Child Advocacy Center Up and Running

Wednesday, 13 February 2013

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/child_advocacy.mp3{/audio}

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

A new center is up and running in Kodiak that will help simplify the handling of child abuse cases throughout the archipelago. Joanna McFarlin is the manager of the Child Advocacy Center, a new kid-friendly facility on Rezanof Drive, across the street from the Kodiak Area Native Association office building.

-- (Child Advocacy 1 :21 “we provide services for … traumatization of kids.”)

McFarlin said people don’t like to think that child abuse happens in the Kodiak community, but the reality is it does. She said the center will bring the team of people that normally would be involved with an abuse case under the same roof so a child will only have to visit one location and tell their story once. At the same time, the center will help different organizations save money by bringing a child from the village to the center and remove the need to fly various individuals out to them.

-- (child Advocacy 2 :19 “Because it used to be that ... have to do it one time.”)

McFarlin said the interviews take place in a listening room at the advocacy center, which has a camera and microphones set up to allow law enforcement, nurses and other organizations involved in the case to watch a live feed from another room. She said this allows a child to be comfortable and not overwhelmed by lots of adults. The process is very transparent, and McFarlin said the child will always be told if other people are watching and will often be shown the room with the live feed so they understand exactly what will happen. The building also includes a forensic medical examination room, as well as a family room for children and their families to relax and wait in throughout the process.

McFarlin said advocacy centers aren’t a new concept, and the idea is actually spreading

throughout the world. She said there are quite a few in Alaska, but this is the first one in Kodiak. The center opened in August, and has already been put to use. She said making the center a reality took a lot of work from many different entities.

-- (Child Advocacy 3 :36 “This child advocacy center … center better.”)

The center is funded through state and federal grants, and McFarlin said she is working toward financial sustainability. In general, she encouraged folks to remain aware of the fact that child abuse does happen, and report any suspicion of it. She said abuse from a parent or household member can be reported to the Office of Children Services, and abuse from someone outside of the home can go directly to the Kodiak Police Department or Alaska State Troopers. Once a case is opened up by one of those organizations, the advocacy center will get involved and stay with the case through prosecution.

###