



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

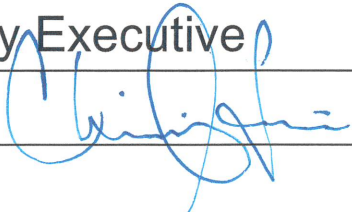
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County
Program Title: Prince William County Child Advocacy Center
Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Courtney Tierney
Title: Director
Department: Prince William County Dept. of Social Services
Telephone: 703-792-7520 Website: https://www.pwcva.gov/department/social-services
Email: ctierney@pwcgov.org

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter
Title: County Executive
Signature: 

Executive Summary/Brief Overview

Prince William County (PWC) remains the second largest jurisdiction in Virginia and continues to be one of the fastest growing counties in the region. According to the July 2022 census population estimate, the county contained approximately 486,943 residents with 26.7% (approximately 130,000) of those residents being under the age of eighteen. After a directive from the PWC Board of Supervisors, the PWC Department of Social Services (DSS) leadership, in collaboration with the public, Police, Community Services, Commonwealth Attorney, County Attorney, and Victim Advocacy Services set up a Child Advocacy Center (CAC) Committee (Committee) to enhance their already strong investigative response to the abuse and/or neglect of children.

The Committee's research found that when the more traditional approaches to child abuse investigations were utilized, numerous agencies and investigators could be involved, and the response could become fragmented. Various methodologies were researched and PWC, with the support of the Board of County Supervisors, decided to implement the CAC model to DSS' already robust array of services. The nationally recognized Child Advocacy Center (CAC) model supports a seamless, effective, trauma-informed response to child abuse allegations, investigations, and prosecutions. The model emphasizes coordination and collaboration with the partner agencies with a goal of avoiding re-traumatization of children during the investigative process. Through research, leadership noted that the CAC model allowed for services to be more efficient, victim access to services occurred quicker, and \$1,000 is an estimated tax savings per investigation.

What stands out about the PWC CAC is that it is located within the local government's DSS, on government property, and has state-of-the-art technology that connects law enforcement and the Commonwealth Attorney in real time during forensic interviews with child survivors of abuse and/or neglect to gather evidence for prosecutions. It is the only CAC in Virginia with Axion interview and video rooms.

In less than 18 months, April 2022 to June 2023, 388 forensic interviews have been conducted, 401 cases have been reviewed by the Multidisciplinary Team, 1,921 advocacy related appointments and services have been secured, and 420 mental health sessions have been conducted. An example of the ability of the CAC to help local children was when PWC Police Department hailed the CAC staff for interviews conducted of two different children in two different cases of sexual abuse in two days resulting in both alleged perpetrators being charged and arrested. Additionally, CAC staff found food and lodging for the families so that all were safe from abuse while making sure referrals were in place for continual counseling.

The Problem

Nationwide, most CACs are formed and operated by independent non-profit agencies. PWC leadership decided to pursue another route. They concluded that by placing the CAC under the county umbrella, the program would be stronger. It would provide the center with financial stability and resources necessary for seamless functioning. Leadership wanted to ensure that the CAC's primary focus would always be on the well-being of the children with a future focus on developing a local foundation to provide grant writing and fundraising for financial assistance. However, the first order of business was to set up and open the CAC in less than 12 months. The multidisciplinary team of PWC CACs is comprised, like the Committee, with PWC DSS' Advocacy, Prevention, and Protection Division staff overseeing the CAC, PWC DSS' Child Protective Services Division, PWC Law Enforcement - Special Victims Unit, the 31st District Commonwealth Attorney (both staff and Victim Witness Program), the PWC County Attorney, PWC Community Services, and the INOVA Forensic Medical Team.

On site, which is fully accessible and has a private entrance, the CAC provides forensic interviews, advocacy, evidence-based trauma focused therapy and referrals to other support services. The team regularly meets and collaborates on cases from investigation onset through prosecution. In addition, research indicates that child advocacy centers are cost effective with some studies citing that child advocacy centers save taxpayers approximately \$1000 per investigation. CACs have been found to reduce the number of child abuse interviews for the victim, improve information exchange between multiple government agencies, lead to better evidence collection, and can increase confessions, prosecution rates, and convictions for perpetrators.

