



Child Chat



"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.

Family Advocacy: Straight From the Heart

From the Editor

Editor's Note: In the last several installments of *Child Chat*, we have sought, through a Question & Answer format, to acquaint you with our services and those that execute them so diligently. Today, we shall abandon that format to permit Bob Tardiff, esteemed LSCAC volunteer and Family Advocate, to tell his own story. Thanks, Bob!

In Search of the "Inner Child"



Bob Tardiff, Family Advocate

"Prior to joining Children's Advocacy, I spent over 40 years in the retailing industry. The last 35 years before retirement were with the JCPenney company in a number of management positions. The last 15 of those years were spent in Northern Maine. After my retirement in 1995, I went to work for the Caribou (Maine) Development Corporation (CDC). As the name implies, I was involved with developing jobs and industry in Northern Maine. Following a successful stint with CDC, my wife and I became seasonal "snowbirds", migrating to Florida to escape the harsh Maine winters. Those annual sojourns to more hospitable climes convinced us that 150 inches of snow and minus 20 degree

temperatures would never again agree with us. So, we picked up and came to sunny Florida permanently and haven't looked back since.

An interesting thing happened to me on my way to the CAC. I was playing golf one Saturday when I experienced sharp pains in my chest. Needless to say, I knew immediately what it was. To make a long story short, I was rushed to the hospital, operated on that afternoon and was successfully released a couple of days later. Prior to that episode, I had undergone a quintuple bypass surgery in 2004. After two harrowing heart episodes, I wondered what God had in store for me. You've heard the old adage, 'God works in mysterious ways,' Well, I bet you didn't know he worked thru Google. When I got home, I Googled 'volunteer-Leesburg FL', and the rest is history.

In my time as a Family Advocate with the CAC, I've discovered that one of the most important attributes one must have in working with families is the ability to listen with empathy. Often, non-offending parents need someone to vent to or a shoulder to lean on. This experience is completely foreign to them, and our

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"Everyone is born creative; everyone is given a box of crayons in kindergarten. Then when you hit puberty they take the crayons away and replace them with dry, uninspiring books on algebra, history, and the like. Suddenly, years later I was hit with the "creative bug". It was then I heard that wee voice telling me, 'I'd like my crayons back, please.'"



- Hugh MacLeod

Many years ago, when I was a graduate student at Boston College, I had a wonderful friend who was pursuing his law degree there. I shall call him Dan. Dan was a brilliant student and so respected within those hallowed halls of jurisprudence that he was selected as President of the BC Law Review following his 1L (first year). Understand that this is no small distinction, as BC Law School has been the breeding ground for thirteen (13) members of the United States Congress and at least one aspirant President of the United States (John Kerry, class of 1976). Of course, Dan had high aspirations of his own and was hopeful that his tenure as president of the Review would jumpstart his legal career and catapult him into a distinguished law firm in Boston, New York or some other seat of urban power. Predictably, upon his graduation Dan was recruited to one of the most prestigious firms in New York City, where he labored assiduously for truth, justice – and (of course) a partnership.

What was not to like? Dan had graduated from a vaunted law school. He was working for one of the most elite law firms in the country. The partners at the firm recognized Dan's astute legal mind and assigned him increasingly responsible cases. He was earning a handsome six-figure salary with the promise of much more to come. Indeed, it seemed that Dan was on the fast track to his selection as a partner with the firm.

So, imagine my surprise when Dan called me one night in utter despair. His tone was depressed, and it was clear that he had been drinking. It was obvious the he needed to talk, and his confessions burst forth in a blitzkrieg of consternation. Tearfully, he admitted that his job had thoroughly taken over his life. He was working 80 –100 hours a week. He had no social life. He could not recall the last time he had been on a date. He had stopped working out for lack of time. His meals had become a "catch as catch can" hodgepodge of fast foods. And, he had not taken a real vacation in three years. It was plain to see that Dan was breaking down. In spite of the money and prestige that his legal position afforded him, Dan was desperately unhappy. He was looking for a lifeline with which to pull himself out of his misery. I spoke with him about the advisability of engaging a therapist who could provide some objectivity and assist him in

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Child Quote: "Children must be taught how to think, not what to think."
- Margaret Mead, anthropologist

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Family Advocacy: Straight From the Heart (from page 1)

responsibility is to make the situation as free from distress as possible.

“...non-offending parents need someone to vent to or a shoulder to lean on.”

