



ChildFirst™

The Forensic Interviewing Newsletter of the National Child Protection Training Center

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A FORENSIC INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE ON DIGITAL RECORDING OF CHILDREN

By Rita Johnson¹

Introduction

Many articles have been written about police interrogations of suspects and recording technology for custodial interviews. However, little has been written about the utilization of recording technology for child forensic interviews. For a professional, charged with the overwhelming task of investigating child abuse, the way in which the investigation is handled ultimately determines our success. These cases are often the most difficult to prove with little physical evidence and, unfortunately, in many circumstances, a child no one believes. In my experience as a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) director and forensic interviewer, the importance of recording technology cannot be over emphasized. This article will discuss, from my perspective, both the benefits and pitfalls that technology offers.

Many law enforcement departments have utilized recordings as a means to protect themselves against false allegations of coercive interrogations and mistreatment of suspects. Many states have now mandated recordings for suspect interviews. Although there has been an increase of law enforcement agencies adopting recording as a standard for suspect interviews, the videotaping of forensic interviews of children continues to be debated.²

There have been great advances in the way child abuse investigations are handled, with a primary benefit being that an alleged child victim is no longer

required to endure multiple interviews by detectives, case managers and other professionals. Research shows that by decreasing the number of times a child is interviewed, you greatly reduce the contamination of the process. Like criminal suspect interrogations, a quality recording of child interviews will significantly increase the ability to successfully prosecute child abuse cases.³

Digital recording has greatly improved the technology available to record forensic interviews. Digital technology has all but replaced analog recordings and the cumbersome VHS tapes of the past. Still, many professionals have apprehensions about the new advancements with recordings. They question exactly what these advancements offer and how they can best utilize what is available. To address the controversies associated with recording technology for child interviews, the components of a child forensic interview need to be reviewed.



Once there is an understanding of the interview itself, an assessment of the center's needs can be made. Because this is an ever changing technological era, the benefits and challenges in making recording technology decisions must be understood. As a center director and forensic interviewer, I was technologically challenged, and the thought of selecting recording technology was not a decision I believed myself capable of making. My only concern was the child I was interviewing and for many years I overlooked just how important the recording of the interview was to my team and the child.

As a result, I set out to identify and learn from the experiences of the many multi-disciplinary teams that do use digital recordings for their child interviews and also those jurisdictions that do not use digital recordings for their interviews. I contacted prosecutors, judges, law enforcement officers, caseworkers, and CAC (Child Advocacy Center) staff to obtain their views on the recording of child forensic interviews. My objective was to determine the following:

- What type of child interviews are being recorded?
- Advantages/disadvantages of recording child interviews?
- What elements/functions of equipment are most important for child interviews?
- Are children made aware of recordings?
- Is cost a factor in the ability to record?
- Is digital recording equipment being used?

Components of Child Forensic Interviews

Prior to the selection of recording equipment, it is important to examine the components of the interviews themselves. The beauty of working with multi-disciplinary teams and child advocacy centers is that the face of the center and team may look very different based on the communities served, but the components and processes are very much the same.

There are over 700 Children's Advocacy Centers in the United States.⁴ The growth of child advocacy centers is no doubt attributable to the fact CACs facilitate collaborative investigations and facilitate forensic interviews that are conducted in a neutral, child-friendly environment.

Although the interview process and protocol, the multi-disciplinary team, and the setting itself may vary, the issues of recording technology for the interview remain constant. The compelling nature and evidentiary value of a child's disclosure during a forensic interview will be lost if the recorded product is so poorly done that it is inadmissible in a court of law.

Current practices in recording forensic interviews

In preparing for this article, I spoke with or otherwise received information from hundreds of child advocacy center team members, law enforcement officials, prosecutors and case workers across the nation regarding the process they use to facilitate forensic interviews. From this information, I can make the following, general observations as to how forensic interviews are being recorded and the advantages and disadvantages as perceived by the front line professionals I spoke to.

Types of child interviews recorded:

Most Child Advocacy Centers interview children alleged to be abused sexually and physically. Some centers include child neglect cases and children who are witnesses to crimes. As a general practice, those centers that do record their child interviews record 100% of the interviews. The jurisdictions that do not record, typically do not record any of their interviews.