As the CAC model dictates, the PWC CAC is designed to help alleviate many of the inherent conflicts in child protection. CACs stress coordination of investigation and intervention services by bringing together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team to create a child-focused approach to the handling of child abuse cases. The goal is to ensure that children are not re-victimized by the very system designed to protect them through multiple interviews in strange and forbidding environments, poor communication among agencies involved and ineffective or irrelevant resource resources being recommended. The PWC CAC helps to ensure that cases are monitored, and support and resources are offered and made available to the child and the non-offending caregiver throughout the life of the case.

Program Description

The PWC CAC provides a compassionate and efficient process for child abuse intervention. We seek to prevent and reduce trauma to children and families using a multidisciplinary approach to investigation, prosecution, treatment, education, and advocacy. We offer child-survivors and their families a safe, child-focused facility where they are the center of the investigation. The CAC works with partner agencies to investigate what children may have experienced or witnessed. The CAC aims to make the investigative process as child-focused and informative as possible. The CAC conducts forensic interviews, coordinates forensic medical exams, provides and makes referrals for trauma-focused therapy, conducts ongoing victim and family advocacy support and assistance. The CAC offers programs for family member and community support via its monthly caregiver series and by offering the nationally recognized *Darkness to Light* community education program. We also inform caregivers of the Virginia Crimes Victims Compensation program and assist with those applications if needed.

The PWC CAC conducted its first forensic interview in December of 2021. Since that time, its staff and multidisciplinary team have worked collaboratively to protect, treat, and counsel almost 400 alleged child victims and their families. Since inception, approximately 18 months ago, the PWC CAC has conducted 388 forensic interviews, 401 case reviews, provided 1,921 instances of advocacy and outreach services, and provided 420 mental health sessions (intakes/assessments, crisis intervention, individual and family sessions). In addition, the CAC staff has not only provided court accompaniment to families but have also served the Commonwealth by providing expert court testimony in both civil and criminal cases of child maltreatment.

Financing and Staffing

In April 2024, the Prince William County Board of County Supervisors approved the FY 24 budget which included funding for the six CAC staff positions. The funding amount of \$710,250 includes \$350,000 (State Funding) and \$360,250(local funding). The PWC CAC is led by a program manager who provides oversight of the CAC staff as they institute program services in compliance with the standards established by the Child Advocacy Centers of Virginia (CACVA) and the National Children’s Alliance (NCA). The program manager is responsible for representing the CAC purpose, goals and programs through public presentations, educational community programs and media communication, successfully maintaining membership with CACVA and NCA as

Prince William County Child Advocacy Center

well as providing oversight to five direct reports. The staff also consists of two full-time forensic interviewers, two dual roles: Family Advocate and Mental Health Clinician and one Administrative Coordinator. Finally, the Program Manager seeks to ensure the accreditation of the PWC CAC within the five-year timeframe allowed by the NCA.

Description of Services

Forensic Interview

The forensic interview is a critical part of the investigation. The interview is conducted by an individual who is trained in specialized protocols for a child's age and social emotional development. The interview is a trauma-informed, evidence-based, non-leading, legal- sound, fact-finding interview which occurs in a child-friendly environment. The interviewer is the only person present in the room with the child. Other members of the multidisciplinary team observe from the viewing room in real time and a copy of the interview is provided to the investigators at the conclusion of the interview. Each forensic interviewer on the PWC CAC team is trained in, at minimum, two nationally recognized protocols (ChildFirst, APSAC, NCAC etc.) and each has a minimum of ten years of experience conducting forensic interviews and or child protective investigations. Interview rooms are specially decorated with colors and furniture that are age-appropriate and trauma-informed.

Therapy

The PWC CAC offers onsite evidenced-based and trauma-focused therapy, that is free of charge to advocacy center clients. The PWC CAC has licensed, certified and/or pre-licensed master's level clinicians on staff. Each clinician is trained to provide various evidenced-based therapy modalities. Clinicians are certified and/or trained to provide Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Restructuring (EMDR) therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE) and/or Parent-Child Interactive Therapy (PCIT).

Advocacy

The family advocate is the first person the family interacts with upon arriving to the CAC. The fully accessible site has a private entrance to include private parking. The advocate greets the family, orients them to the process, assists with paperwork and answers initial questions from the child or non-offending caregiver. While the child is in the forensic interview, the family advocate meets with the family and conducts an initial needs assessment. During the assessment, the advocate discusses mental health and medical resources, possible financial resources, the multidisciplinary team process and begins to make referrals to local resources. The family advocate serves as a liaison and point of contact throughout the life of the case. The CAC family advocate and the Victim Witness Advocate in the Commonwealth Attorney's office often work in collaboration to ensure all the needs of the family are met.

