

Local Team Getting Longer Sentences for Child Abusers



HAYS COUNTY USES THE “CHILDREN’S ADVOCACY CENTER” MODEL FOR INVESTIGATING AND PROSECUTING CHILD ABUSE CASES WHERE LOCAL PROSECUTORS, LAW ENFORCEMENT, CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES, ROXANNE’S HOUSE, CASA AND VICTIMS’ SERVICES PROVIDERS WORK AS A TEAM. THIS TEAMWORK HAS LED TO LENGTHY SENTENCES FOR OFFENDERS. KEY PARTNERS RECENTLY SAT DOWN TO DISCUSS THEIR ROLES IN A COLLABORATION THAT IS WORKING WELL.

A child practices testifying at the Hays County Justice Center in San Marcos as part of Roxanne’s House’s “court school,” which prepares children for the court experience.

When it comes to child abusers, Hays County has been “tough on crime” in 2011 like never before. Consider these eye-popping sentences and statistics concerning perpetrators just since January:

- **7 jury trials have garnered 254 years in prison plus one life sentence.**
- **10 cases ended in 94 years of prison sentencing through plea bargains.**

What these cases have in common is that a collaboration of law enforcement, the legal system, state agencies and HCWC staff performed key roles in prosecuting perpetrators and assisting children. This multi-disciplinary collaboration is organized through HCWC’s Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) known as Roxanne’s House.

Recently HCWC sat down with several key participants in the col-

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Longer Sentences for Child Abusers (Cont.)

laboration to assess why the partnership is achieving success, including Cathy Compton, Chief Prosecutor, Family Justice Division, Hays County; Detective Jeri Skrocki, Sergeant, Criminal Investigations, Hays County Sheriff's Office; and Melissa Rodriguez, CAC Program Director for Roxanne's House.

HCWC: There have been some very successful prosecutions of child abuse cases in the last year. What is working well?

PROSECUTOR: The cases that have worked out the best work out when we have somebody from Law Enforcement dovetail their testimony with Melissa as an expert....when Melissa worked in tandem with our testifying detectives. (Detective) Jeri (Skrocki) has been qualified as an expert many times before. When these cases really essentially boil down to the credibility of one child versus sometimes a whole family or a whole group of adults, that's really important to us. And it makes or breaks the cases.

CAC PROGRAM DIRECTOR: Things have changed in the respect that they're pursuing cases that in the past weren't being pursued and weren't being given a lot of effort.

PROSECUTOR: We've gotten maximum sentences on cases that people were telling us we shouldn't have even been trying and said that there's no way we could win.

HCWC: How does this compare to the way things worked in the past?

PROSECUTOR: In the "bad old days," nothing but slam-dunk cases got tried.

HCWC: Do you think working together on the multi-disciplinary team and through Roxanne's House has made a difference?

DETECTIVE: I'm still dealing with law enforcement officers and counties that don't have a CAC. I don't know how that's even possible. It blows my mind absolutely. The cases don't go anywhere.

HCWC: What is it about the CAC?

DETECTIVE: It's not just the CAC, it's the team. We recently had a child abduction with a sexual predator, and we did an Amber Alert, and ultimately this child was recovered in another county after a pursuit. We strongly suspected this child had been sexually abused although he never made an outcry at the time. We had a forensic interview done in the county where the child was recovered. Unfortunately, it was a very different interview than we are used to. We then requested a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) medical examination be completed and that county did not offer the service. Thus we were unable to collect possible forensic evidence. The only offense we can prove is the abduction. I know in my heart this boy is a victim but I can't prove it. This is an example of an area that doesn't have the benefit of the program we have and this guy won't get what he deserves because of it.

HCWC: How does having Roxanne's House doing the forensic interview help the case?

PROSECUTOR: From a trial perspective it makes a huge difference. Because we're able to present our evidence to a jury to say that we have a neutral agency and an experienced interviewer talk to the child. It adds more weight to the result in the end for the jurors.

HCWC: Has our investigation of cases changed in the last few years? What is working well?

DETECTIVE: Our victim is the kid with baggage, that's the discipline problem and that's the truancy problem. People have to realize they (children) are a product of their upbringing. And so it starts with education not only within the general public but it also starts with my law enforcement officers, realizing that the kid you're getting called out to as a runaway constantly, who's always talking back to mom, et cetera, now all of a sudden outcries that she's been a sexual assault victim.

