



"Dedicated to children and those who serve them"

Steven Wayne Dolliver, Editor



Child Chat is a quarterly newsletter of Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center designed to acquaint the Lake and Sumter County communities with our professional staff and their trauma-focused services to children, as well as to highlight topical children's issues.

Changing of the Guard



Note from the Editor: On behalf of Center management, direct services staff, administrative support staff, as well as our clients, I wish to express our profound appreciation to **Meredith Kirste** for her many contributions as Board President. Meredith served us dutifully, guiding our fortunes through the turbulent period that shall forever be distinguished by the scourge of COVID-19. Happily, she shall continue her participation with our Board and offer her astute ideas for the betterment of our Center. As she relinquishes her role as President, it is my pleasure to introduce Meredith's successor, **John Rohan**. John is a long-time member of the Board who promises to sustain its sound leadership. He has kindly consented to the following "Q & A" session. Please join me in getting to know John Rohan.

Q1. Hi, John. Thanks so much for taking the time to sit with me and answer some questions. I know that you have served on the Center Board for some time now. When did you commence your service on the Board, and what prompted you to become involved with the CAC in the first place?

"Time flies but I believe around 2010. President Pete Wahl and I worked together, he was the spark that I needed to get involved. Pete is all about service above self. I love being part of the CAC team."

Q2. Obviously, the Center's core mission embraces quality services to children to facilitate their recovery from the traumatic effects of abuse. Therefore, I would guess that a prerequisite for becoming a Board member is a passion for children and children's services. Would you speak to your passion for children on a personal level and how that translates into your responsibilities as a Board member?

"As a child growing up in a family of seven and a widowed mother, my mom's care and love for me and my sibs carried over in my love for my two children and those I am able to assist."

Q3. I realize that you have served as President of the Center Board previously. When did you previously serve in that role? As you look back, what were some of the

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From the Editor

An American Tragedy



An iconic image from Sandy Hook

December 14, 2012 was just another day in a seemingly endless string of workdays that would soon culminate in a most welcome Christmas break. It would be a brief hiatus of but four days, but in the spirit of the season it would be the revitalizing communion of family and friends that I so desperately needed. And I was invigorated with the looming prospect of time off from work. As I drove home that early Friday evening, I hummed along to an incessant stream of Christmas carols pouring forth from the radio. I think I was even singing along to some in my tone-deaf tenor. I am sure that "Silent Night", "O Come All Ye Faithful", and "Joy to the World" had never received such shabby treatment. Finally, tiring of my cacophonous strains, I tuned to NPR to get a bearing on the day's events. As with all workdays, I was oblivious to the affairs of the outside world. So, I was playing my usual game of "catch-up" with real life. Thus, I was totally unprepared for the lurid account of a mass school shooting that very morning in a small town in Connecticut. I had never heard of **Newtown**, though I was born and raised in coastal Maine and knew my fair share of New England communities. The reporter enunciated the name "**Sandy Hook Elementary School**" and insinuated the deaths of many young children there (Later, I learned to my dismay that they were all first graders.). I was flummoxed at the thought, as I reflexively steered my Jeep to the shoulder of the road. I tasted salty tears that spilled unbidden from my eyes. I was not certain if they were tears of hurt or anger. Perhaps they were a toxic combination of both. I bitterly contemplated children's lives cut down before their blossoming. For one who had spent his entire professional life in the service of children, I felt eviscerated by the tragic turn of events that would live in infamy for the Newtown survivors and, I suspect, for all Americans.

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Child Quote: "Children become what they are told they are."

- Dorothy DeLay, American violin instructor

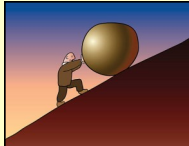


Changing of the Guard (from p. 1)

greatest challenges confronting the Center in those years, and how was the Center able to meet those challenges?

