

FY 2023 Annual Report



**THE CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY CENTER**

of North & Northwest Cook County

Empowering Voices. Inspiring Hope.

Brianna's Story

By Yesenia Hernandez, LCSW, Bilingual Trauma Therapist

Brianna and her two siblings were referred for Safe from the Start (SFTS) services by a DCFS Intact Family Worker as they witnessed domestic violence in their home and were consequently dealing with their father's incarceration. Brianna's mother, Samantha, expressed concern over 8-year-old Brianna as she was increasingly angry, aggressive and was grieving her father. Brianna and her siblings engaged in individual Telehealth sessions, and their mother participated in some parent support sessions.



At the onset of therapy, Brianna greatly struggled to discuss thoughts and feelings related to her father and further struggled to express emotions related to the witnessed violence. After several months of rapport building, feelings identification and emotional regulation, Brianna was able to express mixed and complicated emotions surrounding her parents' separation. Brianna believed her parents' separation was a positive event; however, Brianna greatly missed their interactions and time together.

Brianna was also able to engage in the creation of an art-based Trauma Narrative that focused on processing the witnessed abuse and on strengthening her current sense of safety and security that her mother built following the separation. Upon the release of her father, Brianna engaged in sessions that focused on identifying safe adults and helpers in her life, as visits with him were set to take place. Brianna's mother also worked with an SFTS Therapist to discuss ways of maintaining safety during visit exchanges and in strengthening her own supports.

After a total of seven months, Brianna was able to successfully complete therapy. Brianna's mother shared that Brianna was no longer inappropriately aggressive and was able to channel her energy through soccer and her social life. Brianna continued to have contact with her father upon his release from jail and expressed feeling safe in both of her homes.



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CAC by the Numbers

July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

445

FORENSIC
INTERVIEWS
WITH YOUTH
AGES 3-17

100+

MULTIDISCIPLINARY
TEAM MEMBERS
FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT,
DCFS, THE STATE'S
ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
& MEDICAL STAFF

38

PRIMARY SERVICE
AREA COMMUNITIES

106

TOTAL COMMUNITIES
SERVED

1,798

TOTAL CLIENTS

CAC's mission is to serve as the
leading resource to empower and
heal children and families who have
experienced abuse and to prevent
violence against children.

5,875

HOURS OF MENTAL
HEALTH COUNSELING
PROVIDED

213

KIDS
12 & UNDER
STARTED HEALING
JOURNEYS AT CAC

19 STAFF

8 BILINGUAL

96%

PARENTS WHO AGREED
THEIR CHILD FELT SAFE
AT CAC



A Message of Hope from CAC's CEO

Melanie Pignotti, LCPC



Dear Champions for Children,

Fiscal year 2023 was a year of transformation and opportunity for the Children's Advocacy Center of North and Northwest Cook County (CAC). Following the retirement of the agency's long-serving Executive Director, a new leadership team with fresh perspective had the opportunity to assess the current state of the organization, identify areas of improvement with renewed focus on its mission and goals. This promoted a sense of excitement and motivation among the staff that led to improved connection, collaboration and communication, fostering a positive work environment and enhancing the overall organizational culture.

Despite the presence of refreshed optimism and momentum, the CAC encountered financial hurdles. Through diligent identification and proactive problem-solving, the organization successfully resolved and mitigated the financial issues it faced. The Board's financial committee was reinvigorated, and CAC initiated collaboration with an external accounting firm. CAC shifted focus to diversify revenue streams and boost individual and major donations. A dedicated Grants Coordinator position was established to ensure the acquisition of foundation and corporate funding. CAC's fundraising events have been successful, playing a crucial role in maintaining the financial stability of the organization. These events have not only raised funds but also created a sense of community and increased awareness about the importance of CAC's essential services.

continued on page 6



A Message of Hope cont.