PROSECUTOR: What Jeri does when she trains these officers is that she gives them an understanding of the dynamics behind some of that behavior that they wouldn't otherwise have and that comes from working with teams of people who are trained and can understand and articulate that to the investigators.

This article was excerpted from the complete interview which explores trends in child abuse prosecutions in Hay County. Read the full discussion at: www.hcwc.org.

Changed but Not Broken

THE MOTHER OF A CHILD ABUSE VICTIM RELATES HER FAMILY'S HEARTBREAKING STORY.

In December of 2007, my 12 year old daughter Kate, my husband and I moved from Austin to a smaller town in Hays County to start a new life. My husband and I had been separated and hoped to work things out so that we could be a family again.

In the spring of 2008 my heart was shattered by the deaths of two friends. Things were not working out well with the reconciliation with my husband.

One of my co-workers noticed that I was depressed and tried to

cheer me up by telling me jokes in the office when he would bring in his truck and paperwork. We became friends and when my husband and I decided that things were not going to work out, we began dating.

Bobby moved in soon after my husband moved out. Our relationship became rocky. Bobby would move out and call within a few days wanting to see me again. A few days later he would be back at the house.

Kate began to withdraw after Christmas that year. She stayed in her room more often. She began to become lost in her books and artwork. Bobby wanted to move back in before Christmas and Kate told me that she was not comfortable having him back in our house but she would not explain why.

One day in July, on our way home from the library, Kate told me that Bobby had been lifting up her shirt and touching her. I asked questions and she told me that he had not touched her any other place. She said that he had touched her when I was at the store or taking a nap when I had a headache.

When we got home, I confronted him. He never denied touching her.

“Kate’s therapist from Roxanne’s House sat with us in the courthouse while waiting for us to testify and while we testified.”

He packed his overnight bag and left. I called the police and they came to the house and filed a report. Things began to happen very fast. We were both interviewed by a detective and given the phone numbers to Victims Services and Roxanne’s House.

Kate began therapy at Roxanne’s House. She opened up more to her therapist than to me. I would talk to her therapist as well.

Bobby was arrested in October of 2009 but he was bonded out.

It seemed like the criminal court case took forever. Bobby tried to plea out in June of 2010 but the judge rejected the plea bargain. Kate’s behavior got worse. She cut her arms. She broke her favorite dolls. She turned over the coffee table in a fit of rage. I noticed that these incidents took place each time a trial was set or reset. Therapy helped her. She began to calm down. We moved and it seemed like a fresh start. We felt better in a new house.

Bobby was found guilty. After two years of heartache and depression, our battle is over. Kate’s therapist from Roxanne’s House sat with us in the courthouse while waiting for us to testify and while we testified.

We would have been lost without Roxanne’s House. Without a guiding hand, I would have not known how to find the therapy she needed at that stressful, horrible time in our lives.

Our lives have been changed but we are not broken.



Volunteer Finds Niche

HCWC IS FORTUNATE TO HAVE AN ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER LIKE NINA LINDA RAMOS, WHO HAS GROWN WITH US AND ADAPTED HER VOLUNTEER ROLES TO HER LIFESTYLE AND OUR CHANGING NEEDS.

Nina Linda Ramos first became a fully-trained Advocate-level volunteer for HCWC in 2005, and interned with our charity for a social work class the next year. She has volunteered for us ever since. Here Nina describes what draws her to donate time towards fulfilling HCWC's mission.

I'm a Master's of Social Work student, and a new mom to a beautiful 6-month baby girl. I am also a doula, and hope to provide birth services to disadvantaged women. I have been a feminist activist for as long as I can remember, and helping out at HCWC was just one way I could support the women in my community.

I've volunteered for HCWC in a

number of ways—I have answered the HELPLine, assisted at fundraisers and information distribution events, provided childcare, coordinated large group donations and am now helping out at Roxanne's House. I really liked assisting with information distribution, especially on campus. I like to get the word out and educate people about HCWC and its programs.

One of the most important things I've learned came from my time spent on the HELPLine. I learned

that listening and being present is more important than "knowing all the answers."