“I was the President in 2012/2013. I try to look at challenges as opportunities. Back then we were trying to expand the current office spaces for staff, improve the technology, and move Bids4Kids, our annual fundraiser, from an outside venue to an inside venue. All have proven to be beneficial in expanding staff’s ability to better serve the needs of the children.”

On meeting challenges: “I try to look at challenges as opportunities.”



Q4. Let’s talk about COVID-19 for a moment. In your estimation, what was its greatest impact on the Center, and what, in your opinion, does the Board need to do to help the Center “re-calibrate” in its aftermath?

“Everyone and every aspect of life was impacted. We had to learn, educate, change and improvise for the safety and well-being of staff, children and others to reduce outbreaks and still offer services. A trying time for all involved. The storm has been weathered. Staff did a Herculean job under the circumstances. A lot of lessons learned and even some positive changes occurred. I believe the Board should work with staff to ensure a written best practice, if not already created, to manage such circumstances if they warrant in the future.”



On Covid-19: “We had to learn, educate, change, and improvise for the safety [of all]...and still offer services.”

Q5. It is conventional protocol in most organizations to conduct a periodic SWOT analysis to ascertain institutional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. In fact, our Center did so in 2020 in preparation for its 2021-25 Strategic Plan. Would you kindly give us your personal SWOT analysis of the Center by listing three (3) items for each of the 4 SWOT categories – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats?

Strengths:

1. We are an accredited CAC agency.
2. Dedicated and professional licensed staff
3. Fulfilled audit compliance



Weaknesses:

1. Recruitment and retaining of quality employees
2. Improving technology opportunities
3. Serving the children in quality environment



Opportunities:

1. Growing and adding new board members
2. Improving communication and marketing
3. Reducing child abuse



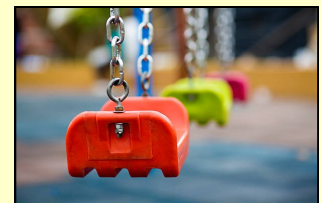
Threats

1. Changes in legislation
2. Changes in state funding and grants
3. Not having enough space for services



In the end the bell tolled twenty-eight times in Newtown. We lost twenty children, six school staff, the shooter Adam Lanza (to a self-inflicted fatal gunshot), and the shooter’s mother, Nancy Lanza. Gradually, the shooter’s profile emerged. It painted the sad portrait of a quiet, socially awkward 20-year old whom previous classmates described as “deeply troubled.” We know that he had been diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, a condition which compelled a crippling alienation from others. We know that his weapon of choice on his murderous mission was a Bushmaster Model XM15-E2S, a semi-automatic rifle renowned for its devastating killing potential. We know that Nancy, an avid gun enthusiast herself, had instructed her son assiduously in weapons safety and frequently taken him to the local gun range for innocuous target practice. She could not have known that those innocent shooting sessions were a prelude to the dark event that transpired at Sandy Hook and that the cold day in December would be her last.

Amazingly, nearly a decade has passed since Sandy Hook. And, as I write this piece, we are a full season and more removed from another tragic mass school shooting – this one in Uvalde, Texas. A few short months ago, Uvalde was a mere dot on the map – a small tumbleweed town of about 16,000 residents nestled in the Texas hill country just west of San Antonio. Probably few outside of Texas would have even been aware of its existence - except perhaps for inveterate devotees of actor Matthew McConaughey. He claims Uvalde as his birthplace. And it likely would have remained that way if not for an angry eighteen-year-old named Salvador Ramos who, bent on murder and mayhem, stormed the gates of Robb Elementary School on a late May day and left nineteen children and two teachers dead in his wake. We now know that the tragedy there represents the third deadliest school shooting in American history, trailing only Virginia Tech (2007) and Sandy Hook for that dubious distinction. Obviously, however, it isn’t about the number of lives lost, devastating as that figure may be. Rather, it is about the incalculable emotional toll exacted on the survivors – and, of course, the abomination of young lives denied the opportunity to achieve the full measure of their potential. It is about the empty chairs at the dinner table and the unoccupied desks at the schools. It is about the deafening silence on the playgrounds, where once children squealed and laughed and exalted. It is about the bedrooms that have been declared sacrosanct and inviolable, their doors forever closed and their



contents undisturbed.