Advantages/Disadvantages to recording child interviews: The child protection professionals not recording forensic interviews expressed the following concerns: the recording will be "used" against the child in court; interviewer errors may be over-emphasized in court; the state does not allow recordings to be used in the judicial process; equipment problems; and poor quality audio and video.

The individuals that do record listed the following advantages: the recording "speaks for itself"; increases plea agreements; allows protection for trained interviewer; obtains both audio and video; shows demeanor of both child and interviewer; and provides evidence.

Equipment capabilities: Most jurisdictions and multi-disciplinary teams utilizing recordings stated that the ability to record every child interview in a reliable form was very important. These team members recommended the following:

- Secure the "original" recording for evidence
- Have multiple DVD recordings of the interview
- Produce DVD's that can play on any computer or player
- Ensure the final product contains a high quality audio and video
- Make sure all equipment used in the recording is easy to use
- Utilize equipment in the forensic interview that provides for the ability to communicate with the interviewer
- The recording must allow for easy retrieval and playback

Ideally, the recording should have a "picture in picture" component that can at all times capture the child's facial expressions as well as the child's movements within the forensic interview room.

Child's knowledge of recording: As a general practice most professionals and interviewers advise the child that the interview is being recorded. Some centers disclose this information based on the child's age or ability to understand but most interviewers tell the child about the team observing and the recording equipment so that the child does not find out about those practices later and feel misled or deceived.



Cost: Cost is sometimes a significant factor for child advocacy centers when purchasing recording equipment. Unfortunately, because many child advocacy centers struggle with sustainability issues overall, often the cheapest equipment is purchased. This leads to the equipment not meeting the needs of the multi-disciplinary team or the center; or the equipment fails to record properly and additional funds are needed to replace the equipment. The key is to educate the multi-disciplinary team and staff to make sure the financial investment will be a positive experience.

Equipment: Recording equipment varies from state to state. However, digital recording of child interviews is the best standard at this time. Most equipment decisions for child advocacy centers are first based on budgetary constraints and then on the ease of use. Recording can “look” very similar, but provide or fail to provide many different features. For the average forensic interviewer, their expertise is not in the IT field and having the ability to understand what recording companies can provide for their team can be a challenge. Education is the key in providing the center with the recording equipment to meet the needs of each center. The American Bar Association has put together an assessment tool for use in determining the needs of your center and team.⁵

Benefits/Challenges of recording child forensic interviews

Many professionals accept that an audio and video recording of a child interview is an efficient and effective evidentiary tool in child abuse investigations. However, many communities and jurisdictions still do not record their child interviews. If a department or agency decides not to record, it often has more to do with budgetary constraints or a fear of not “getting” the information desired from the child. This position presumes there is an agenda for interviewing the child, which taints an investigation from the outset.

In discussing recording of interviews with professionals, I found that those jurisdictions that did NOT want a recording of a child interview tended to believe it may be “used” against them during the judicial process. This thought is contrary to the professionals who choose to record their interviews

and who expressed a greater belief that the benefits far outweigh the pitfalls. As one police chief stated, “The fear of technology has to be overcome or you will be left behind!”

Often, the child being interviewed does not make the “perfect” witness, or may prove to be a challenge for the forensic interviewer. The obstacles needing to be overcome in the interview should not determine whether or not to record. During my research, many forensic interviewers stated they were apprehensive about being recorded; especially when peer review is involved. However, when children are interviewed, it is the skills of the interviewer that need to be improved, not the skills of the child being interviewed. Once properly trained in interviewing children, the fear of the recording being used against the interviewer disappears. The recording serves as a protective tool for the forensic interviewer, a valuable investigative tool for the MDT, and a potential evidentiary tool to assist the child.

Another concern about recording is that some state statutes limit or exclude the admissibility of recordings in court. Professionals in these states may opt to “not record” because they believe there is no use for the recording by the state during the judicial process. However, those currently recording child interviews have found a noticeable increase of plea agreements, because the recording “speaks for itself.”

Both audio and video recordings provide a permanent evidentiary record of exactly what occurred with the child during the interview. Recordings of child interviews prevent any question concerning the type of questions a forensic interviewer asked, as well as the interviewer’s conduct or treatment of the child. With a recorded interview, investigators are no longer called upon in court to paraphrase or explain something a child has told them. Instead, the recording serves that purpose and may ultimately preserve the integrity of an investigation.

