



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **#ThemToo Campaign Launches for National Child Abuse Prevention Month**

The #MeToo movement has dominated both national news media and social media this year with shocking statistics about the level of sexual misconduct and abuse in America. According to a recent ABC News-Washington Post poll, 54% of American women have experienced unwanted and inappropriate sexual advances at some point in their lives. 33 million U.S. women have been sexually harassed. Nearly all women—95%—report that their abusers go unpunished.

Yet, according to Rebecca Simons, Executive Director of the Valley Children's Advocacy Center in Staunton, there is another, equally alarming, abuse story that is going largely unreported in the media and should demand equal attention and concern: the sexual and physical abuse of children in our society. "Every year in the U.S. more than 3.6 million referrals are made to child protection agencies involving more than 6.6 million children" Rebecca explains. "A report of child abuse is made every ten seconds in the United States and many of these reports are sexual in nature. Child sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem children face with the most serious array of consequences." Simmons notes, "About one in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday and that's an unacceptable statistic. The problem is that we, as a society, don't feel comfortable discussing the problem and that only perpetuates the secrecy involved around child sexual abuse." Simmons says, "Only about 38% of child victims disclose their victimization and some never disclose. We must start initiating the dialogue."

However, Simmons notes, it's not all bad news. "Child sexual abuse is largely preventable if we're willing to acknowledge it, educate ourselves about it, and start to feel comfortable talking with our kids about how to avoid victimization."

To help combat this epidemic, raise awareness, and finance local child-abuse prevention efforts, the Valley Children's Advocacy Center is launching a #ThemToo campaign in April to coordinate with National Child Abuse Prevention Month. "We're holding multiple special events in April to focus attention on this under-reported issue," Rebecca announced. We're reaching out in the community with window flyers and restaurant table cards, holding our annual Gala on April 28<sup>th</sup> at Red August Farm in Augusta County, hosting a fundraising 'bingo night' at Bedlum Brewery on Monday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, and planning other, smaller, events which will be announced on our Facebook page ([facebook.com/ValleyCAC](https://facebook.com/ValleyCAC)).

The Shenandoah Valley is not immune to the problem of child abuse and neglect. "We never discuss individual cases to ensure the privacy and protection of the children and families with whom we work, but the need for awareness and support in our area is overwhelming," Rebecca explains. "Last year we assisted and supported 254 children right here in our own community."

The Valley Children's Advocacy Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that follows the National Child Advocacy Center model. As a nationally-accredited child advocacy center, the agency promotes a coordinated response between law enforcement, prosecutors, victims, witnesses, Child Protective Service workers, and medical and mental health professionals to ensure that needs of children who are victims are met. In the neutral setting of the Center, team members can collaborate on strategies that will aid investigators and prosecutors without causing further stress, harm, or trauma to the victim. This innovative, multidisciplinary approach significantly increases the likelihood of a successful outcome in court and long-term healing for the child.

For more information on the #ThemToo campaign or the Valley Children's Advocacy Center, contact: Rebecca Simons, Executive Director, at 540-213-0592. To report child abuse, contact the Virginia Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-552-7096.