Uvalde struggles beneath the weight of an unfathomable burden. Littleton, Colorado. Newtown, Connecticut. Parkland, Florida. They bear that weight with you. And they feel your pain, Uvalde. They share your suffering. So many of their residents understand how, just as your children’s lives were so tragically stilled, your own lives were irrevocably suspended. Still, there are a plethora of other towns scattered across the American landscape whose residents have similarly suffered. Large towns, small towns, and

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Changing of the Guard (from p. 2)

Q6. As you assume your new role as Board President, I am sure that you have already started thinking about priorities for the Center moving forward. In your opinion, what are the top three (3) goals for the Center in your first year, and how will you and fellow Board members assist the Executive Director and her Center Team to accomplish those goals?

1. Listen and gain understanding of the immediate needs of the CAC and develop a vision to better serve our children
2. Gather input to review one-year, three-year and five-year goals and objectives for the CAC
3. Learn and understand the inner workings of the CAC

Q7. The Center has recently hosted successful site reviews by two of our primary regulatory stakeholders: National Children’s Alliance (NCA) and the Department of Health (DOH). For all of their complimentary remarks about our Center, reviewers from both groups noted our evident crowded conditions. I know there have been discussions over the past several years among Board members about constructing a second building of approximate size to our current facility. Can you provide any insight on plans to expand the Center?

“I believe it is a dream of ours that will one day come to fruition. It needs to be sustainable and perpetual so that we can provide years of service and support.”

Q8. I know that in some organizations, particularly large organizations, staff members often feel disconnected from the Board that is so instrumental in guiding their organization’s fortunes. Since the Center is relatively modest in size, it would seem especially important to promote and facilitate a feeling of “connectedness.” What actions will you take as Board President to enhance cohesion between the Board and Center staff?

“We will ask input from staff and board members how and where we can improve on our communication, partnership and connectivity. We all have the same goal to serve children in need.”

Q9. Our Child Chat newsletter is distributed to Center staff, fellow Board members, Multi-Disciplinary Team members (i.e., law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, medical services, mental health services, victim advocacy services, etc.), and select community partners. As you assume leadership of the Board, is there a message you would like to send to our newsletter recipients?

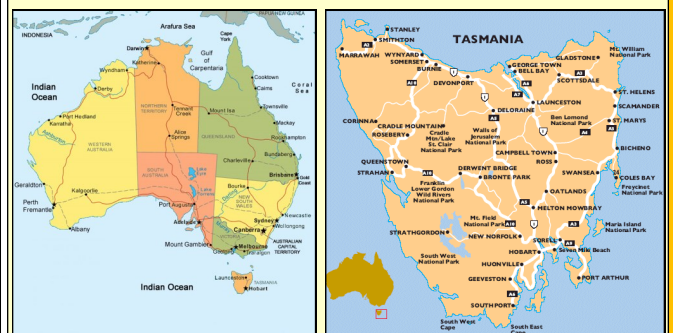
“Thank you for being a part of our team. We look forward to your continued support, sharing our story and helping us anyway you can to end child abuse and help those who need vital services. While we may not know the children they are helping, the children will know they are not alone and there is hope. And with hope comes newness for a better life, which we are dedicated to helping provide.”

In-between” towns. There are too many to name. And the truth is you probably have not even heard of them in the context of school shootings. After all, it would seem that we do not hear about the school shootings in these “other towns” unless the carnage is sufficient to warrant media attention. But I ask you if even one school shooting resulting in one child’s death is simply one too many?

