



CHILDREN'S NETWORK
OF STARK COUNTY
CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 30, 2015

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**NEW INITIATIVES AT THE CHILDREN'S NETWORK OF STARK COUNTY
FOR INVESTIGATING ABUSE CASES AND ASSISTING CHILD VICTIMS**

*NEW COUNTY-WIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIT IS THE FIRST TO BE LOCATED
WITHIN A CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER IN OHIO*

Canton, OH – The Children's Network of Stark County unveiled three new initiatives designed to bring comfort to victims of child abuse and build stronger cases to prosecute their perpetrators. The plans were announced during a press conference today at the child advocacy center that serves children and families who are victims of sexual, severe physical abuse, human trafficking, and those who witness violence.

The first initiative involves the creation of the Law Enforcement Unit at The Network in partnership with Stark County Sheriff George T. Maier and the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Stark County. The mission of the unit is to assist and train peace officers county-wide to conduct thorough investigations and avoid the need to re-interview child victims. This unit, which is the first of its kind in the state of Ohio to be housed within a child advocacy center, will include an administrative liaison for all law enforcement jurisdictions in the county. This liaison will be available to provide training and support to the peace officers who investigate cases of child abuse and will be funded jointly by the Sheriff's Office and the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board.

"Investigating child abuse cases often involves specialized casework that can be quite sensitive and complex," said Stark County Sheriff George T. Maier. "We will be available to train and assist all Stark County law enforcement jurisdictions to thoroughly investigate these crimes to build strong cases that lead to the conviction and incarceration of perpetrators."

"We are pleased to work with The Children's Network on this innovative project," said John Aller, executive director of the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Stark County. "It is critical to have well-trained, specialized law enforcement investigate these types of crimes to ensure additional pain is not inflicted upon an already traumatized child. We know children who have experienced abuse are more likely to experience difficulty in adolescence and adulthood, and are at-risk for developing

substance use disorders or mental illness. Opportunities to work together such as this, minimize trauma on the child for a better likelihood of positive outcomes in the future.”

The second initiative will bring a licensed facility dog to spend time with children while they are waiting in the lobby of The Network. Golden retriever Riley, along with her handler Judy Gaetje, will visit twice a week to help ease the anxiety that children may experience in anticipation of their interview or exam. Riley and Judy participate in Therapy Dogs International, which is a volunteer organization dedicated to regulating, testing, and registering therapy dogs and their handlers.

The third initiative unveils the Pajama Closet, which holds pajamas, socks, and underwear that are available in all sizes for children who visit The Network. The closet was built by Olivieri Construction who donated the labor and supplies for the entire project. In addition, the Hackett Foundation provided \$5,000 to purchase pajamas and books and the local chapter of the Pajama Program donated 500 pairs of pajamas. Any child who visits The Network is offered a new pair of pajamas, socks, underwear, and an age-appropriate book.

“Every day the partners at The Children’s Network are working together to bring healing and justice to victims of child abuse,” said Deborah Forkas, Executive Director of Stark County Job & Family Services. “The children and their families who walk through our doors need our help and we want to do everything possible to help make them comfortable during a very difficult time in their life.”

The Network was the first child advocacy center in the state of Ohio and is accredited by the National Children’s Alliance. It is a collaboration of community partners who work together in one location to help children and their families cope with exposure to violence, sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, and human trafficking. Members of this multi-disciplinary team include: Stark County Prosecutor John Ferrero; Dr. R. Daryl Steiner, CARE Center Medical Director at Akron Children’s Hospital; Joe French, CEO of Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health; Robin R. Tener, Ph.D., Executive Director from Northeast Ohio Behavioral Health; and Chief Andy Turowski from the Louisville Police Department.

After the press conference, The Network held an open house for members of the community to tour the facility. The open house event concludes the month-long recognition of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month.