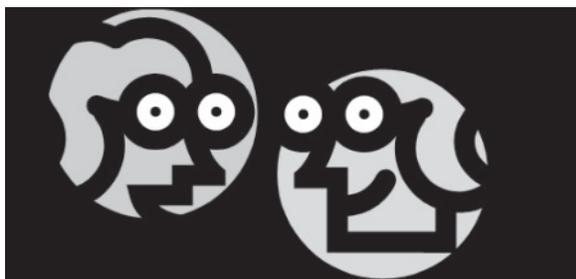
I love volunteering for HCWC and plan to continue to do so as much as I can. HCWC has been a stronghold of our community, and I hope I can add to that in my own small way.

New volunteers should expect a lot of great support and opportunities! No matter what your comfort level, there is a suitable volunteer position. There is always a need, and a way to help.



Volunteer Nina Linda Ramos.

People Are Talking...



...About "Advocates" Training

"Enjoyed the activities." "Great presentation!" "Enjoyed the speakers! Very knowledgeable of the topic." "Really enjoyed the honesty and information! This has even furthered my belief that I should be working in the field of child abuse intervention."

Volunteer Advocates provide essential support for HCWC staff and clients. To be qualified, they must first graduate from our signature Advocates training program.

Join us from September 12 - 29 for a series of ten informative, experiential, wonderful volunteer training sessions! You will hear from resident experts and guest speakers, learn important skills, participate in fun learning activities, and meet interesting people.

Topics include dynamics of sexual assault, child abuse and family violence, boundaries and values, crisis intervention techniques, local resources and how to handle HELPLine calls.

Contact Kate Shaw, Volunteer Coordinator to sign up! (512) 396-3404, ext. 222 or KShaw@hcwc.org

Donors Motivated by Compassion

MARTINDALE’S ROBERT AND COLEEN PFEIFFER HAVE BEEN GENEROUS DONORS THROUGH HCWC’S “BUILDING HOPE” CAPITAL CAMPAIGN AND ANNUAL AUCTION. THEY TELL WHY THEY SUPPORT HCWC IN THEIR OWN WORDS.

We are happy to be contributors to such a place as HCWC.

HCWC provides a safe haven for victims of domestic violence, right here in our own community. The crimes of domestic violence and abuse are usually kept behind closed doors which makes it difficult for the public to reach out and help the victims personally. We can only imagine the life of fear, shame and helplessness these victims and their children have endured. When they finally have the courage to break away, it is comforting to know that a place like HCWC exists for them.

We feel that donating funds to HCWC is the least we can do in trying to combat these horrific crimes happening in our community. It is an avenue of help to these women



Coleen and Robert Pfeiffer.

and children (and sometimes men) that are captive to these crimes. We also know that HCWC is under great leadership and we feel very comfortable in trusting that our donations are used to the greatest benefit for those who seek refuge there.

We hope our donations to HCWC help with not only providing a safe haven for victims of abuse, but also in giving these victims the confidence and skills they need to take charge of their own

lives. We pray that when they leave HCWC, they will have hope for their future and realize that they are deserving of a productive, happy life free from violence and abuse. It is also important to teach the children who have been exposed to abuse and violence that it is not a normal way to live; that families can be, and should be, loving and respectful of one another.

As Disciples of Christ through First Christian Church, we believe it is our duty to help those who cannot help themselves. We are happy to serve as a small avenue from God to HCWC. It is simply the right thing to do.



This summer Robert’s company, R.P. Constructors, Inc. donated its services clearing brush behind the McCoy Family Shelter.



Philosophy

Physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse of one human being by another is unacceptable.

The Hays-Caldwell Women's Center believes that all abuse diminishes or prohibits the full expression of life and growth that is every person's right.

Mission

The purpose of the Hays-Caldwell Women's Center is to create an environment where violence and abuse are not tolerated in the communities we serve. The Center will provide education, violence prevention services, and crisis intervention to victims of family violence, sexual assault and child abuse. We will seek the support and resources necessary to achieve this mission.

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New Digs for Kids

Roxanne's House has operated for years from a vintage San Marcos home originally created to serve 50 sexually abused children per year.

Fast forward to 2010 when the total child abuse victims served rose to 213—up by 31 percent in just one year.

Roxanne's House staff compassionately care for all who pass through its doors, but clearly an investment had to be made in ensuring the safety of the larger number of abused children.

Better and more efficient services are on the way for 2012. Thanks to HCWC's "Building Hope" capital



campaign, by next year Roxanne's House will relocate to our former shelter (see photo).

