



SAFESPOT

Children's Advocacy Center of Fairfax County

2020 IMPACT REPORT

FROM MANAGING DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the SafeSpot staff and Board of Directors, I am honored to share our 2020 Impact Report. In a year that brought countless challenges, I am incredibly proud of all we were able to achieve for children and families impacted by abuse in Fairfax, and beyond grateful to our community of supporters, partners and advocates who made it all possible.



Highlighted within these pages are the many ways the SafeSpot team adapted to the global pandemic and rapidly changing environment in which children found themselves more vulnerable than ever. From implementing new health and safety measures for on-site forensic interviews and family advocacy sessions, to transitioning our mental health program to an all-virtual model, we adjusted our service delivery to meet the changing, more complex needs of children and families. Through these strategies, and in close coordination with our Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)* we were able to provide 448 forensic interviews and family advocacy sessions in 2020. Further, we provided 1,199 sessions of trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy to 102 children and their non-offending caregivers.

In addition to ensuring a nimble response and continued accessibility, 2020 was a year of strategic growth for SafeSpot. With the support of a new, multi-year contract with our partners in the Fairfax County Department of Family Services, we were able to add a second Family Advocate and third Forensic Interviewer to our team. This new County contract is a big step forward in growing our capacity to meet the need, while laying the foundation for a more diverse, sustainable funding model. The addition of new staff also afforded the opportunity to better meet the needs of our diverse clients, more than 30% of whom are Latinx. In 2020, SafeSpot grew the number of bilingual staff from two to five, enabling us to conduct forensic interviews and family advocacy session in English and Spanish, leading to better outcomes for children and their families.

2020 also marked the retirement of our beloved Facility Dog, Pecos. For nearly nine years, Pecos served children as a companion and friend, providing unconditional love and acceptance whenever it was needed. Fortunately, at the same time we said goodbye to Pecos, we said hello our new Facility Dog, Virgil! As the newest member of our team, Virgil represents the renewed opportunity to help abused children build healthy relationships, boost self-esteem, decrease anxiety, improve attentiveness, and reduce loneliness.

In a year in which nothing was predictable, our commitment to serving children and families impacted by abuse never diminished, nor did the support of our caring community. And while 2021 will undoubtedly present new challenges, our determination and purpose has never been clearer. Together, we can create better futures for children and their families in Fairfax.

With Gratitude,

Heather O'Malley
Managing Director

*MDT Partners: Fairfax County and City Police, Herndon Police, Child Protective Services, Victims Services, the Office of the Fairfax Commonwealth's Attorney, INOVA Hospital, and Fairfax County Public Schools



Our Mission

The mission of SafeSpot Children's Advocacy Center is to provide a child-friendly, culturally sensitive environment that promotes the safety and well-being of child victims of abuse while facilitating a comprehensive, multidisciplinary team approach to the intervention, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of sexual abuse and severe physical abuse.

Our Vision

Reduce the trauma and improve the life of child sexual abuse victims as they navigate the investigative, legal, and post-trauma treatment systems following an allegation of abuse.

Our Philosophy

We believe that every child in Fairfax County has the right to receive prompt, thorough, and complete child-focused attention when abuse has been reported.

We believe the process that the community requires for the investigation of abuse should be a best practices model, be culturally sensitive, and focus first and foremost on the needs of the child.

We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all staff, clients, volunteers, partners, and vendors.

We believe we need to be good stewards of the time and treasure that volunteers, donors, and the community give to us in order to forward our mission.

We believe that our Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) members are valuable, important and essential to our vision and mission.

We believe that after an investigation is concluded, our work does not stop; and that Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) can help minimize the trauma experienced by victims of sexual and severe physical abuse.

We further believe that providing non-offending caregivers tools to assist their child(ren) is critical to helping victims post-trauma.