CAC staff have shown incredible resilience in the face of challenging circumstances. Despite unexpected situations that have arisen, they have consistently demonstrated unwavering determination and resiliency. They have remained steadfast in their commitment to their work, showing a remarkable level of perseverance even when facing adversity. Their resilience is truly inspiring and serves as a testament to their dedication and professionalism. In effort to better understand our clients' needs, programs and services were carefully evaluated. The Forensic and Advocacy Services program made changes to its schedule, extending its hours to better serve children, families, and our law enforcement partners. Several staff were cross trained in Forensic Interviewing to enhance unique abilities and availability.

CAC's mental health programs have made significant strides in enhancing their service delivery. They have revised their case criteria to better align with their scope of service, ensuring a more tailored approach to each client's needs. Additionally, they have adopted valid and reliable screening and assessment measures, which have proven to be effective in identifying and addressing mental health issues. Lastly, they have formalized a utilization review process, which allows for continuous monitoring and improvement of their services. These collective efforts have significantly improved the treatment outcomes and overall experience for clients.

Going forward, CAC's attention is centered on its vision and strategic planning while carefully considering our recently established core values. I feel a deep sense of honor and privilege in my role, as well in the opportunity to collaborate with a dedicated board of directors and a team of selfless staff members. In closing, I extend heartfelt appreciation to everyone who has contributed to the CAC throughout the past year, enabling us to offer the best possible services to child victims/witnesses and their non-offending family members who have survived various forms of violence.

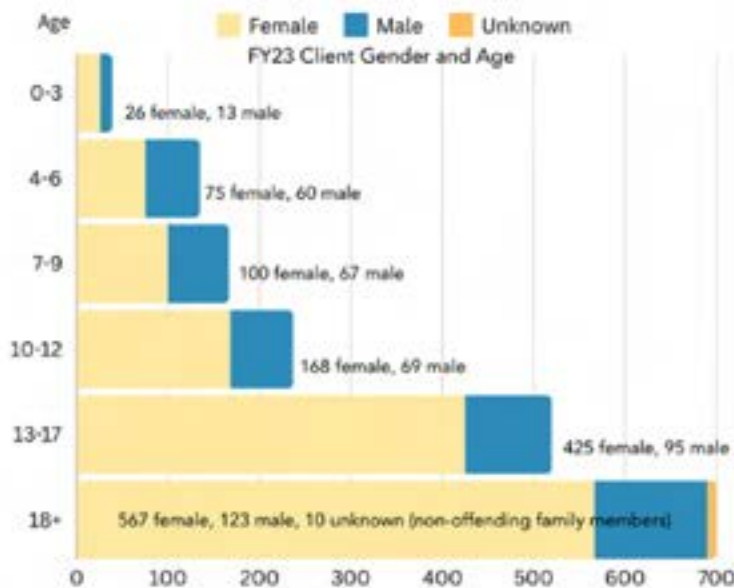
With gratitude,

Melanie Pignotti, LCPC



Who We Served

FY23 CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS



Communities with the Most Clients in FY23

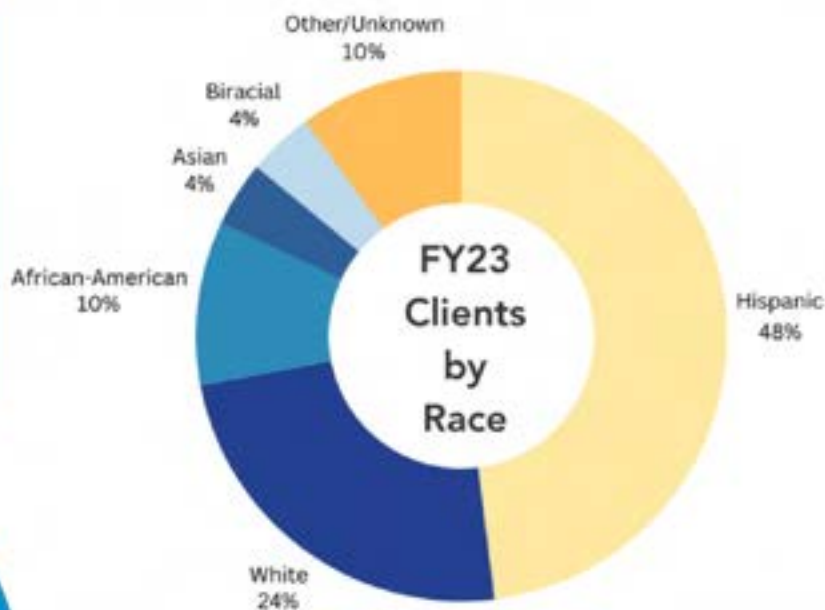
- Des Plaines
- Palatine
- Schaumburg
- Arlington Heights
- Chicago
- Elgin
- Wheeling
- Streamwood
- Evanston
- Hanover Park

