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Capital Campaign Nearing Finish Line; Child Advocacy Center Purchasing Space for Permanent Home

Murfreesboro, Tenn. --- The Child Advocacy Center of Rutherford County (CAC) has purchased its current office space at 503 Highland Terrace in Murfreesboro and continues its progress on a capital campaign to fund the building purchase and renovations. Closing on the 8,000-square-foot building, purchased from Dr. James Garner, occurred February 26.

“We are so pleased to make this announcement,” said Dr. Trey Duke, Murfreesboro City Schools Director and CAC Board Chair. “This step has been 26 years in the making for this vital organization.

“In fact, since its inception, the CAC has not had a permanent location or adequate space,” Dr. Duke said. “They need more room to ensure privacy and confidentiality for the children and families they serve, more space for the Child Protective Investigative Team to collaborate on cases and enough office space for their staff. The organization has been existing in an 1800-square-foot office space and our campaign co-chairs and the Board of the CAC have been working diligently to address this issue.”

Led by founding Executive Director Sharon De Boer, the CAC, serving both Rutherford and Cannon Counties in the 16th Judicial District, is a 501c3, non-profit organization that was founded in 2000 to provide safety, justice and healing for victims of child abuse and child sexual abuse, drug-endangered children, and their non-offending family members.

Retired District Attorney and CAC Board Member Bill Whitesell and Demos Brands Marketing Vice President Kristin Demos, co-chairs of the campaign, have been meeting with companies, individuals and organizations for the past 14 months to solicit funding, said Dr. Duke. Both Whitesell and Demos have served on the CAC Board of Directors. To date, more than 60 donors have contributed approximately \$2.7 million toward the \$3.1 million goal. Major supporters include Rutherford County, the Heart of Rutherford Foundation, John D. Floyd Charitable Foundation and SRM Concrete.

“Bill and Kristin have been invaluable in raising these funds,” said Dr. Duke. “Their commitment to this organization is so appreciated.” Dr. Duke added that it’s important for the community to know that while the CAC has a legal mandate from the State of Tennessee to perform its work, there is no permanent funding from local or state governments to fund operations or capital investment.

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The Critical Need for More Space

The Child Advocacy Center has far outgrown its current space and does not have enough space to serve the number of families who need help. The staff of 16, along with four Middle Tennessee State University student interns, works in a facility that is approximately 1,800 square feet. The CAC has two forensic interviewers, but only one interview room.

The CAC needs a space that is big enough for law enforcement detectives, the Department of Children's Services investigators and the CAC staff to discuss cases and work collaboratively.

Currently, maintaining confidentiality is challenging because the CAC does not have a private waiting room for families. Frequently, a family must wait in the car when another family is receiving services.

The need for a new facility is even more urgent because of the explosive growth of Rutherford County, which is Tennessee's fourth largest county. The population is expected to double in the next 20 years.

About the CAC and Child Sexual Abuse

Over the last 26 years, the CAC has served more than 50,000 people. This number includes approximately 21,000 children and approximately 16,500 people who have participated in the CAC's Darkness to Light child sexual abuse prevention training.

The Child Advocacy Center has implemented a new training program, Speak Up Be Safe, for children in grades K-12 to teach them how to protect themselves from child abuse and seek help from a trusted adult.

During the 2024-25 fiscal year, the CAC served 3,298 people — including 1,314 children. The CAC has an annual operating budget of \$1.48 million. The Child Advocacy Center is accredited by the National Children's Alliance.

One out of 10 children will be sexually abused by their 18th birthday. Child sexual abuse victimization crosses all races, cultures, economic status, religions, sex, sexual orientation, gender, and immigration status.

Only 38% of child victims disclose the fact that they have been sexually abused. Of these children, 40% tell a close friend rather than an adult or authority figure, which does not always result in a formal report. More than 80% of child abuse cases never come to the attention of Child Protective Services, such as Department of Children's Services, or law enforcement, which means that many children in the community are silently bearing the burden of child sexual abuse.

How the CAC Works

The CAC provides a child-friendly environment for the Child Protective Investigative Team to respond to child abuse and child sexual abuse cases. In addition to members of the CAC staff, the team also includes staff from the Department of
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Children's Services, law enforcement, and the District Attorney's Office.

The CAC's highly trained staff conducts legally defensible forensic interviews of child victims. They also support potential victims and non-offending family members by providing crisis intervention counseling, case management and referrals to community resources. This team approach helps children heal from the trauma and helps families rebuild their shattered lives.

The Department of Children's Services receives reports of child abuse and uses CAC's forensic interview to determine if a child is safe to go home.

The following law enforcement agencies investigate child abuse and child sexual abuse cases: Rutherford County Sheriff's Office, Murfreesboro Police Department, Smyrna Police Department and La Vergne Police Department.

The District Attorney's Office chairs the team and aggressively prosecutes offenders using the CAC forensic interviews and court testimony of the interviewers.

The CAC also provides Darkness to Light child sexual abuse prevention training to adults how to protect children from child sexual abuse and what to do if a child reports abuse to them.

Nationwide, school personnel identify approximately half of all identified child abuse cases. Therefore, the CAC offers this training to all Rutherford County schools and Murfreesboro City Schools. The CAC also works to break the generational cycle of addiction with children.

To make a contribution to the capital campaign, please go to <https://cacrutherford.org>.

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