

# Dickson House Children's Advocacy Center

## Office Info

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## What is a Children's Advocacy Center? (CAC)

The Dickson House Children's Advocacy Center is a child-focused center that coordinates the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse while helping children heal. The CAC brings together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team (MDT) to create a child-focused approach to child abuse cases. The MDT consists of members representing the District Attorney's Office, Pike County Children and Youth, Law Enforcement, Medical & Mental Health Representative, and Victim Services. The CAC was created to provide a private, safe, non-threatening environment to conduct interviews of child victims or witnesses. Forensic Interviews and Medical Exams are free of charge. The CAC has a private waiting area for children and those accompanying them that is child-friendly and comfortably furnished. Offenders are not permitted into the CAC. The CAC was designed to create a safe secure place for children.

## Brief History

In 2014, District Attorney Raymond J. Tonkin began discussions in the county about opening a children's advocacy center (CAC) for Pike County children. Prosecutors and State Police Investigators had seen the benefits of the CAC model on many cases involving child victims of sexual and physical abuse, but the lengthy drive to Scranton for CAC services was taxing on workers, and more importantly, child victims and their families.

Since 2014, multiple grants have been awarded to Pike County for multidisciplinary investigative team (MDIT) advancement and CAC development. In that time, District Attorney Tonkin and CAC staff have worked to develop the MDIT and Pike County's own CAC. Pike CAC provided services to child victims in two temporary locations while working toward developing its permanent location with the help of the Pike County Commissioners.

In 2018, Pike County's CAC gained "Associate" membership status with the National Children's Alliance, the accrediting agency of CACs nationwide. In September of 2020, Pike County's CAC moved into its permanent home at 103 West High Street, Milford. In November of 2020, Pike County CAC was formally named Dickson House Children's Advocacy Center, after local hero State Trooper Corporal Bryon Dickson.

## Why the CAC Model?

There is one main reason that we use the CAC model to handle child abuse investigation: **the experts say it is what is best for** children. Before CACs became the gold standard for child abuse intervention, children were typically interviewed multiple times about the abuse they experienced – by child protective services, police officers, doctors, lawyers, and judges (not to mention

by caregivers). Think of it as the child having to re-live the worst day of his or her life over and over again. Similarly, children requiring medical treatment and examination were often brought to emergency rooms or to pediatricians who did not recognize tell-tale signs of abusive injury. At the CAC, children are seen by medical professionals who are trained to evaluate kids for signs of physical and sexual abuse.



Now when a child makes an initial outcry about abuse, he or she is brought to a safe, child-focused environment to be interviewed by a trained child forensic interviewer. The interview with the child victim is recorded and preserved for MDIT members and eliminates the need for repeat interviews. In the interview, children are given time to get comfortable and are able to draw or play with playdough as they talk. It is common for kids to say to the forensic interviewer, "I thought I was going to an interrogation room!"

## Childline

ChildLine is a 24/7 hotline for reports of suspected abuse. If you suspect or witness the abuse of a child, please call 1-800-932-0313.

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