Many times a parent and child will come through our front door for the first time and the parent, usually the mother, highly agitated, will claim, “I don’t know why we’re here’. From past experience, I can tell you that she’s probably correct. A teacher or medical professional thinks that something may be wrong. At that point I attempt to calm the parent. I’ll sit with them and tell them that the people behind these doors are just about the greatest people your child will ever meet and on top of that you’ll walk out of here in an hour with a smile on your face. In the 6 years I’ve been here, I haven’t misjudged one yet. I still get a kick seeing that smile when they leave.

In Family Advocacy a typical case would involve an interview with the non-offending parent or caregiver to determine their needs, if any. Such needs might include healthcare, housing, food, clothing, transportation or employment. After determining their needs, I will give them a list of service providers in Lake County that will be able to assist them in their requirements. After the interview I will turn over the information I have collected to the counselor involved to provide a better representation of the family. After a reasonable amount of time, I will follow up to see how things have progressed. In some instances I will assist them in obtaining help from an agency with which they may be having a problem.

Sometimes, charges are brought against the child’s perpetrator, and I will go to court to support the child. Going to court with the parent and child is certainly different in every case, but there are quite a few similarities as well—from visiting the State’s Attorney for the first time to the final verdict. I’ve found that there are two separate groups of children, the very young and innocent and the older sullen ones. Obviously, they all need our consideration and support. At the same time, it is obvious to me that the non-offending parent needs us just as much. That parent is fearful and yet hopeful that everything will be resolved in the child’s favor. When it isn’t, we have to be ready to provide comfort.

“[The non-offending] parent is...hopeful that everything will be resolved in the child’s favor, When it isn’t, we have to be ready to provide comfort.”

One of my most powerful memories working with the folks at Child Advocacy was during the annual Christmas party for the families. I was standing off to the side waiting to take a package to the car when I saw a lady sitting by Santa, sobbing. When I asked her if there was anything I could do for her, she looked up to me and said, ‘if it wasn’t for you people, we wouldn’t have any Christmas. Thank you so much.’ Touching words as those make it all worthwhile!”

Calling All Advocates...

Unfortunately, COVID-19 seriously impeded our plans to recruit volunteers to join our Family Advocacy Program for well over a year. With the easing of the coronavirus threat, we are prepared to resume our recruitment efforts. If you have a burning desire to advocate for children, please contact us at (352) 323-8303 and ask either for Steve or Cathy. Either shall guide you through the preliminary requirements for the program (i.e., background screening, application process, advocate training). Your call could well be the first step toward one of the most rewarding endeavors you shall ever experience. We look forward to hearing from you!

In Search of the “Inner Child” (from page 1)

putting a plan together to address his situation and the depression it had spawned. I warned him that the plan would likely involve making some pretty dramatic adjustments in his life. Dan agreed that he was ready for a change and would seek out a clinical professional. As we were about to hang up, Dan joked that he guessed he needed to find his “inner child”. Admittedly, I was not quite sure what he meant, but I playfully retorted, “Hey, good luck with that!”. We pledged to keep in touch, and our conversation ended.

The next day I paused to reflect on my exchange with Dan. I was worried about him, no doubt about that. I was also struck by his off-hand remark about finding his inner child. Just who was this “inner child”, I wondered? Where did Dan lose it? And, most importantly, what makes it so worthy of recapturing? Well, that led me to think about my own childhood and what made it such an exquisite and memorable experience. Oh, I could gush interminably over the external factors that had blessed me, for I was raised by loving parents in a vacation paradise on the coast of Maine embraced by a national park. I had a bunch of boyhood friends who would have taken a bullet for me, though (thankfully) they were never thus tested. I had great teachers, coaches and mentors who inspired me and nurtured my dreams in those early years of what I referred to as my “existential awakening”.

I will be eternally grateful for where I was born and raised, the parents who raised me, my childhood buddies and all those who positively influenced me in those delicate formative years. Still, I wondered about my inherent self—the self upon which all the external influences were imprinted—and the “gifts” that were bestowed before those influences forged my “steel”. You see, I have upon reflection concluded that the “inner child” to which Dan had casually alluded in our conversation is composed of several such “gifts” whose magical qualities rarely transcend the chronological bounds of childhood. It is the mystical fascination with life that most of us have forgotten (forsaken?) as we have set upon the mundane routines that characterize adulthood: maintaining a marriage, raising children, sustaining employment and paying the bills. Taken together, these “gifts” might just be the “holy grail” that each of us so desperately seeks as life proceeds. So, please indulge me as I explore with you the gifts that, in my estimation, constitute the “inner child”.

The Gift of Curiosity

Have you ever noticed the unbridled enthusiasm with which children explore their world? They quite literally assault it with all five senses in their multi-sensory arsenals. Imagine a small boy appraising a field of daisies.

