

SUSIE'S PLACE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER



HOW ONE CAC BECAME THE LEADER
IN ADULT- AND CHILD-FOCUSED
PREVENTION EDUCATION



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Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) work with multi-disciplinary teams such as law enforcement, child protection services, forensic interviewers, and mental and medical health professionals to ensure that children and families are given the support they need. Susie's Place, like many other CACs, was developed to create a safe environment for Indiana children to disclose abuse, receive help, and begin the healing process. They operate three centers and serve families in 38 counties, conducting over 10,000 forensic interviews since opening their doors in 2009.¹

THE ISSUE

According to the 2017 Child Maltreatment Report, 2,675 children in Indiana reported being victims of child sexual abuse, making it the second most common form of child abuse in the state.² Susie's Place quickly realized that in order to stop abuse their communities needed education on child sexual abuse prevention. As the number of abuse cases rose, Susie's Place found that many community members didn't truly comprehend how frequently abuse occurs or its long-term effects. Working as a case manager before coming to Susie's Place, Candace Balzano found families tended to ignore the issue, unable to fathom how something so horrific could happen within their home, their neighborhoods, or at school. Balzano also realized that she had the skills to help families respond to abuse but struggled to help them prevent or understand child sexual abuse.

Knowing that every 10 seconds a child abuse report is made somewhere in the United States, and that more than four children—usually under the age of four—die every day as a result of abuse and maltreatment, Susie's Place felt very strongly that education must be the first step.³ In order to continue pursuing their vision of strengthening their community's ability to nurture and protect children, Susie's Place looked for ways to normalize conversations that promote prevention and help families better handle instances of abuse.



THE MOVEMENT

In response to their community's needs, as the Prevention Education Program Director, Balzano started developing the Susie's Place prevention education strategy. Susie's Place began offering Darkness to Light's evidence-informed *Stewards of Children*® child sexual abuse prevention training in 2014, which teaches adults to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse. The CAC offered the training to all adults working with youth, from sports programs to schools to religious institutions to community centers and more, in the 38 different counties that they served.

As Susie's Place dove deeper into prevention education, Balzano realized that although it is an adult's responsibility to protect children, children also need to be educated so they can articulate when their boundaries are crossed. When adults and children have complementary language to communicate about abuse, the community's ability to nurture and protect children, as well as respond to child abuse, grows exponentially. After much discussion with Susie's Place Executive Director, Emily Perry, Balzano began the search for a body safety program for children and youth. Partnering with another CAC in Anderson, IN, they created their own research-based body safety curriculum and began implementation in 2017. Their program was designed to begin with elementary students in Kindergarten, 2nd, and 4th grade, but the team quickly realized that they should teach online safety as early as kindergarten due to increased access to technology. Balzano began the search for another curriculum that could meet the requirements.

At Darkness to Light's 2017 IGNITE National Prevention Conference, Balzano learned about the Monique Burr Foundation for Children's *MBF Child Safety Matters*®, a comprehensive, evidence-based curriculum for Kindergarten-5th grade students. The program educates and empowers children on strategies to prevent, recognize, and respond appropriately to bullying, cyberbullying, all types of abuse, and digital abuse dangers. "I knew then that this was going to be the child-focused program [for Susie's Place]," Balzano says.



At the same time, the state of Indiana passed Senate Bill 355, which required schools to teach age-appropriate, evidence-based protection skills to all grades beginning in 2018. With the passing of the bill and the discovery of *MBF Child Safety Matters*[®], Balzano was able to acquire significant buy-in from stakeholders to deliver MBF's program alongside *Stewards of Children*[®] as a part of Susie's Place prevention education program. Susie's Place began using MBF's curriculum in 2018, ultimately becoming a founding Prevent 360° partner.

THE SOLUTION

Prevent 360° is a comprehensive approach to child abuse prevention from Darkness to Light and Monique Burr Foundation for Children. The partner program gives both adults and children the education and skills they need to prevent abuse, backed by evidence and research. The two organizations offer their prevention education as a package, training facilitators in both programs for a 360° approach. Because there are a range of factors that put children at risk, addressing these risks on multiple levels enables an organization to better prevent and intervene in abuse. This collaborative approach is often more successful than intervention alone.

“We offer *Stewards of Children*[®] for school staff and *MBF Child Safety Matters*[®] and *MBF Teen Safety Matters*[®] to children. The hope is that all the adults in [the children's] lives, parents, church staff, or teachers - any adult that surrounds the lives of these children are educated.”

– Candace Balzano, Susie's Place Prevention Education Program Director



Prevent 360° is ideal for daycares and schools, child advocacy centers, youth sports, youth-serving organizations, and faith-based groups; anywhere there is a meeting of children and adults. The complementary skills taught through Prevent 360° give children and adults a common language and expectation that can help keep children safe.

As a Prevent 360° partner, organizations receive:

- exclusive access to nationally recognized child- and adult-focused prevention education,
- customized service packages for each individual organization,
- programs backed by evidence and research, and
- a commitment to ongoing research to ensure efficacy
- ongoing support and resources through implementation.

THE RESULT

Since adopting Prevent 360°, Susie's Place has implemented trainings everywhere they serve families, including 88 schools. In 2019-2020, Susie's Place taught 40,730 students MBF's curricula and trained 360 adults in *Stewards of Children*®.

The "train-the-trainer" model of both curricula fits perfectly with the organizational model of Susie's Place and allowed them to reach wider audiences. The Susie's Place Prevention Education Team works directly with schools to coordinate trainings every year free of charge, grants permitting. Each year they train school counselors in *Stewards of Children*® and as MBF facilitators authorized to deliver *MBF Child Safety Matters*®.

“I’m so thankful that Prevent 360° happened... It just makes sense for these two organizations to come together and the CAC is extremely grateful they’ve made it so easy and affordable for us.”



2020 CHILD PROTECTION CASE STUDY



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SOURCES

¹ Susie's Place. 2020. About - Susie's Place. [online] Available at: <<https://susiesplace.org/about>>

² US Department of Health and Human Services. Child Maltreatment 2017. Children's Bureau. Published January 28, 2019. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2017>

³ US Department of Health and Human Services. Child Maltreatment 2014. Children's Bureau. Published January 25, 2016.