



CHILDREN'S  
ADVOCACY  
CENTERS  
RESPONDING TO  
CHILDREN IN  
MONTANA  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
OVERSIGHT  
COUNCIL PANEL  
2026

- Brenda George, Executive Director  
Children's Alliance of Montana
- Tricia Loving, CAC Coordinator  
Yellowstone Valley CAC a program of Riverstone  
Health
- Sue Parker, Program/Finance Director,  
Fort Peck Tribes CAC – a Program of the Red Bird  
Woman Center of the Fort Peck Tribes (virtual)
- Kent Sipe, Fergus County Attorney  
Central Montana CAC

**CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE OF MONTANA  
IS A NETWORK OF CHILD ADVOCACY  
CENTERS AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY  
TEAMS THROUGHOUT MONTANA.**

- The mission of CAM:
  - Ensure every child in Montana has access to a CAC and the expertise of professionals working on an MDT..

**Operation, Technical Assistance,  
Equipment & Resources**

**Training Development &  
Coordination**

**MDT Development,  
Sustainability &  
Enhancement**



## COMPOSITION & ROLE

### Discipline

### Primary Role within the MDT

#### Law Enforcement

Investigates allegations, collects evidence, and interviews witnesses/perpetrators.

#### Child Protective Services

Focuses on the child's immediate safety and well-being; develops protective plans.

#### Prosecution (County Atty/Tribal/Prosecutor/U.S. Attorney)

Reviews evidence for criminal charges and navigates the legal aspects of the case.

#### Forensic Interviewer

Conducts child-centered, non-leading interviews in a neutral, child-friendly environment.

#### Victim Advocates

Acts as the main link between the family and the team, providing support and resource referrals.

#### Mental Health Providers

Offers evidence-based, trauma-informed therapy to help victims and families heal.

#### Medical Professionals

Performs forensic medical evaluations and differentiates abuse indicators from medical issues.

## WHAT IS A CAC?

**What is a children's advocacy center?**

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graph TD; A[What is a children's advocacy center?] --> B[Children's advocacy centers (CAC) are safe, confidential, child-centered environments where MDT professionals come to the child and non-offending caregiver.]; B --> C[A child can tell their story to a trained forensic interviewer and get connected to services & resources.];
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Children's advocacy centers (CAC) are safe, confidential, child-centered environments where MDT professionals come to the child and non-offending caregiver.

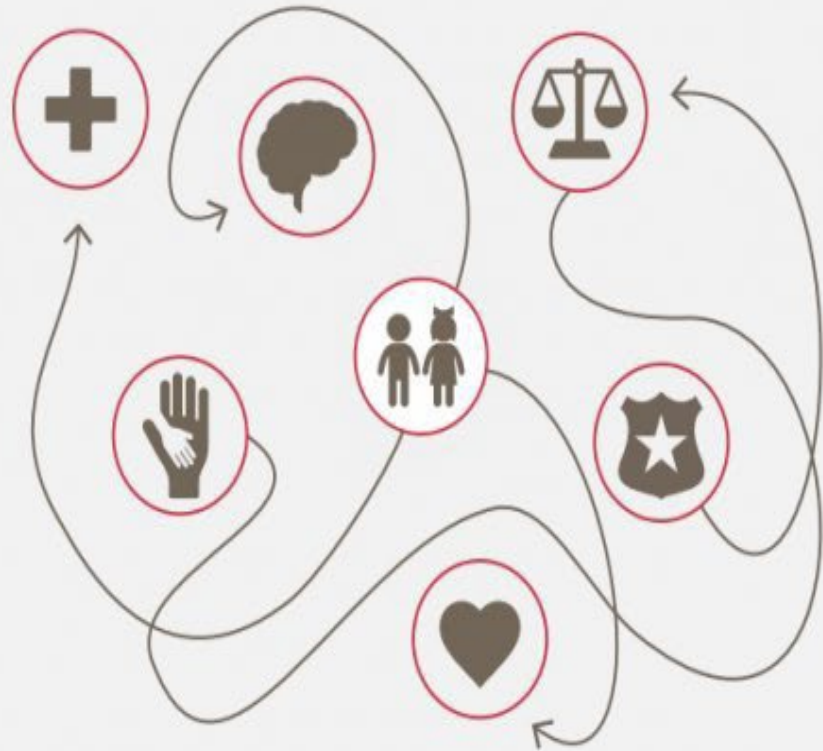
**A child can tell their story to a trained forensic interviewer and get connected to services & resources.**

