



COUNTY OF YOLO
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
JEFF W. REISIG, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: October 20, 2014 **Contact:** Jonathan Raven, Chief Deputy District Attorney
Jonathan.raven@yolocounty.org

Yolo County Hosts Statewide Conference on Child Advocacy Centers

(Woodland, CA) – Yolo County District Attorney Jeff Reisig announced that on October 16, 2014, over 130 child abuse professionals attended the Children’s Advocacy Centers of California Annual Summit “How Ongoing Trauma Affects Children and Child Abuse Professionals” at the Woodland Community Center. The workshop offered information from experts on how to avoid inflicting additional trauma on child victims of child abuse and sexual assault and was attended by police officers, child welfare social workers, therapists, child forensic interviewer specialists, deputy district attorneys, and probation officers. In addition, there was discussion on dealing with the trauma that professionals experience when working with these crimes. Participants travelled to Woodland from as far away as Southern California, also in attendance was an international five-member team from Zambia. This Global Alliance for Health-sponsored study group is spending the month visiting California courts, district attorney’s offices, police departments and child interview centers to observe best practices for investigating child abuse and domestic violence crimes.

Al Killen-Harvey, clinical supervisor at the Chadwick Center for Children and Families in San Diego, spoke during the morning session of the conference. He stated that a lack of awareness and formal training in trauma can cause additional inadvertent trauma to these very vulnerable victims. He indicated that sounds, smells, or even a simple question can trigger another traumatic event for these victims. Mr. Killen-Harvey noted that, “It is crucial that we understand how the kids feel and avoid dehumanizing them. We are asking them to describe to us something that was not a pleasurable event and which was overwhelming,” and that these children are especially vulnerable because the crime(s) caused them to lose control over their lives and bodies and the mere asking them what happened can cause more trauma. He reminded the group that even adults have difficulty and embarrassment describing to a stranger their own last sexual act.

Mr. Killen-Harvey encouraged the participants to look for ways to give these victims some choice or control. He says it can be as simple as allowing the child to select their seat, taking a break when they want, and letting them know that it is okay to break down emotionally. He stated that “A little piece of control can be enough when they currently feel that they cannot control anything.” He also said that trauma experienced at a young age is the most damaging. Infants who are exposed to the sounds of domestic violence are known to later show related trauma-induced behavior. “Infants are taking it in, we have to worry about it,” and those exposed to domestic violence can actually be worse off than those physically assaulted in a domestic violence incident.

The afternoon workshop featured Dr. Nancy Bohl-Penrod, of the Counseling Team International based in San Bernardino. Dr. Bohl-Penrod has been providing trauma support services and training to law enforcement since 1983. She has worked with persons involved in the Oklahoma bombing, earthquake, fire and airplane disasters and New York 9-11 survivors. She stated that “repeated exposure to suffering children” is among the four top police officer stressors (the top three include a fatal line of duty shooting, a line of duty death of a fellow officer, and surviving a physical attack).

Dr. Bohl-Penrod noted that many people do not realize the impact of stress until they are burned out with “compassion fatigue.” Compassion fatigue includes having calloused indifference towards others, losing interest in life, work and love ones, having difficulty sleeping and making decisions. This state of anhedonia – inability to experience pleasure – needs to be addressed. Lack of disgust is not a good sign. Having terror dreams can be okay because it may mean that the brain is trying to make sense of the situation. She stated that professionals who are exposed to trauma can successfully address the negative emotions by processing those experiences through peer support. She told the audience that a supportive workplace network is the most important resource. Listening to each other’s stories “to empty it out of the brain” and having that support at work and with a partner is really important.

The Children’s Advocacy Centers of California (CACC) is a membership organization helping local communities effectively and efficiently respond to child abuse allegations while putting the needs of the child victim first. CACC provides statewide training, support, technical assistance and leadership. The October 16th training was hosted by the Yolo County Multi-Disciplinary Interview Center (MDIC) and Yolo County District Attorney’s Office.

###