The field almost instantly becomes a “curiosity workshop” in his tiny hands. He listens excitedly to the buzz of the bees atop a cluster of daisies, recalling mother’s cautions that “bees sting, so don’t touch them”. He smells the pretty flowers apart from the buzzing insects, discovering disappointedly that they possess no discernible aroma. He tentatively touches the gentle white petals, noting their smooth, waxy texture. He tastes one just for the novelty of it and spits it out disgustedly. He plucks another pair, casting them delightedly into the breeze. He watches them float gently



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CPT Newcomer Introductions

We are pleased to introduce two new Case Coordinators serving children on behalf of our Child Protection Team: **Regina Berry** and **Kaneeshia Walker**. Let's get to know them a little bit....



Regina Berry was born and raised in Jasper, Florida, a town of approximately 4,100 residents slightly south of the Georgia border. Though she contends that she led a "sheltered life" as a child, Gina acknowledges that she was instilled with the essential values that have guided her personal and professional journey throughout: respecting one's elders, doing the right thing, and treating others the way you would wish to be treated. Gina matriculated at Bethune Cookman

University in Daytona Beach, Florida, where she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice in 2012. Following graduation, Gina served a lengthy tenure with the Department of Juvenile Justice, State of Florida and retired from her services there. She immediately set upon finding a subsequent employment "home" where she could continue her work with at-risk children and honor her professional approach to "reach one, teach one". Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center is now the fortunate beneficiary of Gina's considerable experience in working with children and her self-professed quest "to set pathway stones for children to follow". When asked what she likes best about working with children, Gina eagerly responds, "EVERYTHING!! I love their smiles, their giggles, their unique ways of expressing themselves, and their ability to be resilient beyond comprehension." Gina feels that her mindset is particularly well-suited to working with severely traumatized children. She explains, "I have always been drawn to those less fortunate or disadvantaged. Having the not-so-perfect childhood, [being] bullied and picked on, has taught me to always help others in any way possible." And, Gina is amply prepared to handle the vicarious trauma that is an occasional by-product of serving traumatized children. In her own words she attests, "[I do] a quick meditation before and after [each service], recalibrating my thought process and ensuring everything is placed in the proper perspective. Basically, I give myself a good ol' pep talk." We are certain that approach shall serve Gina and the children she serves well throughout her tenure with our Center. It is great to have you on our Team, Gina!



Kaneeshia Walker is a Florida native who largely divided her childhood between the Sunshine State and Georgia. Proudly, she is one of seven children in a blended family she affectionately describes as "very close and supportive". Kaneeshia received her diploma from Tavares High School in 2008 and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Paine College in Augusta, Georgia in 2013. Following her matriculation at Paine, Kaneeshia embarked on her career working with children in the helping professions. She served a stint as a

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across the field, squealing with pleasure as they waft ethereally through the air before settling on the ground a seeming world away.

In a child's world the ubiquitous question is "why?". Why is the sky blue? Why is the grass green? In fact, we parents are constantly amazed at the sheer number of "why questions" that our children generate. While we understand implicitly that it is part of their learning process, they can sometimes drive us a bit crazy – am I right? (Please agree.) Still, "Why?" is indeed the essential question as we explore our world and develop our analytical skills in relation to it. It occurs to me that we adults often plod through our lives with heads down and noses to the grindstone, failing to ask ourselves why.

The Gift of Spontaneity



Young children are truly remarkable for their capacity to apprehend life "in the moment". Perhaps it is because virtually all of their early experiences are first-time events that they

launch themselves so unabashedly into the breach. They have not yet been afflicted with the self-consciousness that causes many adults who, worn down by criticism and perceived failure, incline to pause, reflect and back off. After all, we adults are largely cautious creatures, aren't we? We examine and analyze situations ad nauseum, always looking for the sure thing. We endlessly study human behavior and social interactions in the hope that we shall not offend. We lean heavily on norms, mores and traditions, secure in our belief that what is familiar is surely righteous. We calculate tendencies and identify precedents until we have squeezed all novelty from the human experience. Where is our spontaneity?

The Gift of Possibility

How many times have you heard earnest parents tell their children, "If you work hard at it, you can be anything you want to be"? Whether that is true is not particularly germane. Rather, what is relevant is the pervasive notion that a young child's world is unfettered, unimpeded and unbounded in the very beginning. When you ask children what they wish to be when they grow up, you are often met with a cornucopia of responses. Of course, sometimes the answers reflect the vocations of their parents. We shall call those the "default options". However, frequently those responses occupy the "rarified air" of personal accomplishment. For all of those children who dream of one day donning the uniform of their favorite professional sports team, there shall be an infinitesimally small number who



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Kind KCI Contribution



Pictured from left: Vaneese Collins, LSCAC Board Secretary; Brenda Crellen, LSCAC Executive Director; Steven Dolliver, LSCAC Director of Operations; Jessica Gilbert, KCI Director of Community Affairs.