Sadly, the phenomenon of school shootings has been described as a “uniquely American” event. Though this is not altogether supported by the data, they do suggest that the United States was home to 57 times as many school shooting events as all other nations combined for the past two decades. While the cross-cultural statistics are disturbing, the trending in America from 2000 to the present is equally so. For the decade 2000-09 there were 68 school shooting events in the U.S. The number climbed to 231 such events from 2010-19, a 240% increase. And it appears that the upward trajectory shall continue in the present decade. There have been 84 school shootings from January 1, 2020 through September 30, 2022. At that rate we can project approximately 305 school shooting incidents in our country by the close of 2029. This would represent another 32% increase from the 2010-19 numbers.

So, is there a way out of this insidious school shooting malaise for America? Well, consider the heartening gun control tale of Australia, a nation which once reeled from a horrific mass shooting and heroically rose above it. On April 28, 1996 Martin Bryant, an intellectually disabled and emotionally challenged 28-year-old, peppered the Southeast Tasmania tourist site of Port Arthur with semi-automatic rifle fire, killing thirty-five people and wounding another twenty-three. The “Port Arthur Massacre”, the most heinous mass killing in modern Australian history, was a game changer in the “land down under.” It sentenced Mr. Bryant to thirty-five consecutive life sentences, a measure designed as an emphatic deterrence to others who might entertain plans for mass shooting. Furthermore, within one month of the massacre, it crafted a National Firearms Act that featured extensive licensing and registration procedures. It included a 28-day waiting period for gun sales. In addition, it banned all fully automatic or semiautomatic weapons, except when potential buyers could provide a valid reason—which did not include self-defense—for owning such a firearm. The federal government also instituted a gun-buyback program, which resulted in the surrender of some 700,000 firearms. 85% of Australian citizens polled following the ground-breaking legislation approved of the stringent measures enacted. The positive impact of Australia’s gun control legislation is undeniable. By 1998 gun deaths in that nation had decreased by 28%, and as of 2015 they had dropped by 67% compared with 1996 (pre-massacre) figures.

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On the Road to Sumter

We thought about it. We dreamed about it. We schemed about it. And twice we even tried it. Still, no matter how much we thought, dreamed, schemed, and tried, we could not seem to remove the obstacles that obstructed **CAC satellite services in Sumter County**. Our quest was to serve a community of children “where they live”, relieving families of the oppressive burden of driving too many miles to our Leesburg office when feelings are raw and emotions are acute in the aftermath of abuse.

It was clear that we needed a partner to make those Sumter satellite services happen—a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) agency that would benefit in its own respect from our proposed outreach initiative. And, much to our delight, up stepped the **Sumter County Sheriff's Office (SCSO)**. SCSO offered us space to conduct our services in its pristine facility—a building that comprises the Public Safety Center. Its elaborate security system ensures the safety of the children we serve, which is always a paramount concern. The SCSO site even offers a medical examination room, which is not always available at law enforcement facilities.

Our Center has been providing forensic interviews, medical evaluations and victim advocacy services to Sumter children and families at the SCSO site since July. We serve on an on-call basis, dispatching three-person teams to the satellite location on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays as service needs warrant. Happily, the arrangement has proven to be a win-win-win situation. The Sheriff's Office wins because it expends less time on transports and is freed up to attend to other emergent community demands. Our CAC wins because it serves more children and families in Sumter County, given their ready availability. And, most importantly, families win because of the ease, convenience, and comfort in accessing services in their veritable “backyards.”

We are grateful for the willing collaboration of the Sumter County Sheriff's Office. Together, we are changing the service “landscape” in Sumter County for the health and wellness of those we mutually serve.

Upcoming Events - October to December

The last quarter of every calendar year is a busy time for Center staff and children alike. 2022 is no exception, as the following illustrates:

October 11. The Center shall sponsor a **Bowling Team-Building Event** at the AMC Lanes in Leesburg.

November 5. Former CAC Board Chair Meredith Kirste is facilitating a charity event at her office location from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. to benefit services to our children. The festivities shall include a staff bake sale, gift purchases, and appearances by local law enforcement and fire department representatives. The public is invited to join us for all the fun and to support our kids!

