

# Local United Way makes contribution to regional child advocacy center

\$68,500 donated to facility that offers help in child abuse cases

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SAUKVILLE — Representatives from the United Way of Northern Ozaukee County and the United Way of Washington County were in Saukville on Friday touring a recently opened facility designed to assist with child abuse cases.

United Way of Northern Ozaukee Executive Barbara Bates-Nelson and Kristin Brandner from Washington County presented a \$68,500 donation to Amanda Didier, the executive director of the Lakeshore Regional Child Advocacy Center, to fund the forensic interview program and their outreach efforts.

“It’s a shocking reality, but hundreds of children in our community are victims of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse every year,” Brandner said in a news release published Friday.

The Lakeshore facility is tasked with assisting law enforcement and other child advocate personnel with investigating incidents of child abuse where the information can be used as evidence in a trial or as a foundation for further investigation.

Child advocacy centers are facilities where forensic interviewers such as Didier can speak with children about their traumatic experiences. Cameras and microphones record the conversation, and law enforcement and other personnel are invited to watch the interview from a separate location.

The testimony is used to evaluate the case and assess the needs of the child while evidence is gathered for a possible prosecution. Representatives from agencies involved with the case then meet to determine if any additional action is necessary to address the situation.



Ralph Chapoco/Daily News

**ABOVE:** Amanda Didier, executive director of the Lakeshore Regional Child Advocacy Center, poses for a photograph Friday in the waiting area of the Saukville facility where she accepted a check for \$68,500 from the United Way of Northern Ozaukee and the United Way of Washington County to fund operations. **LEFT:** Didier, left, demonstrates how the video and audio recording system works to United Way Executive Directors Barbara Bates-Nelson, center and Kristin Brandner on Friday at the Lakeshore Regional Child Advocacy Center. The facility is designed to provide a place for abused children to be interviewed about their experiences.



“The goals of the interview are to minimize additional trauma while maximizing legally defensible information we obtain from the child,” Didier said during an interview earlier in the year.

The advocacy center began as a government initiative, but transitioned to a nonprofit status and operates as a separate entity from the county. However, center staff receive support from Ozaukee, Sheboygan and Washington

County as they serve children’s needs in the area.

To receive services from the centers, a child must be referred by law enforcement or a partnering agency.

Lakeshore board members and staff have been scouting a location for several months, settling on a site that places them centrally among areas with few resources for interviewing abused children.

The location, which opened in

September, has a waiting room filled with books and toys as children wait to be seen. There are spaces for meetings and offices. There is an interview room with a video and microphone that is virtually connected to another viewing area.

In 2017, center staff conducted more than 230 interviews with children from the three counties, according to statistics that Didier provided.