



2019 SUMMIT TO STOP CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Summit Observations
March 15, 2019



To Stop Child Sexual Abuse, We Must Understand It and Take Action

The second annual **Summit to Stop Child Sexual Abuse** convened on Friday, March 15, 2019 to help community leaders identify tangible actions they can take to intervene and help prevent child sexual abuse.

The half-day Summit included breakout sessions and a keynote presentation from Lindsey Smith, investigative reporter at Michigan Radio/NPR. The keynote address focused on the podcast [Believed](#), which provides an in-depth report of Larry Nassar's sexual abuse of young girls, teenage and Olympic athletes—one of the largest sexual abuse cases in US history. We encourage everyone to listen to this podcast series. The Summit breakout topics included:

- How Public Policy is Addressing Child Sexual Abuse
- The Manipulation of Victims and Effects of Untreated Trauma
- Cultivating a Culture of Safety for Our Youth
- What If I Am Wrong?: Suspicion reports investigated by a multi-disciplinary team approach
- How Toxic Masculinity Contributes to Sexual Misconduct

More than 110 community leaders attended, representing a wide variety of local sectors: business, education, faith-based, foundations, government, law enforcement, legal, media, medical, non-profits, and youth serving organizations.



SAVE THE DATE

The next **Summit to Stop Child Sexual Abuse** will be held April 1, 2020



Melissa Werkman

Executive Director, Children's Advocacy Center, Kent County

“ I invite you to read and share this report with your colleagues and through your social media platforms. I hope that what you learn here will inspire changes you can make in your business, organization, church, or family, to help us as a community respond to child sexual abuse.”

Local Resource

We want to be a resource to the community, in particular to youth-serving organizations, educational institutions, and medical providers. Part of our new Strategic Plan focuses our efforts as a training resource center to share our expertise with the community through programs such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and Mandated Reporter training.

The Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) can help organizations look at policies they have in place and ways they communicate to and receive information from children.

Mandated Reporting

All Youth-Serving Organizations should understand their role and obligation to report if a child discloses sexual abuse to them. Staff and professionals working directly with children are mandated by law to report child sexual abuse and many organizations don't understand that they should train their staff to be [mandated reporters](#).

We can help educators, summer camp staff, parks and recreation staff, and medical professionals know that they are required to report. At present they don't all receive that training and don't know about this law. We have seen it with some mental health institutions too—kids who were there for counseling and the counselors did not know they needed to disclose.

I am encouraged that youth camp organizations and the Boy Scouts are willing to share their experience about mandated reporter training, and ensuring policies and procedures are in place to protect children from sexual abuse.

A Media Guide for Reporting on Sexual Abuse

A focus group was conducted among Children's Advocacy Center staff to explain the way we want the media to help report child sexual abuse appropriately. A media guide was created as a result. We are working with our media contacts to distribute these reporting guidelines to every newsroom.

Child sexual abuse is a crime. We want the media to report it as a crime. There should not be sugar coating of the language or stereotyping—especially with juvenile offenders—about what happened and blaming the victim.

We want everyone to know that incorrect reporting of child sexual abuse can have a negative impact on the victim and may prevent other victims from coming forward to report their abuse.

LOCAL FACTS

The Children's Advocacy Center receives approximately **3-4 new cases** of sexual abuse **every day**.



1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.



> 1,000

children suspected of being sexually abused are brought to the Children's Advocacy Center each year.

In Kent County,
99%
of child sexual abuse survivors **know their abuser**.



False reports of child sexual abuse are rare.

Only 4-8% of reports are fabricated.



Children who are sexually abused are at significantly greater risk for experiencing **posttraumatic stress** and other **anxiety symptoms, depression, and suicide attempts**.

Child sexual abuse is likely the **most preventable health problem** children will experience.



children's
ADVOCACY CENTER
OF KENT COUNTY

Several community leaders who attended the Summit shared their thoughts and commitment to action in this report. We are encouraged by their level of engagement to work across organizations to help us eliminate the scourge of child sexual abuse.



Carol Paine-McGovern

Executive Director, Kent School Services Network

“ We have 45 schools, 23,000 students, and lots of stories about students who are hurting.”

The Summit was a great experience for me, as well as for several of our superintendents who attended. Kent School Services Network represents nine school districts of more than 23,000 students. The CAC [Kids Have Rights](#) program is in several of our schools already, and my main takeaway from the Summit is to encourage more of our schools to reach out and become involved.

Melissa Werkman was so vulnerable in sharing the story of her personal journey. I left the Summit feeling very good about the Children’s Advocacy Center, their leadership, and where they are headed.

Action items from the education sector:

- ➔ Be mindful of child abuse concerns when writing and editing policies
- ➔ Listen to staff needs, provide additional education, and support their work with students and families



Tommy Allen

Publisher, Rapid Growth Media

“ The staff at the CAC blew me away with what they brought to the table the day of the event: actual tools, including a guide to responsible reporting on child sexual abuse.”