CAC also served residents through law enforcement/DCFS referrals from 96 suburbs outside our primary service area.

Children ages 0-17
794 female | 304 male

Caregivers age 18+
597 female | 123 male

Total Clients
76% female | 24% male



"My wish is that no family has to go through what we had, but in reality it happens. I hope for the victims and families that they will reach out to the Center for help and guidance." ~FY23 Client Parent



Forensic and Advocacy Services

A forensic interview is available to all children ages 3-17 in cases of alleged sexual or physical abuse or other crimes involving children as victims or witnesses.

445

forensic
interviews
conducted

CAC uses a collaborative approach that is child-focused and trauma-informed. This model protects the child's well-being and allows the child to tell their story once to CAC's Forensic Interviewer in a safe, neutral space at CAC while the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) observes via a real-time live feed. The MDT includes law enforcement, DCFS, the State's Attorney's Office and mental health and medical personnel. They work together, using the forensic interview to determine the next steps in the investigative process.

All families using CAC's services are also paired with an Advocate who provides extensive support to the child and non-offending family members including:

- navigating the complex criminal justice system
- referrals to CAC's in-house mental health services (or outside medical or mental health care providers if needed)
- connections to other community resources for help with housing, food, legal or transportation needs

1,614

total clients
served

8,633

total service
hours

Top 5

Des Plaines
Palatine
Schaumburg
Arlington Heights
Streamwood

"I have a great partnership with the CAC. They are great at what they do, very sensitive in nature and allow feedback if need be. The rest of my peers share a similar experience when working alongside members at the CAC.

Keep up the great work!!!" ~2023 MDT Partner



Mental Health Services

CAC's Trauma Therapists work collaboratively to develop individualized treatment plans for each child survivor and their non-offending family members that address and work through past traumas. The goal is to help clients process and resolve trauma, build resilience and break cycles of abuse/violence. All therapy is free and offered in English or Spanish. Staff accept both in-house and outside therapy referrals for clients who qualify based on an assessment screening.

Therapy services include:

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Play Therapy
- Art in Therapy
- Parent Support Groups
- Crisis Intervention



In addition, CAC's Safe from the Start program is a unique outreach for children birth to age 5 who have witnessed domestic abuse or are victims of abuse or neglect.

While "healing" looks different for every family, our goal is to ensure that they leave therapy knowing what happened to them is not their fault, that they feel safe in their world and that they are able to function better in daily life.

263

total clients
served

3,656

total service
hours

Top 5

Des Plaines
Wheeling
Chicago
Schaumburg
Streamwood

"... estuvieron pendiente de nosotras y fueron muy amable y su profesionalismo de todo el personal." ~FY23 Client Parent



Safe from the Start

CAC's Safe from the Start (SFTS) program is unlike any other in the area. We work with families who have experienced abuse to help each member on their path toward healing in a safe, therapeutic setting. What's truly unique about the program is that our therapy is offered to children ages birth - five years who have witnessed domestic abuse.

This program is offered free of charge and in English and Spanish.

Our Trauma Therapists use age-appropriate, evidence-based techniques such as:

- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT)

In addition, they incorporate principles from play therapy, art therapy and Mindfulness, working both with individuals and the parent and child together.