Changing the Child Welfare System

WHAT USED TO HAPPEN WHEN KIDS NEEDED HELP FOR ABUSE



START

6 YEAR OLD JULIA TELLS HER TEACHER SHE IS BEING HURT AT HOME

- While at school, Julia is questioned by her teacher, her principal, and a school nurse who examines her.
- The school calls Child Protective Services and Law Enforcement

JULIA MEETS WITH POLICE, THEN GOES TO THE DOCTOR'S FOR AN EXAM

- Police Officer talks to Julia
- At the Doctor's, Julia talks to a nurse, social worker, and the Doctor who examines her
- Once a detective is assigned to her case, Julia is sent to a specialized hospital where another team of Doctor's ask questions and examine her



JULIA TALKS TO A CPS WORKER, LAWYER, PROSECUTOR, AND COUNSELOR

- Julia needs to meet with the CPS worker on her case, a lawyer, and a counselor
- They all have different questions and objectives for Julia



END

JULIA HAD TO TALK TO 15+ PEOPLE

Children were forced to share the most traumatic experience of their life, over and over again.
The needs of the system were more important than the needs of the child.



Changing the Child Welfare System

WHAT HAPPENS TODAY WHEN KIDS NEED HELP FOR ABUSE

START

6 YEAR OLD JULIA TELLS HER TEACHER THAT SHE IS BEING HURT BY HER MOM'S NEW BOYFRIEND AT HOME

- Julia's teacher calls Law Enforcement, who schedule a Forensic Interview at SafeSpot Children's Advocacy Center for Julia



Julia will be interviewed by a professional forensic interviewer while a detective and CPS worker listen as a team



FORENSIC INTERVIEW



While listening to Julia's story, the MDT will determine what the best course of action will be for Julia and her family; Julia's needs come first and foremost.

Law Enforcement
Victim Services
Child Protective Services
Medical
Public Schools
The Commonwealth's Attorney Office



THERAPY

Julia is referred to a therapist who will teach her coping-skills, including relaxation and cognitive coping



FAMILY ADVOCATE

Julia's mom talks to an advocate, who will help assess her family's basic needs and provide connections to community resources



END

This place is great!



The Forensic Interview

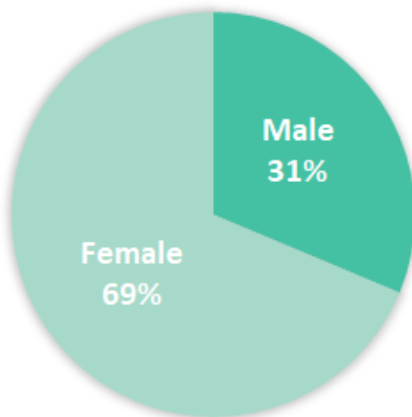
Paving The Way For Justice

When police or child protective services receive a report that a child has been sexually or physically abused, the child is brought to SafeSpot for a forensic interview. Here, our highly trained Child Interview Specialists know how to ask questions that are structured to avoid re-traumatizing the child or compromising the investigation. We bring together representatives from all Fairfax County agencies responsible for criminal investigation and child welfare, facilitating a coordinated response, and ensuring the child is not forced to relive their experience(s) through multiple interviews conducted by multiple agencies.