Since 2003 **Kids Central, Inc.** has served as the lead nonprofit agency charged by the State of Florida to treat and prevent child abuse in Citrus, Lake, Sumter, Hernando and Marion Counties. Its mission of “protecting children, supporting families and engaging communities” is exemplified through its extensive array of prevention programs, including Family Resource Centers, Kinship Care, Healthy Start, Baby Sleep Basics and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, to name a few. The child-centered practices that KCI implements strengthen families and help create, support and maintain safe environments for children. Furthermore, KCI develops and licenses foster homes that provide stability and security to children until they can be reunified with their respective families. If reunification is not possible, KCI prepares prospective adoptive homes for child permanency placement.

At Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center we are gratified to have such an accomplished community partner as KCI within our service region. Recently, we were honored to receive a \$5,000 grant award from KCI (see picture above). It is notable that KCI has so blessed us in consecutive years. This year's generous contribution shall be utilized to purchase clinical, play and art supplies for our Center's Counseling Program. As you are likely aware, play and art serve as most effective vehicles for facilitating therapy, particularly for young children with undeveloped or under-developed verbal skills. So, the materials we purchase with the KCI funds, combined with the expert trauma-focused therapeutic interventions of our counselors, may well expedite children's trauma recovery. We thank KCI for its absolute and abiding commitment to children and its continued support to our Center!

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actually do so. For all of those children who aspire to spectacular careers in entertainment, there shall be precious few who realize those lofty aspirations. And for those that would be neurosurgeons, they likely do not realize that only 0.5% of all physicians practice that medical specialty – if one is fortunate enough to get admitted to medical school in the first place. Still, the point is that children's minds lie wide open to the plethora of “best scenario” possibilities. They possess the courage to dream before the discouragement imposed by other people and situations rob them of the “gift of possibility”. I surmise it is not by accident that those who live the longest, richest lives are those who continue to dream of endless possibilities throughout their lives.

The Gift of Accomplishment

Isn't it wondrous how young children derive satisfaction from even the simplest of accomplishments? Do you recall the sense of satisfaction you felt when you finally mastered that elusive bow and for the first time tied your own shoes? Probably not. Or, how about the moment when you raised up from all fours and unsteadily balanced on two legs to the applause of your doting parents? Not so much. Or, how about the thrill you felt when you first pedaled your bike without the support of training wheels? Not ringing any bells? The point is that there was a time when we recognized even the smallest of accomplishments. We celebrated each with squeals and giggles and hand claps and happy dances. Life was not so crucial and critical and serious then. We did not worry about achieving straight A's, starring on the basketball team, matriculating at an Ivy League school or holding down a six-figure job. Yes, tying bows and standing up and riding a bike were preludes to larger achievements, but they (obviously) did not carry the gravity, urgency or oppressive burden tied to the later conquests of adulthood. Do we in later life truly take the time to smell the roses and drink in the rich aroma of our accomplishments, both large and small? For the most part, I think not.



The Gift of Joy

Have you ever been captivated by a small child's giggle – a giggle so infectious that you cannot help but follow suit?



Little kids just seem to find happiness in the simplest of things. Is it that they simply make their own joy rather than to wait for it to come to them? In Latin there is a term that seems to encapsulate the

joy we witness in happy, well-adjusted children - **cupido vitae**, which means “zest for life”. To me it means making the most of what you have and finding fulfillment therein. I'll tell you what I mean. When I was a boy, I had a band of buddies - you know, those same guys I mentioned earlier

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corrections officer with the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, taught reading and civics with Lake County (Florida) Schools, delved into mental health services with LifeStream Behavioral Center, and then temporarily relocated back to Augusta, Georgia to serve with the Department of Family and Children's Services. Sadly, a traumatic event compelled Kaneeshia's return to Florida in March 2021: a fire which destroyed her Georgia home. It would seem that life is fraught with strange ironies, but we believe that Kaneeshia would agree that the trauma she suffered in 2021 shall make her an even more effective advocate for our CAC children in their own trauma recovery in the years ahead. Relevantly, Kaneeshia points to children's "ability to be resilient regardless of the situation" as a primary reason she enjoys working with them. Kaneeshia observes that she has "always been the 'go to person' with [her] friends and family when they are going through a difficult time." Certainly, her capacity to serve others shall be a decided benefit for our children, as well as her fellow Center staff members! We are so pleased to have you on board, Kaneeshia!

