



Child Chat



"Dedicated to children and those dedicated to serving 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.

Bids for Kids is Coming!

In our October 2020 edition of *Child Chat*, we made you aware of Bids for Kids (B4K), our annual fundraiser. At the time, we discussed the sad reality that we were compelled to cancel our March 2020 B4K event in light of the substantial risks associated with COVID-19.

It is now our pleasure to announce that our 2021 installment of B4K will take place on Saturday, March 13 with a couple of significant modifications from its traditional format. First, we shall do our utmost to preserve the health and safety of prospective participants by making Bids for Kids 2021 a **virtual** event. Therefore, all donated items shall be accessible for viewing and available for competitive bidding on a designated website. Second, this year's event shall be an **open event** for all who have pre-registered through the bidding site.

Auction registration details and dates shall be announced on our Center website at www.cac4kids.org.

We invite you to be part of the fun of Bids for Kids 2021! Thanks in advance for your participation and support! See you there!



From the Editor: A Story About "Baby Steps"

"I'm doing the work. I'm baby-stepping. I'm not a slacker!"

- Bob Wiley from the movie "What About Bob?" (1991)

So, here we go again—new year, new hopes, new dreams, new goals, earnest resolutions...and, I suspect, another set of lofty expectations that soon shall be summarily abandoned. Invariably, as each old year gives way to the new, I find myself harkening back to the classic dark comedy "What About Bob?" for prescriptive guidance on finding abiding self-fulfillment. If you've seen the movie, you know that an egotistical, self-absorbed psychiatrist Dr. Marvin (Richard Dreyfuss) desperately (and futilely) urges his obsessive-compulsive patient Bob Wiley (Bill Murray) to subscribe to the lessons advanced in his best-selling book *Baby Steps*. The prevailing, if not profound, wisdom Dr. Marvin espouses in his book is that anyone can achieve virtually anything if he manages to reduce life's challenges to simple component "baby steps". Well, as you probably have guessed, this grand recipe for success grossly (and hilariously) unravels as the incorrigible Bob lays anal-retentive waste to the master plan—and drives the pretentious Dr. Marvin to madness in the bargain.

You know, I've discovered over the course of my long life that our children are very much like the fictional Bob Wiley. In fact, I'm reminded of a twelve-year-old boy whom we shall call Tommy whose presentation in therapy many years ago effectively illustrates my point. I first encountered Tommy as a neophyte therapist at Gateway School, in Orange County. Gateway was a bastion of alternative public education serving wayward exceptional education students carrying stigmatizing labels such as "Emotionally Handicapped" and "Severely Emotionally Disturbed". Tommy personified the latter category. His behaviors formed a rather caustic amalgam of oppositional defiance, noncompliance and physical aggression spurred on by undistilled rage. So contrary was his comportment in the classroom that Tommy spent a large portion of each school day in the dreaded timeout room, a forbidding space barely four feet square reserved for only the most obstreperous and disruptive students. Tommy seemed to wear his frequent pilgrimages to timeout as distinguished badges of honor. I suspect he felt sure that he had outfoxed all of us with each insertion. After all, with each episode he escaped the schoolwork he could not do, avoided the authority he could not accept and telegraphed a message to his fellow students that to mess with him would be done at their own peril.

So, as you might have guessed, it was my dubious responsibility to get Tommy back on track—emotionally, behaviorally—and perhaps even, existentially. The school system hoped, however faintly, that Tommy's progress in those arenas would augur concomitant scholastic success. It would prove to be a

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By the Numbers

For all of you "data geeks" out there (of which I am one), here are the service numbers for our Center for calendar year 2020:

Type of Service

Medical exams: 578
Counseling sessions: 3455
CPT assessments: 788

Gender Served

Males: 252
Females: 415

Ages Served

6 years and under: 286
13-18 years: 164
7-12 years: 217

Race / Ethnicity

Caucasian: 434
African-American: 103
Hispanic: 76
Asian: 4
Other children: 50

Type of Abuse

Sexual abuse: 384
Physical abuse: 258
Neglect: 250
Witness to violence: 74
Other: 53

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"Just like children, emotions heal when they are heard and validated."

