

Dear friends,



2021 was a year of transition, growth and continued resilience for CARES Northwest. We welcomed new faces and bid farewell to longtime friends, all while caring for 1,721 children during the pandemic.

As you know, Executive Director Kevin Dowling and Manager Karen Phifer transitioned from our organization last spring. Kevin and Karen collectively gave 43 years of service to CARES Northwest. I know and respect them both and hope to build on their accomplishments by expanding our reach while preserving the expert, compassionate care our community deserves.

I focused my first year as Executive Director on growing our incredible team, reimagining existing positions and adding new ones to help make this challenging work feel more sustainable. We were also delighted to officially name Dr. Adebimpe Adewusi as Medical Director, after months of her behind-the-scenes leadership.

COVID-19 continued to impact patient care and we pivoted to deliver services safely. Requests for our services increased closer to pre-pandemic levels. We were heartened to see our community's safety net for at-risk young people grow stronger again as in-person schooling and activities resumed. Youth were reunited with caring adults, like teachers and coaches, and our child abuse prevention team actively supported these professionals as they faced a new normal in education.

Despite the challenges, we served families in new and valuable ways. With the expansion of our Family Support Team (FST), each parent or guardian has a support person to help them throughout their child's evaluation process and beyond. Our FSTs offer ongoing outreach, referrals and support to the caregivers long after their clinic appointment ends, for as long as they need us.

Services at our Washington County clinic also flourished, and we expanded our days of operation. We're excited to increase services as staffing allows, and to continue strategizing for a future, permanent home for our Washington County patient care.

Lastly, we conducted a racial equity assessment with external diversity consultants to identify our successes and improvement opportunities. These insights informed a multi-year racial equity plan involving our whole team. This work is ensuring all our patients are cared for by providers who look like them, are knowledgeable of their traditions and values, and understand the impact of generational trauma from oppression. To retain our valuable staff, we must be an employer that fosters safety, honors diversity, and creates advancement opportunities. Our efforts are ongoing, and we will continue to update you about our progress and lessons learned.

Through all this change, one thing that has remained constant is your commitment to the children who walk through our doors every day. We are grateful and don't take your support for granted. With your ongoing partnership, more children will find safety and healing. Together, we will give them their childhoods back and break the cycle of abuse.

Jenny Gilmore-Robinson
Executive Director, CARES Northwest

Together,
we can create
a safe and
healthy
future for
our children.



Intake: the team behind the scenes

Before a child makes their first visit to CARES Northwest, an enormous amount of work goes into preparing them for a successful experience. Consulting with physicians, coordinating with law enforcement and social services, reaching out to parents or guardians and connecting community members to other resources is all in a day’s work for our intake team.

“We’re putting all the pieces together so the rest of the team can do their job as effectively as possible and provide the best care for the families we serve,” explains Amanda “Meeda” Reesman, supervisor of the five-member intake team.

Here are just some tasks that could be part of their typical day:

- Consulting with a child abuse pediatrician about concerns of abuse for a child in the emergency department.
- Meeting with the onsite Portland Police and Department of Human Services liaisons to review case files.
- Calling the parents or guardians of a referred child to orient them to our program and services, explain the evaluation process, and gather information about the child’s preferences or special needs.
- Connecting with a child’s therapist to ensure an evaluation will not interfere with the child’s current treatment progress.
- Preparing detailed intake summaries for CARES Northwest providers.
- Connecting families with the appropriate community resources if it is decided the child doesn’t require service at CARES Northwest.



The intake team (L to R): Gemma Rivera, Amanda “Meeda” Reesman, Monica Vasquez, Aly Rosas Castro, Sandra Soto Rocha, and Katharina Ramos

Meeda says organization and communication are key to the team’s success. Equally important are crisis intervention and emotional intelligence to provide appropriate support to parents or guardians who are having a difficult reaction. Four team members are Spanish-speaking.