After attending last year, I saw there was plenty of opportunity for media to be more involved, and heard what the media might not be doing correctly. Now I can go back to the people in my media community and encourage more intentionality, so media makes the right decisions. I was impressed that the CAC staff was able to hear me about bringing in media leadership, not just entry level reporters.

The staff at the CAC blew me away with what they brought to the table the day of the event: actual tools, including a guide to responsible reporting on child sexual abuse. This gives journalists resources approved by people with such credibility. It is great to have an organization such as CAC provide something easy to use and take back to the office—like putting it on the refrigerator, in line of sight in newsrooms.

Action items from the media:

- ➔ Continue to advocate for greater understanding on how to report sexual abuse stories and ensure we are telling the correct stories
- ➔ Continue to conduct self-inventory on motivations—checking one’s self in a click-bait world



John Boeschstein

President & CEO, Custom Profile, Inc.

Incoming Chair, Board of Directors, Child Advocacy Center, Kent County

“ I am a junior varsity basketball coach and the only mandated training we receive is concussion protocol training. We should receive training to recognize the signs of a child who may be trying to report sexual abuse.”

The community support at the Summit was so evident. Many people attended and received lots of good information to take back into their own section of the community.

Little things stay with me from attending the Summit. Last year at our table, Ashley, the lead therapist at CAC, told the table full of parents and grandparents that our culture has to change about the way we set up our kids in innocent childhood playtime. For example, at the lake or swimming pools little kids are running around naked and everyone laughs at it as entertainment and take pictures. That has to change.

You would not believe the shock on the faces of the people at the table: that setting kids up for the perception that taking off their clothes is going to generate excitement. That is exactly what you don't want to do.

Action items from the business sector:

- ➔ Continue to raise money to support the work at the CAC
- ➔ Support local school districts and encourage ongoing child sexual abuse education in K-12



Dr. Sahibzada Ma Mol

Director, First Islamic Center of West Michigan

“ We will support on a faith base and humanitarian level, and whatever support the Islamic Center can provide we will do.”

The Summit was very important and useful because of the injustice happening to kids. It is a humanitarian and faith issue. It is most important for everyone to participate and look after the kids, protecting them from the heinous crime of abuse.

When I was at the Summit, my second time attending, I expressed my opinion of how shocking are these crimes being committed. It is very good to hear the ways agencies are taking measures to take care of the children.

Action items from the faith-based sector:

- ➔ Continue training and educational support of the CAC
- ➔ Mentor, read, teach, and facilitate through conferences, classes, seminars, and lunch & learns



Aaron Gach

Scout Executive, CEO, Boy Scouts of America
Michigan Crossroads Council
President Ford Field Service Council

“ I have an interest in sharing organization-to-organization what we do in Scouting with others responsible for youth protection.”

As one of our nation's largest youth services organizations, a number one priority of the Boy Scouts is protecting children from abuse. I am new to this role in Grand Rapids and this my first Summit. When I heard about this event, I jumped in.

Scouting has been my whole life—33 years since I became a scout and Eagle Scout. I have an interest in sharing organization-to-organization what we do in scouting with others responsible for youth protection.

Action items from the youth-serving sector:

- ➔ Continue education around youth protection and abuse
- ➔ Create a culture that puts the topic of child sexual abuse at the forefront



Amna Seibold

Mayor, East Grand Rapids

“ I asked for a date for my city commission to go visit the CAC for a ‘Walk in Their Shoes’ tour. If the CAC did not exist, we would have to invent it.”

On the Summit Organizing Committee we looked at which people were invited—who was there who could affect change, to help reduce child sexual abuse. This year we invited our city programs that involve children, such as parks and recreation. They are the boots on the ground.

In East Grand Rapids, we have our director of Parks and Recreation now reviewing our policies for compliance, and ensuring that the appropriate people are dedicated and being trained in [mandated reporting](#). We don't want it to just be in a book, we want it to be implemented.

Action items from those in government:

- ➔ Review policies and insist on compliance for mandated reporters
- ➔ Believe the victim
- ➔ Continue the discussion to stop child sexual abuse



Chris Becker

Kent County Prosecutor's Office

Member, Board of Directors, Children's Advocacy Center, Kent County

“ So many more people are recognizing the issue of child sexual abuse; it is changing more from the previous 20 years, which is good to see.”

There was tremendous support for the Summit for the second year in a row. So many more people are recognizing the issue of child sexual abuse; it is changing more from the previous 20 years, which is good to see.

I have noticed a definitely increased awareness about child sexual abuse in conversations at court. Even now jurors are much more engaged, willing to share their stories of abuse, even in jury selection; some have served on juries.

