

THE CAC AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

A little girl named Amy arrived at the Children's Advocacy Center and hesitantly walked through the front door. She was unsure as to what she should expect, but she knew she was going to have to talk about her "darkest secret". Her wide eyes and tentative steps communicated the fear she was experiencing.

Amy was met by a woman with a big smile. She introduced herself and seamlessly struck up a conversation about the nursery rhyme characters scattered throughout the mural on the wall. Amy had fun trying to guess the names of each character and the nursery rhymes from which they came. The tension in Amy's body seemed to relax as she drank apple juice, ate snacks and played games with her new friend.

A few minutes later, another lady appeared. She sat down in the floor and joined in the game that Amy was playing. As they talked the lady explained that she was the one who would be talking with her today. She told Amy they would be talking about a lot of different things like school, best friends and what she likes to do for fun. She invited Amy to come to the room where she talked to children.

As Amy entered the special "kid talking" room, she saw a colorful quilt on the wall, a window covered with blue skies and white, "fluffy" clouds, a big green plant and a lamp that cast a warm glow over the room. Amy and the lady sat at a table just big enough for the two of them.

At first Amy felt a little shy, but she quickly opened up when they began to talk about her favorite sport – soccer. She talked about her team mates and the game they played last Saturday. Their conversation covered a wide range of topics and Amy was more than willing to answer the lady's questions. All of that changed the moment the lady asked about the "secret" that Amy had shared with her teacher.

Amy immediately felt sick to her stomach, her face was stinging and big tears welled up in her eyes. She sat quietly staring at the floor. She didn't want to talk about all of the scary things her uncle had been doing to her. She was so confused. She loved her uncle and she didn't want him to get in trouble; and yet, she wanted someone to make him stop touching the private parts of her body.

The lady waited quietly for a while. She looked at Amy and assured her that she could tell her anything. Amy hesitated for a moment and then started to speak. At first it was hard to explain what happened, but the longer they talked, the easier it became. Amy told the lady about everything her uncle had been doing to her. The lady listened carefully to what Amy had say. Amy was surprised, yet relieved, to see that the lady never got mad, acted embarrassed or shocked – even when she told her the worst parts.

By the time Amy left the room, she felt relieved. She knew there was a grown-up who knew her secret, believed her, and was going to do something to help make it stop. When Amy went back to the lobby, she went straight to her mother's arms for a hug and then finished playing her game. When it came time to leave, Amy asked her mother when they could come back to visit

her new friends. Her mother smiled and said, “I don’t know, we’ll have to wait and see”. As they turned to leave, Amy’s mother made eye-contact with the staff at the CAC and mouthed the words, “thank you”.

Amy and her mother occasionally come by the office just to say “hi”. Amy was a child whose life was changed because of her encounter with the Children’s Advocacy Center. She is in counseling and back to enjoying a normal childhood.