## SERVICES OF A CAC

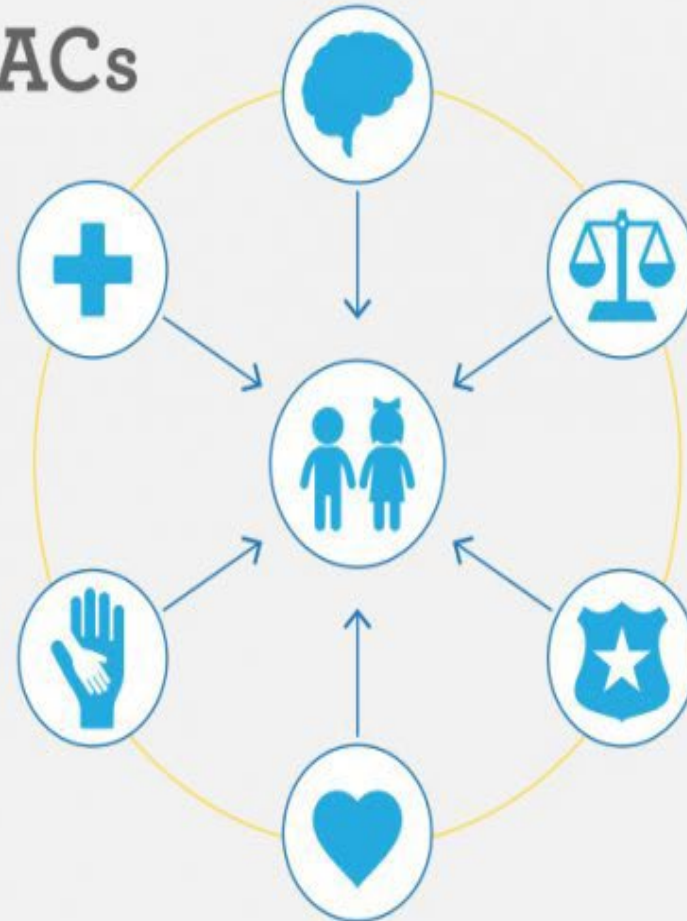
- MDT Comes to the Child
- Neutral child focused setting/environment
- Trained child forensic interviewers
- MDT Coordination
- Victim Advocacy –
  - Crisis & Basic need resources
  - Support for the life of their case, or as long as needed
- Access to a specially trained medical provider – where available
- Referrals to a trained mental health provider – where available