Action items from members of the legal sector:

- ➔ Educate at least one member of society about the work of the CAC
- ➔ Be more involved with the CAC and attend more team case meetings



Jerry O. Kooiman, MPA

Assistant Dean and Chief External Relations Officer,

Michigan State University College of Human Medicine

“ We looked at this as an opportunity to support efforts from a community perspective and find ways to combat child sexual abuse.”

We provided sponsorship to the Summit to End Child Sexual Abuse and also had a few people attend from the College of Human Medicine. The Summit has resonance with our interests in pediatrics, and the MSU pediatric residency. We want our medical students and residents to have learning experiences about the kids they treat in a physician's office—to recognize that some are dealing with these types of trauma issues.

It is really important for our students and residents to see that more closely and have a better understanding that not every one of their kids are the same—they all come with histories and potential issues of sexual abuse.

Action items from the medical field:

- ➔ Improve sexual abuse screening in our pediatric clinic
- ➔ Talk with patients and parents about body safety
- ➔ Re-evaluate sexual abuse prevention currently used in our clinic



Lt. Kristen Rogers
Grand Rapids Police Department

“ The Child Abuse Summit was great. We all benefit any time you can get all the resources and partners together in the same room to sit and talk and network.”

The Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) is a benefit to children and their families, helping with the anxiety of all involved. They continue to increase their community outreach efforts, creating awareness of rights of the child and keeping kids safe.

The Child Abuse Summit is a great reminder of why we do what we do. When we face burnout from all the cases, Summits and the people you meet refresh you to go back to your desk. I appreciated seeing the attendees by sector, so if we are involved with an agency, we at least have names we can call. We all benefit any time you can get all the resources and partners together in the same room. We all use the CAC, but we are not always in the same vicinity to sit and talk and network.

Action items from law enforcement:

- ➔ Talk with friends and family about sexual abuse
- ➔ Stop generational sexual abuse
- ➔ Educate the community



Lucy Dyer Joswick
Executive Director, Camp Blodgett

“ We are taking action from our participation in the Summit. We had an idea for the CAC ‘Kids Have Rights’ program to expand out of schools into summer camps and youth organizations.”

I represented the camp world on the Summit Planning Committee. We understand it is so important to frame body safety as a right for children—that they can challenge by choice, to keep themselves emotionally and physically safe.

As a result of our participation in the Summit, we are taking action. We had an idea for the CAC [Kids Have Rights](#) program to expand out of schools into summer camps and youth organizations. We are piloting that with CAC at Camp Blodgett, to see how it works.

It is a little untraditional—outside of school and expanding to reach kids up to age 13. We are stretching and trying, but I hope that the intent of sharing their programs is to see how to bring that to our own organization and others.

Action items from parks and recreation:

- ➔ Review current organizational policies and training
- ➔ Continue to be involved in efforts to end child sexual abuse
- ➔ Consider ways to educate parents



Michael Christy

Executive Director, Children's Advocacy Centers, Michigan

“It was incredible the organizations coming forward: all these concrete things we can do to bring child protection into our sphere of influence—in sports teams, child care organizations, the faith community, and rec leagues.”

It was pretty incredible experiencing the Summit for the first time. The thing that struck me was the number of people and the number of different sectors represented—all advocating for kids and protecting children. It's powerful to see the community come together around this issue.

Two other CAC leaders were at the Summit from other parts of the state. They were interested in how this is being done and will bring it back to their organizations, to replicate in their own communities.

Action items from CACMI:

- ➔ Coordinate with local CACs and other leaders on informational and actionable communication
- ➔ Push for legislative change that actually makes a difference

TAKE ACTION

“ We want families to know that they are welcome here—that the minute the child comes here and walks through our doors, their healing journey has begun.”

— Melissa Werkman, Executive Director, CAC Kent

Child sexual abuse is a community problem and it requires a community response.

Everyone needs to be involved—from leaders of businesses, youth serving organizations, the media, faith-based organizations, to families and parents. We want families to know that the CAC is a safe place for children and they are welcome here. The minute the child walks through our doors, their healing journey has begun—they have come to a place of love and support.

We encourage you to identify tangible actions you can take to intervene and help prevent child sexual abuse.

COMMITMENT FORM

As a leader in this community, I commit to helping eradicate child sexual abuse by moving forward the following action item(s):

What resources do I need to work toward these action items?

What timeline would I like to set for achieving these action items?

LINKS:

[Online Reporting for Mandated Reporters](#)

[Kids Have Rights](#)

[Walk in Their Shoes](#)

[Believed](#)—a podcast by Michigan Radio and distributed by NPR, covering the Larry Nassar child abuse story

DOWNLOADS:

Best Practices for Youth Serving Organizations

A Media Guide for Reporting on Sexual Abuse



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cac-kent.org

Follow us for news,
advice and resources.

