



UPMC Child Advocacy Center of Central PA

Offering hope to children and caregivers

*Honoring 30 years of
advocating for children*

2023 Annual Report

UPMC
LIFE CHANGING MEDICINE



Dear Friends,

2023 was a busy and exciting year for the Child Advocacy Center of Central PA (CAC). Our focus continues to be on supporting children and families by ensuring our services are culturally appropriate and trauma informed.

To achieve this goal, we are developing virtual tours of each of our offices to reduce a child's anticipatory anxiety before an appointment. These videos will be narrated with a child's voice using artificial intelligence. Videos will be shared with families and caregivers.

In addition, we have hired another therapist and modified other staff positions to increase our capacity to provide trauma therapy. We now have two full-time and three part-time behavioral health therapists who are trained in multiple therapeutic modalities, including counseling children under twelve who exhibit sexually problematic behaviors.

I am happy to share that Shannon Cossaboom was promoted to manager and Clara Roberti was promoted to lead forensic interviewer. I'd also like to congratulate Drew Krantz, behavioral health supervisor, on achieving his Doctorate in Behavioral Health Leadership in 2023.

The CAC received a grant through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) to help us achieve accreditation of the satellite office in Cumberland County. We are also working with our Lebanon County team to develop a timeline for accreditation in that county.

In 2024, the CAC will implement a strategic plan to prepare for our 2026 re-accreditation and to ensure we are meeting the needs of children, families, and our multidisciplinary team partners.

Finally, I would like to recognize our CAC supporters including the Allegrini Family, who hosts the annual Joe Allegrini memorial golf tournament to benefit the CAC, and Rene Ryan for organizing the For the Love of Max Run. Through their generosity, we can provide therapy without charging a co-pay, purchase vital equipment for our centers, and ensure our print materials are translated into Spanish, Nepali, and other languages spoken by families who come to our center. The support from donors like The Allegrini Family and Rene Ryan, is crucial for ensuring that all children can access the help they need without undue hardship to the family.