Additional funds are needed to complete this essential project. Significant naming opportunities exist for reception rooms, pediatric sexual assault nurse examiner room, play therapy rooms, interview rooms, kitchen, work room, teen room and counseling offices.

Raising the roof. This July 14 photo shows the new Roxanne's House (right) and HCWC's Center for Community Partnerships (left) under reconstruction.

To learn about naming opportunities, phone Charles Vestal, Director of Development and Community Partnerships, at (512) 396-3404, ext. 260.

How You Can Help

Donate Gifts-In-Kind

Nonperishable food • Healthy kids' snacks and drinks • Over-the-counter cold & flu medicines • Hair Conditioner • Sippy-cups • Pots and Pans • Silverware • Cooking utilities – can openers etc. • Blow Dryers • Bus vouchers • New or working alarm clocks • Small hand sanitizers • Blank composition books • Arts / Crafts Supplies • Towels • New or gently used pillows • New underwear for girls & boys (size 2T & up) • Bras • Panties • Socks, shorts, tee-shirts for all ages, genders • Baby wipes • Diapers (sizes 3-5) • Baby bath sets • Gas Station Gift Cards (e.g. HEB).

Donate Gift Cards from HEB, Target and Walmart. Help new clients shop for new clothes and essentials like gasoline.

Donations other than cash and food are accepted by appointment. Contact Ashley Rios at (512) 396-3404.



HCWC volunteers recently gathered for quarterly "continuing ed" training and fellowship. From left: HCWC Sexual Assault Counselor Whitney Bliss, Craig Handley, Elia Yeager, Rachel Tocker, Laura Baskin, HCWC Volunteer Coordinator Kate Shaw, Jackie Rinehart, Kevin Smith and Allyson Yates.

Donate Money through your workplace giving program. See if your company matches donations!

State workers: find HCWC as an approved charity in your fall SECC campaign booklets.

Write in **#85308** on your contribution form. Give securely online at www.hcwc.org.

Volunteer for office work, or if direct service is your thing, enroll in our 40-hour "Advocates" training starting in September 2011. Graduates volunteer for HELpline and HEARTeam. Interested? Phone Kate Shaw at (512) 396-3404, ext. 222.

27th Auction a Smash!

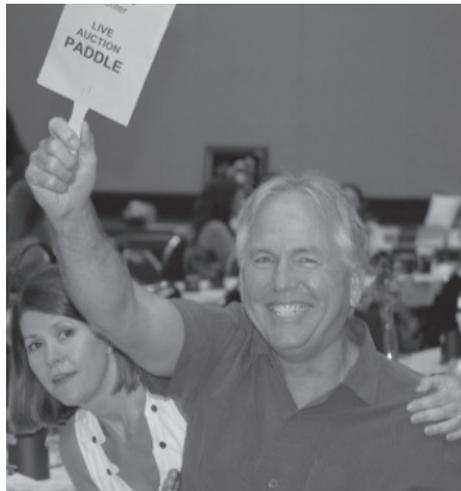
OUR ANNUAL AUCTION, HELD JUNE 4, RAISED \$64,174 FOR SERVICES TO VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT AND CHILD ABUSE IN HAYS AND CALDWELL COUNTIES. SPECIAL THANKS TO CO-CHAIRS CECELIA ADAIR AND MARSHA MOORE FOR STELLAR LEADERSHIP, AND TO ALL WHO DONATED TIME, MONEY AND AUCTION ITEMS!



Silent auction bidders included Melissa Millecam (second from left) and Dianne Pape (right).



Auctioneer Leonard Germer again donated his considerable talent to the cause.



Carolyn and Hollis Burklund were enthusiastic bidders.



Some items brought a smile.

Fine art and sports memorabilia were in abundance.



Lynne Dean returned once again to support HCWC's biggest fundraiser of the year.



Amy Lockhart (left) and Katie Schick survey the jewelry offerings.



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E-mail: info@hcwc.org



Realtor Donates Expertise

Ron Hart, owner of San Marcos' Hart Properties, is donating his firm's services to sell the charming historical commercial building currently occupied by Roxanne's House in preparation for the Children's Advocacy Center's move to HCWC's repurposed former shelter (see related story, page 5). For more information about the Roxanne's House building for sale, contact Ron at (512) 392-2100.