Even though their participation in a case is brief, their work is vital for the rest of the family’s experience at CARES Northwest. As Meeda describes it, “We’re carefully setting up the dominoes so everything will smoothly fall into place.”

Educator training helps teacher empower students

Kayci Murray-Balto remembers feeling a bit astonished by her first encounter with CARES Northwest. At the time, she was a health educator at Harriet Tubman Middle School and participating in Building Foundations for Healthy Relationships, a district-wide violence prevention training CARES Northwest presented to Portland Public Schools. “I realized this is a huge topic that had been missing from the previous curriculum I had taught,” she said. “It opened my eyes to how important consent and sexual abuse prevention are to a comprehensive health education.”

She left the training well-equipped with the information and resources she needed to engage her students in these topics. “It was impactful that the training was coming directly from the prevention education team at CARES Northwest,” said Kayci. “They provided good information on the background and reasoning for the curriculum, how to make it accessible for students, and how we can help students learn to communicate in an adult world.”

There was a little hesitancy when Kayci first introduced the lessons to her students, but they soon started participating in discussions. It ended up being an empowering experience to learn about autonomy and that they were in control of their body.

Encouraged by what they learned in class, two of her students have disclosed their experience of abuse to trusted adults at the school. Because of the knowledge and resources provided by CARES Northwest during their training, the adults were able to appropriately support the students through the reporting and evaluation process.

Each quarter Kayci checked in with Danise Elijah, one of the CARES Northwest violence prevention educators, to provide feedback on the curriculum. They particularly discussed how it resonated with the diverse population at Tubman, ensuring lessons were accessible and culturally responsive for all students.

Kayci still applies what she learned from CARES Northwest every day in her classroom and at home with her own sons. “My awareness is so different now,” she explains. “It is so important for those of us who advocate for children to pay attention to the signals they give off and make sure they are empowered to speak up for themselves.”



Reassurance on the path to healing

“Will people be able to tell just by looking at me?”

Thirteen-year-old Leah* had been sexually abused for almost two years by her uncle. Hurt and manipulated by someone she trusted, Leah felt frightened and ashamed. When the abuse was discovered, her mom immediately knew Leah needed support.

Leah came to CARES Northwest for a child abuse evaluation appointment, including an interview and a head-to-toe checkup by a medical provider who specializes in abuse. As happens with most sexual abuse survivors, Leah’s medical exam was completely normal. The nurse practitioner reassured Leah that her body was healthy and exactly the way it should be.

But the trauma of abuse affects a child’s mind as well as their body.

In the following months, Leah struggled with anxiety. Family members treated her differently. Some refused to believe her. She questioned herself and her memories of what happened: if there were no physical signs of abuse during her exam, did that mean nothing happened? With the start of school approaching, she was deeply worried that other kids would know she had been sexually abused just by looking at her.

Leah began attending trauma therapy at CARES Northwest to work through her feelings and manage her anxiety. Her counselor suggested they make a list together of all her questions about her body and the abuse so they could talk through them with the medical provider who did her exam. Our nurse practitioner then sat down with Leah and answered her questions, one by one:

“Your body is healthy and normal.”

“Most sexual abuse survivors have normal physical exams. Those areas of your body heal quickly, which is a positive thing.”

“No one can tell what happened to you by looking at you.”

“The only way anyone will know is if you choose to tell them. That is your decision.”

Sometimes the most important service our team provides isn’t medical at all – it’s reassurance. Kids often have questions about the abuse they experienced and how it might affect them. These questions may feel too embarrassing to ask a parent or trusted adult, and the lack of answers – and worry – can stop kids from moving forward.



