

Whole Health Buffalo: New Child Advocacy Center on target for spring 2024 opening

The staff members at the Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf are watching the progress of the construction and renovation of the center's new, expanded home with great anticipation.

The center's future move to 899 Main St. will allow it to offer much more space to meet the high demand for its services by children and families in Erie County who are victimized by trauma and abuse.

Further, it will be more visible and accessible, located on a public transportation route along a major city roadway. Medical services will be available by its neighbors on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus.

And significantly, the larger location also will accommodate a new delivery model that will offer seamless referrals to a network of related services.

It is on track to open in spring of 2024.

The need is urgent. Erie County has the second highest cases of child abuse in the state behind Suffolk County.

Child Advocacy Centers are nationally accredited. Each county has one, though organizational models differ from center to center. The center operating in Erie County is a program through its parent, BestSelf Behavioral Health, which will share space with the center at the new location.

"The center's relationship with the large behavioral health parent greatly facilitated the services



Sam Vaughn, LCSW

Director, The Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf

offered to children and families and the expansion at the new location," said Sam Vaughn, Director, The Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf.

The center has been operating for 30 years out of tight quarters in a former home built in the 19th century at 556 Franklin St.

There isn't enough space to accommodate the multitude of children and families who could benefit from the care and treatment available at the center. It currently serves about 1,000 children annually, which is a third of the children in Erie County needing these services.

"We have worked the best we possibly could in these facilities," Sam Vaughn said.

The new location is the site of the former Lifetime Health medical office, which is being gutted for a reconfiguration of interior spaces and getting a third floor.

Fundraising for the \$10.5 million project got underway four years ago with contributions from government sources, and Key Bank, M&T Bank, Oishei, Foundation 214, Highmark of Western New York and other foundations and donors. The pandemic interrupted the momentum, but the campaign has picked up, and the campaign total is expected to be reached by the end of the year.

Vaughn called the project a once in a generation investment in public infrastructure to address victims of abuse.

Service areas will increase from one forensic interview room to four, one exam room to three and three therapy rooms to eight and new spaces will be created for group therapy, sensory rooms, meeting rooms, a gym, and individual offices. The new location also will afford room for 10 additional personnel.

"I don't say that with exaggeration but empathically," he said. "It will increase our capacity fourfold, and it will be the first time we get all the community partners in one building."

The new center will provide a convenient physical location and ample office and meeting areas for its partner organizations forming the multidisciplinary team. These include child protective services,

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Stephen Turkovich, MD,
President, Oishei Children's Hospital

law enforcement and the district attorney's office.

Having partners in-house for the ease and comfort of clients is a model coveted by Child Advocacy Centers everywhere, Vaughn said.

The current fundraising campaign covers the construction of the new office, Vaughn noted, but additional financial support is needed for the continuation of the service delivery model, he said.

BestSelf is truly grateful to have Oishei Children's Hospital as a dedicated and hands-on partner, conducting medical exams within our facility.

"Our foremost commitment is to the community, emphasizing physical and mental health as integral pillars of the Child Advocacy Center's healing model," Dr. Stephen Turkovich, hospital president, said. "The new building at 899 Main St. is a testament to our shared dedication, ensuring that no child is left untreated and receives the high-quality care they rightfully deserve."

As we prepare to open the new Child Advocacy Center's doors, we ask the business community to invest in and solidify their impact on children in the Western New York area. To get involved, please visit cacbuffalo.org.



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