Safe from the Start also collaborates with a network of social service partners for referrals and wraparound support.

SFTS is staffed by four trained Trauma Therapists, all of whom have participated in the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) 40-hour training program.

188

total clients
served

2,219

total service
hours

Top 5

Des Plaines
Elgin
Streamwood
Hoffman Estates
Schaumburg

"We were made to feel at home and that was very important. Good to be in a safe space." FY23 Client Parent



Connecting with Community

Generous donors and partners help fund CAC's services so that they are free for families. To learn more or get involved, contact Taylor Kanara, Director of Development, at 847-885-0100 or tkanara@cachelps.org.



Financials

	FY23	FY22
Assets		
Current Assets:		
Cash & cash equivalents	\$534,011	\$526,405
Certificates of deposit	\$0	\$201,888
Contributions and grants receivable	\$198,183	\$76,610
Prepaid insurance	\$0	\$4,687
Other prepaid expenses and deposits	\$11,610	\$7,065
Noncurrent Assets:		
Property & Equipment	\$188,657	\$194,296
Security Deposits	\$6,977	\$0
Operating lease right-of-use assets	\$168,028	\$0
Donated facilities	\$310,575	\$69,770
Total Assets	\$1,418,041	\$1,080,721
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities:		
Accounts payable	\$33,485	\$4,942
Accrued payroll	\$53,674	\$56,087
Accrued vacation	\$55,868	\$101,177
Current portion of operating lease liabilities	\$65,736	\$0
Noncurrent Liabilities:		
Operating lease right-of-use liabilities	\$110,037	\$0
Total Liabilities	\$318,800	\$162,206
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	\$707,226	\$823,745
Temporarily restricted	\$392,015	\$94,770
Total Net Assets	\$1,099,241	\$918,515
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$1,418,041	\$1,080,721



Empowering Voices. Inspiring Hope.

# New Donors	# Donors by District	# Total Donors	# Total Gifts	# Reactivated Donors	Average Gift Amt.	# Volunteers	# Vol. Hours
314	D2 - 61 D3 - 195 Other - 488	744	1,360	108	\$355	63	238



\$2,500
average cost per client for mental health counseling



\$2,500
cost per client for one forensic interview



\$100
cost for weekly client transportation to/from therapy

CAC Service Area (D2 suburbs | D3 suburbs)

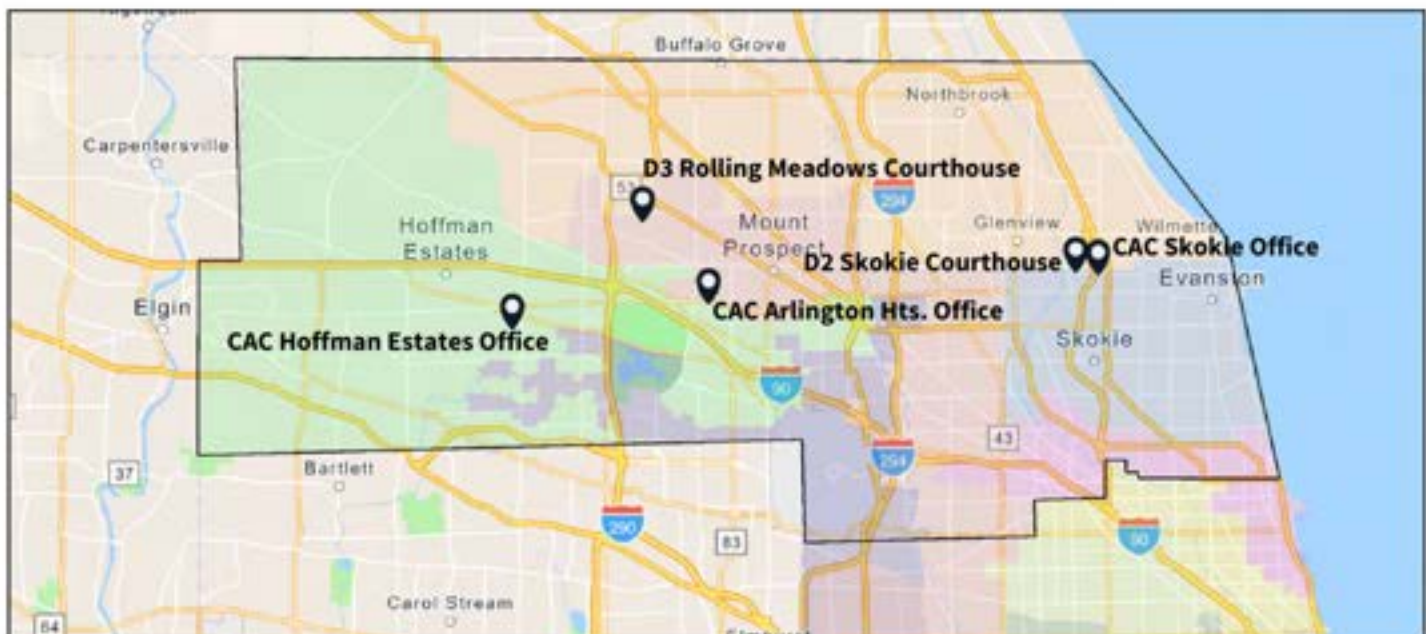
Arlington Heights
Barrington
Barrington Hills
Bartlett
Buffalo Grove
Des Plaines
Elgin
Elk Grove Village