# WITHOUT A CAC VS WITH A CAC

## Without CACs

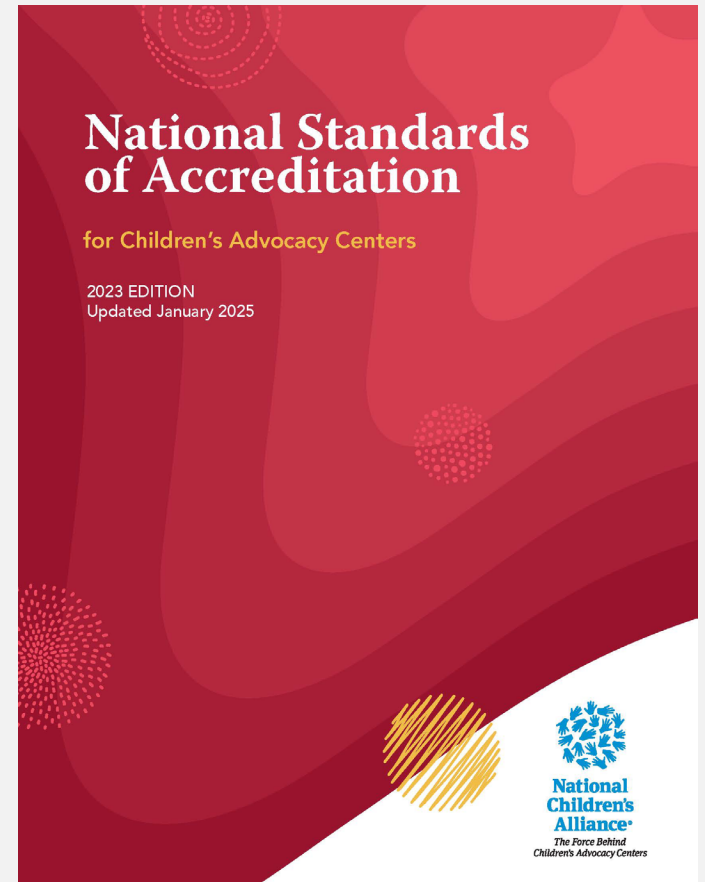


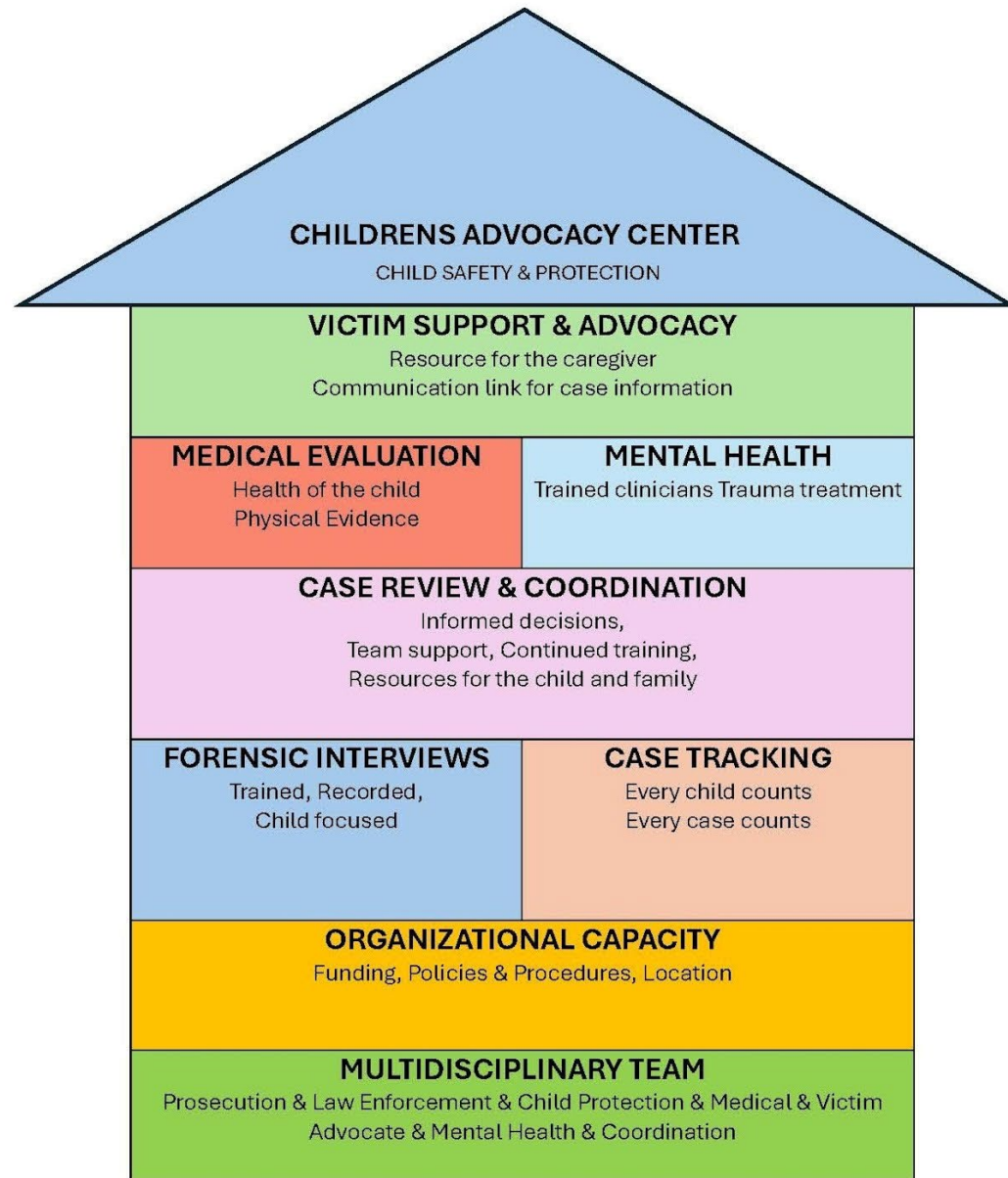
## With CACs



# NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE NATIONAL ACCREDITING & MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION FOR CHAPTERS AND CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTERS

