



Merrimack County

Advocacy Center

August 2, 2016

Allenstown Board of Selectmen
16 School Street
Allenstown, NH 03275

Dear Board Members:

We are contacting the Town of Allenstown to request additional participation directly from those towns who are currently utilizing the services of the Merrimack County Advocacy Center (MCAC). The MCAC is requesting funds from your town now because there has been an increase in cases and dynamics within and around those existing cases generating a need for increased staff and resources. Technology, human trafficking and the drug epidemic are making the cases referred more difficult to investigate, creating a greater difficulty to build trust with the victims in an initial interview and the ongoing need for support is more intensive.

The purpose of this letter is to request your community's consideration of our agency to become a line item in your town budget in the amount of 2000.

The Merrimack County Advocacy Center (MCAC) has partnered effectively with the Allenstown Police Department, the Merrimack County Attorney's Office and the Division for Children Youth and Families to serve victims of crime – child sexual abuse and sexual assault reports – living in the Town of Andover. During the past calendar year (2015), the MCAC served **11 victims** and their families living in the town of Allenstown. In 2014, **10 victims** and their families were served and to date in 2016, **6 victims** and their families have been served. A nationwide study entitled *The Economic Impact of Child Maltreatment* found that communities using child advocacy center service models result in savings of an average of \$1,300 per case.

Imagine having been abused at 9 years of age (***the average age of a child seen at the MCAC***) and having to tell your story 7 – 10 different times, to 7 – 10 different adult professionals, many without training or an understanding of how to talk to children. It truly is unimaginable! This is what the MCAC *prevents* by providing a trained forensic interviewer to conduct a *minimal number of* interviews of a victim, and supporting that victim and their non-offending family members throughout the entire investigatory process.

The MCAC works with the above mentioned team members and our member communities on cases in Merrimack County ranging in ages from 3 to 17, who are reporting child sexual abuse, felony level physical abuse, or who are witnesses to violent crimes such as homicide or domestic violence and adults who are reporting sexual abuse – current assaults or abuse from childhood. To date, more than **85%** of the victims interviewed at the MCAC have been victims of sexual abuse. In addition, the MCAC provides support to the non-offending caregivers and empowers them to protect and support their children during the criminal justice process and on their journey to healing.

The MCCAC first opened its doors in Concord in December 2009 giving families in Merrimack County access to these services. The MCAC is based on a nationally recognized model and is a pending accreditation with the National Children's Alliance. Our current operation is funded thru the Merrimack County Board of Commissioners. However, we are in need of additional support and funding to handle the immense growth in these types of cases that we are seeing.

In a traditional sexual abuse investigation utilizing non-CAC methodology, a victim would be subject to eight or more interviews in a variety of locations and with a variety of professionals. This scenario recreates trauma for the victim every time they are urged to tell their story, increases their stress level, and results in inconsistent stories over time – not due to lying, instead due to lack of training by the professionals asking the questions. In addition, non-offending caregivers were forced to navigate the multiple systems alone, often not knowing how to support or protect their child.

The MCAC facilitates a multidisciplinary approach to sexual abuse investigations. The professionals responsible for the investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse cases work together to support the victim and seek justice from the offender. When an allegation of sexual abuse or felony level physical abuse is reported to the police or the Division for Children Youth and Families (DCYF) a referral is made directly to MCAC. The multidisciplinary team is quickly activated and assembles at the MCAC office. The multidisciplinary team includes law enforcement, forensic interviewers from the MCAC, DCYF, a prosecutor, and a victim advocate from the Crisis Center of Central NH.

The National Children's Alliance reports that in municipalities where a Child Advocacy Center advocacy is utilized there is a 40% increase in successful prosecution of these cases, more support for families and less trauma to child victims.

Thank you for any consideration of our request. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you would like to learn more about the Merrimack County Advocacy Center we are available and I am very interested in making a formal presentation to your board and community members or giving your members a tour of our center.

Sincerely,


Bethany Cottrell
Executive Director

cc: Paul Paquette, Chief of Police

*Thank you for
your support!*