Evanston
Glencoe
Glenview
Golf
Hanover Park
Harwood Heights
Hoffman Estates
Inverness

Kenilworth
Lincolnwood
Morton Grove
Mount Prospect
Niles
Norridge
Northbrook
Northfield

Palatine
Park Ridge
Prospect Heights
Rolling Meadows
Roselle
Rosemont
Schaumburg
Schiller Park

Skokie
South Barrington
Streamwood
Wheeling
Wilmette
Winnetka



Our Staff



CAC STAFF FAST FACTS

- 19 staff
- 100% female-led
- 8 bilingual English-Spanish
- 13 with Master's degrees
- 3 in graduate school
- 9 staff have been with CAC 5+ years
- 1 staffer has been with CAC 10+ years
- 75+ years combined CAC work experience



Our Staff

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Melanie Pignotti, LCPC - Chief Executive Officer

Taylor Kanara - Director of Development

Jessica Montgomery, LSW - Director of Forensic & Advocacy Services

Kate Schultz, LCSW - Director of Clinical Services



FORENSIC AND ADVOCACY SERVICES TEAM

Paula Amat - Bilingual Family Advocate & Forensic Interviewer

Sara Castillo - Bilingual Family Advocate

Wendy Diaz - Lead Forensic Interviewer

Taylor Edmunds, MSW - Forensic Interviewer

Brianna Kness - MDT Coordinator

Grace Ording - Family Advocate

Romelia Rodriguez, MSW - Lead Family Advocate



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TEAM

Valerie Cifuentes, MSW - Bilingual Trauma Therapist

Cristina Fausto, MSW - Bilingual Trauma Therapist

Bianca Gonzalez, LCPC - SFTS Program Supervisor & Bilingual Trauma Therapist

Yesenia Hernandez, LCSW - Bilingual Trauma Therapist

Valerie Katz, LPC - Trauma Therapist

Cara Liace, LCSW - Trauma Therapist

Romelia Rodriguez, MSW - Bilingual Trauma Therapist

DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Rachel Gilmore, MEd - Grants Coordinator

Megan Younker - Development Coordinator



Staff Word Cloud



Our Board

BOARD OFFICERS

Roy Picciuca - President
Eddie Cisneros - Vice President
Dr. Jeff Foreman - VP, Fund Development
Bob Tucker - VP, Board Development
Gretchen Peters - Secretary
Pooja Bansal - Treasurer

