



Beyond Individual Therapy: JPA's Insights Help Professionals Respond More Efficiently to Child Sexual Abuse Cases

Aside from its expert therapeutic services for children and families, JPA provides consulting services to schools and child welfare agencies. JPA's expertise in evaluation, quality improvement and mental health enables us to support other professionals.

Tragically, child sexual abuse continues to be a serious problem in Chicago and throughout the United States. JPA therapists often deal with the issue when working with individual children, but JPA's expertise reaches far beyond our own clients.

For many years, JPA has helped the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center (ChicagoCAC) improve their own services for victims of child sexual abuse by studying their procedures and contributing valuable insights, ultimately enabling the organization to better serve children and help them heal.

ChicagoCAC's Executive Director, Char Rivette, revealed in an interview that they receive anywhere from 5-15 reports of sexual abuse a day, with increased reports occurring when children return to school after holidays. Last

year, there were over 2000 reports. To date, they have served over 30,000 Chicago children going through one of the most traumatic periods a child can experience.

ChicagoCAC describes itself as the "First line of responders to reports of child sexual abuse, as well as reports of physical abuse of children under three." One major element of their work includes

"coordinating the efforts of child protection staff, police, family advocates, medical experts, and mental health clinicians under one roof."

In child sexual abuse cases, it's critical that children not only be encouraged to "disclose" so the perpetrator(s) can be apprehended, but also that

it be done with minimal further trauma to the child so healing can begin as soon as possible. (Disclosures ideally occur during videotaped interviews conducted by trained forensic interviews. These interviews are observed by law enforcement and child protection investigators so that the child will only have to be interviewed once, and the investigators can get everything they need to proceed with their investigation.)

Because the issue of child sexual abuse is so serious, ChicagoCAC needed to know how well

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it was doing and what it could do better. In 2001, they turned to JPA for help evaluating their capacity dealing with mental health issues and assessing their coordination of physical abuse investigations involving children under three.

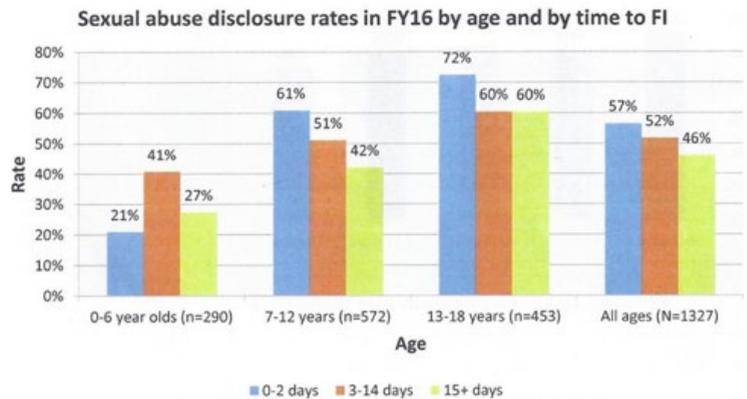
In 2010, JPA began working as the evaluator for the PATHH (Providing Access to Hope and Healing) Collaboration and continues to be instrumental on our work to improve the mental health access system for victims of sexual abuse.

In July 2016, ChicagoCAC chose JPA to oversee all of its evaluation and quality improvement efforts for their child sexual abuse program, prevention, and mental health programs. Most recently, Dr. Stephen Budde, JPA’s Executive VP, and Akadia Kacha-Ochana, Research and Quality Improvement Specialist, have collected data, conducted studies, and written reports suggesting ways ChicagoCAC can best serve the children who come to its attention.

JPA’s analyses showed that when children had to wait longer for a formal forensic interview they were less likely to disclose that they were sexually abused in these interviews. Furthermore, the age of the child made a difference.

Delays in conducting forensic interviews reduced the likelihood of disclosure more for children age seven and older. (See chart).

These findings, for example, helped ChicagoCAC highlight the need for the multiple professionals observing forensic interviews to coordinate their attendance and avoid delays in scheduling



the interviews. ChicagoCAC modified its procedures to better ensure that children would see investigators as soon as possible, while also being better informed about how these multidisciplinary teams could work together most efficiently.

Steve and Akadia have also provided expert research and technical assistance to the Illinois Children’s Justice Task Force, of which Char is the Chair. They provided a report to the Illinois General Assembly about the urgent need for a more systematic multidisciplinary approach to investigating allegations of child sexual abuse and serious physical abuse of young children in Illinois. Steve, Char, and others testified about the report’s findings and recommendations to a state Senate subcommittee.

Ultimately, DCFS chose to support piloting the recommendations of the report in four sites across the state, including the ChicagoCAC. JPA attends the subcommittee meetings for the pilot planning and provides technical support to on data collection to the CACs in each site.

“JPA’s findings and recommendation have helped ChicagoCAC successfully lobby for support from 45 different funding sources.”

Char praised JPA's work with the ChicagoCAC in part because of JPA's clinical and evaluation expertise, and their experience providing consultation and support to mental health service providers. "It helps that JPA has a clinical department. Other [organizations are often] more academically focused. JPA is more service oriented. They get it. They know what data means, which helps us formulate good practices."

In addition to helping ChicagoCAC improve their services, JPA's findings and recommendations have helped ChicagoCAC successfully lobby for support from forty-five different funding sources, including the Illinois legislature.

Char says, "JPA is just a great partner. They're easy to work with. It's so helpful to be able to bounce ideas off them. Steve is a great evaluator and researcher, and Akadia is just fantastic — a great writer. I can't imagine having a better partner than JPA.... We could not have done statewide recommendations without JPA."

She sees the partnership continuing well into the future as they continue to see what works in the best interests of the children they serve. Char hopes to connect more with schools through JPA's contacts and says, among other things, she'd like to introduce JPA into the Chicago Park District's work with kids and families.

Steve and Akadia continue to support ChicagoCAC's efforts in Chicago. They have recently received funding to provide similar technical assistance to CACs across the state in collaboration with the Children's Advocacy Centers of Illinois. By sharing its extensive research and therapeutic experience with them, JPA reaches far beyond its own borders. Through this partnership, JPA enacts its vision of enabling children affected by trauma from all over the city to "have access to the highest quality of services" as they begin to heal.

To report suspected abuse in Illinois, call 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). Outside of Illinois, call 1-800-422-4453. [JPA](#)