Multi-Disciplinary Team Members

Collaboration occurs between and among program partners daily and representatives from each partner group meet simultaneously one time monthly to collaborate and staff cases.

- CAC Staff (Forensic Interview, Behavioral Health, Advocacy, and Administrative Support)
- PWC Commonwealth and County Attorneys (Legal)
- PWC Child Protective Services (Child Protection)
- PWC Special Victims Unit (Law enforcement)
- INOVA FACT Department (Medical)
- PWC Community Services (Behavioral Health)
- Commonwealth Attorney Victim Witness Advocate (Advocacy)

Innovation

Vision: To transform the community by eliminating child abuse.

Mission: The CAC's mission is to provide a safe, child-centric environment to help children move from victim to survivor by reducing trauma and educating the community through a multidisciplinary approach to prevent, recognize, investigate, and prosecute child abuse.

PWC DSS CAC Cornerstone Values

1. Child friendly and family focused environment
 - o Safe objective place for interviews and evaluations
2. Trauma informed resiliency focused response and care
 - o Connection to medical and specialized mental health support and services
3. Multidisciplinary team approach and collaborative services
 - o Collaborative approach enables all partners to wrap around the child and family
4. Advocacy
 - o Throughout the life of the case and beyond if necessary
5. Community Education/Prevention

As previously stated, the PWC CAC performed its first child forensic interview in December of 2021 and since that time has conducted almost 400 interviews. There are only eighteen child advocacy centers in the state of Virginia, and PWC CAC is one of the newest. The PWC CAC is unique in composition and one of only three CACs in the state with a similar structure (housed in County DSS versus 501c3 non-profit or hospital based). Additionally, the PWC CAC is the only one in Virginia that utilizes a video and interview room solution known as Axon Interview. Axon's typical clientele consists of law enforcement agencies, legal teams, and healthcare settings. PWC DSS made an impactful decision when it elected to financially invest in this robust system. Securing Axon as the PWC CAC's system ensures seamless sharing of information and secure livestreaming capabilities with the PWC Commonwealth Attorney's Office and PWC Law Enforcement who were already utilizing the company for evidence collection. The innovation of the PWC CAC lies in our array of professional service offerings coupled with our state-of-the-art technology.

The PWC CAC has three rooms outfitted with two cameras each (an overt camera and a covert camera unit). Having two cameras allows for picture-in-picture recording and leaves no portion of the interview room uncovered. One camera captures the room as a whole and the other has tilt, pan and zoom capabilities. While in the viewing room, investigators can utilize the tilt pan zoom feature to zoom in on writing, facial expressions, body movement or any other non-verbal that they feel may be pertinent to their investigation. This video solution

Prince William County Child Advocacy Center

is cloud based and has password protected secure live-streaming capabilities. The PWC Commonwealth Attorney and the PWC Police Department all have their own “instances” of Axon owned by their respective agencies. With partner access, after an interview is conducted, the CAC interviewer creates an electronic case file and immediately and securely sends that interview to the specified party. Prior to leaving the CAC, our Child Protective Services partners have a secure download link for the audio content of the interview. Information exchange is secure, seamless, and immediate. All system access and file movement are electronically noted, logged, and stamped with user, date and time of access and cannot be modified.

In addition, investigators have access to an electronic referral form and a live scheduler. Utilizing this technology enables investigators to request forensic interviews twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. While in the field and meeting with families, investigators can view and request forensic interview appointments in real time. Access to a live scheduler, allows CPS investigators and SVU detectives to immediately meet with caregivers in crisis, conduct their minimal facts interviews and confer on the best day and time to schedule the forensic interview. Families can know immediately when and where their child’s interview will occur. The services offered at the PWC CAC are not only child-centered, trauma-informed and evidenced-based, but they are also state-of-the-art.