- Jill Bolte Taylor, American Neuroanatomist

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Human Trafficking: Up Close and (Far Too) Personal

Editor's Note: Occasionally, our Center practitioners are called upon to serve child victims of one of the most intrusive, heinous and unconscionable crimes of the human condition: Human Trafficking (HT). Fortunately, HT incidents remain relatively few at our clinic, though their numbers are increasing at local, state and national levels. With HT trends on the rise, we felt it was our responsibility to highlight this timely topic in this edition of our newsletter. Initially, we considered presenting an actual case anecdotally using a fictitious child name, as such presentations are poignant, impactful and illustrative. However, upon further reflection we recognized that the limited number of HT cases at our Center would risk undue confidentiality issues for the subject child. Ultimately, we resolved to treat this as an educational piece. We recognize that many of you are fully versed on HT. In that case perhaps you will receive this rendering as a serviceable review of the topic. On the other hand, for those who are relatively uninitiated, we hope this will serve as a foundation on the topic moving forward. In any event we sincerely hope that you will derive some benefit from the following.

Defining the Term. Human trafficking is defined **as** the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service, typically in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation. It is distinguished by three distinct constituent elements: the act, the means and the purpose. The **act** (what is done) constitutes recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons against their will. The **means** (how it is done) involves the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim. The **purpose** (why it is done) of human trafficking rests with the concept of exploitation for personal gain. Manifest examples include prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, and/or removal of organs.

Debunking the Myths. The phenomenon of human trafficking is not particularly well understood, though efforts to raise consciousness and educate human services professionals and the lay public have intensified in recent years. The lack of pervasive understanding of HT may be partly attributable to the relative infrequency of reported events. Though HT makes for sensational media accounts, the number of such events pales comparative to other crimes against the person. Furthermore, HT perpetrations occur in the darkest shadows of our societal underbelly and largely go undiscovered and, consequently, under-reported. Given our relative lack of understanding of HT, it is important to distinguish the misguided myths from the painful realities. So, let's methodically sort through the misconceptions to come to an enhanced understanding of this insidious phenomenon.

Myth: Trafficked persons are always immigrants from other countries.

Reality: The federal definition of human trafficking includes both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals.

Myth: Human trafficking must involve some form of travel or movement.

Reality: Trafficking does not require transportation.

Myth: Human trafficking is another term for human smuggling.

Reality: Smuggling is a crime against a country's borders. Human trafficking is a crime against a person.

Myth: Human trafficking only occurs in illegal underground industries.

Reality: Human trafficking can occur in legal and legitimate business settings, as well as underground markets.

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A Story About "Baby Steps" (continued from cover)

tough task that could only be accomplished in...well, **baby steps!** You see, Tommy had been dealt a bad hand from the outset. His family life was nothing short of chaotic. His father defected from the family virtually from the boy's birth, whereabouts unknown. His mother was serving a lengthy tenure of incarceration for a fatal shooting incident in a drug deal gone bad. In fact, but for the interest of a loving neighbor, Tommy and his older brother would have been consigned to foster care. And, to complete this touching family portrait, that brother, four years Tommy's senior, had already done a couple of hitches in "juvie" for offenses ranging from illegal possession of controlled substances to breaking and entering to burglary to grand theft auto. Furthermore, the neighborhood that Tommy called home could only be described as a squalid cesspool of drugs, guns, promiscuity, unemployment and broken dreams—the kind of place where potential goes to die. The final blow for Tommy was an inherent one. His Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder so impeded Tommy's academic performance that he fell woefully behind in the classroom. He had already been retained in fourth grade and was at certain risk for a second retention. Family deficits, environmental impoverishment and untoward learning challenges had conspired to erode Tommy's support network, his faith in others and his self-respect. Accordingly, he was an unrepentantly angry young man.

My first session with Tommy was an unmitigated disaster—lengthy periods of silence interspersed with his firm declarations of "I ain't gonna tell you nuthin'" and the occasional impatient query, "How long do I got to stay here?". It went on like this for several sessions. (It seemed interminable.). Indeed, those were long, hard days. So sparing were our meetings that I barely had enough information to cobble together a treatment plan to guide our work together. Still, I intoned my private and resolute mantra, "Baby steps, baby steps, baby steps...." In my quiet moments apart from Tommy, I contemplated the hard truths attendant with trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Maybe he did not want this. Maybe he was not ready for this. Maybe I was forcing the square peg. But, even during my darkest hours of professional doubt, other truths came bubbling to the surface. There was the truth that from the very beginning Tommy had never refused a therapy session. Regardless of how little was actually accomplished, he had faithfully appeared for all. And there was another truth. Tommy had never left a session prematurely, though he had protested mildly from the start. Consistency and perseverance were two qualities a therapist—and a client—could build upon. "Baby steps, baby steps, baby steps...."

