

## **Adams County Children's Advocacy Center: Serving our Community with Strength, Resilience and Focus.**

*By Cindy Small, President, Board of Directors*

2021 marks Adams County Children's Advocacy Center's 15<sup>th</sup> year in service to Adams County. In 2006, as part of a very strong grassroots community effort, the Adams County Children's Advocacy Center (ACCAC) opened its doors to provide support for children who were victims of abuse. Since that time, with vital community support, the ACCAC has grown to provide advocacy, forensic interviews, medical exams, case management, trauma therapy, caregiver education, support groups and community-based education. The ACCAC has served 2,093 child victims since it began. In addition to providing services and support to child victims of abuse and their families, the ACCAC conducted community outreach and prevention education activities for more than 13,000 individuals, primarily elementary school children, in the past fifteen years.

In 2021, alone, the ACCAC served 201 children and their families, while coordinating the efforts of the 98 multidisciplinary investigative team members (law enforcement, child welfare, medical and mental health professionals). The past two years of living with COVID-19 have challenged us to work together, creatively, like never before. Every day we saw resilience in our staff and partners, and in the children we serve. Although deemed essential to combating the spread of COVID, safety measures such as school closures, digital learning and social-distancing created environments where kids were isolated from their support networks including teachers, coaches, counselors, and other trusted adults. Due to social isolation and additional stressors as a result of the pandemic, some children were even more vulnerable to abuse. Physical abuse was on the rise. In 2015 only 8% of ACCAC's cases involved physical abuse but in 2021 physical abuse comprised 49% of cases.

The Adams County Children's Advocacy Center moves into the future focused on providing a refuge and a voice for abused children while supporting their caregivers and family members to overcome the trauma of abuse and begin to heal. At the same time, we are dedicated to working in a unified approach with our community to prevent child abuse from happening in the first place. Experts believe when five percent of the adults in a community commit to learning about child abuse prevention, it becomes the "tipping point" percentage to reducing community-wide abuse.

While a tremendous amount of progress has been made in the last fifteen years, it is critical to continue to grow our programs and services to best serve both children and families and the entire Adams County community. In desperate need of space, the agency located a new facility in the Fall of 2021. When renovations are completed, the larger facility will nearly double our capacity to provide direct services to children and families while also supporting resilience building and child abuse prevention activities for community members.

We exist and remain steadfast on our path forward due to the roots that anchor us, namely, our compassionate and generous community, donors, and partner advocates, who remained focused on our mission from the first day we opened our doors, through the pandemic ridden days of 2021, to where we are today.

We begin 2022 with hope, deeply grateful for the strength, resilience and focus on our mission by all who invested their time, energy and expertise over these fifteen years. We ask for your continued support as we forge ahead together, dedicated to a community where children are safe, families are strong, and our child victims become children again.

If you would like to learn more about ACCAC's work and plans for the future, please contact Elida Murray, Executive Director via email: [emurray@kidsagaincac.org](mailto:emurray@kidsagaincac.org) or Cindy Small, President, Board of Directors, [csmallco@comcast.net](mailto:csmallco@comcast.net).

PHOTO CAPTION:

**Future Home of the Adams County Children's Advocacy Center**

Currently under renovation, ACCAC's new facility in Gettysburg will double the agency's capacity to provide care to child victims of abuse.