Concerns about the possibility recordings will harm the government’s ability to investigate a case of child abuse are similar to the concerns some investigators had about the recording of custodial interrogations. The thinking was “don’t record because we don’t know what will be said” or “how it will be used against us.” Eventually,

departments started recording in many communities as “protection” against false accusations against the interrogator. In addition, many state statutes are starting to require law enforcement to record their interrogations. The bottom line is that recording provides a clear and accurate account of what happened during the interrogation.

Many challenges can be removed or minimized by learning what is available in recording technology and educating those conducting the interview in proper techniques in working with children who have allegedly been abused. The professionals investigating child abuse cases indicated the most important feature of recording technology must be the reliability of the equipment. Simply put, the equipment must record every time without fail. In addition, the quality of the recording needs to be superior in order to effectively utilize the recording later in court.

Professionals must determine the needs of the community that they serve and the capabilities of their team in order to select the proper recording technology. An assessment should be completed to determine the needs and compare which products will meet those needs.

My experience as a forensic interviewer allowed me to come face to face with the challenges technology presented during my interviews and to come up with a solution. First, I had to look at what was currently being used to record child interviews, and then determine whether the current equipment met our team’s objectives in ultimately putting the child’s needs first.



A few examples of some of the challenges I personally faced as an interviewer determining whether the technology was sound included: could I hear the team's questions in my earpiece? Was the quality of video and audio satisfactory? (When I would attempt to review the recording for my court preparations, sometimes I couldn't even hear what I was saying!) As many team members in the past may have looked at the recording equipment as just a small part of the forensic interview process, it is now quite evident that it may be the single most important piece of the forensic interview. Researchers Margaret-Ellen Pipe and others have called the forensic interview, properly conducted, the "equivalent of the 'DNA' of the case."⁶ When we installed a quality recording system in our CAC, I experienced an unexpected benefit. Not having to worry about the recording allowed me to focus more on the interview process itself, and the overall quality of the interviews improved.

Considerations in selecting technology

As quickly as technology changes, it is essential that professionals select recording technology that will be a "solution" for their interviewing needs for a significant amount of time in order to justify the investment. In comparing the products currently available to child advocacy centers, there are two types of companies. The first type is local companies that deal with DVR's (digital video recorder), cameras, and surveillance type equipment that may be pieced together for a center. The second type of company specializes in solutions for particular interviewing needs. These companies offer products specifically designed for recording interviews. The difference in functionality and the quality of the resultant recording can be significant.

Once you look at the overall process for your interviewing, the equipment should allow for ease of start and stop recording; ease of categorizing and retrieval of interviews; and should produce a recording that is playable on any piece of equipment.

The reason the last item is so important is that since the DVD may ultimately be used in a judicial setting, the recording must have the ability to be played on any type of equipment used by the court. Also, do not forget that the integrity of the recording – being able to say unequivocally to the court that it is a true and accurate representation of what happened and what was said during the child's interview – is essential. "The quality of digital is better", says Lt. Jon Priest, with the Denver (Colorado) Police Department.⁷

However, when dealing with any type of investigation, the evidentiary aspect of the recording is important to all professionals. When digital technology entered the recording world, there was controversy about how the digital recording might be tampered with, edited or manipulated. Most jurisdictions require an original recording to be submitted into evidence. This requirement means that law enforcement may be confronted with a problem if any digital recording needs to be reproduced or edited in any way.

In looking at digital recording equipment available, there are many companies providing many different solutions for the digital recording of interviews. Often a local company specializing in surveillance type recording will piece together a system for a CAC or Multi-disciplinary team. Because cost is often a factor, this solution meets the present financial need. However, since many DVR's purchased for forensic interviewing ultimately do not meet the recording requirements or needs of a CAC, MDT or courts, additional equipment must be purchased. This additional cost, added to the initial cost, is often higher than if the CAC had gone with a company that specialized in interview room recordings.