Then, one day it happened. It was totally unexpected, as breakthroughs often are. I was doggedly attempting to force the square peg into the round hole, as seemed to be the case in so many early sessions with Tommy. I was trying to forge that long-overdue treatment plan—trying to extract, most painfully, some goals and objectives from my obstinate, unwilling subject. Suddenly, in a flash of ferocity, hackles raised, Tommy jumped to his feet and screamed, "Whatcha want from me!!". I recoiled in momentary shock, not quite certain of the next move, feeling a bit unbalanced by Tommy's violent verbal outburst. Amazingly, and almost as suddenly, I was suffused with a surreal calmness as a glimmer of understanding surmounted my fear. I realized the gravity of the moment. Slowly and softly, I uttered the words that would propel our therapeutic relationship to its ultimate healing conclusion. "Tommy, it's not about what I want from you. It's about what **you** want for yourself." I watched then as

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A Story About "Baby Steps"

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Thank You



NICE WORK! We were so pleasantly surprised and delighted when our friends from Lowe's Home Improvement (pictured above) arrived to "spruce up" our Center in anticipation of our Santa's Curbside Christmas event on December 18. In a "New York minute", the kids' playground equipment and the sidewalks surrounding our facility were pressure-washed to a veritable sheen. And, to top it all off, the Lowe's crew liberally spread rich mulch around our shrubs and trees, thus providing that "finished look" we all admire. Thanks to you sturdy and stalwart friends of our Center for investing your time and energy on our behalf!



TOYS! TOYS! TOYS! The holiday season can be such a frenetic, if joyous, time at our Center. Typically, we are inundated with generous donations of toys, games and stuffed animals from our caring and compassionate community who wish to ensure a prosperous Christmas for those we serve, as well as for their brothers and sisters. Frankly, though we never doubted the hearts of those who have so kindly given before, we wondered whether this year's challenging pandemic might make such giving all but impossible. As it turns out, we should never have questioned the staunch determination of our many friends in Lake and Sumter Counties. The gifts pictured above are but a fraction of those received! They epitomize a special community that would not be deterred in its mission to bring joy to children who have suffered enough. On behalf of our children, we at the Center thank you most sincerely!

Announcements

GOOD JOB! It is our distinct pleasure to announce that LSCAC Counselor [Angelica "Angie" Vega](#), our esteemed friend and colleague, recently passed her examination in partial fulfillment of requirements to become a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the State of Florida. Angie earned her M.S. degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Nova Southeastern University in August 2018. As part of her clinical training, Angie served an internship at The Healing Tree of The Howard Phillips Center for Children & Families in Orlando. Her placement there, with its emphasis on Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, provided particularly salient preparation for Angie's employment with our Center since September 2018. Angie is a most valued member of our Counseling Team and a decided asset to our program. We congratulate Angie on achieving a significant professional "rite of passage" in advancing a certain promising career!



PLAY BALL! We are deeply gratified as we acknowledge [Major League Baseball \(MLB\) and the Major League Baseball Players Association](#) for their generous grant award to our Center of \$50,000 for 2021. These funds shall be utilized in partial support of our ongoing trauma-focused Counseling Services to child survivors of abuse. It is worthy of note that MLB/MLBPA has awarded \$3,000,000 in 2020 and 2021 to U.S.-based nonprofit organizations to 1) build and improve [relationship skills](#) for the next generation, 2) build and improve [mental health resiliency](#) for vulnerable populations and 3) strengthen critical services to [survivors of domestic violence](#). They have really hit a [homerun](#) for those in need!



Tommy's defenses gradually evaporated. His chest heaved, his shoulders shuddered, and his tears flowed in a waterfall of emotion. I could not tell if they were tears of anger, frustration, disappointment or hurt. Perhaps they were simply tears of joy with the realization that someone finally understood.

For months thereafter Tommy and I talked about what he would do to take control of his life—to be the strong boy that would ultimately become the sturdy, proud young man. We talked about what it would take to overcome the father who had never been there for him, the mother who would yet be absent for quite some time, and the brother who could not mentor him. We talked about the strength within him to conquer his ADHD affliction. We talked about resilience and self-sufficiency. And, we talked about the "baby steps" we all must take to find hope, to foster dreams and to realize enduring life fulfillment. I do not worry about Tommy anymore, for I know that his baby steps shall serve him well—to overcome the challenging times and to sustain the good.

