

Children's Advocacy Center of Central Texas Case Study

The Children's Advocacy Center of Central Texas began in 1997. George Moffatt, a Bell County Sheriff's Office investigator recognized the need for a child-friendly interview room where young victims could be interviewed in a non-threatening environment. Space in the Juvenile Detention Center was allocated for this purpose. Donations of toys and furniture completed the room. The vision continued to grow and eventually with the help of a Bell County Attorney's investigator, Jack Mazzucca, and various dedicated board members, the Children's Advocacy Center of Central Texas was created.

In 1998, incorporation was completed, membership to Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas was obtained and start-up funds secured. In November, the center began multi-disciplinary team meetings to staff and to discuss child abuse cases. An executive director was hired in early January 1999, and interviews began in the new interview room within days. In the first year of operation, the center provided collaborative services to nearly 200 children. The staff and budget has grown each year with the support of the community. Last year, over 700 children were served.

Two interviewers conducted over 488 interviews last year, averaging 45-50 interviews per month. Each interview was recorded using standard DVD recorders, however, "We were having some issues with the recordings," states Michelle Carter, Executive Director of the Center. "If there was a technological error or something went wrong with the DVD or VHS tape, the interview was just lost. Sometimes we didn't know that until after we had passed on the video to the District Attorney's office," says Tammy Bracewell, Program Director for the Center.

The interview room has recently been upgraded with *V2 Advocate*, the digital interview recording management system manufactured by Commercial Electronics Corp. of San Antonio. The system is used to improve interview objectives. The most helpful features are the numerous search criteria available, the ability to burn more than one DVD at a time, and to recover info that would previously have been lost.

Depending on the timeframe, the time savings for personnel reviewing an interview can be substantial. The system has numerous search parameters. A variety of fields are available on which to filter searches including date, case number, specific words or phrases, etc..

Additionally, law enforcement can be provided more than one copy of the DVD. That can also speed up the process to obtain a warrant because going back to the individual police departments to make a copy is no longer necessary. Courtesy interviews for other jurisdictions are also conducted. When that happens, one of that jurisdiction's law enforcement agents must be present. Multiple copies of the interview are required, i.e. the Center's records, the agency of jurisdiction, the District Attorney's office, etc. Having the *V2Advocate* system saves time by providing up to four DVD copies simultaneously and each copy can be certified as authentic because of *V2's* watermark technology. The entire process can be done very quickly.

Another improvement that *V2 Advocate* offers over past systems is the ability to burn a DVD even if there is an error. The fault tolerance of the *V2* system allows that even if technical errors occur in the system, the recording is still on the hard drive and the ability to retrieve the information is still there. "The biggest improvement is the reliability of getting the interviews," says Ms. Bracewell.

Ms. Bracewell continues, "Having a system with customer support available all the time is critical. We wouldn't be able to have a system without that; it just wouldn't work. Also, having technicians to walk 'not-so-tech-savvy-people' through things that need to be done if an error does occur is important. The ability to record interviews reliably without worrying that even if there is a quirk, you still know that it's being recorded on the hard drive. Basically, the reliability in knowing that no matter what, or what we have experienced, the interview is going to be recorded as long as the start button is hit, and you're doing what you need to do. Customer care is a big thing too!" Customer support provided by Commercial Electronics Corp. is available 24 hours a day.

"We were able to participate in the *V2* pilot program offered by Commercial Electronics. We would make the same decision again!" Ms. Carter affirms.