1 2 3 4 5 By the Numbers 6 7 8 9 10

For all of you "data geeks" out there (of which I am one), here are the service numbers for our Center for the just-completed Fiscal Year 2020-21:

Type of Service

Medical exams: 572
Counseling sessions: 2,601
CPT assessments: 742

Gender Served

Males: 220
Females: 411

Ages Served

0-12 years: 426
13-18 years: 205

Race / Ethnicity

Caucasian: 424
African-American: 86
Hispanic: 75
Asian: 5
Other children: 41

Type of Abuse

Sexual abuse: 393
Physical abuse: 262
Neglect: 239
Witness to violence: 88
Human Trafficking: 15

"How Can I Help?"

Our friends in the community, who realize that our Center is a nonprofit agency, always ask us, "How can I help?". Here are two ways with our most sincere thanks:

1. We gratefully accept financial donations of any size by check or money order, which may be sent to:
Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center
300 S. Canal Street
Leesburg, FL 34748
2. Order a Stop Child Abuse specialty license plate at myfloridaspecialtyplate.com. Proceeds support our Center and community partner Children's Home Society.

Thank you!



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that would take a bullet for me. Well, we all loved baseball, and we lived and died with the fate of our beloved Boston Red Sox. But, as much as we loved the Red Sox, we loved playing the game of baseball even more. The only problem was that we had no money for bats and balls and gloves. Truth be told, we didn't even have a decent field to play on. The larger truth is that we didn't care about any of that. So, we made an abandoned parking lot our field (I have to admit that sliding into second base was a little rough!). We didn't have bases, so makeshift cardboard squares had to do. And we smacked a tight ball of yarn with birch "bats" until either the yarn unraveled or the birch broke. Until then, we were in our minds the greatest players of our generation: Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Bob Gibson, Sandy Koufax, Mickey Mantle. Every summer day we reveled in pure, unadulterated joy on our contrived "diamond" until darkness descended and drove us home. No one ever complained that we did not have balls or bats or gloves. We had each other and the game we loved. For a young boy that's about all you really need.

What about Dan?

So, what happened to my friend Dan, you ask. Well, despite our pledge to keep in touch, I did not hear from Dan for quite some time. Oh, I had placed a couple of follow-up calls to ask how he was doing and received only recorded messages in return. Then, quite suddenly, out of the blue, Dan called me for the first time in three years. And, what a story he told! It started with that therapist I had urged him to see a full three years before...

Well, as it turns out, Dan did call that therapist. And, in the course of their therapeutic alliance, Dan discovered a few things about himself. He found that he did not wish to be a ladder-climbing corporate attorney after all. With a bit of "guided introspection" he realized that he had been merely trying to satisfy his father's wishes by pursuing the law and following obediently in Daddy's substantial footsteps. He soon recognized that this was not the ideal recipe for self-fulfillment. So, Dan promptly tendered his resignation from the firm – much to the shock and dismay of the power brokers there (and his father, too, no doubt!). And he never looked back. With his sizeable financial portfolio in hand, Dan threw caution to the wind and boldly embarked on a larger-than-life world tour. He ran with the bulls in Pamplona. He sailed Kilimanjaro. He sailed the seas of the South Pacific. He explored Australia's Great Barrier Reef. He communed with the exotic creatures of the Galapagos Islands. He trekked the lush Amazon rain forests. Oh, and did I mention that Dan tackled this devil-may-care adventure with none other than the very therapist who had conspired to unleash his child within? (I'll reserve comment on the ethics of that liaison!).

Upon his return from "the great adventure", Dan assumed a more pedestrian, if personally satisfying, lifestyle. Thus, he reads. He writes. He paints. He sculpts. He is not concerned over the judgments of others who appraise his creations. He creates for the exquisite joy of creating. And when Dan is not creating, he hikes the myriad trails that snake through and around his modest coastal Maine town. Sometimes, at summer's height, he occasions on a field of daisies. He pauses to listen to the somnolent buzz of bees alight on the blossoms. He stoops to sniff an unattended flower – still no smell. He plucks a petal and feels the smooth, waxy texture between his thumb and forefinger. He places it gently on his tongue and spits it out disgustedly. He plucks another pair of petals and casts them into a gentle zephyr, watching them waft ethereally across the field until they settle a seeming world away. Contentedly then, he settles his body neatly in the buzzing, luscious field and drifts into a peaceful slumber. Blissfully, he dreams of the "inner child" he has become....



Can your inner child come out and play?