- Research Based
- Topic Expert Work Groups
  - 3 Professionals from Montana have served on these national work groups
- Urban and Rural Application
- Montana has 9 nationally accredited CACs
- 25 Locations where kids can get Forensic Interviews
- CAM is an Accredited Chapter







# MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS (MDT) & CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS

## CORE FUNCTIONS

- **Minimizing Re-Traumatization:**
  - The model allows a child to tell their story **only once** to a specially trained forensic interviewer while other team members observe. This prevents the child from having to repeat traumatic details to multiple separate professionals/agencies.
- **Information Sharing:**
  - Members share expertise and resources immediately, which reduces redundant efforts and expedites investigations.
- **Coordinated Case Review:**
  - Teams meet regularly (often monthly) to discuss case progress, assess safety risks, and track cases through the criminal justice and child welfare systems. ***Cases/Kids don't fall through the cracks.***
- **Comprehensive Support:**
  - The MDT connects children and their non-offending families to essential services, including forensic medical exams, specialized mental health counseling, and victim advocacy

# IMPACT & BENEFITS

## **Stronger Prosecutions:**

MDT cases are significantly more likely to result in substantiated allegations—one study found **3.06 times higher odds** of substantiation compared to non-MDT cases.

## **Cost Efficiency:**

Investigations using an MDT response have been found to be **36% less expensive** per case than those without, saving upwards of \$1,000 per case.

## **Better Outcomes for Child and Family:**

Caregivers often perceive MDT members as more supportive and respectful, leading to better engagement during the investigation process.

## **Professional Support:**

Collaboration reduces burnout among child abuse professionals by sharing the emotional and operational strain



# Yellowstone Valley Child Advocacy Center

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A comprehensive community response to  
child abuse



# Child Advocacy Center Model

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- **Reduces interviews/disclosures** a child must give
- **Minimizes trauma** by limiting how often a child must tell their story
- Increases the chances of **successful prosecution**
- **Improves** communication between multiple agencies
- Provides families with ongoing **support and connection** to resources via a Child Advocate.

# Advocacy Room





## The Child Advocate meets with the caregiver while Forensic Interview is in process

- Referrals to therapeutic services for child and family
- Referrals and resources to community services
- RiverStone Health offers free medical exam for all children that come to the Child Advocacy Center
- Ongoing communication about the criminal and prosecution process.



# What is Forensic Interviewing?

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Primary goal is to obtain information while minimizing trauma and supporting investigations and legal proceedings.

- Developmentally appropriate conversation with a child by a specially trained, objective, interviewer.
- Neutral and non-leading; utilizing open ended questions to encourage free recall of the child's account in a neutral environment.
- Trauma informed techniques designed to reduce stress and prevent re-traumatization.
- Interview is recorded and watched live by team involved.



Forensic Interviewers are trained in an evidence-based process developed by Dr. Thomas Lyons - **Ten Step Investigative Interview**



# Forensic Interview Training

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Forensic interviewers require training in child development, memory, trauma informed practices, and legal procedures

- 32-hour initial training put on by Montana Department of Justice
- Researched based, Dr. Thomas Lyon's Ten-Step Investigative Interview
- Ongoing training per National Children's Alliance accreditation standards
- Required monthly peer reviews per National Children's Alliance

# Observation Room





# Yellowstone Valley Child Advocacy Center

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- Conducted over 1,400 forensic interviews as reported to National Children's Alliance since 2014.
  - **2024 149** Forensic Interviews completed
  - **2025 213** Forensic Interviews completed
- The majority of victims are between 7-12 years of age.
- Victims 60-70% female & 30-40% male
- 1 staff forensic interviewer, 13 interviewers from partner agencies

# The Forensic Interview is the beginning of the process, not the end

## **Yellowstone Valley Child Advocacy Center Multidisciplinary Team** meets monthly to review cases

- Yellowstone Valley Child Advocacy Center Coordinator
- Yellowstone Valley Child Advocacy Center Child Advocate
- Billings Police Department
- Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office
- Laurel Police Department
- Department of Criminal Investigation (DCI)
- Yellowstone County Attorney's Office
- Juvenile Probation
- Child and Family Services (CPS)
- Community Child Therapist
- RiverStone Health Medical Provider