The Sequel: *Many years later I was shopping at a Beall's department store when I sensed a compelling presence behind me. I turned and beheld a handsome, strapping young black man whom I estimated to be in his late twenties. He was sporting an absolutely infectious grin. I may not have yet recognized the man behind it, but I knew that grin. It was a grin that transported me back in time some seventeen years. It was the faint memory of a struggling little boy who had found his joy and now had become an able young man.*

"Tommy, my God, is that you?!" I gasped. He just laughed—a barrel-chested, robust boom that reverberated off the walls and back. We embraced in a huge bear hug—two survivors of what had proven to be a life-changing experience for us both those many years before. Like two old friends we recounted the intervening years. I told him I had followed his football exploits as a star running back at a high school north of town until his graduation put me out of touch. He dovetailed with his matriculation and graduation from Florida State University, his inglorious but constant participation on a national championship football team, and his marriage to his college sweetheart during his senior year. He sweetened the pot by telling me that he had even earned an advanced degree in, of all things, Social Work. I could not have been more proud.

For a few seconds I allowed myself to bask in the glow of Tommy's accomplishments. And then I turned to him and asked how he had been able to achieve so very much. Tommy just shrugged, winked and uttered those inevitable words that came as no surprise, "Well, you know how it is, Mr. Dolliver. I just took baby steps!" And, with that, we laughed and laughed...until we cried!



The Spirit of Christmas Prevails (even with COVID-19)

Note from the Editor: Every year our Center hosts a festive holiday party for our children and their families in December to celebrate the spirit of the season. Routinely, the party is an indoor event that offers food treats, gifts for all children in every family and, of course, the obligatory and much-anticipated visit with Santa Claus. Naturally, with the perils of COVID-19, this year's event took on a very different aspect. With the poem that follows, we sought to capture the atmosphere of an exceedingly unconventional 2020 holiday party we affectionately called "Santa's Curbside Christmas".

Santa's Curbside Christmas

We worried, we fretted, and some said, "Forget it!",
as COVID had laid its cruel claim,
to trash our plans with it, if we would but let it,
Oh, Christmas would not be the same;

When money was fleeting, and our kids were not eating,
the holiday seemed such a lark;
With six-foot-space seating, no face-to-face meetings,
the season was losing its spark;

From whence come the toys for good girls and boys,
with everyone saving scant dimes,
And if we had toys, who would we deploy
to wrap them in such risky times?

And what of Dear Santa, his health such a matter
if children on his lap would sit,
Would we tempt fate with an elder so great,
or to his good health would commit?

For our staff and our guests, we in turn must confess,
our concern had fomented a reason
to thus take the fall in the interest of all,
and with grace abandon the season;

Then someone said, "No!", could not bear such a blow,
insisting there must be a way;
It was then we set forth to consider a course
that would magically preserve the day;

We would start with our trust in those friends much like us,
their constancy measured and true;
They would give even more just to even the score,
unbroken by this strain of flu;

We would not be tied and therefore denied
by collections of ribbons and bows,
Their toys would be naked but no child was forsaken,
Sometimes, that's just how it goes;

To keep Santa safe, with such blessed relief,
we would take our party curbside;
With consummate faith, clung to our belief
that peace, love and joy would abide;

They came in great legions, their spirit in season,
this drive-thru event to attend;
These families galore who in turn did implore
our voices with theirs for to lend;

And Santa was singing, which left our ears ringing,
though none seemed to care 'bout the din;
With no Christmas treats, there was nothing to eat,
We fed on the warmth from within;

Then, the toys were dispensed, gift-giving commenced,
They lay in huge bags for to see;
And the parents relented and soon they consented
to their children's impassioned pleas;

No child seemed to care when no wrappings were there,
for wrappings can only delay
the unrestrained joy of a child with a toy
with no obstacle to his play;

When all had left, and silence descended,
it was time to reflect on what COVID had rendered;
So many lives lost, so many lives shaken,
So many children whose parents were taken;
For them, the holidays never the same,
May we not take for granted our friends who remain.



Happy New Year 2021!

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Human Trafficking (continued from page 2)

Myth: Victims of human trafficking will immediately ask for help or self-identify as a victim of a crime.

Reality: Victims of human trafficking often do not immediately seek help or self-identify as victims of a crime.

Myth: There must be elements of physical restraint, physical force, or physical bondage when identifying a human trafficking situation.

Reality: Trafficking does not require physical restraint, bodily harm, or physical force.

Myth: Sex trafficking is the only form of human trafficking.

Reality: The federal definition of human trafficking encompasses both sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

Myth: Human trafficking victims always come from situations of poverty or from small rural villages.

