



The Benefit

*Citrus County
Children's Advocacy Center*

After the initial investigation these children are also in need of therapeutic services to overcome their victimization. Jessie's Place, Citrus County Children's Advocacy Center (CCCAC) is a local, non-profit, child-friendly setting that provides a safe space for child victims of abuse, neglect, and crime to disclose their victimization and be provided needed services in one central location.

The center will bring together a multidisciplinary team led by CCCAC staff which will include local law enforcement, protective investigators, Child Protection Team interviewers and medical providers, the State Attorney's Office, victim/witness advocates, the Citrus County School Board, a Guardian ad Litem representing the child, The Centers (community mental health provider), and a therapist specializing in child abuse. The team approach allows members to combine their professional knowledge of a child's case, which increases communication and accuracy of information between agencies. It also allows for more immediate follow-up, timely and appropriate referrals to medical and mental health services, and consistent support for child victims. This local center will reduce the trauma and travel victims currently experience during investigations of child abuse in Citrus County.

The CCCAC is designed to be warm and welcoming, so that child victims of abuse and neglect have a safe haven to tell their story and begin their road to recovery. The CCCAC centers care around the child, instead of the child around the care. All necessary services are onsite, at one location, and are designed to help "each and every child who has been physically or sexually abused feel like a child again."

Interviews are held only once and are performed in an environment especially designed to be warm, inviting and child-friendly. The CCCAC implements a multi-disciplinary team approach, bringing professionals to the child, in one building, instead of sending the child to them. By doing so, children receive expedited care in one familiar location; being spared the time, trauma and inconveniences of traveling to multiple locations.

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Results of the services the CCCAC provides will include:

- Assist our partner agencies with investigative efforts, while eliminating redundant services;
- Hold agencies accountable for providing all needed services;
- Improve communication and efficiency among agencies;
- Ensure offenders are held responsible for their actions by preventing information from being lost as it passes between law enforcement, the Child Protection Team, the Department of Children and Families and the State Attorney's Office; and
- Help children transition from victim to survivor by reducing the trauma of their care experience and by proper counseling that will help return them to a healthy level of functioning.

"With Jessie's Place, we can help each child overcome their abuse with love and comfort. The healing starts here."

Sunshine Arnold, University of Florida Child Protection Team