

# Consistent with Corruption

## CornerHouse and Midwest Children's Resource Center

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A suspicion or accusation of child sexual abuse is a pivotal point in the life of a child and his or her family. If Child Protection, the courts or police make the wrong determination the results can be devastating. Vulnerable child victims can be placed back in the hands of predators, while at the same time, an innocent individual may end up in prison. If abuse is determined when there is none. A different type of victimization takes place if children are "treated" by therapists who serve as validators, convincing children that they are victims when they are not. At that point it doesn't matter if the abuse is real, the trauma is real if the child believes it happened. This is especially destructive when the falsely accused person is a beloved parent and the accusation takes place in the context of a custody battle. Sometimes these accusations are deliberately fostered. Sometimes a false allegation is simply an honest mistake made in the context of the hysteria that has been created around child sexual abuse.

Given the impact of a child abuse investigation on so many lives, we have a need to see that the organizations and individuals who undertake that investigation are knowledgeable, skilled and unbiased. They must be subjected to the deepest scrutiny and the toughest oversight. There should be zero tolerance for egos and personal agendas when the lives of our children are in the balance. When there is an allegation of child sexual abuse in the Twin Cities there are two organizations which are contracted to evaluate the accusation. These organizations are CornerHouse in Minneapolis and Midwest Children's Resource Center (MCRC) in St Paul. These self-appointed experts are completely unqualified for the work they are doing and both organizations are responsible for victimizing our most vulnerable children. This needs to change.

It is the incestuous relationship with the prosecution that makes these organizations so unfit. Both CornerHouse and MCRC are contracted by the police and child protection to conduct an evaluation when there is an accusation of child abuse, especially sexual abuse. MCRC's contracts with the police state that MCRC does not get paid if abuse is not determined and a case opened. MCRC bills by the hour for their services as expert witnesses. They have testified only for the prosecution for 20 years. CornerHouse also has contracts with the police and Child Protection and, in addition, is contracted by the Hennepin County Attorney's office and an assistant District Attorney is stationed at CornerHouse. As a child is being interviewed, the prosecutor and a police officer watch on a monitor in another room. They can contact the interviewer and guide her questioning. Thus, it is not the needs of the child that drives the course of the interview. It is the needs of the prosecution. CornerHouse, after all, was founded, in part, by the former head of child abuse prosecution, Tom Frost, who is also the current director. The board is not made up of unbiased experts in child development, but instead mostly police and attorneys, people who use the results of the interviews for personal, professional and financial benefit. Both organizations also receive federal grant money from the Department of Justice, the same people who pay the prosecuting attorneys.

MCRC is staffed by nurses and physicians. It is important to keep in mind that

child abuse is not a disease that can be medically diagnosed, it is an event that needs to be investigated. In a real case of abuse, there is rarely any physical evidence to be found in a medical exam. This means that finding nothing is consistent with abuse. It is also consistent with no abuse. If an “expert” appears in court and says an exam was “consistent with abuse”, what a judge and jury hear is “proof of abuse”. MCRC staff testimony, or statements to the media, repeatedly use the phrase “consistent with abuse”. It is a meaningless, misleading phrase that, for a fee, lends a stamp of credibility to an accusation of abuse. It makes no sense for a doctor to testify when there is no medical evidence.

The director of MCRC, Dr. Carolyn Levitt, uses disturbing methods to exam the children brought to the center. She inserts her fingers into children’s vaginas and anuses, and stimulates little girl’s clitorises and asks questions concerning the allegation while doing this. Dr. Levitt calls this “eliciting responses” and claims she can tell by the actions of the child whether he/she was abused or not. These actions are incredibly leading and suggestive and there is no research supporting the idea that the child’s reactions can be accurately read in such a way. There are others known to use similar techniques. For example, Dr. William Ayres of San Mateo. He was also well-respected and received many referrals from the police and Child Protection. He was arrested and charged with masturbating children after several of his patients had the courage to come forward and talk about his “examinations”. Dr. Levitt in St.Paul has “examined” over 10,000 children.

There is extensive research on forensic interviewing. A poor interview produces inaccurate results and contaminates the memory of the child, making the truth an impossible goal. Human memory is not like a recording device which produces an accurate, unchangeable record of an event. Memory, especially that of young children, is malleable and can be influenced and altered. Child sexual abuse is *not* an exception to this rule of corruptible memory, but CornerHouse bases their work on the myth that children never lie about child abuse. “We found in our research and our findings here that kids hardly, hardly ever will lie about something that big.” (recorded phone call) This kids-never-lie approach can be used to justify the most coercive and contaminating interview techniques, since whatever the child says can be seen as “proof” of abuse, not the results of poor interviewing.