Reality: Poverty alone is not a single causal factor or universal indicator of a human trafficking victim.

Myth: If the trafficked person consented to be in their initial situation, then it cannot be human trafficking or against his/her will because he/she “knew better”.

Reality: Initial prior to acts of force, fraud, or coercion (or if the victim is a minor in a sex trafficking situation) is not relevant to the crime, nor is payment.

Frequency of HT Incidents. Human trafficking is often referenced in law enforcement parlance as a “hidden crime”. HT incidents remain hidden because of victims’ disinclination to bring them forth. They fear vengeful reprisals from their traffickers, or they fear arrest by law enforcement for criminalized behavior as prostitution. Sometimes, a language barrier provides the impediment to coming forward. Consequently, any discussion of HT frequency presupposes an underestimate of the number of actual cases prevalent at any point in time. With that in mind, it is instructive to know that [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#) maintains one of the most extensive databases in the United States. Its data sets derive from phone calls, texts, online chats, emails and online tips received through the hotline.

Predicated on hotline data it was reported that the United States had 11,500 human trafficking cases. The vast majority of those reported cases was sex trafficking @ 8,248. When examining HT data by state, it is important that we define our terms. Some reporting sources rank order states by actual number of HT incidents, while others present their data on the basis of frequency per 100k. The disparity between these two accounting methods causes consequent differences in state rank-ordering. If we are simply seeking “pure” numbers for 2019, we find that California leads the way with 1,507 cases. California is followed by Texas @ 1,080 cases and Florida @ 896 cases. On the other hand, if we look at rate per 100k for 2019, Nevada ranks #1 with a rate of 7.63. On that basis Mississippi follows with a rate of 4.98, with Florida close behind @ 4.13. It is merely coincidental, but nevertheless significant, that Florida rests third on both HT measures. It must be stated emphatically that while numbers possess an inherent value in our understanding of the general phenomenon of HT, there is no calculation for the emotional, psychological and spiritual devastation for the victims of this nefarious crime.

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Human Trafficking (continued from left)

Signs & Symptoms of the Victims. Naturally, we would always prefer to thwart human trafficking activity at its incipience. Unfortunately though, it is inevitable that we will be operating reactively in many cases. In that event it is crucial that we exercise exceeding vigilance and remain alert to the signs and symptoms in children or adults that may signal HT victimization. Four (4) personal presentations, among others, might suggest the presence of HT involvement, as follows:

1. Individual avoids eye contact, social interaction and law enforcement.
2. Individual responds in manners that seem rehearsed or scripted.
3. Individual lacks personal identification documents.
4. Individual lacks basic personal possessions.

Preventative Measures. HT spans the globe and, therefore, demands international awareness, as well as prohibitive legislation and legal enforcement. At the “macro” level then, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has authored an international [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons](#). The protocol clearly defines the phenomenon of human trafficking to provide consistency and consensus around the world in responding to this abhorrent crime. It also calls for adopting legislation to criminalize HT within all nations. UNODC urges that such legislation be expansive, dynamic and flexible to respond to trafficking which 1) occurs across borders and within a country, 2) addresses a broad range of exploitative purposes (not just sexual exploitation), 3) victimizes children women and men, and 4) takes place with or without the involvement of organized crime groups. In the final analysis, efforts at eradicating human trafficking are contingent on a global response.

It is significant to note that in Florida the number of HT cases has more than doubled from 418 in 2015 to 896 in 2019. State authorities are very aware of this alarming trend and have thus conducted a Human Trafficking Summit annually since 2014 to increase public and professional awareness and develop strategies to thwart these occurrences. Whether we are exploring HT in Florida or in the context of the more global reaches of the phenomenon, it is clear that space in this newsletter is insufficient. Consequently, we would direct you to the [Polaris Project](#) should you wish to learn more about HT prevention efforts domestically and across the globe.. As a dedicated nonprofit organization, Polaris commits its energies and resources to dismantling the very systems that promote HT.



Did you know that...

- * 1 in 4 human trafficking victims are children
- * 1 in 7 of those children are *sexually exploited*
- * 1 in 4 HT children are exploited thru *forced labor*

Important Note: January is “Human Trafficking Awareness Month”. Relevantly, there is a [Conversation on Justice Human Trafficking Workshop](#) scheduled on Monday, January 25 from 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. via the following Zoom Link: <https://valenciacollege.zoom.us/j/96453494489>. For information, please call Britney Pierce at (407) 582-6531.

STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING!
Call 1 (888) 373-7888