November 22. There shall be a staff potluck lunch to celebrate Thanksgiving. Let the feast begin!

December 16. The CAC Annual Children's Holiday Party shall be an indoor event for the first time in three years. Rumor has it that Santa and Mrs. Claus shall appear to kick off the holiday season!

December 22. In the spirit of the season, staff shall enjoy a gift exchange as a wrap-up to its Secret Santa activities.

On Giving: *“It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.” - Mother Teresa*

What is Giving Week?

The **Mount Dora Community Trust** has become synonymous with generosity in its ongoing support of area nonprofit organizations that consistently make our communities better through their manifold services. True to its giving spirit, MDCT recently announced sponsorship of its 3rd annual **Giving Week**. Accordingly, during the week of **November 29 to December 6**, as many as 45 local nonprofits shall have the opportunity to receive monetary donations from their most ardent supporters—**donations that shall be augmented by in-kind matches from MDCT**. We are fortunate that our Center was among those agencies selected to benefit from this potential windfall. At the same time, kind readers, we need your help. You have always been there for us—with clothing, toys, and school supplies for our children, with art supplies for our counseling programs, and with your outstanding support of our annual Bids4Kids fundraiser. Certainly, we appreciated your heart-felt words of encouragement when we, as you, weathered “the COVID years.” And so, we ask you once more to support us with a modest donation during MDCT's Giving Week.

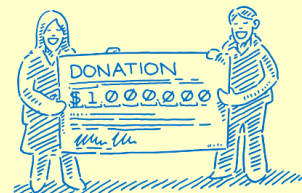
How do I donate?

It's easy. You simply select your favorite nonprofit organization (spelled L-a-k-e S-u-m-t-e-r C-h-i-l-d-r-e-n-s A-d-v-o-c-a-c-y C-e-n-t-e-r) :) You may donate online or by cash or check. Checks should be made to **MDCT**, with a memo line specifying **Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center**. You may send your check to Mount Dora Community Trust, 821 N. Donnelly Street, Mount Dora 32757 with our thanks. Please check our website at www.cac4kids.org in November for explicit instructions for online giving, as well as particulars on the MDCT Giving Week. You may also follow us on Facebook in November for the most current information on the giving event.

How will my contribution benefit the Center ?

Our CAC shall benefit from fiscal “matches” from MDCT predicated on the dollars you kindly contribute. It is a graduated matching system, ranging from .25 on the dollar to dollar-to-dollar matches. Obviously, the greater the amount we receive in pledges, the greater the MDCT “match.” And there is an added bonus: the nonprofit organization that receives **the most donations**, the dollar amount notwithstanding, shall be awarded another **\$5,000!** So, you don't have to break your personal budget to make a difference. The minimum donation, according to MDT giving guidelines, is \$10. Heck, many of us spend that much a week on coffee, right? Most importantly, all proceeds we receive, whether directly or indirectly, shall benefit the children we serve.

Please mark the week of November 29 through December 6 on your calendar, and GET PUMPED about the opportunity to help our kids through your customary generosity! We thank you most sincerely !





An American Tragedy (from p. 3)

Many Americans opine that the gun control measures legislated in Australia will never be possible in our country. They point to the 2nd Amendment of the Constitution stipulating our right to bear arms. They observe the powerful lobby of the National Rifle Association, which donates millions of dollars to the political campaigns of pro-gun legislators. They lament the persistent partisan gridlock among Democrats and Republicans which obviates agreement on even on the most fundamental principles of right to life and the pursuit of happiness. They assert that mass shootings are perpetrated only by the mentally ill and/or misguided youth and argue that more rigorous screenings and the establishment of mandatory age minimums for purchase of semi-automatic weapons shall stem the tide. Meanwhile, our children die, and they die with shocking regularity. In fact, from January 1, 2000 to September 30, 2022, 345 American children have lost their lives at the hands of school shooters. Another 657 children have been injured in school shooting incidents. Still, there are those as internet entrepreneur Alex Jones who vehemently deny the lethal events perpetrated in countless towns as Littleton, Newtown, Parkland, and Uvalde – deny the lifeless bodies of innocent children and the grievous losses of suffering families and friends. Fortunately, spurious and insensitive denials do not go unpunished. In fact, a recent civil case against Jones sparked by his Sandy Hook denials levied \$945 million in damages. In truth though, there is no compensation adequate to those Sandy Hook survivors, whatever the amount. It will not bring their children back.