Thank you,

Lynn Carson

Lynn Carson

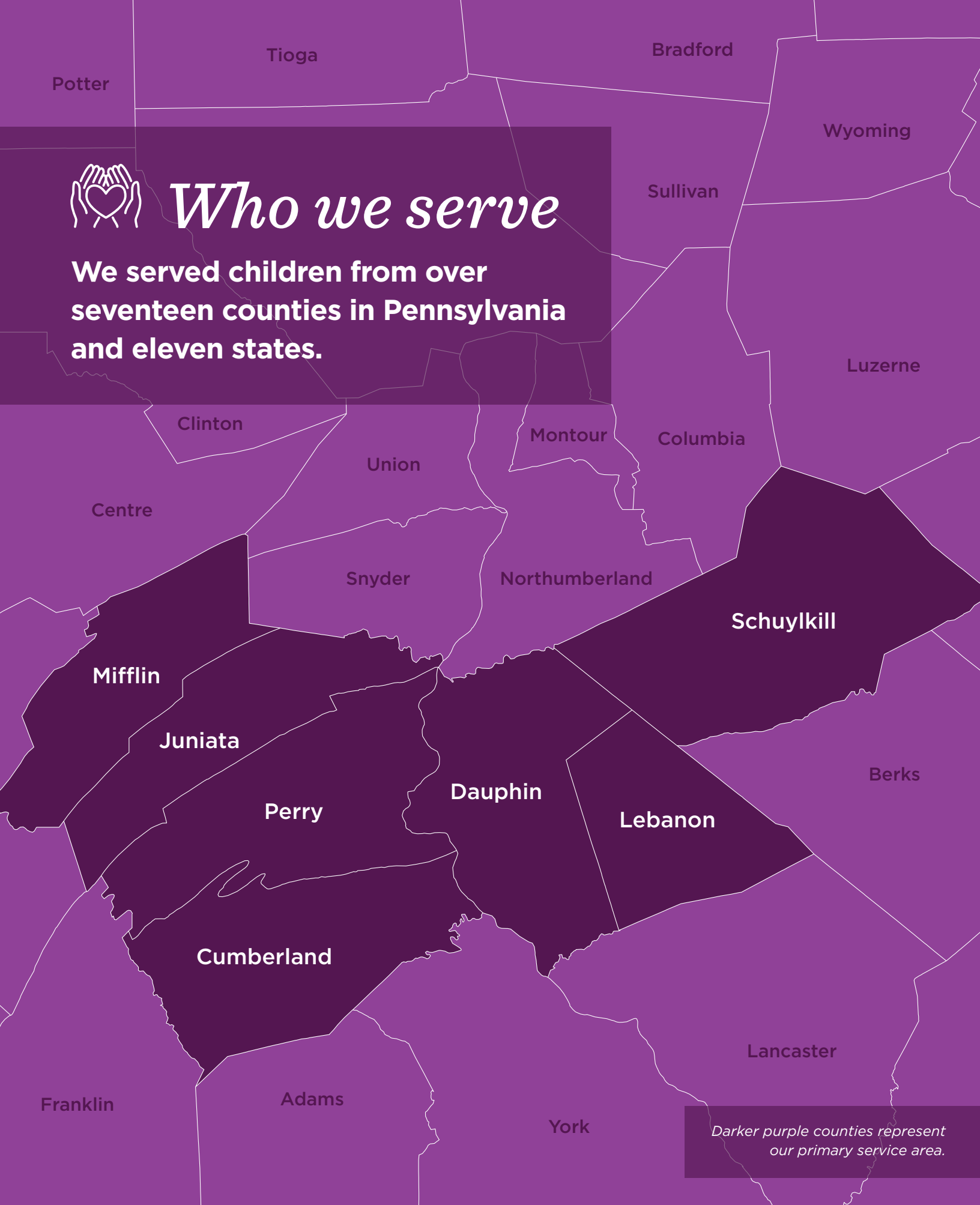
Director of Operations





Who we serve

We served children from over seventeen counties in Pennsylvania and eleven states.



Darker purple counties represent our primary service area.



1,013 number of children served

1,013 families were provided with advocacy services

801 or **79%** children received medical examinations

1,200 therapy sessions provided to children at the CAC



Meeting the needs of children and families.

We strive to meet the diverse needs of children and families through regular training and professional development, assessing client feedback, collaborating with community partners, including cultural competency training as part of our annual goals, and adhering to evidence-based practices.



Forensic Interview Team:

Megan Briggs and Cara Daly have been promoted to senior forensic interviewers.

They assist in orienting new forensic interviewers and ensure consistency and quality across the team. The addition of Clara Roberti, who is fluent in Spanish, is a significant step towards improving accessibility and communication with children who are more comfortable speaking Spanish. Direct communication during the forensic interview, without the use of an interpreter can also enhance the child's comfort and trust during the interview process.

Sarah Funck and Amber Bybee's leadership in supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives demonstrate the team's commitment to excellence and inclusivity. And Jo Ellen Bowman, per diem forensic interviewer, provides valuable support during our busy periods.



Mental Health Team:

The mental health team has been busy with both staffing changes and enhancements to their services. Over the year, we welcomed Kate Herr, Nick McConnell, and Amy Bitner as mental health coordinators who strengthened the team and brought fresh perspectives and ideas.

Nicole Ruffin, therapist, expanded the team's capacity to provide therapy services while Trish McHenry and Rhianna Musser transitioned to mental health therapist positions and now split their time between supporting families during an appointment and providing trauma-based therapy. I would also like to recognize Darby Weist for achieving her license as a professional counselor. And four of our staff members completed training on Phase Based Treatment (PBT) for problematic sexual behaviors to enhance the team's expertise.

