



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **TOWN HALL MEETING FOCUSES ON CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION**

**Uniontown, PA** – In observance of Child Abuse Awareness Month this April, local leaders and representatives from child welfare and anti-violence organizations came together at a child abuse prevention town hall meeting in Brownsville to shed some light on the services available to Fayette County residents.

The town hall, which took place April 18 at the Brownsville fire station, was attended by Fayette County District Attorney Mike Aubele, as well as Brownsville Chief of Police John Brant, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Fayette County Executive Director Corie Berry, A Child's Place Director of Programming Dee Dee Blosnich, and Crime Victims' Center of Fayette County Executive Director Andrea Hibbs.

Berry said a representative from Children and Youth Services was scheduled to attend, as well, but due to an emergency, the organization could not be there.

The purpose of the town hall meeting is “to bring awareness to child abuse prevention, to talk about the services we offer, and to make us more approachable to the community,” Berry said.

Panelists opened the town hall by discussing their roles, what each organization does and the kinds of help and services each offers.

“The district attorney joined us this year, which I thought was fantastic, as did the (Brownsville) chief of police,” Berry said.

Aubele explained during the town hall that he works closely with law enforcement and noted most abuse cases do go through a review by his office.

“We usually work with CYS at every stage, from forensic interviews to search warrants – whatever it may be,” he said. “We also work with the Crime Victims’ Center to “keep victims informed through each stage of the proceedings.”

Blosnich said A Child's Place is a child advocacy center serving six counties in Pennsylvania, including Fayette.

“We are the entity that provides the forensic interviews for child abuse cases,” she said. “A child advocacy center is that neutral, kid-friendly space where kids can come and be interviewed by a trained forensic interviewer. They follow a specific protocol that will hold up in court.”

Interviews are recorded and then turned over to law enforcement. Case workers and law enforcement personnel may observe interviews through a two-way mirror.

Blosnich said the center also helps connect families with services they may need.

"We work at it from both ends," she said, explaining A Child's Place connects with law enforcement on child abuse cases that already have occurred but also strives to work with parents and families to help prevent the abuse from happening "again or at all."

Berry said CASA of Fayette County recruits and trains volunteers to advocate for children who have suffered abuse and neglect. She said volunteers also work with biological families and resource families, as well as schools, mental health services and "anybody who has contact with that child."

CASA is currently advocating for 30 children. Advocates, she said, receive about 30 hours of training and usually work one-on-one with children, giving them more time in the house "to really get to know the kids we're working with."

Hibbs said the Crime Victims' Center has been in existence for 49 years and is a comprehensive non-profit organization. "We provide free and confidential services to victims of all sexual assault and other violent crimes."

The center offers counseling and has an outreach department to inform the community of their services. Representatives visit schools as well to share information.

"CVC has provided services to 773 adults and 793 juvenile victims," said Hibbs. "To me, that's just too high. We shouldn't be having those types of numbers."

Hibbs said all of the organizations present want to be able to inform the community about what to do if a crime is witnessed and how to report it. "We always ask, if you have questions, please reach out."

Berry said the panel received some insightful questions and noted this was the second year for the town hall meeting.

"We had it in Connellsville last year," she said. "We're trying to do a different location each year. There has been a lot of conversation with the Crime Victims' Center, CYS and myself about, 'We have a lot of outreach in Uniontown. Where aren't we having a lot of outreach?'"

Berry said county residents should keep an eye out for next year's town hall meeting. "It's always (a good idea) to find out a little bit about what's happening in your community and have your questions answered."

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.fayettecountypa.org](http://www.fayettecountypa.org).

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