Conclusion

Any CAC or MDT preparing to analyze the need for a recording system for interviews of children alleged to have been abused or neglected will have a complex and challenging process to go through. This is particularly true as technology advances and the laws continue to change. There may be no more important decision than that of "to record or not to record" in the

world of child abuse investigations. Just make sure that you consider all of your options and make a decision that is in the best interests of the children in the community you serve. If you use this as a benchmark, you truly can never go wrong.

Footnotes

- ¹ Rita Johnson, forensic interviewer, trainer, child advocacy specialist, Word Systems, Inc.
- ² See Kenneth V. Lanning, *Acquaintance Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis*, in COOPER, ET AL, MEDICAL, LEGAL, & SOCIAL SCIENCE ASPECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION 529, 574 (2005) (noting "it is still my opinion that the disadvantages of taping generally outweigh the advantages.")
- ³ See generally, Frank Vandervort, *Videotaping Investigative Interviews of Children in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse: One Community's Approach*, 96 JOURNAL OF CRIMINAL LAW & CRIMINOLOGY (2006). See also, Amy R. Warren & Cara E. Woodall, *The Reliability of Hearsay Testimony: How Well Do Interviewers Recall Their Interviews with Children?* 5 Psychology, Public Policy & Law 355 (1999) (finding that interviewers' memories degraded following interviews with children and they had difficulty recalling with specificity the questions asked of children and the responses children provided during interviews).
- ⁴ See generally, Nancy Chandler, *Children's Advocacy Centers: Making a Difference Once Child At a Time*, 28 HAMLINE JOURNAL OF PUBLIC LAW & POLICY 315 (2006).
- ⁵ The assessment tool is entitled *Closed Circuit (CCTV) and Recording Technology for Use in Child Abuse Cases* and can be obtained on the American Bar Association website at: www.abanet.org
- ⁶ Margaret Ellen Pipe, et al, *Do Best Practice Interviews with Child Abuse Victims Influence Case Processing?* (November 2008) at page 12. Available online at: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/224524.pdf>
- ⁷ Pamela Mills Senn, *What's New with Interviews*, LAW ENFORCEMENT TECHNOLOGY (July 2006)



ChildFirst™ State Training Calendar 2009*

MARCH

March 9-13, Sykesville, MD
March 16-20, Bridgeton, NJ
March 23-27, Meriden, CT
March 30-April 3, Bentonville, AR

APRIL

March 30-April 3, Bentonville, AR
April 13-17, Forsyth, GE
April 20-24, Columbia, SC
April 27-May 1, Ottawa, KS
April 27-May 1, Lewes, DE
April 27-May 1, Oklahoma City, OK

MAY

April 27-May 1, Ottawa, KS
April 27-May 1, Oklahoma City, OK

JUNE

June 1-5, Wayne, NJ
June 22-26, Little Rock, AR

JULY

July 20-24, Columbus, OH
July 20-24, Terre Haute, IN
July 20-24, Wheeling, WV
July 23-27, Columbia, SC

AUGUST

August 3-5, Athens, GE (advanced course)

SEPTEMBER

September 14-18, Hays, KS
September 21-25, Little Rock, AR

OCTOBER

October 19-23, Meriden, CT
October 19-23, Springfield, IL
October 19-23, Indianapolis, IN
October 19-23, Sayerville, NJ
October 26-30, Columbus, OH
October 26-30, Columbia, SC
October 26-30, WSPV Academy, Institute, WV

NOVEMBER

November 2-6, Oklahoma City, OK

*ChildFirst™ state programs are open only to child protection professionals working or residing in the state in which the course is held.

ChildFirst™ National Training Calendar 2009

When Words Matter: Emerging Issues in Forensic Interviewing

May 4-7, 2009

St. Louis, MO

WhenWords Matter is designed to extend the concepts taught at five day forensic interviewing courses teaching the CornerHouse interviewing protocol RATAC®. All child protection professionals are encouraged to attend including prosecutors, law enforcement officers, child protective service workers, forensic interviewers, child counselors/psychologists, medical professionals, victim advocates, and anyone else who interviews children or prepares them for court.

The Forensic Interviewer at Trial

August 24-26, 2009

National Child Protection Training Center, Winona, MN

This course will be designed for teams of prosecutors and forensic interviewers. The course will require the prosecutors to conduct a direct examination of their forensic interviewers, and to conduct a re-direct examination after their forensic interviewers have been cross-examined. The prosecutors, working with their forensic interviewers, must also respond to the critiques of their forensic interviews from a defense expert.

