



### **Valley Children's Advocacy Center Opens New Expanded Center**

The Valley Children's Advocacy Center has moved to a new and significantly improved location at 1105 Greenville Ave, Staunton. The new space will increase the Center's ability to meet the needs of children who are victims of abuse by improving its capacity to coordinate between law enforcement, prosecutors, Victim/Witness Program staff, Child Protective Service workers, and health professionals.

"The larger space provides us with additional counseling rooms, which has allowed us to tailor different spaces to the needs of different clients," Executive Director, Rebecca Simmons, explains. "We now have rooms specifically tailored to the needs of young children, older youth; and we have counseling rooms specifically designed for adult caregivers. These rooms are equipped with age-appropriate furniture and allow for increased privacy."

The new Center location also has space dedicated to support-agency coordination, conference meetings, staff support, and a community training room.

In the Center's previous location, offices often had to double as waiting rooms and therapy rooms, and clients often had to be shuffled between rooms to ensure their privacy when visitors, other clients, or other support agencies needed to meet with staff or clients.

#### **New Center Made Possible Through Community Support**

"We could not have made this move without a significant outpouring of support from the community," explains Ms. Simmons. "Our landlord, David Trainium, has been accommodating in every way imaginable. Home Depot in Waynesboro donated doors, supplies, and volunteers. Fraternal Order of Eagles State President, Jerome Lane, who is also a member of our local Eagles, gathered community resources in order to provide a large donation. Additionally, Dominion Power honored Justin Huggard with a donation to support child victims of abuse. Staunton City Sheriff, Matt Robertson, constructed new doorways and installed new doors throughout the building. And, we have had many individual volunteer members of our Board of Directors and the community help us with moving, building improvements, and general maintenance."

The Valley Children's Advocacy Center has listed all the volunteers that have assisted them so far on its Facebook page ([facebook.com/ValleyCAC](https://facebook.com/ValleyCAC)). "We'll keep adding to the list as more people turn out to help us finalize the building improvements," Rebecca adds. Volunteer opportunities are also listed on Facebook.

Simmons concludes, "Effectively responding to child abuse is truly a community wide responsibility. This building serves as a symbol of the community's commitment to our response to children who have been victimized and we should take pride in that!"

#### **Child Abuse a National and Local Crisis**

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. A report of child abuse is made every ten seconds in the United States. Children in the first year of their life had the highest rate of victimization—24.2 per 1,000 children of the same age. Of the children who experienced maltreatment or abuse, three-quarters



suffered neglect; 17.2% suffered physical abuse; and 8.4% suffered sexual abuse. Some suffer more than one form of maltreatment.

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 294 children from our 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 Valley Children’s Advocacy Center, contact Rebecca Simmons, Executive Director, at 540-213-0592.

To report child abuse, contact the Virginia Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-552-7096.