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jamie Brown
Chief Bill Caponigro
Damita Cravens
Don Duffey
Herb Horn
Lynn Ludaway
Lisa McComb
Adam Newman
Jennifer Saperstein
Bonnie Sidran-Mollison
Kurtis Todd
Dr. Janet Tomezsko
Tracy Tucker

EMERITUS BOARD

Joe Crimmins
Brian Burke

LEADERSHIP BOARD

Dr. Jerry Bernstein
Jim Burke
Representative Fred Crespo
Eugene Faut
Jim McKenzie
Mayor Bill McLeod
Joane McLeod
Senator Laura Murphy
Troy Triphahn



Q&A with Herb Horn, Immediate Past Board Chair

Q: Where did CAC grow in FY 23?

A: Growth significantly occurred in the agency being more efficiently restructured. Responsibility and authority was given to defined areas managed by directors reporting to the newly hired CEO. An outside financial agency was hired as an acting CFO, thus unburdening the CEO and being financially more competent.

Q: How did CAC respond to challenges?

A: 3 Words...Change Saved Us

Q: What was your biggest achievement as the Board Chair?

A: Helping guide our agency and the Board as its chair to make the necessary changes and support the new agency leadership throughout the year. In addition, overseeing successful succession planning in securing new board leadership.

Note...I'm really relieved FY 23 is behind us, but I do not regret having survived the experience.



Our Volunteers



Thank you!
We couldn't
do it
without
you!

Our Supporters

Thank you!

Volunteers

Event Volunteers

Alex Kanara
Adam Newman
Anna Levin
Bonnie Sidran-Mollison
Brianna Murphy
Chelsey Shoemaker
Corky Jacob
Dani Cawley
Darrin Hildebrandt
Derek Alvalle
Grace Ording
Ian Levin
Jaclyn Bailey
Janet Starmach
Jim Cawley
Kamilla Krzeminska-Kenrich
Kasia Cawley
Leesa Kanara
Lisa Edmunds
Mark Rohde
Medha Pael
Melissa Michael
Michael Pignotti
Mike Ornelas
Rachel Hubsch
Roberta Fitzgerald
Sandy Jacob
Soham Jaswani
Su Montavon
Susan Hildebrandt
Suzanne Levin
Tyler Krause
Wendy Paszkiewicz



2023

Mark Parr Champion for Children

Hoffman Estates Mayor
William McLeod

(pictured with Melanie Pignotti,
CAC Chief Executive Officer)

Committee Volunteers

Angela Tribuzio
Billie Larkin
Eduardo Cisneros
Gretchen Peters
Heather Humphrey
Herb Horn
Jaclyn Bailey
Jim Burke
Kathryn Cawley
Mark Wondolkowski
Matthew Park
Phillip Giacone
Roy Picciuca
Susan Hildebrandt
Suzanne Levin

In Kind Donors

Adam and Jennie Newman
Beverly Lane
Bill Barry
Billie Larkin
CAC Board of Directors
Chatham Imports
Chef BnbEats
Chicago Bears
Chicago Cubs
Cinema Star Grill
Costco
Crumb Cookies
Eddie and Terri Cisneros
First Trust
Float Sixty & Salt Escape
FT Cares Foundation
Gail Cohen
Georgios Pizza
Gretchen Peters and Andy Stump
Herb and Bonnie Horn
Impact Makers of Palatine
Janet Tomezsko
Jeff Foreman
Jim Burke
Lisa McComb
Lynn Ludaway
Main Event
Mario Tricoci Salon and Spa
Mayor William D. McLeod
McDonalds
Michael and Melanie Pignotti
Michelle Mussman
Northern Décor
NOW Arena
Patty Errera
Peterson's Tasty Delight Bakery
Pinot's Palette
Pollyanna Brewing Company
Roy and Maria Picciuca
Ruth's Chris Steak House



Our Supporters

Thank you!

In Kind Donors cont.