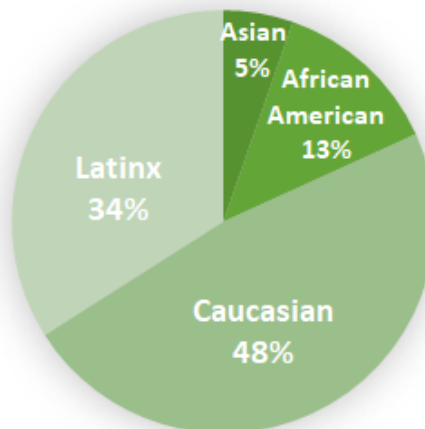
448

**FORENSIC INTERVIEWS
WERE
COMPLETED IN 2020**

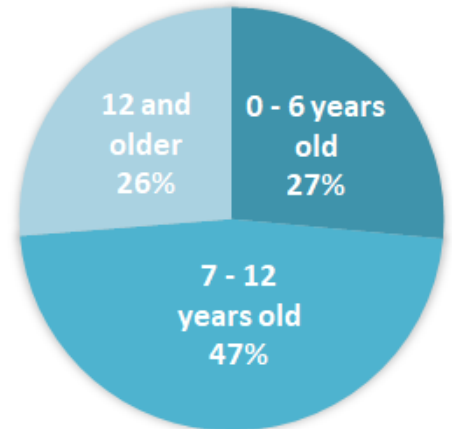
Gender



Race/Ethnicity



Age



What Children are Saying About SafeSpot:

"SafeSpot made me feel safe and comfortable."

"They care a lot about your well-being."

"I like that I was sorta at my own pace and I wasn't pushed to give an answer right away."

"This place is magic!"

Family Advocacy

Safety, Stability, and Support

SafeSpot Family Advocates provide parents and caregivers with crisis counseling, resources, service referrals, and guidance on navigating the child welfare and criminal justice systems. Addressing the needs of the non-offending parent or caregiver is critical, as feelings of guilt, anger, and disbelief can often follow a report of child abuse, especially when the alleged abuser is a family member or friend. Helping caregivers understand the impacts of abuse and trauma ensures the best support is given to their child, and that the remaining family unit grows stronger.



448

**PARENTS AND
CAREGIVERS RECEIVED
ADVOCACY SERVICES
IN 2020**

99%

Of participating parents/caregivers reported that SafeSpot staff provided them with resources to support their child and respond to their needs in the days and weeks to come.

97%

Of participating parents/caregivers reported that they knew what to expect from the situation facing their child after visiting SafeSpot.

99%

Of participating parents/caregivers reported that their child felt safe at SafeSpot.

What Parents and Caregivers are Saying About SafeSpot

"You made us feel safe, understood, and validated."

"Thank you for your support and time dedicated to us and other families that are going through these problems."

"Keep doing what you are doing so we as parents and our children can feel that there is always someone that can help."

Trauma Focused Therapy

Promoting Long-Term Health & Resiliency

102

**CHILDREN & FAMILY
MEMBERS RECEIVED
TRAUMA FOCUSED
THERAPY IN 2020**

1,199

**THERAPY SESSIONS
WERE COMPLETED IN
2020**

Helping children process and recover from the pain and trauma of sexual or severe physical abuse requires specialized care. SafeSpot's Mental Health Therapists utilize *Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)*, an evidenced-based therapy tailored to the unique challenges of youth with post-traumatic stress and mood disorders resulting from abuse, violence, or grief. Over the course of 12-16 sessions, our therapists work with survivors to build coping strategies, reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, address negative behaviors such as distorted thinking and low self-esteem, and regain the ability to form trusting, healthy relationships. Caregivers are active participants in their child's therapy; through individual and joint sessions, our therapists help family members to cope effectively with their own emotional distress and develop skills that support their children.

96%

96% of children who completed TF-CBT services in 2020 demonstrated a decrease in trauma-related symptoms at time of discharge (based on standardized assessment measures results).

"Thank you so very much for helping to give my daughter back her voice!"

~ Parent of a SafeSpot Therapy Client



The Multidisciplinary Team: A Coordinated Response

9



The Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) model is the foundation on which a Children's Advocacy Center operates. This innovative approach recognizes that in order for communities to effectively respond to child abuse, a true public-private partnership is essential. As facilitators of Fairfax County's MDT, SafeSpot brings together the many agencies and departments responsible for the protection of children, ensuring a united effort to respond. The SafeSpot team conducts weekly leadership meetings with all members of the MDT, monthly peer review sessions in which cases are thoroughly reviewed with all agencies, and semi-annual trainings.



