

Abbott House provides safe place for children to tell stories after abuse

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Mary Abbott Children's House makes a commitment to every child who walks through their doors, whether it's 2:30 in the afternoon or 10:30 at night.

It's a place where children go to tell their stories after an instance of abuse. It's a place where staff works to provide facts about what happened in the child's own words.

"We don't heal a child and we are not responsible for the whole path, but we do set them on the path to healing," said Clint Williams, executive director of the nonprofit.

Williams, who has served as executive director since 2012, said although the work that takes place at Abbott House is traumatic at times, it's a place where transformations take place.

"This is a very uplifting job and it's a very uplifting place to be because we see the transformation that takes place — even when children are just here for an hour. Telling their story and being able to relieve themselves of that information and knowledge can be incredibly transformative," he said.

Williams talked about a young girl who had once been exposed to pornography. Because it was a family member, she didn't know that wasn't the way it is in every family. While he didn't remember the disclosure, he believes it was accidental.

The girl went to someone's house and realized it wasn't a normal thing, so she told someone.

"Through that, not only was she able to get out of that home life situation, she was also able to help others because now she tells her story and is an adult," Williams said. "She's able to talk about how important it is to not make child abuse taboo."

Having those conversations with children or students creates a better chance of preventing or, at the very least, immediately responding to an instance of child abuse, he said.

Abbott House provides services for children and their families, including forensic interviews,



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Members of Mary Abbott Children's House board, staff and agency heads and members of the Norman Chamber of Commerce pose during a groundbreaking ceremony last year to celebrate a building expansion.

medical assessments and family advocacy. Last year, about 650 forensic interviews were conducted and staff saw between 800 to 850 children.

While they serve the same area as the district attorney's office, Cleveland, McClain and Garvin counties, the organization also works with other counties that don't have advocacy centers.

Although things can often get hectic amidst fundraising or daily tasks, Williams said they always remember the model and example provided to them by the woman who started it all, Dr. Mary Abbott.

"She was willing, at a time when it was not comfortable or convenient, to go out on a limb for children," he said. "We just remember the example and the model that she provides for us and it pulls us back to the most important thing, which is keeping the children's best interest at heart — first and foremost. Everything else is secondary."

For more information about Mary Abbott Children's House, visit www.unitedwaynorman.org.

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