

# Victim Advocate

## Facts about Victim Advocates

- Referrals come from law enforcement agencies and Department of Human Services.
- An Advocate continues to work with the child and family even after their case is closed if needed.
- Oceana County's Child Advocacy was established in 2000 and serves an average of 42 families per year.
- Mason County hired it's first Child Advocate in January 2006. In the first half of 2006 she worked with 34 families.
- The advocate works with the family to secure counseling dollars through Crime Victim's Assistance Program.

In our effort to reduce trauma to the non-offending parent and child victim we have tried to address all the questions families have at the point of the victim's disclosure of abuse. There are many services in our community to help assist families, but **NONE** to assist them through the investigative process. The criminal justice system can be intimidating and confusing! We provide the family with one-on-one guidance, from the initial report of abuse to the trial of the alleged perpetrator.

## An Advocate's Story

**A 6 year old Mason County girl is raped by a family friend.**

**The girl tells her mother who reports it to the police immediately. The police then called Kids' House to conduct the interview.**

I first met this family at the forensic interview. Soon after the interview the family split up, the father took custody of the girl, they became homeless and then moved out of the area. I was with this family through this ordeal, helping them acquire short term housing, attaining food and transportation to their new home down state where they had family and opportunities waiting.

All was going well until we had to go to court. **What happened after that was appalling!** While waiting to be interviewed by the Assistant-Prosecutor, we sat in the lobby of the court house. The perpetrator's family kept trying to approach the girl and ask her questions about why she told. I shuffled the little girl into a cubical right off the lobby. It was full of boxes and broken equipment. After a while, the perpetrator's lawyer came in and told us to "get out NOW, this room is needed." As we left, right outside the door was the very man that raped her—standing right behind his lawyer, in prison yellow and with no police officer in sight. I jumped in between them or my child would have bumped into him! After 5 minutes, I could hear the little girl's voice, "my" little girl's voice. I couldn't figure out where it was coming from and then it hit me! The perpetrator and his lawyer were watching her forensic interview tape—all the details of how she was raped, where he put "it", all the horrific details were being played out loud ---so anyone in the lobby of that courthouse could hear!!!! I was shocked. I found the police officer and asked him to make that stop. Luckily the little girl did not hear it. This will never happen here again to another child, as I will always be in that courthouse fighting for their rights, and fighting for their consideration.

Marta Kistler- Child Advocate

### Outcome:

Because of this unfortunate story, the Andre Bosse Center worked with the Prosecutors' office and the Mason County Courthouse to secure a "safe room" for victims of abuse and their families to use during the trial. This is a step toward other possible improvements such as... an off-site waiting area and closed circuit testifying.