

# THE PINWHEEL



## Local Teen Organizes Teddy Bear Drive for CAC

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At the start of the year, Kaylie Kelley set a personal goal to collect 1,000 teddy bears for the Children's Advocacy Center of the Coastal Bend.

Her teddy bear drive began on January 5th and ends on February 15th with several drop-off locations throughout the city.

"The teddy bears that the Children's Advocacy Center gives you after a forensic interview represent how strong you were to come forward with your story," said Kaylie, a 15-year old freshman at Flour Bluff High School. "I'm hoping the teddy bears will provide a sense of comfort to a traumatic situation."

Kaylie came up with the idea to organize the drive on her own, but

# CAC RAINBOW ROOM PROVIDES RESOURCES TO HELP MEET CHILDREN'S BASIC NEEDS



Family Advocates Karen Emero (left) and Vanessa Cordero organize items in our Rainbow Room serving children who need our services.

Each day, our CAC Family Advocates helps families navigate the complex systems once their child makes an outcry of abuse. Oftentimes, our FA team works with non-offending caregivers to assure that children who visit the Center are having their basic needs met. In 2021, our Family Advocates worked with a total of 814 families.

## TEEN BEAR DRIVE CON'T

first met with her school counselor to help her develop the idea into a plan of action.

"I started out by talking to my counselor who talked to my principal who contacted the superintendent," she explained. "I spoke at City Hall and the Flour Bluff board meeting. I designed the flyer myself, made posters and painted each of the donation boxes with little teddy bears."

But all of Kaylie's hard work is worth her extra time - especially with the high rate of child abuse right here in the Coastal Bend. Just in the last year, the number of children receiving primary services increased from 1,552 in 2020 to 1,854 in 2021. That's an increase of more than 300 children.

"I feel that what happened [to these children] was something that no one should ever experience," she said. "I want to help people who have been through it feel more comfortable telling their stories and keeping themselves safe because it is more common than people think."

When a family-in-need walks through our doors, our Family Advocates not only leads families through the process, but can help them successfully access resources during their time of crisis.

Our FA can offer referrals to partner agencies for additional services, Driscoll Children's Hospital for a medical evaluation and coordinate CACCB therapy and other resources which may also include selecting items from our Rainbow Room.

The Rainbow Room, which was established at the Center in 2018, stocks new boys' and girls' clothing, undergarments, shoes, blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, diapers and hygiene and feminine products, all provided at no cost to the families.

In 2019, the Rainbow Room was dedicated to Leota 'Lee' Gaines who made hundreds of unique stuffed animals for the children served by the Center. Sadly, Gaines passed away in 2021; however, the room honors her memory.

The Leota 'Lee' Gaines Rainbow Room is partially funded by multiple community organizations.



## BEAR DROP-OFF LOCATIONS

- Flour Bluff ISD Schools (entrances)
- Surfside Sandwich Shoppe
- Buffalo Wings Company
- Scuttlebutt's Seafood Bar & Grill



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

By Clarissa Mora

As we wrap up 2021, I am in awe of the work we did. While many things around us slowed down, the number of children and families who walked through our doors certainly did not. We provided more child forensic interviews, more mental health, and more community outreach.

In the final quarter of 2021, the Center forensically-interviewed 367 children, provided 539 mental health sessions, and presented to 1,024 children. Wow! Our staff should feel a sense of accomplishment, rising to all the challenges we have faced since the pandemic.

The amount of therapy we have provided has increased significantly over the last few months. To be more specific, the number of therapy sessions increased from 1,126 in 2020 to 1,818 in 2021. This is due to the Center being awarded additional state funding to focus on mental health in the rural communities we serve.

Since our inception in 1994, we've never had a facility outside of Corpus Christi. ... Until now! With the additional funding, we have secured offices in Alice, Beeville, and Sinton. Also, we hired two more therapists, so we are adequately staffed to provide therapy outside of Corpus Christi, while maintaining a full schedule at our main office.

