



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Press Release

Norfolk Advocates for Children Earns National Re-accreditation

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The county's Child Advocacy Center, the Norfolk Advocates for Children (NAC), has earned re-accreditation from the National Children's Alliance, according to Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey and NAC Board President, Joel Fishman.

"Child Advocacy Centers were created to provide compassionate, effective, sensitive support to children who have been sexually and physically abused, and support their non-offending family members," District Attorney Morrissey said. "Being accredited by the National Children's Alliance is a rigorous process of making certain that we are adhering to national best practices in our service to child victims and their families," said Board President Fishman.

Earning that accreditation, Morrissey said, "means we are providing Norfolk County child victims with the best service and support possible."

Norfolk Advocates for Children, Inc. (NAC) is a public-private partnership between District Attorney Morrissey's office, the 501 (c) (3) non-profit NAC governing board, and more than 50 governmental and social service organizations – including all 27 municipal police departments in Morrissey's jurisdiction.

"This process helps us continue to grow and improve," said Board President Fishman. "It also assures the families who use the NAC to help their children, the donors who support our mission, and our partner organizations, that we are serving those children well."

The core of the Child Advocacy Center model is the interdisciplinary investigation of child abuse and sexual assaults. "Years ago, children coming forward to report an assault could be interviewed first by a detective at a police station, then by a medical professional, then by child protective services or others," said Jessica Kelly, Executive Director of the NAC.

"The goal of the multi-disciplinary approach used at the NAC is to limit the amount of times a child is interviewed," Kelly said. "A trained forensic interviewer asks questions of the child in a neutral, non-leading, developmentally appropriate, and trauma-informed manner. All of the agencies involved in protecting the child are present and obtain the information needed for their individual discipline at one time. The partners communicate directly to the interviewer through an earpiece as the interview unfolds which allows all disciplines to obtain their necessary information."

Children often find police stations, hospitals, and other institutions to be intimidating, Kelly said. Now forensic interviews are video recorded and take place in a stand-alone, child-friendly, culturally-diverse facility. The NAC opened in 2010 on Payson Road in Foxborough. There is also a medical suite where pediatric SANE (sexual assault nurse examiner) services can be provided.

"Every time a child has to tell, then retell, the story of abuse, there is the potential for additional traumatization – and a child might interpret repeated questioning as not being believed," District Attorney Morrissey said. "This allows us to collect the best evidence in the way least traumatic to the child, and then connect them with support and services – whether they decide to pursue a criminal case or not."

This reaccreditation status is effective for five years. For more information, visit www.norfolkadvocatesforchildren.com