With five providers now offering evidence-based trauma therapy, the team is well-equipped to address the complex needs of children and families who have experienced trauma. This emphasis on evidence-based practices ensures that clients receive effective interventions tailored to their specific needs.

The team is also partnering with schools to implement the HEART Program. HEART is a proactive step towards enhancing trauma-informed care within the school setting, ensuring that children receive appropriate support and understanding from school personnel following their visit to the CAC. This program facilitates communication between the CAC staff and school personnel (with the caregiver's approval) to inform the school counselor when a child received services at the CAC. This way, the counselor is better prepared to support the child upon their return to school.

Implementing the Social Needs Questionnaire (SNQ) to assess additional resources needed by families reflects a holistic approach to addressing the needs of clients beyond the immediate trauma-related concerns, potentially linking them with vital community resources and support services.

Our grant through the National Children's Alliance, supports a part-time child life specialist, is entering its third year. Liz Anderson, child life specialist, was instrumental in developing strategies to reduce anxiety children often feel at the beginning of an appointment. Liz has now transitioned back to inpatient care, and Tara Mullen is stepping into the child life specialist role.



Support Staff:

Promoting Rachel Holly to senior intake coordinator, adding Michelle Goodrich to the intake team and Angela Taylor-Cook as the patient services representative are key steps in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the center's operations.

Michelle Goodrich's role will contribute to streamlining the process of scheduling patients and ensuring they receive the support needed from the beginning. Angela Taylor-Cook's role as the patient services representative, highlights the importance of providing a positive and welcoming experience for patients from their initial contact with the center. Her focus on creating a warm and supportive environment can set the tone for the entire client's experience and help ease any anxiety or apprehension they may have about seeking services.

Together, Rachel, Michelle and Angela play crucial roles in ensuring that patients feel supported, respected, and well-cared for throughout their interactions with the center. Their contributions not only enhance the operational efficiency of the center but also contribute to its overall mission of providing compassionate and effective care to those in need.

Wanda Walmer, senior price estimate analyst, continues to be essential to the center's operations. Her expertise in billing and understanding of the intricacies of victims' compensation, insurance, and fee-for-service models ensure the center's financial sustainability.

Medical Team:



We are extremely excited to welcome **Dr. Sarah Sotelo**, child abuse pediatrician, to the CAC team. Originally from Southern California, Dr. Sotelo graduated from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. She was an outpatient general pediatrician before starting a fellowship in Child Abuse Pediatrics at Penn State Hershey. The CAC staff are well-acquainted with Dr. Sotelo as she completed part of her fellowship requirements at the advocacy center. Dr. Sotelo is looking forward to starting as the Medical Director at the UPMC Child Advocacy Center this fall.

The promotions of Jennifer Trygar and Mary Twomey to senior CRNPs reflect their dedication and expertise in the field. Their elevated roles within the team indicate a recognition of their contributions and a desire to empower them to take on greater responsibilities. We also welcomed Nakia Williams, our newest CRNP, who continues to grow in her expertise in diagnosing child abuse.

From our medical providers to all of our team members, together, we continue to provide high-quality medical care and support to children and families affected by abuse and maltreatment. The medical team's combined skills and passion for their work positively impact the community we serve.



Taking things in stride



In 2022 we opened our satellite office in Carlisle and within 6 weeks had to close it due to a ruptured water pipe. Thanks to UPMC's support, repairs were made quickly and we re-opened in early 2023.



The New Post-COVID Normal

The CAC staff maintained a positive attitude as we dealt with the multiple challenges during the COVID Pandemic. While there is a natural to desire to return to a "pre-covid" way of operating, we recognize the need to function in a new normal. We've identified several areas that seemed especially impacted through COVID and are focusing our efforts to address them.

The first is to strengthen multidisciplinary team relationships. Although the CAC remained open during COVID, our case reviews and advisory board meetings were held virtually, which limited the networking opportunities so vital to the success of a multi-disciplinary team approach to child abuse investigations.