CornerHouse™ Advanced Forensic Interview Training

October 13-16, 2009

National Child Protection Training Center, Winona, MN

The CornerHouse™ Advanced Forensic Interview Training is open to law enforcement, child protection investigators, prosecutors, and child interview specialists who have completed the required prerequisites and work as part of their multidisciplinary team. This course teaches advanced forensic interviewing issues, modifies the CornerHouse™ RATAC® interview protocol for physical abuse and other violent crimes, provides a mock cross-examination demonstration and provides participants the opportunity to learn and utilize a videotaped interview assessment tool to critique their own interviews. Students will either have a videotaped interview peer reviewed or they will participate in an interview role-play with an actor.

ChildFirst: Interviewing Children and Preparing for Court

November 16-20, 2009

National Child Protection Training Center, Winona, MN

ChildFirst is the forensic interview training program of NCPTC. Presented in collaboration with CornerHouse™, this course is designed for investigative teams of law enforcement officers, social workers, prosecutors, child protection attorneys, and forensic interviewers. Students are taught the forensic interviewing protocol developed by Cornerhouse. This protocol, entitled RATAC, has been specifically recognized and approved by a number of appellate courts. Includes lecture and discussion, review of CornerHouse videotaped interviews, skill building exercises and an interview practicum.

To register for these courses, or to receive additional information, visit our website at www.ncptc.org or call the National Child Protection Training Center at 507-457-2890.

ChildFirst™ State Updates

(in order of admission to the program)



As of January 1, 2009, our statewide forensic interview training in South Carolina will be known as *ChildFirst South Carolina* so that we are aligned in name and in program with NCPTC and CornerHouse. We announced the change to our children's advocacy centers and agencies which employ forensic interviewers.

We have four trainings scheduled in 2009. Each course trains twenty-four professionals, and we anticipate that each 2009 course will be fully subscribed. The Finding Words program has been very successful in South Carolina, and, as of October 2008, Finding Words South Carolina trained 575 professionals. Those professionals include: 34 prosecutors; 190 law enforcement officers; 180 child protective service case workers; and 171 children's advocacy center interviewers. Thirty-seven of our forty-six counties have Finding Words trained forensic interviewers. Those counties which do not have trained forensic interviewers within the county coordinate with the nearest children's advocacy center for forensic interview and other multidisciplinary team services.

While we have not had the resources to comprehensively capture and analyze the data on the impact of trained forensic interviewers on successful criminal prosecutions, we have anecdotal information that our forensic interviewers are contributing to successful prosecutions. We also have anecdotal information that the increased use of videotaped interviews in combination with our child hearsay statute passed in 2006 is assisting the successful prosecution of child abusers.

While we have much yet to do in South Carolina, resources provided by NCPTC, CornerHouse and the Finding Words states has provided South Carolina professionals first class training and first class support. Those of us on the faculty and in the administration of Finding Words South Carolina look forward to continuing our efforts as ChildFirst South Carolina and to continued coordination with NCPTC, CornerHouse, and the states.

For more information about course offerings in South Carolina, visit our website at: <http://childlaw.sc.edu>



Currently, New Jersey has held 20 trainings and has trained a total of 691 people in all 21 counties. In 2008, a total of 119 people were trained, including detectives, assistant prosecutors, DYFS workers, DAG's, medical doctors, and clinicians.

New Jersey hosted the Beyond Finding Words Conference in August 2007. The program Co-Directors, Anthony V. D'Urso, Psy.D., and Joseph Del Russo, Esq., and the Program Coordinator, Sarah B. Michalowski, MSW, LSW, attended the grand opening of the National Child Protection Training Center in Winona in October of 2008. Dr. D'Urso also attended the faculty meeting in Cincinnati in September 2008. New Jersey is developing a research project based on the RATAC protocol in collaboration with NCPTC and CornerHouse. New Jersey is in the process of developing a new website.



Mississippi has completed its sixth year of forensic training as a ChildFirst state. In the past six years, we have trained hundreds of child protection professionals from every region of the state. We also been able to host advanced forensic interview training and to serve as resource not only in our state, but many of our faculty have also taught at national forensic interviewing courses. Our program, and the CornerHouse RATAC® protocol have specifically been recognized by our appellate courts.