Schaumburg Boomers
Schaumburg-Hoffman Estates Rotary Club
Something Blue Photography
Studio Winery
Sydney Kunz
The Aliados Team at Ally Insurance Co.
The Hampton Social
The Humphrey Family
The LINKS Technology Team
Tracy Tucker
Vince DiBenedetto
WSHE Radio

Businesses

3D Extreme, Inc.
Abbott Laboratories
AbbVie Inc.
Addison Green Meadows, Inc.
Advanced Urogynecologic Care
Ally Financial Inc.
AmazonSmile
Ameriprise Financial
Amway
Anonymous
Arc-Tronics, Inc.
Ascension Saint Alexius
Assurance Agency
AT&T
Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund
Berry K. Tucker & Associates, Ltd.
BHS Robotics
Boeing
Caterpillar Inc.
Central Auto Body
Costco
Counseling and Diagnostic Center
Craig Brown Insurance Agency
Dickson Design Studio, Inc.

Estee Lauder Companies
Fidelity Charitable
First American Title
GWC Injury Lawyers LLC
Hansen Plastics Corporation
Harris Harris & Cabrera LLP
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HomeSmart Connect
Horizon Therapeutics
Inspirate Advisory Services LLC
Intuit
Kilwins Arlington Heights
Kimberly-Clark
Law Offices of Jeffery M. Leving, Ltd.
Law Offices of Julia McConnahay
Links Technology
Mesirow Financial
Meyers & Flowers LLC
Motorwerks of Barrington
Network for Good
Nicor Gas
Polsinelli
Principal Life Insurance Company
Puzzle Wealth Solutions
PwC
R.J. Augustine and Associates, LTD. CPA's
Redmon's Village Towing, Inc.
Robert Marketing, Inc.
S & C Electric Company
Schaumburg Toyota
Schwab Charitable
Staffing Network LLC
Storino, Ramello & Durkin
Supporting Strategies
Supreme Lobster and Seafood Company
TK Concrete, Inc.
TransUnion
TVG-Medulla, LLC / Chiro One Wellness Centers
United Health Group
Wintrust Commercial Banking
Woody Buick GMC of Naperville
WT Group
Zurich North America



Our Supporters

Thank you!

Tributes

In Memory Of

Faith Antonia Buettner

In Honor Of

CAC Staff

Taylor Edmunds

Jeff Foreman

Arlene Leshner

Herb & Bonnie Horn

Erin Merryn

Linda Morris

Townships & Municipalities

Barrington Township

Cook County Government

Elk Grove Township

Elk Grove Village

Hanover Township Mental Health Board

Maine Township

New Trier Township

Niles Township

Northfield Township

Palatine Township

Schaumburg Township

Village of Bartlett

Village of Hanover Park

Village of Hoffman Estates

Village of Schaumburg

Village of Streamwood

Village of Wheeling

Wheeling Township

Faith Organizations, Foundations, Community Organizations & Schools

Aliados of Ally Insurance

Bob's Discount Furniture Charitable Foundation, Inc.

Catalina Marketing Charitable Foundation

Charities Aid Foundation America

Elizabeth Beidler Tisdahl Foundation

Friedman Foundation

GFWC Northwest Suburban Womens Club

Give Lively

Givinga Foundation Inc.

Goldman Sachs Philanthropy Fund

GoodCoin Giving Fund

Hoffman Estates Fire Department Local 2061

International Paper Foundation

Kiwanis Club Of Streamwood

McCormick Funds

National Christian Foundation

Northbrook Woman's Club Fdn., Inc.

PNC Foundation

Rotary Club of Palatine

Rotary Club of Schaumburg-Hoffman Estates

Schaumburg-Hoffman Estates Lions Club

St. Mark Lutheran Church Foundation

Tony's Charitable Organization

The Canning Foundation

The McKenzie Foundation

The TJX Foundation, Inc.

United Way of Greater Cincinnati

United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

United Way of Northeast Florida

Verizon Foundation

Village Treasure House

WACO

Wings Program

Z Zurich Foundation





THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

OF NORTH & NORTHWEST COOK COUNTY

Empowering Voices. Inspiring Hope.

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Arlington Heights, IL 60005



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