



**Vol. 1, Issue 2**  
**February 2017**

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**2017**

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From L to R: Past Board President, Renee Willoughby; CAC Executive Director, Lori Allen; Board President, Sherry Bruening

**Thoughts From Our Board President,**  
**Sherry Bruening:**

I would like to first start by saying THANK YOU to the staff for a record setting 2016! We are enormously proud of your achievements! It is a shame that you have had to answer the number of calls/cases for service you did in 2016 but I thank God every day that each of you are there to help! Your hard work and dedication to the mission of the CAC does not go unnoticed.

I'm excited about 2017 and what the future holds for the CAC. Over the past few years we have seen such an enormous expansion of the CAC in programs, facilities and staff. All of this allows us to reach more victims in need and helps them become survivors. At the same time we are mindful of the rising challenges with providing additional services and the budgetary demands. With help from our broad range of board members we will continue to address the needs of the CAC and provide support and solutions to EDUCATE, ADVOCATE and PREVENT child abuse and sexual assault.

Lastly, I am truly honored to walk in the footsteps of my dear friend and past Board President, Renee Willoughby. I'm sure she has exceeded the expectations of her promise to Pam Smoak's vision. But don't think Renee is EVER going to step away. She will still have an active role in supporting the CAC...Lori and I will make sure of that!

See you soon,

Sherry

#allaboutthembabies

"Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children." – Walt Disney

**Gulf Coast Children's Advocacy Center**

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[www.gulfcoastcac.org](http://www.gulfcoastcac.org)

[www.facebook.com/GulfCoastCAC](https://www.facebook.com/GulfCoastCAC)

You can support the GCCAC with an online donation at [gulfcoastcac.org](http://gulfcoastcac.org)!



# GulfCoast

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

*Protecting Children, Strengthening Families*

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## For Your Calendar!

*Feb. 25: Designer Purse  
Bingo*

*April: Child Abuse  
Prevention Month*

*Apr. 15: Community Easter  
Egg Hunt at CAC*

*May 6: Washington/Holmes  
Designer Purse Bingo*

*May: Whiskey, Watches, &  
Wild Cards*

*June: Hwy 98 Poker Run*

*Aug. 5: Designer Purse  
Bingo*

*Sept. 23: Zombie Run*

*Nov.: Little Black Dress*

*Dec.: Christmas at CAC*

## Thoughts From Our Past Board President, René Willoughby:

Let me begin by saying what an honor and privilege it has been to serve as president of the Board of Directors for the CAC. Eight years is a long time, but in many ways it seems to have passed quickly. 2017 celebrates my 15th year as being a part of the CAC family. As many of you know, I was asked by our beloved founder, Pam Smoak, to "do her a favor," and here I am. We've come from a small agency that was Pam's brainchild to the benchmark of what an advocacy center should be. I can't help but think that Pam had this in her long-range vision; I know she would be delighted at the leaps and bounds we've come.

I was asked to pinpoint one thing at the CAC of which I am most proud, and I can say without hesitation OUR EMPLOYEES! We are not just a building(s), not just programs, not just therapy, we are people helping those who are at the most vulnerable time in their lives. The staff of the CAC saves lives and changes lives, all day, every day. 24/7. Everyone works for the same goal, even if they have to overcome obstacles that should be assets. We never give up on those children and victims that need us the most, or on each other. Now that's something to be proud of!

Best wishes to our new president, Sherry Bruening. She's awesome and I look forward to working with her for many years to come. Again, thank you all for affording me the opportunity to serve as board president. The CAC has been, and will remain, my heart.



The Gulf Coast Sexual Assault Program began providing services to adult and minor victims of sexual violence in Bay, Gulf, Jackson, Calhoun, Washington, and Holmes Counties in 2015. Since then, they have been busy with community outreach, advocacy for victims, and general information about medical and legal issues. A 24 Hour Hotline (1-866-218-4738) serves to provide immediate telephone crisis intervention services to all primary and secondary victims of sexual violence.



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## **Signs of Child Abuse and What To Do If You Suspect It**

The Gulf Coast Children's Advocacy Center has transformed the lives of victims of child abuse and sexual violence by offering a refuge for victims and their families to cope with the terrible crimes of child abuse and sexual assault while reducing the fear and further trauma that disclosure and investigation often creates. We rely on our community to help us protect children and we couldn't do what we do without your support. The National Children's Alliance has listed indicators of child abuse that can include but are not limited to these signs below. Some signs that a child is experiencing violence or abuse are more obvious than others. Trust your instincts. Suspected abuse is enough of a reason to contact the authorities. You do not need proof. If you suspect a child is being harmed, or has been harmed, you should report your concerns to the appropriate authorities, such as child protective services (CPS), in the State where the child resides. Each State has trained professionals who can evaluate the situation and determine whether help and services are needed. In Florida, the Hotline is 1-800-96-ABUSE.

1. Unexplained injuries. Visible signs of physical abuse may include 6 unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.
2. Changes in behavior. Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's 7 behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.
3. Returning to earlier behaviors. Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.
4. Fear of going home. Abused children may express apprehension or 9 anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them.
5. Changes in eating. The stress, fear and anxiety caused by abuse can 10 lead to changes in a child's eating behaviors, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.
6. Changes in sleeping. Abused children may have frequent night-mares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.
7. Changes in school performance and attendance. Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive ab-sences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's inju-ries from authorities.
8. Lack of personal care or hygiene. Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.
9. Risk-taking behaviors. Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.
10. Inappropriate sexual behaviors. Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use explicit sexual language.

