

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM OVERVIEW:

Many disciplines inform the competent investigation of child sexual abuse. These disciplines include law enforcement, child protective services, psychiatry, psychology and medicine. Child abuse experts across the nation recognize the value of a coordinated and informed approach to the assessment of child abuse—an approach that incorporates the unique perspective, insight, and knowledge contained within each discipline by bringing professionals from each discipline together to form a multidisciplinary team.

Use of a multidisciplinary team allows for collaboration across the disciplines to provide comprehensive investigation, assessment, and consultation in challenging and complex abuse cases.

The coordinated and collaborative manner of the multidisciplinary approach ensures an effective response to reports of child abuse and neglect, as members benefit from the input and attention of the many different parties comprising the team. Because of the effectiveness of this model, a growing number of jurisdictions have adopted the multidisciplinary model and established teams of professionals to aid in investigations and responses. The multidisciplinary team approach is the cornerstone of Child Advocacy Centers across the country. These centers provide a safe, comfortable and child-friendly location for interviewing victims, allow for joint forensic interviewing, serve as a home base for the multidisciplinary team, and offer other supportive services for the victim and their family. For additional information on Child Advocacy Centers in the five county region of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, please visit the websites below:

Philadelphia Children’s Alliance www.paphiladelphia.nationalchildrensalliance.org

Montgomery County – Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center www.missionkidscac.org

Bucks County Children’s Advocacy Center www.buckscac.org

Chester County Child Advocacy Center 610-344-6801

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Use of Multidisciplinary Teams:

Under the guidance and direction of former child abuse prosecutor Gina Maisto Smith, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia created a multidisciplinary team to investigate and assess allegations referenced in the 2011 Grand Jury Report, which alleged misconduct with minors by a number of priests. Mrs. Smith, who was hired by the Archdiocese to lead this effort, determined that the benefits of a multidisciplinary team approach would provide a more thorough and comprehensive investigation and a more robust assessment of the allegations. The multidisciplinary team approach ensured consistency in investigations, provided for a more informed investigation, allowed for the sharing of information across lines of expertise, and offered a consideration of the treatment of both alleged offenders and victims.

The multidisciplinary team, which reports to Mrs. Smith, is composed of seven local and national experts in the area of child sexual abuse, including a forensic psychiatrist, a psychologist who specializes in evaluating and treating sexual offenders, a pediatrician who leads the Child Protection Program at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, two former Philadelphia detectives from the Special Victims Unit, and two former Philadelphia assistant district attorneys. Together, this team has investigated and assessed more than 20 historical allegations of sexual abuse brought forth by adult survivors years, and in some cases, decades, after the actual abuse was alleged to have occurred.

Team members include:

Gina Maisto Smith is a former sex crimes prosecutor in the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. She investigated innumerable cases, handled more than 100 jury trials, and developed unsurpassed experience in the investigation and prosecution of sex crimes and child abuse. She also trained prosecutors, investigators, and police in handling the most difficult aspects of sex crime investigations. She now advises and represents clients in all aspects of sexual misconduct matters.

Maria D. McColgan, M.D., is director of the Child Protection Program at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia and the Advisory Board chairperson of Prevent Child Abuse PA, a state chapter under the umbrella of the national Academy of Pediatrics. Prevent Child Abuse America is a national prevention organization with statewide chapters that work to prevent the abuse and neglect of children, focusing on community-based prevention programs. Dr. McColgan is founding director of the Child Protection Program and Clinic at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children. The program serves approximately 200 patients per year in the outpatient setting and over 70 per year in the inpatient setting.

Thomas McDevitt has 36 years with the Philadelphia Police, including 13 years as a Lieutenant, Commanding Officer, Special Victims Unit/Special Investigations Unit. He has been the lead investigator in thousands of sexual assault investigations. He has taught course segments on sexual assault investigations for the Sex Crimes Training Program at the Gloucester County Police Academy in New Jersey, as well as classes at other schools and programs nationwide. He is a faculty member for Aequitas Prosecutors Resource Center at the Pennsylvania Institute on "The Prosecution of Sexual Violence" in Philadelphia.

Harry Young retired from the Philadelphia Police Department in 2010 after 40 years as an investigator. He began working in the Special Victims Unit/Special Investigations Unit in 1996, and developed an expertise in investigating child abuse and child sexual assault cases and assessing sexual assault patterns. He also led the region in investigating cases involving child pornography and computer and Internet crimes against children.

Barry Zakireh, Ph.D, a licensed psychologist, is director of the Adult and Forensic programs at the Joseph J. Peters Institute, where he oversees the operation of the adult offender and forensic evaluation programs. His duties consist of management, supervision, and provision of clinical and administrative services to adults who have been perpetrators or victims of sexual violence. He supervises clinical activities with county, state, and federal probation and parole programs, as well as program for impaired professionals including physicians and clergy. In the last two years, he has performed numerous psychological evaluations of clergy and priests accused of sexual misconduct or sexual abuse with parishioners or during the course of their ministry. Among his memberships, Dr. Zakireh is a research and clinical Member of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA); board member in the Sexual Offenders Assessment Board in Pennsylvania; and a member of the Medical/Legal Advisory Board on Child Abuse, Office of Pennsylvania Attorney General.

Barbara Ziv, M.D., is a forensic psychiatrist with specialization in perpetrators and victims of sexual abuse. She has performed more than 300 assessments of convicted sex offenders and has performed over 200 independent medical examinations of other individuals in the context of criminal and civil court proceedings. Currently consulting medical director at Life Sync/Humana Health Care, she also serves on the Pennsylvania Sexual Offenders Assessment Board, on which she was appointed in 2000 by former Gov. Tom Ridge and reappointed by former Gov. Ed Rendell. Dr. Ziv is responsible for evaluating convicted sex offenders with respect to Pennsylvania's Megan's Law, and participates in quarterly trainings regarding the assessment, treatment and disposition of sex offenders. She also serves on the state's Medical/Legal Advisory Board on Child Abuse, appointed in 2007 by then-Attorney General Tom Corbett.

Leslie Gomez joined the team in September 2011. She is a former child abuse prosecutor who handled complex child abuse cases for more than 14 years. She focused on the prosecution of cases involving victims of tender years, children with special needs or disabilities, and older children who were victims of incest, serial pedophiles or repeat sexual offenders. Ms. Gomez most recently served as the Chief of the Juvenile Court Unit at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, where she was involved in every aspect of investigation and charging decisions in cases of alleged sexual assaults against minor victims for both juvenile and adult offenders. She has been a frequent lecturer on the investigation and assessment of child sexual abuse, locally, regionally, and nationally, and has developed extensive training materials and authored numerous template briefs addressing the many complex legal and practical issues involved in evaluating credibility and child abuse cases.

For additional information on national resources, please visit the websites below:

The National Children's Advocacy Center www.nationalcac.org

National Children's Alliance www.nationalchildrensalliance.org

Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/