Results of the Program

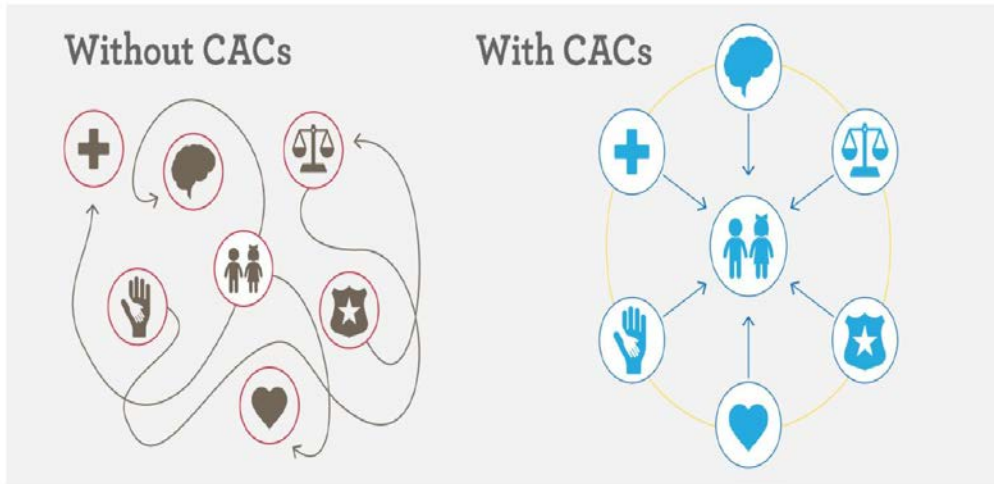
Each month, the multidisciplinary team meets to discuss the cases from the previous month and follow up on cases that the CAC is still tracking from previous months. The team reviews the cases for past agency involvement, safety of the children and outcome of the forensic interview. If a forensic medical examination was conducted, results will be discussed, and the investigation progress and dispositions will also be discussed. In addition, cases are staffed for needed resources and plans of action for the way forward are implemented. Utilizing this collaborative approach allows for families to secure necessary resources and enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of investigations. Needs are being addressed, resources are being put into place and children are being served.

It takes time to prosecute alleged abusers. PWC PD was elated when the CAC staff conducted of two interviews of two different children in two different cases of sexual abuse in two days resulting in both alleged

Prince William County Child Advocacy Center

perpetrators being charged and arrested. Additionally, CAC staff found food and lodging for the families so that all were safe from abuse while making sure referrals were in place for continual counseling.

The CAC will serve the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park when asked. Recently, an emergency interview was conducted in a in a high-profile case with media interest. It is expected that charges and arrests will follow.



Infographic demonstrates what children experience in investigations with and without a CAC presence.



The Prince William County Child Advocacy Center (PWC CAC) is a safe, welcoming place for children and their supportive caregivers. Our team works together to protect, investigate, treat, and counsel child victims and their families. The CAC provides preventative services, advocacy, counseling, and support from the beginning of an abuse investigation through prosecution. The PWC CAC provides a compassionate and efficient process for child abuse intervention.

PWC CAC Highlights

- 100% of team members are ChildFirst trained
- The team has a combined total of over 70 years of child maltreatment experience
- OMS survey results are consistently at or above the state and national results
- All mental health providers are trained in and utilize at least two evidenced-based therapies
- The PWC CAC offers MSW Intern placement and training opportunities

The CAC model for child abuse intervention is proven and effective. The model brings together trained professionals to provide comprehensive investigations and access to services. The model ensures appropriate referrals to forensic medicals, mental health services, advocacy, and support for child abuse victims and their nonoffending caregivers. The model also holds offenders accountable through collaboration with the judicial system.



The single most important factor affecting the child's recovery is the level of support from the caregiver.

What are families and partners saying about the PWC CAC?

"... the people talking to me were very nice and helpful" -Child

"... professional, yet friendly and welcoming. We were given adequate amounts of information that was very helpful." -Caregiver

"They make me feel safe" -Child

"They are very good at making sure they are answering all questions and understanding you." -Caregiver

"I liked how they actually know what I'm talking about and going through." -Child

"People here are very attentive and caring." - Caregiver

"The warmth and discreetness of the location and the people in this place made me breathe a little better." -Caregiver

"I appreciate the friendliness and kindness of all the staff. Everyone was helpful and everything is explained clearly and simply." -Caregiver

"This is an excellent service for victims." - MDT partner

"These ladies did everything they possibly could to make us feel comfortable. Thank you for making the best of a not so great time." -Caregiver

"Thank you for being here, and sharing the knowledge and resources, and a safe space to decide on what we needed." -Caregiver

"Love the CAC Staff, they are so accommodating to us. Thanks for the snacks!" -MDT partner

The CAC model offers child-focused, facility-based programs in which representatives from various disciplines work together to conduct interviews and make decisions regarding cases of child abuse.