We have moved from video cameras to web cams utilizing the iRecord System to do our student interviews. We initiated this change in our October session and it was a great improvement. In addition to simplifying setup of the room, the sound quality is better and it's easier to adjust the angles. With the VHS format becoming obsolete, it's more efficient and less expensive for the DVDs...not to mention less cumbersome!

We are incorporating a role play scenario in our training using our legal and law enforcement faculty to demonstrate the process of screening a criminal case. We hope to use this to liven up the legal section by incorporating hearsay discussion in a live format rather than strictly lecture which consistently generates many negative comments from the non-legal folks in the class. Our intent is to give some concrete examples of how information garnered during the investigation can be used to corroborate the child's interview.

Finally, we are hopeful that 2009 will include an advanced course which will incorporate Internet sources which can enhance an investigation. We have a strong statewide ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children) Task Force and one of our counties has a countywide multi-agency task force which includes investigators, forensic analysts and a prosecutor who can assist with this training.

For more information, visit our website at: www.firstlightcac.com



ChildFirst Georgia started in 2003 and has continually received high evaluations and maintains waiting lists, thereby demonstrating the need for continuing this training program and promoting consistency in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse throughout the state. During each application period in 2008, the number of applications exceeded each course offering by at least two times more applicants than student space. To date, the program has trained 792 persons from 109 counties. Due to the overwhelming success of the AFG, the Office of the Child Advocate decided to develop an advanced course, Advanced Finding Words Georgia. Each course is limited to 15 students due to intense interactive scenarios. Students are furnished a "mock case file" containing investigative documents generated in a child sexual abuse investigation, participate in a mock MDT meeting and testify in a mock trial.

For more information, visit our website at: www.gachildadvocate.org (click on training to find "Frequently Asked Questions and 2009 Application")



Missouri is proud to be the host state for this year's *When Words Matter* conference to be held in St. Louis May 4-7. Missouri was among the first states to recognize the necessity of developing state forensic interview training programs. Since we implemented the course in 2003, we have trained over 500 child protection professionals from over 70% of our counties.



ChildFirst Maryland held two trainings in 2008, one in July and the other in September. Both of these trainings were at the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commissions in Sykesville, Maryland.

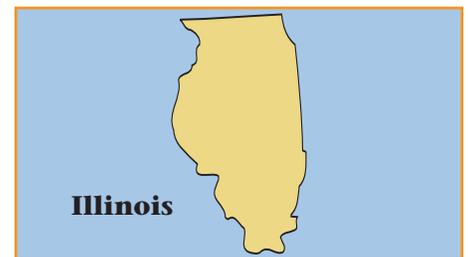
The ChildFirst team welcomed two new faculty members on board at the July training. Sgt. Mark Plazinski, supervisor of the Family Crimes Division with the Montgomery County Police Department and Mrs. Vera Doukmajian a Social Worker with the Montgomery County Department of Social Services.

In 2009, ChildFirst Maryland plans to hold three trainings throughout the State. For more information about course offerings, visit: www.goccp.org and www.mdle.net.



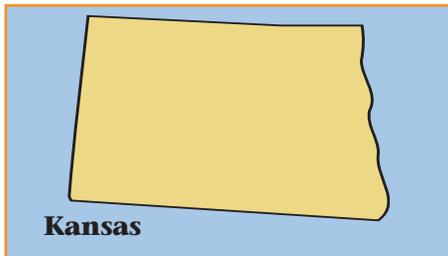
ChildFirst West Virginia just completed our fifth year of being part of the Half A Nation Project. To date we have trained over 430 professionals in the RATAAC® method of forensic interviewing. We were also pleased to bring CornerHouse to West Virginia in December and offer a three day Advanced Finding Words course to previous graduates of our program. Our ChildFirst faculty remains stable and our funding secure for the coming year!

