



First Witness

CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

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Report of Program Activities:

1. What measurable outcomes did the project make for your organization and/or those served by the project?

What is a Forensic Interview: When a child discloses abuse, social services or law enforcement may recommend that the child receive a child friendly forensic interview to talk about their abuse.

2014 Total Forensic Interviews:	101
2014 Forensic Interview of Duluth Youth:	73

Safe and Strong Child© is a sexual abuse prevention program implemented throughout southern St. Louis County and Lake County. The program teaches children basic personal body safety skills while giving parents, educators and other youth-serving professionals information and resources to reduce the risk of victimization and respond effectively to disclosures of abuse.

During the 2014-2015 school year, First Witness Staff completed the following:

170 Safe & Strong Presentations to 2,315 children
Lakewood Elementary: k-5 th -186 students
Piedmont Elementary: k-5 th -313 students
Laura MacArthur: K, 2 nd , 4 th & 5 th -249 students
Non ISD709: Minnehaha, Silver Bay, Two Harbors, North Star Edison, Hermantown Elementary
20 presentations to 225 parents through ECFE
26 community presentations to 580 youth educators, school administrators and non-profit staff

See attached surveys for teacher feedback

2. Describe any unanticipated benefits or problems you have encountered with this project.

One unanticipated benefit was further creating relationships with teachers and staff at individual schools in order to improve community response to disclosures of child abuse. Through the integration of First Witness staff into the schools, we were able to assist teachers directly when disclosures were made within classrooms, we're able to assist teachers with inappropriate or sexually reactive behaviors, and also position ourselves as a resource for when future disclosures were made. This allows us to use a more collective approach to disclosures and helps us guide the schools with how they can handle disclosures of abuse in a way that provides the best outcomes for the individual families involved. There were several classes that parents actually came in and sat through the presentations. They were incredibly grateful for hearing the topic and were also taken back by some of the students responses especially around students blaming themselves for the abuse or if the abuser apologizes and promises to not do it again then it's ok to not tell an adult.

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Building relationships within the schools also creates opportunities for us to branch out educational and prevention services to tertiary community-based organizations, such as Early Childhood Family Education groups, community collaboratives and youth organizations. This allowed us to further explore topics around body sovereignty and body safety with more families, many of whom have pre-k children. These opportunities to work more closely and directly with parents, teachers and youth further inform the array of services we provide and our coordinated community response to child abuse, while helping us to better ensure that our responses effectively and accurately meet the needs of community members.

Consistently amongst all grades students still identified abuse as their fault if they didn't say no to unwanted touches, this showed us the importance of continuing the discussion throughout the years. With the Kindergarten-2nd grade it was also clear that most students while they could identify what a safe and unsafe touch was, they felt that if it was a parent that was giving an unsafe touch then it was considered safe and they didn't need to tell.

This year Piedmont and Laura MacArthur expressed interest for us to come into the school every year vs every other year. The plan is every year to present to K, 2 & 4th grade and then if any other grades/classes express a need then we can add them to our schedule. Also, we did not have a response back from Homecroft or Congdon this year so we are going to connect with them earlier in the school year to talk about presenting in their school either this year or the next. Next year the schools that we will be presenting at will be: Stowe, Myers Wilkins, Lester Park & Lowell.

3. If you were to undertake this project again would you do anything differently? Please explain.

We would like to examine if there are cohorts of students that are missing the curriculum because of amended scheduling or individual needs such as: ESL learners or Special Education students. We are concerned that since we are primarily in traditional classrooms, there are students that are continually missing the curriculum. We want to ensure that we serving these populations and adjusting our curriculum appropriately to meet the needs of all students.

We would also like to add more conversation about the way technology is used complicity in sexual abuse and the implications of that as technology continues to be an increasing platform for child abuse.

Providing more opportunities to connect with teachers about what their concerns or questions are surrounding the curriculum and surrounding child abuse, what to do and how to handle it is another service we want to continue to bolster over the upcoming year.

Frequently students identify their teachers and school staff as safe people they can talk to. I would like to do more follow up with teachers and principals about ways they can continue to share the message

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that they are safe people for their students and continue the message of body safety throughout the year.

4. If applicable please provide a success story for this project.

Conversations with 4th and 5th grade students about body safety were especially fruitful this year. In one classroom, after discussing what sexual abuse is and what it looks like, one student asked about how we could also identify safe people and how we know if someone is a safe person. As a class, we discussed this question. It highlighted that talking about sexual abuse and body safety doesn't have to be inherently "fearful" or "scary" for kids. It can also be about identifying what it means to have character and how to treat and respect other people and their bodies. Furthermore, part of this discussion focused on personal responsibility. We talked about the fact that while adults' misconduct primarily constitutes criminal sexual abuse, it still is kids' responsibility to understand how to treat other kids and how to act, so that they are safe around each other as well. Planting these seeds at this age about appropriate and safe contact can help prevention unsafe sexual misconduct later in life. We also talked about the ways that students can help support other students in getting help and safety if another student or child discloses to them.

There were several students who asked the question, "what if you like the unsafe touch?" Being able to offer an open conversation with kids about why these touches are unsafe in a non-shaming and age appropriate was especially rewarding.

This year while in the schools, we did receive some disclosures from students. While we do not do these presentations with the intention of obtaining disclosures, we recognize that these presentations may be the first opportunity students have to speak openly about sexual abuse or may be the first time they've identified something that happened to them as being unsafe. We consider it a success that we have the privilege of supporting teachers, administrators, students and parents when these disclosures are made so we can have a role in providing the best possible outcomes for those families.

There were also several occasions where children came to First Witness for a forensic interview because a disclosure was made outside of school, but they were comforted when they came to our center and recognized their safe and strong presenter greeting them at the door. Additionally it has been a great reward to also be a member of the Duluth community and be at the local grocery store, park or outing and have a student remember you and give a big smile and wave or say, "Hey, you came to my class and talked about safety!"