In the interest of fairness, I would observe that the United States has taken several gun regulation steps similar to those exercised in Australia: more rigorous background screening, minimum age regulations, and mandatory waiting periods, to name three. And, in the aftermath of the mass shooting at a Jason Aldean concert in Las Vegas on October 2, 2017, Congress passed legislation prohibiting the use of “bump stocks” that enhance the firing capacity of semi-automatic weapons. Conspicuously, at the same time, it has consistently refused to enact legislation that would prevent ordinary citizens from purchasing semi-automatic weapons as the ubiquitous AR-15 that are central to school shooting incidents. Their comparatively ready accessibility shall perpetually place children at risk in spite of all the aforementioned ameliorative gun control measures. Though the most innocent among us may be blithely unaware, they are potential targets every weekday of the school year – in the classroom, in the hallways, and on the playground. Their parents may fortify them with haute couture bulletproof backpacks, but they shall ultimately fail to keep their children safe. So, what’s next? Kevlar vests? Full body armor? I think not. If we take divisive politics and intransigent ideologies out of the equation, we can then prevail on the fundamental logic of Occam’s razor: “The simplest (solution) is the preferred (solution).” So, let’s dispense with the automatic weapons before they dispense with us (and, most importantly, our children) – in the name of humanity....



“Anonymous: A Poem”

Editor’s Note: Invariably, we search for answers in the aftermath of tragic events as the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas five months ago. Mostly, we simply want to know why they happen. We seek rational explanations for irrational actions and inevitably come up empty. The following poem is merely a product of my imagination. It is intended neither to explain nor excuse the wanton acts that extinguish young lives whose promise shall never be fulfilled. Still, perhaps it lends some insight into the insidious way that trauma begets trauma. May we always treat our children well....

ANONYMOUS

He call himself Anonymous,
such a vague and faceless term
for one who could not read or write,
His truth shall I affirm;

At birth he was forsaken,
a mother’s harsh disdain,
left naked on a doorstep,
his cries a dull refrain;

So feckless were his efforts,
development delayed,
The family that had claimed him
took pains to lock away;

His schooling one sad litany,
All said that he was “slow”,
His seat reserved for back of class,
ignored in the last row;

And he endured the labels,
their acronyms replete,
When taken altogether,
they cruel and indiscreet;

And when a recess beckoned
with promise of a game,
Alas, he was unchosen
and left to sit in shame;

As schooling reached completion
and sheepskins did abound,
His showed he had attended,
no further to expound;

No colleges came calling,
And no jobs came his way,
All said he held no promise,
resigned at home to stay;

Each day as he marked his time
an anger grew within,
a slow and silent seething
that seemed without an end;

Then one night, bored and alone,
he watched the evening news,
The anchor spoke of Texas,
begged we her tears excuse;

She broached the name Uvalde
in hushed and reverent tones,
lamented children dying,
some younger than her own;

’twas next he viewed an image
of a shooter young as he
who on his birthday purchased
the weapons of his spree;

That night something got twisted,
A piano string was sprung
His thoughts a loathsome tangle
of logic come undone;

So it was one fateful day
that he unleashed his plan,
The unsuspecting children were
dispatched like grains of sand;

And he never once considered
the pain that he had wrought,
consumed in the achievement
of the lasting fame he sought;

No longer he anonymous,
as pundits wondered how
he something did so heinous,
I guess we know him now.



We'll “talk” again in January. Until then,
our Center staff and Board members
wish you...

Peace, Love, and Joy

throughout the holiday season