with the advocacy center based on availability. However, the experience with Collin county's advocacy center made a believer and supporter out of her. She attended many child interviews and case staffings at the C.C.C.A.C. She stated there was always a district attorney's office representative, as well as law enforcement, available at the interviews and staffing. Staffings were timely, well organized, and notices sent to parties in advance so that they could plan their schedule.

William Conratt, the district attorney for Kaufman County, has stated he is supportive of the advocacy center concept and has worked with several centers on cases. However, he voiced concern over the number of actual cases available in Kaufman county and if such child abuse cases could support a full-time center.

In the 1996 Crimes Against Children Seminar, Dallas Chief of Police, Ben Click, made some opening remarks. Chief Click stressed that advocacy center mobilized a community by offering a cooperative, team approach.

Sgt. Fred Rich, Dallas Police Department, stated in a panel discussion that "turf" battles do exist in advocacy centers. He stated centers need supervisors who are strong and committed to the goals of a center for success of that center.

Dr. Leah Lamb stated advocacy centers needed competent, educated physicians committed to the goal of finding and reporting child abuse. She believes very strongly in a doctor's participation the team review process. A drawback to heavy involvement in cases taking the time off necessary for court appearances.

The Dallas Police Department has a unit of child abuse investigators stationed at the Dallas advocacy center. An officer from this unit usually accompanies a child protective

services worker based on the advocacy center. The drawback to this plan is that there are more than 12 units of Dallas child protective services based in their main building in Dallas. These other workers often do not have the availability of the center due to emergencies on their cases.

The Collin county advocacy center is based in Plano and houses 2 child protective workers, 2 detective, volunteers and a district attorney's representative. Outlying areas, such as Blue Ridge, Princeton, and McKinney, also participate in this center. Representative from these agencies attend videotaping of victim's statements and the weekly staffings held at the center.

### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

The key issues as to whether or not an advocacy center would benefit Terrell Police Department are the number of referrals received, the usage of officers and detectives, funding and team relations.

An advocacy center would be an asset to all of the Kaufman county area for the express purpose of making the child abuse system work for the child. While a center could be based in Terrell, it would serve the rural county of Kaufman. Therefore, center activities would not be based solely on the number of referrals received by the Terrell Police Department. An officer of Terrell could be based at a center for community relations and for the handling of Terrell cases.

Funding of a center would not be the role of the Terrell police, nor of any of the agencies involved. However, the community would have to bear some of the financial support for the center through fund-raising activities. The Terrell Police Department would have to be active in community awareness and support of such a center. Agencies involved in the center would have to maintain financial responsibility of their on-site staff. For example; the child protective services staff housed at the center would be paid by the state of Department of Protective & Regulatory Services.

Finally, the primary area of responsibility is the Terrell Police Department's role in teamwork. Judgment, strong commitment to the goal of a center, and the belief that a child's needs override an agency's need to be the leader can only lead to one word: teamwork. It is the



teamwork in a center that points out the name “advocacy center”. Effective functioning of team means the number are working as strong advocates for children.

A major opportunity of centers today has been the formulation of child death review teams. Child deaths are being reviewed to see if any patterns are available to prevent future child deaths. An example is the Dallas children’s advocacy center. In 1994, 12 homicides, 45 accidents and 11 undetermined causes of child death were reviewed at the center. (Dallas county Children’s Advocacy Center informational brochure, 1994). Child death review laws are appearing nationwide, so the advocacy center could play an important role in developing these reviews in Kaufman county.

The major cost/benefit to be brought into any community like Terrell comes down to the terms of manpower hours and efficiency. If an officer is able to go to one location and interview parties and video victim, it saves time. The additional resources of a child protective services worker and district attorney’s personnel lets the office know fairly quickly the status of the cases and what legal material is necessary to get the prosecution started in a timely fashion.

## **Conclusion**

Terrell Police Department investigates violations of the penal codes of Texas; a major investigation involves child abuse. As part of these investigations, the development’s usage of an advocacy center has to be considered. The team process of a center can cut the amount of time the police department uses in an investigation, while the usage of a childfriendly center can ease the trauma to a child.

Advocacy centers are being established nationwide, including rural areas. With an active police force and community, it is likely one will be initiated in Terrell within the next several years.

Primary issues are the location, funding and teamwork of an advocacy center. Location is a necessity to ensure proper involvement by all the parties. It must also be located in an area adequate to serve the needs of families.

A center must pursue funding for its location, staff and equipment. Each participating agency would be responsible for the funding of its staff.

The most important aspect of a successful center is teamwork. The Terrell Police Department will have to develop and maintain numerous relationships, including those with child protection services, district attorney, and the medical profession.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collin County Children Advocacy Center; Plano, Texas

Dallas Children's Advocacy Center; Dallas, Texas

Violence Against Children: Physical Child Abuse in the U.S. Gil, David; 1970; Oxford University Press.

When Your Child Has Been Molested: A Parent's Guide to Healing and Recover; Hagans, Kathryn and Case, Joyce; 1988; D.C. Heath and Company.

National Network of Children's Advocacy Centers; Huntsville, Alabama.

Child Abusive: Governing Laws and Legislation; Sloan, Irving J. 18\983; Oceana Publications, Inc.

Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services 1994.

Terrell Police Department: Operating Procedures Manual. Whitt, Jeff, Chief of Police, 1996.