## PARTNER PROFILE: RETHA CABLE



Since beginning her career in 1994, Retha Cable has successfully prosecuted many cases involving child witnesses and victims.

"As a prosecutor we meet these children at the lowest point in their short lives," said Cable, Assistant District Attorney Kleberg and Kenedy Counties. "While I cannot take the hurt away; I can give them back some of the power taken from them by

the perpetrator through the criminal justice system."

Cable, who also worked with DAs offices in Nueces and San Patricio counties before joining Kleberg and Kenedy DAs office in 2016, says that the CACCB has been a useful tool in her trial arsenal because it is a safe place where children can go to tell what has happened to them.

For most, this outcry is the important first step in ending the abuse for the child, she says.

"During this process, I assure them that they are brave for telling about the abuse and that the offender will not hurt them again," she said. "I know that without the CACCB, many of these children would not be able to tell of the abuse and would therefore continue to suffer... as no child should suffer."

## EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER: SARAH PUENTE



Being culturally sensitive to the needs of the families and providing excellent customer service is important for Bilingual Family Advocate Sarah Puente.

"Making sure our families get the right information and help they need is what motivates me," said Puente, who has been with the Center since June 2020. "Also, knowing that God uses me to help families is the best part about working at the CACCB."

While at the Center, Puente has worked hard to assure children seen at the CAC are referred to therapy and teen support group, but she has also offered help outside of her scope by translating new forms, designing flyers for the Center and offering technical support.

"I'd like to thank God for placing me in a job where I'm happy and can help serve Him," she said. "To the entire team at the CAC you all are amazing and so fun to work with! Thank you for all the laughs, the help, the love, and all you do in making the CAC so awesome!"

## BUY A T-SHIRT TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE CAC

## SUPPORTER ADOPTS CAC AS SECRET SANTA



The newly designed CACCB T-shirt will be available soon and just in time for Child Abuse Prevention & Awareness Month in April. "Stand up for children" and help raise money for the Center.

"It's important that this fundraiser is a success since we have been unable to hold our usual fundraisers due to the ongoing pandemic," said Executive Director Clarissa Mora. "We hope everyone likes our new design for 2022 and will consider buying a T-shirt."

Mora says the goal is to raise \$10,000. The cost of each shirt is \$20. Individuals, groups and organizations may purchase T-shirts by calling the Center at (361) 855-9058. Those who purchase a T-shirt will be contacted to arrange for pick-up once T-shirts arrive.

This Christmas, Cassandra Cochran and her family wanted to make the holidays special for the children who come through our doors.

So her family decided to adopt the CACCB as our Secret Santa, shopping for many requested items including children's snacks, juice boxes, waters, fleece blankets, stuffed toys, fidget poppers and hygiene items for our Rainbow Room.

Prior to the holiday break, Cassandra and her family members delivered these gifts to the Center earlier this week.

We want to thank the family for their heart-warming generosity this Christmas!

## COMMUNITY GIFTS HELP KEEP US GOING

Recent gifts totaling nearly \$30,000 will help keep the Center running smoothly for years to come! We are so appreciative to the following organizations:

- The **King Ranch Family Trust** provided a \$25,000 check for the Center's efforts to serve children and families in Kleberg, Kenedy, Brooks and Jim Wells counties.
- **McMullen County** gave a gift of \$2,800 to assist the Center's general operating funds.
- Through the **Grande Communications Grande Cares Club**, Grande employees voluntarily contribute a portion of their earnings. The earnings are matched by Grande's Corporate Giving. The Grande Cares Club donated a total of \$1,400 to the Center in unrestricted funds.



Alice G.K. Kleberg

## UPCOMING DATES



Feb. 14: Valentine's Day  
Feb. 21: Closed, President's Day  
April - Child Abuse Prevention Month

April 2 - CACCB @ Heritage Park Market Days  
April 15: Closed, Good Friday  
For details, call (361) 855-9058, ext. 0.