

**Hernando County Sheriff's Office**  
**Sergeant William Power**

As Sergeant over the Crimes Against Persons section of our Major Case Unit, I feel compelled to apply for the “Why We Serve” grant in order to pay homage to the most vulnerable victims in which our unit serves: the children of our county. When working a case where a child is a victim of physical or sexual abuse, it is a case that stays with the unit. We go home every day thinking about these certain cases and how we can solve them to gain justice for those children who have been victimized. These children do not choose their parents, family members, or other individuals whom they end up surrounded by. Regrettably, bad things do happen to innocent human beings in the world that we live in.

This is why it is so important to have the best relationship you can have with your community partners. In our case, our partnership with the Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) of Hernando County is like no other. The center offers free therapy to child victims, child witnesses, and non-offending caregivers, as well as other family members who are trying to cope with the fact that a child has been victimized by another individual. The Children’s Advocacy Center currently has four therapists on staff and there is still a waitlist for individuals to receive the services they are desperately in need of. The center is a safe haven where children know they are not in harm’s way. They are able to play, watch movies, and receive their services in one building, knowing that the perpetrator will never be able to reach them again in that special building.

In addition to offering counseling, they have partnered with The University of Florida to offer forensic interviews and forensic medical exams, locally, to save families from driving to Gainesville.

From January 2017 to April 2018, the Hernando County Sheriff’s Office has worked in partnership with the Children’s Advocacy Center on over 130 cases. In a nutshell, this number represents the amount of times that the Crimes Against Persons section receives cases where a child has been the victim of a heinous crime, resulting in the need for child protection services facilitated through the Children’s Advocacy Center.

Other community partners also rely on the professional, efficient, staff of the CAC, including the Department of Children and Families, and members of the State of Florida Fifth Judicial Circuit. Supervisor Jacquelyn O’Brien, from Department of Children and Families says; “The Child Advocacy Center (CAC) plays a vital role in assisting and treating child victims of abuse and neglect. They are an essential element in investigations conducted by the Hernando County Sheriff’s Office and the Department of Children and Families. The CAC utilizes a collaborative approach with all entities involved, and without their services child victims would be deprived of receiving the very best services available to them.” Assistant State Attorney Erin Daly as the head of the child sex crimes unit advised that the corroboration brought together by the CAC allows for a very successful prosecution rate on these types of difficult cases. They bring together interviewers, therapists, medical teams, Department of Children and Families, Law Enforcement, and many other agencies to allow for the most successful outcome possible concerning both the victims’ safety and healing; and to help seek justice against the perpetrators.

If I am chosen to receive the “Why We Serve” grant, the Children’s Advocacy Center of Hernando County would be the charity of choice to receive the grant money. They will be able to use the funds to better assist our most vulnerable victims we serve, children. These kids need extensive assistance to break the cycle of violence and to help others in the future. It would be a huge benefit to the center to receive these funds in order to offer additional services and/or goods so that these strong children of Hernando County can return to some sense of normalcy in their lives that have unfortunately been struck with terror.