# Fort Peck Tribes' Red Bird Woman Center Children's Advocacy Center

- The Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck Indian Reservation are two distinct Nations collectively known as the Fort Peck Tribes (FPT).
- Communities served:
  - \* Frazer
  - \* Oswego
  - \* Wolf Point (Roosevelt County Seat)
  - \* Poplar
  - \* Brockton
  - \* Fort Kipp
- Geographic location: northeast corner of MT on approximately 2.1 million acres of land considered as "Frontier". Reservation overlaps 4 counties: Valley, Roosevelt, Daniels, and Sheridan
- Total Tribally enrolled members: 13,109 & 31% population are ages 0-17 (Progeny ES, 1/26)





**Fort Peck Tribes'  
Red Bird Woman Center  
Children's Advocacy Center**

**The 1st NCA accredited  
Tribal Child Advocacy Center  
in Montana  
(since 2017)**

- Forensic Interviews: Child/Adult Forensic Interviewer (CAFI) & RBWC Staff
  - Multidisciplinary Team meetings
  - Sexual Assault Response Team meetings
  
  - **Crisis Intervention**
    - On-call emergency services 24/7
    - On-call SANE services
    - Child Protection Team (CPT)
  
  - **Support services are provided as needed**
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Fort Peck Tribes'  
Red Bird Woman Center  
Children's Advocacy Center

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**Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) &  
Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)**

**Collaborative entities whom each plays a role to help child  
victims of physical & sexual abuse**

U.S. Asst. Attorney  
FPT Criminal Investigators  
RBWC Advocates/MDT Coordinator  
Northeast MT Victim Advocate  
B.I.A. Social Services  
FPT Tribal Health Behavioral Dept.  
FPT Tribal Health SANE  
CAFI or Forensic Interviewer

F.B.I. & F.B.I. Victim Specialist  
FPT Prosecutors  
Northeast MT Health Service  
B.I.A. Social Services  
MT DPHHS (Child & Family Services)  
I.H.S. Behavioral Health  
SORNA Officer



NATIONAL  
CHILDREN'S  
ALLIANCE®

ACCREDITED  
MEMBER

**Fort Peck Tribes'  
Red Bird Woman Center  
Children's Advocacy Center**

Recipients of the  
**2023 Director's Community  
Leadership Award**  
**from the U.S. Dept. of Justice,  
Federal Bureau of Investigation**

In recognition of outstanding service to the local community and for enduring contributions to the advancement of justice.

(F.B.I. Director Christopher Wrey and Susan Parker, RBWC)

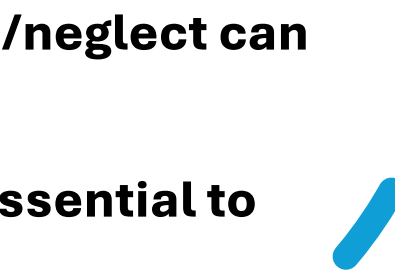


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Fort Peck Tribes'  
Red Bird Woman  
Center  
Children's  
Advocacy Center

- RBWC/CAC Mission Statement:

**To provide a centralized safe and child friendly facility that will support the investigation and successful prosecution of reported child abuse cases, while minimizing further trauma to the child victim and non-offending family members**

- RBWC operates under the following guidelines:
    - **Survivors of crime have complex needs that require comprehensive support to achieve health and safety.**
    - **Reporting and investigation of abuse/neglect can be effectively coordinated through a multidisciplinary approach.**
    - **Full enforcement of court orders is essential to breaking cycles of abuse.**
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- Four blue, curved, brush-stroke-like lines in the bottom right corner of the slide.

**Fort Peck Tribes'  
Red Bird Woman Center  
Children's Interview  
Room and Conference  
Room**

- A safe place for children to talk about abuse and tell their story to the trained Forensic Interviewer
- Interview is conducted in a non-leading & non-threatening manner
- Investigative agencies watch interview from another room



# Fort Peck Tribes' Red Bird Woman Center Children's Advocacy Center

## FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES:

- CAC staff aim to meet with the non-offending caregiver to conduct an intake, assess for needs of the family, and offer referral assistance as needed
- CAC staff/F.B.I. Victim Specialist can be the compassionate support the family needs throughout the entirety of the case (forensic interviews/exams, etc.)
- Learning how to support your child will help in the process of recovery and healing

(Family Waiting Room)



