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Press Release

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“BIG NEWS FOR OUR SMALLEST VICTIMS”

Mayor Gaylor Baird, LPD Chief Ewins, and Other Dignitaries Participate in Child Advocacy Center Groundbreaking Ceremony

Lincoln, NE, (October 25, 2021) – *With the help of Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird, the Child Advocacy Center held a ceremony today to announce the groundbreaking of their Room to Heal expansion and renovation project, which includes co-location with the Lincoln Police Department Special Victim’s Unit, to better address the needs of child abuse victims in Southeast Nebraska.*

This afternoon, Mayor Gaylor Baird announced the public phase of the Child Advocacy Center’s Room to Heal Capital Campaign. At a projected cost of \$5.2 million, this 17,000 square foot expansion and remodel of existing space will allow the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) to co-locate with the Lincoln Police Department Special Victims Unit, improve medical and mental health services, add triage space for children awaiting foster care placement, and enhance their focus on training and prevention. The building designed by Sinclair Hille and project managed by Cheever Construction, will create a true one-stop shop for child victims of abuse and their non-offending caregivers. To date, the Child Advocacy Center has raised \$3.5M towards the project and is still actively fundraising towards the total goal.

Upon building completion, the Lincoln Police Department Special Victims Unit (SVU) will office alongside the Child Advocacy Center’s forensic interviewers, child advocates, and case coordinators. The unit will have dedicated space for 19 team members, as well as an evidence locker, equipment storage, and more. CAC Executive Director, Paige Piper said, “The CAC is thrilled to share our expanded public/private partnership with LPD. Having the Special Victims Unit on-site will result in better case collaboration and outcomes for victims.” The Lincoln Police Department shares equal excitement in this next phase of the agencies’ collaborative efforts to protect the children in our community.

Along with the Lincoln Police Department, the Child Advocacy Center is collaborating with the University of Nebraska’s Project SAFE and Lutheran Family Services to build upon their long-term partnership to expand mental health services, allowing for both group and individual therapy sessions for children and their caregivers. The agency has also established a partnership with Children’s Hospital to better address the physical aspects of abuse, including foster care entry examinations. The medical expansion will result in three clinics with full-time trauma-informed practitioners who will be able to perform acute sexual assault exams on-site, allowing for the collection of evidence that may be used towards the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators.

Further, a significant component of the expansion will include the creation of a triage space for children who are awaiting foster care placement. To best comfort them and help them through this difficult time, the CAC is collaborating with the Foster Care Closet to create an environment where children of all ages can go to feel welcome, safe, and comfortable. The space is designed to allow children to find comfort through the power of play and imagination, while meeting their basic needs of a warm meal, clean clothes, and medical care.

In addition, Room to Heal allows the CAC to create a more robust training and prevention program by establishing a team that will proactively address child abuse through training efforts that educate the community on warning signs of child abuse, appropriate response to disclosure, prevention measures and other trauma informed topics.

There are several key milestones that led to this point of expansion:

- In 1998 the CAC served 36 children. In 2010, the number had grown to 856, and in 2019 they served 1,225 children.
- In 2012, LB 993 was passed, amending Nebraska State Statute 28-728 and mandating CAC utilization for children who are 3 to 18 years of age and are alleged to be victims of abuse or neglect.
- Also in 2012, the CAC expanded on-site mental health services through a partnership with UNL's Project SAFE and Lutheran Family Services.
- In 2013, the Trial Team was created to increase successful prosecution of offenders.
- The CAC began operating two satellite offices in 2014, one in York and one in Nebraska City (now Auburn), to better serve families in their 17-county service area.
- In 2015, a Training and Prevention Program was launched with the goal to educate multidisciplinary teams, parents, and the community on warning signs of child abuse, proper response to disclosure, reporting laws, and strategies to keep children safe. To date, they have trained approximately 20,000 individuals.
- In 2018, the CAC began serving child victims of sex-trafficking. The number of victims has grown 350% in 3 years. In 2019, they formed a Commercial Sexual Exploitation Multidisciplinary Team. The first of its kind in Nebraska, this team assists in organizing a coordinated investigative response, identifying possible victims of sex trafficking, advocating for victims' needs, and seeking justice on their behalf.

Since opening its doors in 1998, the Child Advocacy Center has served 18,000 child victims of abuse and neglect, resulting in a 3,303% increase over the last 23 years. Subsequently, since moving into their current location in 2011, the staff has grown from a team of 8 to a team of 23 to be able to continue providing quality essential services to children in crisis. And their need continues to grow. Once complete, the CAC hopes to be able to not only help more children in crisis, but also take a more holistic approach to better provide them with the necessary resources and medical and mental health services to set them firmly on a path toward healing.

About the Child Advocacy Center: The mission of the CAC is to provide Southeast Nebraska with a coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach to the problem of child abuse. Established in 1998, the CAC has grown and evolved to create a child-friendly environment for interviews and medical evaluations for the alleged child victim. Staff members work closely with law enforcement, county attorneys, Health and Human Services, and medical and mental health services to provide advocacy and support under one roof.

For further details, visit us online: <https://www.smallvoices.org> or <https://www.smallvoices.org/RoomtoHeal>. A media packet is also available online at <https://www.smallvoices.org/media>.

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