If you are a child protection professional in West Virginia interested in attending one of our courses, training information is available at: www.wvpai.org



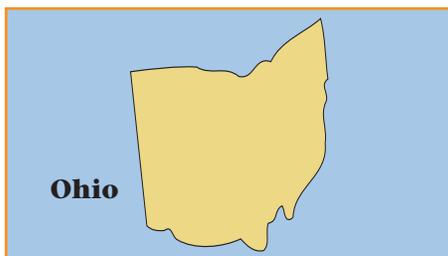
It was another positive year for *ChildFirst* in Illinois. During our spring training, 40 MDT members were trained. Staff changes occurred in the summer, bringing a new coordinator to the program, Jordan Benning. Another 37 MDT members were trained during our fall training, and we were excited to incorporate new sections into our curriculum at that time. Mike Burns, a long-time faculty member and detective for the Bloomington Police Department, conducted a session about multidisciplinary teams, with positive feedback from participants. Dr. Tim Kutz, a pediatrician with Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, provided a very informative and well-received session about medical exams. We are proud to have such committed and knowledgeable faculty, and appreciate the interest and dedication of MDT members throughout our state who participated in Finding Words this year.

Child abuse professionals in Illinois who would like to participate in our 2009 courses should contact Jordan Benning, Associate Director of Training and Education, at 217.528.2224.



ChildFirst Kansas has had a wonderful response to our course. Usually they are sold out months in advance. It is great to hear in the beginning of the classes when asked why they are attending the class the majority say because they have heard from others how great a class it is! Seldom do we have anymore "because my boss said I had to come". Because of loss of some state funding we had to raise the price from \$200 to \$350 for this next year. Luckily that has not seemed to stop anyone from applying.

For the last four years we have offered three courses a year in different locations in the state so more counties have easier accessibility. So far we have trained child abuse professionals from over half of our counties; the goal is to have a trained MDT in all of our Kansas counties. We have been fortunate to have the same core faculty teaching and the same talented and dedicated actors from Wichita State University. After every class we continue to hear from at least one veteran student if not more, that this is the best and most valuable training they had received in their career. Reminds all of us why we do this, because the kids will benefit in the end!



Traditionally, Ohio has hosted the *ChildFirst* course three times a year with a maximum of 30 students per course. Due to budget constraints, the course will be offered twice in 2009 with a maximum of 40 students per course. Scheduled dates are July 20th – 24th and October 26th – 30th. The tuition fee will remain at \$200. This fee generates enough revenue to offset a large portion of the training costs without being cost prohibitive for smaller jurisdictions.

To date Ohio has hosted 11 courses and trained 314 professionals representing legal and clinical disciplines. The core faculty remains dedicated to the course, but adding new faculty members is a priority for 2009. Last year, a medical lecture was added to the course. Given the overwhelmingly positive feedback, it will be offered again this year.

Ohio recently held a special election and elected a new Attorney General. As with any incoming administration, the course will be under review. Currently, online registration is not available, but the registration brochure is accessible at www.ag.state.oh.us (follow the upcoming events link).

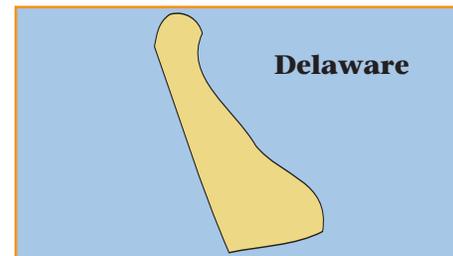


ChildFirst Arkansas experienced a great and encouraging year in 2008. We now have over 300 frontline investigators trained and more than half of our state's counties are represented with investigators who have attended the training.

Since we are located in the further most northwest corner of the state it has been difficult to reach many investigators located in the southern regions. With this in mind, we took the *ChildFirst* program off site for the very first time this year. This was not necessarily an easy task as it leaves little room for error. The result was a full conference that was incredibly successful. In fact it was so successful that in 2009 we will have 2 of our 3 trainings hosted off site by the Arkansas State Police Training Headquarters in Little Rock, AR.

Interest and applications for the 2009 training season have already begun to arrive. We are encouraged by the ever growing interest in the conference and the number of people with a desire to protect the children of Arkansas.

If you live in Arkansas and are interested in attending one of our courses, visit our website at: www.cherishingchildren.net.



We are preparing for our 8th Statewide Forensic Interview course (April 27 - May 01, 2009) which will be our first "*ChildFirst*" session. We are very much looking forward to completing the transition from *Finding Words* to *ChildFirst*.