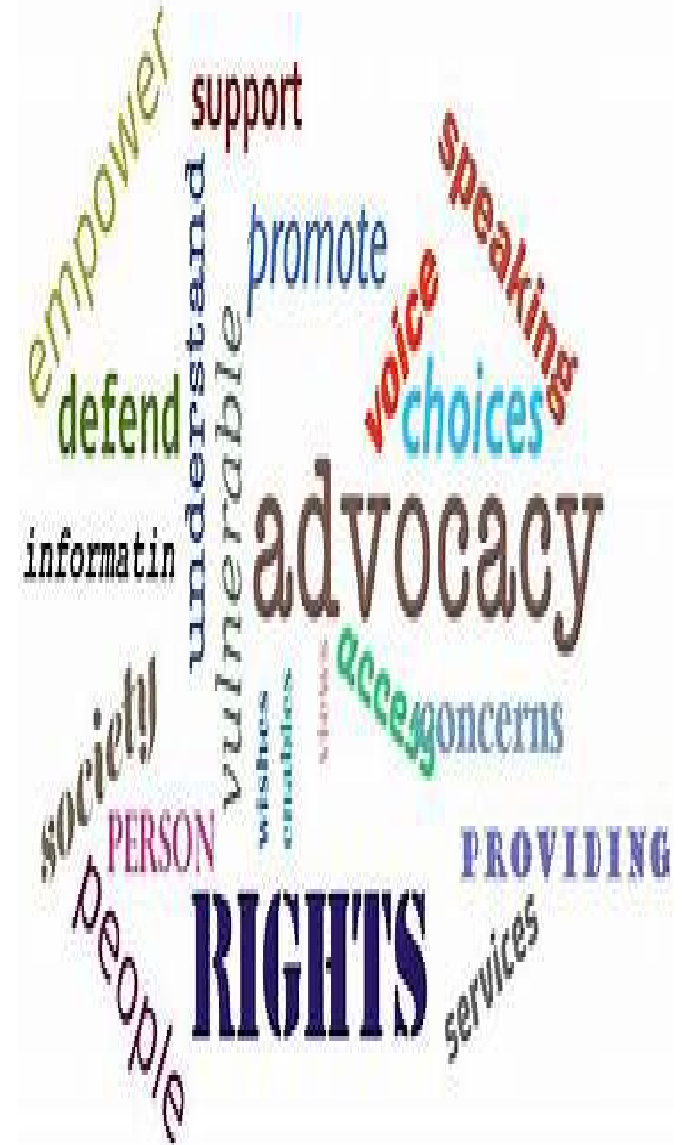
Fort Peck Tribes'  
Red Bird Woman  
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Children's  
Advocacy Center

- **Forensic Medical Examinations**
  - Advocate/F.B.I Victim Specialist assists with coordination
  - Exam is conducted at local emergency room by the SANE
  - Exam includes medical history from the caregiver and child
  - Trauma informed thorough head to toe exam
  - Advocate and SANE support the child throughout exam
- **Mental Health Screening and Referral**
  - Offer mental health screening at time of child's intake, exam, or forensic interview
  - Based on screening, CAC staff/MDT will offer referral to mental health care

# Fort Peck Tribes' Red Bird Woman Center Role of a Child Advocate

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- Will receive referrals from the Forensic Interviewer, RBWC Staff, CFS, BIA Social Services, CPT, and other programs' referrals on child abuse, neglect, child physical and sexual abuse
- Respond and arrange crisis and support services
- Referrals for counseling with child victims and offer support for non-offending parent/guardian
- Provide information to families about child abuse, trauma, and victim recovery
- Act as liaison between non-offending family members and multi-disciplinary partners



# Fort Peck Tribes' Red Bird Woman Center Role of a Child Advocate

- Maintain contact with victims and families to provide additional resources when needed
- Attend and provide support in legal proceedings as necessary
- Coordinate monthly Child Protection Team meetings
- Transportation of client to and from appointments if needed
- Implement a service plan developed mutually between supportive non-offending family/guardian, forensic interviewer, and service providing agencies.



# Fort Peck Tribes' Red Bird Woman Center

We never forget that violence ends through social change

- Changing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors

We never forget the role of systems change work that focuses on safety and offender accountability

We never dismiss the reality that conflicts are “teachable moments” for all involved, including advocates

We ask, listen, believe, and respectfully act on what the survivor states they want and need

