



Media Release

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Children's Advocacy Center of Brevard Director and Clinical Intervention Program Counselors Recognized for Outstanding Efforts to Strengthen Families

Brevard County, Fla.-- Each year the Child Abuse Prevention Task Force of Brevard County recognizes individuals and organizations that have worked to reduce the incidences of child abuse, or contributed time and talent in the name of abuse prevention and family stability. This year the Children's Advocacy Center of Brevard's own Mary Bratsen, LCSW, and Terri Williamson, LMHC, were presented with awards in the Healthcare Individual category, and Charles (Chuck) Biehl was presented the Civic Individual award at the task force's annual banquet on April 22 at the Holiday Inn Melbourne-Viera Conference Center Hotel.

Chuck Biehl is the Director of the Children's Advocacy Center of Brevard and Child Protection Team, and is well-known among his peers for his uncompromising attitude to ensure the absolute best is being done for child victims of abuse.

Bratsen and Williamson are Clinical Intervention Coordinators and work daily to strengthen and support families whose lives have been impacted by child abuse. Mary Bratsen, a licensed clinical social worker, and Terri Williamson, a licensed mental health counselor, have both worked at the Advocacy Center for many years and bring specific experience in counseling child abuse victims to the program.

The Clinical Intervention Program was established in December 1997 at the Children's Advocacy Center in response to the need for readily accessible mental health counseling for child abuse victims through on-site crisis intervention to both the child victims and their non-offending parents/caregivers. The program addresses the victim's emotional crisis and the difficulties of non-offending parent(s) to create a supportive, protective home environment.

Child abuse can have long-lasting negative effects on children, their families and ultimately, on the rest of us, even if we aren't directly involved. The Clinical Intervention Program helps promote a healthy community by providing crisis and short-term counseling, and personal advocacy services for child victims and non-offending family members at no charge and without a waiting list.

In fiscal year 2008-2009, the one full-time counselor and one part-time counselor provided 1,010 counseling sessions to 258 children and non-offending family members. We are well into fiscal year 2010, and between July 2009 and March 2010, the CIP counselors have provided 832 counseling sessions. With three months remaining until the end of the fiscal year, they are expected to exceed the number of sessions provided last year without any increase in staff.

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CACB Staff Efforts to strengthen Families Recognized

Biehl notes, "Mary and Terri do a remarkable job providing these services to child victims and non-offending family members. The volume of their services continues to grow, and I am amazed at how they continually meet the multi-layered needs of these child victims and their families. Their recognition is well deserved."

Mary Bratsen explains some of the outcomes they strive to achieve in CIP, "We work to ensure that child victims have the coping skills to deal with what may be the most traumatic event in their lives. It is also very important that child victims understand basic principles of body safety and safe personal boundaries." Terri Williamson adds, "The non-offending parent or caregiver is an important person in a child victim's life and they oftentimes need intervention, too. We want to be sure that they understand how to be protective of the child and any other siblings in the home."

A non-offending parent recently explained that the program provided a safety net for them. Even many months after the incident involving their child, and after the counseling sessions were completed, one of the counselors was always available to meet with them. "This speaks to one of the great advantages to our program," Biehl explains. "CIP is officially a crisis intervention and short-term counseling program but because of the dedication and expertise that Mary and Terri possess, we are able to allow victims access to the program whenever they need it. We recognize that child abuse can have lingering effects and something other than another incident may trigger a need to talk. Mary and Terri are great resources for the children in this community."

Established in 1996, the Children's Advocacy Center of Brevard (CACB) is a nonprofit organization affiliated with Wuesthoff Health Services. CACB is a multi-agency collaboration of the Child Protection Team, the Florida Department of Children and Families, both of which are onsite at the Advocacy Center; Brevard County Sheriff's Office and municipal law enforcement agencies, the Office of the State Attorney and community mental health professionals. Advocacy Center partners are involved in the most difficult child abuse cases in Brevard County, including cases of child sexual or severe physical abuse, and neglect. Major on-site services provided by the Child Protection Team include medical exams, medical consultations, and specialized and forensic interviews.

For additional information about the Children's Advocacy Center of Brevard, call 637.7652 or visit the website at www.cacbrevard.org.

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Photo and caption follow on page 3.



Children's Advocacy Center of Brevard Clinical Intervention Program counselors Terri Williamson, Licensed Mental Health Counselor (standing,) and Mary Bratsen, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, were recognized in the Healthcare category by the Child Abuse Prevention Task Force for their efforts to strengthen families and prevent child abuse.