During the first seven offerings of our course, we trained and graduated 224 front-line protection professionals. Our graduates represent a diverse population which include the Division of Family Services (75 graduates), the Department of Justice (25), the Children's Advocacy Center of Delaware (7), statewide Law Enforcement (81), Office of the Child Advocate and the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) (7) and other disciplines such as child mental health, SANE nurses etc. (29).

ChildFirst Delaware is in the process of recruiting and training additional faculty members so that we ensure adequate coverage for all presentations and also strive to engage more child protection professionals in our *ChildFirst* training initiative.

Our student feedback from all seven courses offered thus far in Delaware is extremely positive. We are also finding that as we send our graduates out into the field we are building a "network" of professionals who understand how important it is to ensure that we have a "collaborative" response to allegations of child abuse and that we work together as a "multidisciplinary team" in order to ensure a "comprehensive" response where we all apply the "*Child First*" doctrine.



The ChildFirst Virginia training program is coordinated through the Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Criminal Justice Services, by staff in the Juvenile Services section. At this time, our Juvenile Services section is waiting for approval to hold the training. The state is encountering fiscal challenges and all requests to proceed with training programs must go through a detailed approval process. Presently, there are no 2009 training dates scheduled. Once training sessions are scheduled, information on ChildFirst Virginia will be available at the Juvenile Services website link: <http://www.dcs.virginia.gov/juvenile/cja/findingWords/index.cfm?menuLevel=5&mID=7>

Virginia began offering our course in 2006 and has since that time provided the forensic interviewing training to 265 child welfare professionals from multiple disciplines representing 57 jurisdictions. This year, we intend to hold the course regionally, allowing for an even greater focus on the importance of the multidisciplinary team in these investigations.



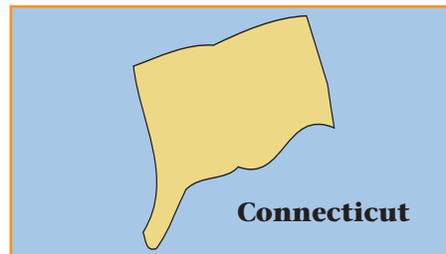
It has been a great year for ChildFirst Oklahoma. This was our first year to do the course without national faculty being present. Using our own clips, cases that we have first hand knowledge about, really adds to the course. We taught two sessions in 2008 and to date have 184 students who have completed the course. 33 of 77 counties are represented and two Native American tribes. Students include 29 assistant district attorneys, 72 law enforcement officers, 55 child welfare workers, 18 forensic interviewers and 10 other team members. I wonder how long it will be

before we stop being surprised by what a success the course is. Students always have great things to say on the evals, as as to the faculty. We really enjoy seeing the students after they have taken the test. How the whole course then makes sense to them and how valuable they found the exercises.

We have a great group of actors that are students from OU. We will be recruiting new ones for the actors who are graduating in May and will be training more before our course in Fall of 2009. We have had a couple of faculty members who were not able to teach their lectures, but the back-up faculty were prepared and did well. For our most recent course, we had a get together at the Oklahoma County Child Advocacy Center at the end of the first day so that the students could get to know each other and see the centers.

We were fortunate to be able to send a ChildFirst Faculty member to both the Grand Opening of the National Child Protection Training Center and to the Cincinnati meeting of the states. We are looking forward to seeing everyone in St. Louis at When Words Matter.

For more information, contact Amy Baum, ChildFirst Coordinator at 405-271-8001, Ext 44545. You can also visit our website at: www.findingwordsoklahoma.com



Connecticut has completed its second full year and recently hired a coordinator to run the program. We continue to have the benefit of the Police Office Standards and Training Counsel's police academy at which we run our program. This has been a tremendous resource both in terms of cost and highlighting the seriousness of the topic and the course.

At this point at least some child abuse professionals from each of our judicial districts have been through ChildFirst Connecticut and we continue to have waiting lists for each of the courses. In total, 177 professionals have completed our five courses, of which 68 were law enforcement officers, 65 social workers, 17 prosecutors, and 15 forensic interviewers.



Wisconsin is pleased to have been accepted into the program. We have selected faculty for our ChildFirst course and are in the process of selecting course dates. We hope to have the state program up and running in 2010.