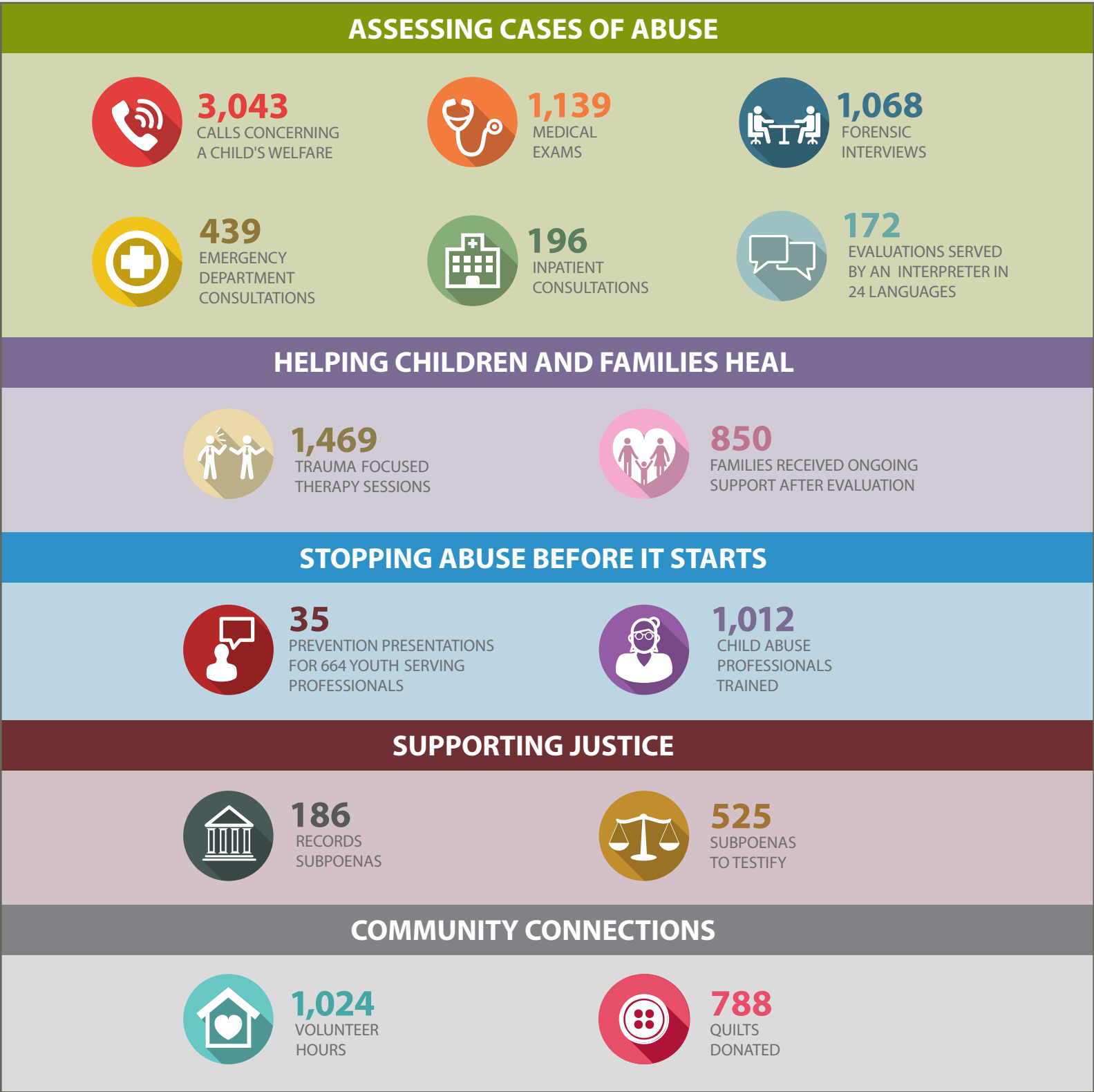


Protecting children, healing lives.

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Randall Children's Hospital at Legacy Emanuel

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2021: By the numbers



To make
a gift

Please contact Heather McEvoy, Senior Associate Director of Development, Randall Children's Hospital Foundation
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