CornerHouse staff state that they never get any fabricated charges, they start with the assumption that every child brought in has been victimized. When asked how many false charges they get I was told “...I don’t even have a percentage for you but it’s slim to none.” (phone call) CornerHouse is a child advocacy center (CAC). MCRC also runs an advocacy center out of their office. An advocate, by definition, is not the impartial investigator needed in the charged atmosphere of an abuse accusation. An advocate is someone emotionally and professionally invested in an issue and an agenda. The purpose of a CAC (based on various websites) is to “strengthen the prosecution” and “enhance evidence collection for effective criminal prosecution”. CACs strive for “increased offender prosecution” and “assist the State’s Attorney’s Office in the prosecution of offenders.” In other words, the goal of their interviews is to collect evidence for the prosecution, not to investigate as to whether abuse occurred or not. This negates the constitutional right of the accused to be considered innocent until proven guilty. The interviewer has no feedback whether the result of the interview is accurate or not. She/he simply assumes that if the child discloses abuse, that is the correct answer. The result is

that techniques that elicit any sort of disclosure are repeated and reinforced.

Oversight and accreditation for CACs comes from the National Children's Alliance (NCA). The NCA also controls over \$8,000,000.00 in federal grant money to be distributed to CACs. Is the NCA an impartial, research based organization watching out for the welfare of the children? Of course not. Dr. Carolyn Levitt, director of MCRC is a former president of NCA. Dr. Sandra Hewitt, cofounder of MCRC, is currently on the board. Julie Pape, former MCRC employee is also currently on the board. So is Victor Vieth of the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse and long-time partner with CornerHouse in their training program. Basically, these advocates accredit themselves, oversee themselves and fund themselves.

The taped interviews done at CornerHouse and MCRC are closely guarded. However, sources such as newspaper articles and case summaries offer direct quotes and descriptions available to the general public. These interviews are like reading a parody of proper therapeutic interviewing techniques: leading questions; ignoring the child's denials or contradictory statements; introduction of information which the children never provided and repeating it until it becomes incorporated into the child's narrative. From the interviewer children will hear about oral sex, penetration, masturbation, pornography, licking, fondling, ejaculation, etc. etc.. Children are usually eager for adult attention and approval. They may create fantasies if they think that is what the adult wants and they may incorporate information which the interviewer has provided into their answers . When a disclosure of abuse is the result of these faulty techniques we can not be sure if it is real or the result of a child simply creating a narrative under the guidance of an extremely biased interviewer. It should be remembered that for centuries it was believed that children would never lie about something as big as witchcraft. We'll never know the full number of people who were tied to a stake and burned alive on no more "evidence" than the testimony of young children who, under the coaching of parents and the encouragement of authorities, reported that they saw their neighbor fly through the air or suckle a hellish imp from their secret witch's teat. We need to leave the middle ages behind.

Once the interview is finished a summary is written up which is offered to Child Protection and the courts to use in making judgments. These summaries are presented as if they are transcripts but, in fact, they are inaccurate. An MCRC staff member told me during a phone call that they were quite aware these summaries were inaccurate: "... you can always have typographical errors, and, you know, although we have typists that we would like to depend on completely, you know, they get tired. They don't necessarily write what was said they write what they thought they heard." Life shattering decisions are made based on half remembered "guts of the important questions that we asked and their answers" (phone call). MCRC gets their statements into court under the medical hearsay exception, claiming the child's statements are "medical history" but all they ever "diagnose" is child abuse. We would not tolerate a physician who only got paid for finding cancer and thus diagnosed every patient with cancer and then subjected healthy individuals to a harmful course of chemotherapy.

MCRC and CornerHouse staff also do training. CornerHouse teaches it's method of interviewing called R.A.T.A.C.. This protocol is based on discredited junk science which states that the steps a child goes through in disclosing abuse are: denial, tentative, active, and recantation. In other words, if a child says "yes" it's proof of abuse, if a child

says “no” it’s proof of abuse. If a coercive interview results in some sort of disclosure and the child later says the abuse never happened, this too is seen as proof of abuse. It’s a trap with no escape. A child who recants or doesn’t disclose is treated as “in denial”. If the accused adult continues to claim their innocence they are also seen as “in denial” and deemed more dangerous. They are considered “not amenable to treatment” and will be punished with longer prison terms or lifetime incarceration in sexual offender treatment centers. If friends and family support the accused, they too are considered in denial. Advocacy centers like the National Children’s Advocacy Center have “family advocates” to work with “non-offending” caregivers “in the face of their own denial, that of the alleged abuser, and the denial of their family and friends.” In this incredibly flawed and dysfunctional system a social worker who spent 30 minutes interviewing the child, and never met the accused, nor saw him or her with the child is treated as the only one who knows the truth. Because they have attended a few weeks of training, the courts will take this stranger’s word over that of people who have known the accused all their lives and are witnesses to the relationship between accused and child.

CornerHouse has recently finished a project in which they combed the literature on child interviewing and carefully selected only the articles that appear to support their methods while ignoring studies which make clear the problems and flaws in that method. CornerHouse is publishing this list of articles in an attempt to appear credible and science based. This is not legitimate science. Research should *precede* the development of an interviewing protocol and that method should be regularly tested and new research incorporated. There are no scientists on the staff of CornerHouse trained in analyzing the methods and data behind the literature. In fact, an employment listing for program assistant at CornerHouse calls for only a high school diploma.

