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Hamilton County's Innovative Approach to Sex Abuse Investigations Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Advocacy center -- lauded as the first of its kind – now handles all types of abuse investigations

Cincinnati (Sept. 30, 2010) For 10 years, The Mayerson Center for Safe and Healthy Children at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center has gently served Hamilton County's tiniest victims of unimaginable abuse.

Lauded as the first of its kind when it opened Oct. 1, 2000, Mayerson is a holistic, therapeutic center for handling children who are abused and neglected and must be interviewed by social workers, police, prosecutors, medical providers and victim's advocates. Instead of shuttling between these offices, being interviewed multiple times and having to endure multiple examinations, children receive cooperative care from everyone in a comfortable, friendly setting. Hamilton County staff working at the center handles about 1,000 cases a year, but the center serves the region and handles even more cases.

"With all of the professionals in one place, we are able to each use our specific expertise to further the investigation and help each other," said Moira Weir, director of the county's Job and Family Services Department, a founding member of the Mayerson Center partnership. "But the most important reason the center exists is that it makes it easier on the children and families. Many have been through horrific ordeals, and we need to ensure they are treated with as little trauma as possible."

In addition to Children's Services workers, The Mayerson Center staff of 40 includes officers from both the Cincinnati Police Department and the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, a victim advocate from the Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office, and Cincinnati Children's staff of physicians, nurses and social workers.

"Police officers can immediately talk to doctors, social workers can get their questions answered right away – there is a tremendous spirit of cooperation all in the name of helping the child," Weir said.

Since its inception in 2000, the center has expanded, moving from sex abuse investigations to investigations of all types of abuse and neglect, including physical abuse, medical neglect, child fatalities or even child witnesses to crime. And the commitment and collaboration from all parties has turned it into a one-stop shop for all child abuse prevention, treatment and research. Countless children in this community have been helped by the center, and it has become a model for other communities to copy.

With brightly colored walls, child-sized furniture and colorful artwork, the Mayerson Center offers comfort to child victims and their families. The center also includes state-of-the-art diagnostic treatment, prevention and training programs and cutting-edge research.

“I think the Mayerson Center is so successful because of the relationship we have formed at an individual level, at an agency level and at a county level,” said Heidi Malott, clinical program manager at Mayerson. “We communicate with one another, we collaborate with one another and we support one another in doing this very difficult job of protection, intervention, prosecution, treatment and prevention of child abuse and neglect. I often tell others that I wish I could bottle up what we have and give it to other communities so they could replicate this.”

The center conducts internal and statewide peer review of forensic interviews, to ensure continuous quality improvement. The center also provides educational opportunities for medical students, residents, fellows and nurses regarding child abuse and neglect.

About Hamilton County’s Department of Job and Family Services

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, elderly protection, child care, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food assistance and Medicaid disbursement. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands each year and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.