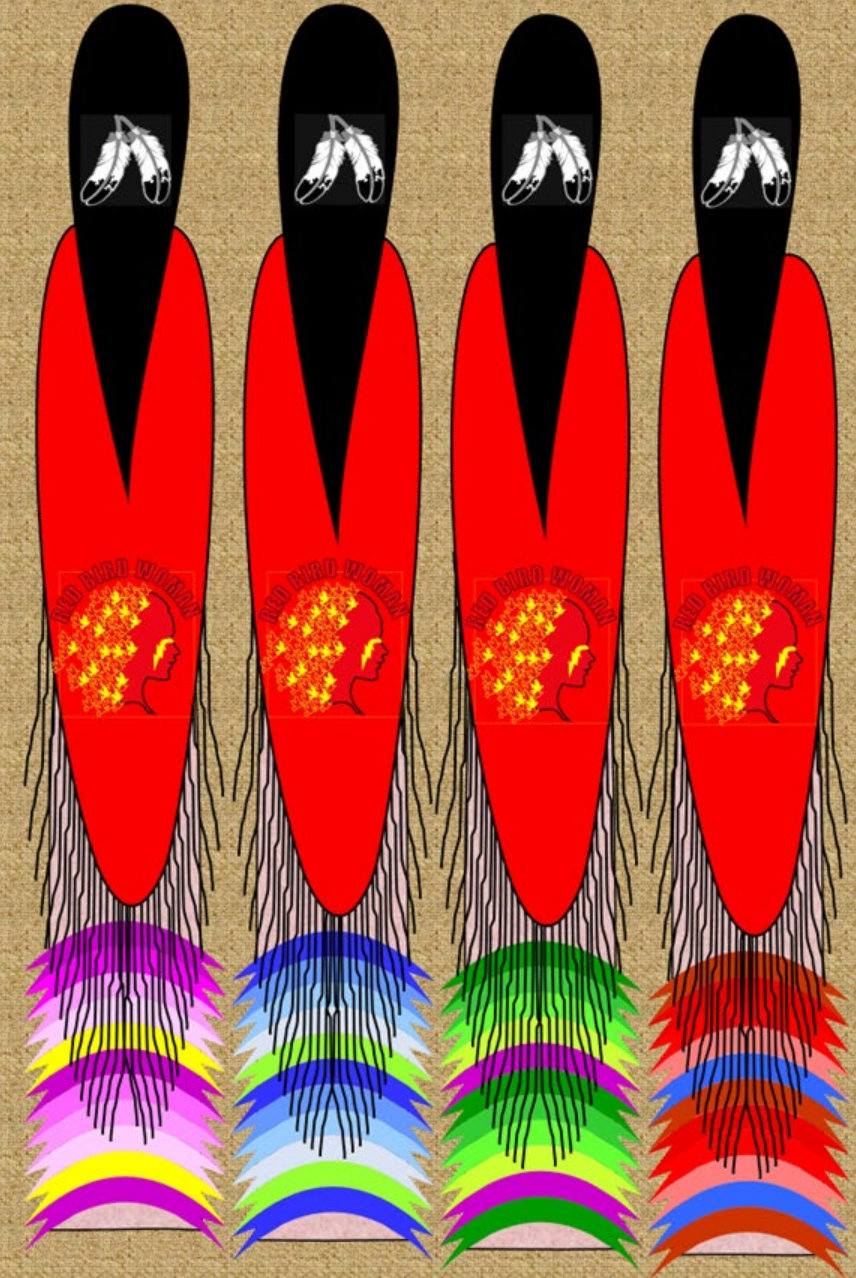
Fort Peck Tribes'  
Red Bird Woman Center  
Children's Advocacy Center

*Violence is unacceptable.*

*Any type of sexual assault and  
battering is a crime.*

*The victim of sexual or physical  
assault is never at fault.*

*The fault lies solely with the  
perpetrator of such violence.*



202

  
SNOWY MOUNTAIN  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

SNO

**WE**  
**OUR SMALL**  






















# Central Montana Child Advocacy Center

- Fergus County, City of Lewistown, Petroleum County, Judith Basin County, Wheatland County
- Started Multi-Disciplinary Team Summer 2009
- Interviews have moved from DPHHS off to Courthouse to new dedicated space
- Restructured after two child death cases (challenged team)
- County Attorney, Sheriff, DPHHS, City met to reorganize
- Chiefs rotate coordination (time consuming)
- Forensic Interviews 2025: 42 total. 2026: 13 as of April 28.
- Active Interviewers-FCSO, 3; LPD, 3; DPHHS, 3; WCSO, 1; JBSO, 1.

# Benefits and Struggles

Recent Trials

Prior Inconsistent Statements



**THANK YOU!  
WE APPRECIATE THE INVITATION & YOUR  
TIME**