What MDT Members are Saying About SafeSpot:

"This center and its staff are truly a gift to everyone who comes in. I appreciate the care they give to our families."

"SafeSpot uses strategies to continually improve the engagement of all parties in the MDT."



Meet Isabel and Serena

Last Fall, 13-year-old Isabel told her biology teacher that her grandfather had hurt her. After talking with Isabel, the teacher contacted Child Protective Services (CPS) and Isabel was brought to SafeSpot for a forensic interview. While Isabel felt frightened and unsure of what her admission would mean for her family and herself, the Child Interview Specialist at SafeSpot made sure Isabel felt safe, and that she knew she had done nothing wrong. With Law Enforcement and CPS observing the interview, Isabel made a full disclosure, prompting both agencies to open an investigation.

Isabel's family received immediate support and crisis counseling with SafeSpot's Family Advocate while Isabel was in her forensic interview. The Advocate helped Isabel's parents understand the dynamics of sexual abuse and helped them feel better prepared to support Isabel following her unexpected disclosure. After meeting with the Advocate, Isabel was referred for a comprehensive trauma-focused mental health assessment with a SafeSpot Therapist. Throughout the assessment process Isabel demonstrated high levels of trauma and her parents reported behavior changes such as isolation and social withdrawal, as well as a depressed and anxious mood.

While working with her Therapist, Isabel began to learn more about sexual abuse and how to identify and express her emotions. Isabel's mother also met with the therapist on a weekly basis to increase her understanding of the dynamics of sexual abuse and her daughter's symptoms.

After several therapy sessions, Isabel reported to her therapist concern that her 10-year-old sister, Serena, may have also been sexually abused by their grandfather, despite her previous denials. Based on Isabel's concern, her Therapist was able to report the new allegation and communicate directly with the investigative team, who brought Serena to SafeSpot for her own forensic interview. During the forensic interview, Serena disclosed sexual abuse by the same alleged offender, and law enforcement was able to act swiftly to bring charges against the paternal grandfather. At the same time, Serena was connected with her own SafeSpot Therapist to address her unique needs.

Both Isabel and Serena benefited from the trauma-focused therapy and services received at SafeSpot, all at no cost to the family. They learned to use art and writing to express their difficult emotions, and by the end of services both children were effectively communicating with their mother about their abuse experiences and reported feeling more connected as sisters, and as a family. Mom and Dad also reported feeling more confident in their ability to respond to their daughter's different emotions and support their long-term healing. Both girls look forward to the Fall, when Isabel starts High School, and Serena starts Middle School. Neither of them is fearful of what the future will bring.



SafeSpot in the Community

SafeSpot staff, board members, and supporters were out and about in 2020! From socially distanced fundraisers to local and regional recognition, SafeSpot's critical work and impact was highlighted throughout the year. Thank you to everyone who brought attention, resources, and awareness to our community's most vulnerable children.



Champions For Children Golf Tournament

The **2020 Champions For Children Golf Tournament** was a huge success. Thanks to our sponsors, golfers, tennis players, and volunteers, we raised nearly \$120,000 for children and families impacted by abuse! **Be sure to mark your calendar for this year's tournament, scheduled for October 18, 2021 - we hope to see you there!**

SafeSpot received the **2020 Child Advocacy Award** winner by Fairfax County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)! Thank you to our partners at CASA for this honor.



Lady Niner's Score a Hole-in-One for SafeSpot!

Wednesday October 28th marked the **11th Annual ICC/SafeSpot Charity Golf Tournament**. Hosted by the Lady Niner's of the International Country Club, and led by Co-Chairs Gita Marin Joyce and Sue Martin, this year's tournament and Hit the Green competition raised more than \$20,000 to support SafeSpot's programs and services. We are truly grateful to the incredible women (and men) who came out to support children in Fairfax!