Finding Words is the name of the training program that was taught for years as a partnership between CornerHouse and the American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI). A group of prosecutors and CornerHouse staffers come and teach their R.A.T.A.C. method. The students are taught that “prosecution is often a pre-requisite to protection”. There will later be a follow up by the APRI in which they will measure the effect of the training on “charges, convictions and sentences” (Finding Words program information). As of March, 2008 the Finding Words program has been completely taken over by prosecutors under the guidance of Victor Vieth, director of the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse as well as director of the National Child Protection Training Center. The goal is to train half of the nation’s child abuse investigators in this method by 2010, with the other half following soon after. This is training designed by the prosecution with the goal of collecting evidence on behalf of the prosecution. The needs of the child play no part. only the desires of those who further their careers with convictions.

Victor Vieth has developed a plan he calls *Unto the Third Generation: A Call to End Child Abuse in the United States Within 120 Years*. Vieth travels the country promoting this program and earning praise and awards for his effort. *Third Generation* is not an effective plan to prevent child abuse, it reads more like a call to crusade. This is a “battle plan” fought by an “army” of front line workers trained in Vieth approved Finding Words methods. These people are to be the “brave hearted souls removing bleeding boys and girls from the jaws of the beast”. *Third Generation* actually says nothing about preventing abuse, it is all about punishing the abuser for the sins committed against a

child. It is the prosecutor who will wield the sword of vengeance. The seven principles which are to serve as the “ethical core” of the program make this clear.: “As long as children and prosecutors are being served ...our primary mission of helping prosecutors held the children whose lives depend on us.” and so on.

Vieth sees himself as placed in this fight by God himself. “We live in a sinful and corrupt society that devalues human life and existence.” states the website of an organization called G.R.A.C.E (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) of which Vieth is a board member. Vieth believes that all crime in America would be eliminated if everyone adhered to a set of four Christian principles which he lists in *A Christian Prosecutor’s Perspective on Crime*. Elsewhere he has stated that “for many children, the damage done to their spirituality is the overriding block that prevents them from disclosing...” (*When Faith Hurts: Overcoming Spirituality-Based Blocks and Problems Before, During, and After the Forensic Interview*). There seems to be little interest in the emotional, physical and psychological harm of abuse but a great deal of concern about “spiritual injury”. *Third Generation* calls for every suspicion of abuse to result in an interview by one of his inquisitors and Vieth makes it clear that he considers every one of these calls to indicate actual abuse. It is the role of the prosecutor to break down this “wall of denial” and never give up. There is no such thing as a false or mistaken allegation. No one is innocent until proven guilty according to Vieth.

Mr. Vieth claims there are seven million victims of caretaker violence every year in the United States (about 4 million babies are born per year). The Center for Disease Control (CDC), on the other hand, puts the number at 905,000 and that includes “physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, neglect and custodial interference or family abduction.” The CDC also state that “The ultimate goal is to stop child maltreatment before it starts.” In contrast, Vieth’s focus IS on punishing the perpetrator, which means a child has to suffer abuse so that the abuser can be caught. By implying that all the children are bleeding, battered or raped, Vieth, and organizations like CornerHouse and MCRC, keep us from noticing that their work results directly in psychological and emotional abuse of children and eagerly supports the crime of making a false allegations. Manipulating children in a custody battle is incredibly harmful to the child. I have found nothing written or said by Mr. Vieth or these two organizations that recognizes custodial interference as the abuse it is. Instead, they embrace these criminals and abusers with a guaranteed finding of abuse.

The victims most affected by the corruption of MCRC and CornerHouse are the falsely accused and the children forced into treatment for abuse that never happened. These individuals are caught in a trap. If they speak out about the bias in the system they are punished further. They are considered to be a pedophile trying to get away with their deeds or a child so traumatized by abuse that they are in denial. That is why I am writing this. I am neither accused perpetrator nor assumed victim. I am a witness to the devastating tragedy of a deliberate, false accusation of sexual abuse on a wonderful father and his two sons. The accuser, the ex-wife, has since lost custody of the children because of her serious neglect, abuse, alcoholism and the fact she would bring the boys with her to buy heroin and inject it while they were in the car with her. Her word is still taken as absolute truth by an MCRC interviewer and a CornerHouse trained social worker and guardian ad litem. Father and sons have not seen each other for over a year. It was the way these children, now 5 and 7, and their father were treated that started me on my

research. They were ground underfoot and kicked aside. Meanwhile members of MCRC and CornerHouse, and others like them across the country eagerly court the press and politicians, shouting out their own praise and feeding the hysteria over child abuse with manipulated figures and falsehoods. The result is a lynch mob, some naively thinking they are helping children and others coldly using the issue of child abuse to further their own agenda. It's time to still the lynch mob and silence the babble of the self-appointed heroes and ask them who they really are. I think we will find the answer deeply chilling.