The second is providing education to staff and the multidisciplinary teams so they can better support children and families as we see increasingly complex cases. Post COVID we are seeing families who are in unstable living conditions, with food insecurity, and ever-changing family dynamics. Training on these dynamics is vital to providing the best care for kids and families.

The third is the exponential growth of mental health needs of children since COVID. According to Dr. Sarah Hall, Associate Professor at Penn State University, the disruption in routines, social disconnection, increased stress in parents, messages about danger and threats, and loss and grief all contribute to a rise in mental health symptoms among children.

The CAC is committed to:

- Be more intentional in engaging our multi-disciplinary team members.
- Connect families to services and offering a "warm hand-off" to those services.
- Provide education to staff and teams so they can recognize and respond to abuse earlier.
- Modify our mental health staff roles to increase the number of appointments we can provide per week.

Celebrating Our Multi-Disciplinary Team

We re-established our annual multi-disciplinary team recognition event at the Penn Harris Hotel in Camp Hill. Jeff Corcoran received the **Joe Allegrini Children's Hero Award** which was an especially touching tribute given his connection to Joe Allegrini through their shared work. It was heartwarming to recognize Jeff for his dedication and contribution to the center's mission.

The gesture of "caping" staff members to recognize them as heroes in their daily work further emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the efforts and impact of everyone involved in supporting children and families at the center.

Overall, the event was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the achievements and commitment of those who advocate for children.



Shine Walk

In September, staff participated in the Shine Walk to bring attention to child sexual abuse. This annual one mile walk begins on Harrisburg City Island and ends at the Capitol.





Community Support

Community Support is Vital to the CAC's sustainability.



We appreciate René Ryan's ongoing dedication to sponsoring the "For the Love of Max" run, especially given its significance in raising awareness about the impact of abuse on children. This Super Bowl Sunday tradition demonstrates a collective commitment to supporting children affected by abuse. Events like these not only promote physical health and wellness but also foster a sense of community and solidarity in tackling important social issues. Overall, "For the Love of Max" serves as a powerful platform for raising awareness, fostering community engagement, and advocating for the safety and protection of children.



The Joe Allegrini Children's Hero Fund's annual golf tournament is a remarkable effort to support the CAC and the vital services it provides. Their fundraising success, amassing over \$400,000 since the tournament's inception, is truly commendable. This substantial sum has made a

significant impact, enabling the CAC to purchase specialized recording and medical equipment, and covering the expenses of forensic interviews and therapy services that may not be covered by other sources. We are profoundly grateful to the Allegrini family for their continued support.



I want to give a special shout out to Duck Donuts for their continued support through monetary and donut donations. They are truly one of the unsung heroes.

It is truly heartwarming to see such a strong sense of community support and generosity. The acknowledgment of pledges made during The United Way Campaign, as well as the donations from Lebanon Valley College and the gifts of care products, underscores the importance of collective efforts in making a positive difference. The support from the community and UPMC employees is invaluable and appreciated, and it plays a significant role in helping those in need and fostering a caring environment.



A \$24 billion health care provider and insurer, Pittsburgh-based UPMC is inventing new models of patient-centered, cost-effective, accountable care. The largest nongovernmental employer in Pennsylvania, UPMC integrates 92,000 employees, 40 hospitals, 800 doctors' offices and outpatient sites, and a 4.1 million-member Insurance Services Division, the largest medical insurer in western Pennsylvania. In the most recent fiscal year, UPMC contributed \$1.7 billion in benefits to its communities, including more care to the region's most vulnerable citizens than any other health care institution, and paid more than \$900 million in federal, state, and local taxes. Working in close collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences, UPMC shares its clinical, managerial, and technological skills worldwide through its innovation and commercialization arm, UPMC Enterprises, and through UPMC International. U.S. News consistently ranks UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside among the nation's best hospitals in many specialties and ranks UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh on its Honor Roll of America's Best Children's Hospitals. For more information, go to UPMC.com.