With kids stuck at home, ER doctors see more severe cases of child abuse



Angela Haslett, a forensic interviewer, at SafeSpot, a children's advocacy center in Fairfax, Va., on Monday. (Jahi Chikwendu/The Washington Post)

By Samantha Schmidt and Hannah Natanson

Angela Haslett, Manager of Forensic Services, on being featured in the Washington Post:

"We were seeing a dramatic reduction in the number of forensic interviews being referred to SafeSpot in the weeks and months following the onset of the pandemic. With schools closed and children isolated at home, fewer eyes were on children. And fewer eyes meant fewer reports to law enforcement and child protective services. **Giving children a voice is one of the most important roles of a Children's Advocacy Center, and I was happy that the Post article could shine a light on the situation.**"

Farewell Pecos! Welcome Virgil!



In November 2020, Pecos officially retired as SafeSpot's facility dog. Pecos was the first facility dog placed in a Children's Advocacy Center in Virginia in 2011. Pecos assisted thousands of abused children in forensic interviews, therapy, court hearings and medical exams. In retirement, Pecos looks forward to long naps, leisurely walks, and lots belly rubs! Most importantly, he is excited to serve as a big brother and mentor to Virgil.

Virgil joined SafeSpot in November 2020. As an expertly trained Facility Dog, Virgil partners with our forensic interviewers, family advocates, and mental health therapists to provide comfort and companionship to the children and families visiting our Center, attending court, or receiving a medical exam. Virgil was trained for two years by *Canine Companions for Independence* and is certified through *Assistance Dogs, International*. One of the most valued qualities of Virgil is the unconditional love and attention he gives to the clients with whom he interacts. Virgil was born on April 10, 2018 and loves long walks, cuddling with children, and playing with squeaky toys.



**"You will never walk alone.
I will always be with you."
- Pecos**

Making the Most Of Your Investment

It is only through the generous support of our community that we are able to provide comprehensive services to children and families touched by the trauma of abuse, all at no cost to the family. We are grateful to have earned the confidence of our donors, and we strive to be good stewards of the financial contributions with which we have been entrusted. Thank you for investing in better outcomes for children and families in Fairfax.

2020 FINANCIALS

REVENUE

Government	\$245,603
Contributions	\$195,881
Grants	\$458,610
Events & Other Income	\$264,048
Total	\$1,164,144

EXPENSE

Salaries & Benefits	\$745,195
Programs	\$ 23,297
Events	\$ 38,020
Management & General	\$218,422
Total	\$1,024,934



Join Us

There are many ways to join the movement to support children and families impacted by abuse in Fairfax. SafeSpot is always look for volunteers, donors, and community advocates of all types! If you are interested in getting involved, please visit our website at: www.SafeSpotFairfax.org, or contact our office at 703-385-KIDS (5437). SafeSpot is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Our federal tax identification number is 46-1358388. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 148, Fairfax, Virginia 22038.

2020 SafeSpot Board of Directors

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Michele Thames, Executive Director
Lindsey Kerber, Clinical Director
Angela Haslett, Manager of Forensic Services
Leannah Farbotko, Therapist
Lindsay Bullock, Therapist

Alexsandra Mendez, Program Assistant
Shanice Madera, Bilingual Forensic Interviewer
Carla Claudio-Silva, Bilingual Forensic Interviewer
Veneisy Andrade, Bilingual Family Advocate
Jasmine Gutierrez, Receptionist
Virgil, Facility Dog



What Families Are Saying About SafeSpot

"My daughter immediately began enjoying her [therapy] sessions and looked forward to attending. Watching my child come out of a session smiling begun to heal my heart (as well as heal her). The SafeSpot Therapist made me feel like this was a team effort, we were both working towards the same goal...being involved in the process also made me feel less helpless as a parent and reassured me this was the right decision and definitely in the best interest of my child. I honestly cannot even put into words effectively the huge impact [SafeSpot] had on our family.

~SafeSpot Client

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