CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY & PROTECTION CENTER
of Catawba County

Quarterly Newsletter

Fall Issue 2026

Offering HOPE

by MeLissa Swartley, Child & Family Advocate

Several times a year the CAPC offers **HOPE class**. This is a 6-week education and support group for non-offending caregivers of children who have experienced child sexual abuse.

The goals of the class are to **educate caregivers by providing information on:**

- The definition of child abuse including its scope and common myths
- The effects of abuse and how to respond after a child discloses
- Stress, grief and self-care
- Trauma related behaviors and trauma informed parenting
- Offenders and grooming
- Negotiating the legal system
- Ways to protect their children and the opportunity to connect with others who have experienced similar circumstances.

There is *no cost to families.* Our dedicated volunteers and supporters provide dinner, childcare, and gas vouchers to help remove any barriers to participation.

It is a big deal when families enter the building knowing they will be well cared for.

We have difficult discussions and talk about hard things. Caregivers are learning how to move forward and growing in their parenting.

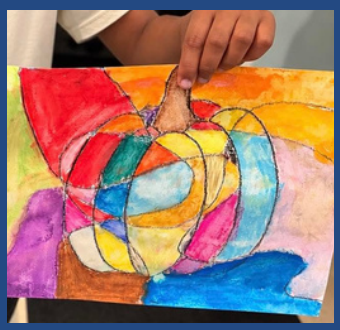
The time spent giving a child undivided attention or making chicken nuggets and a salad is no small thing. Class would not occur without all the behind-the-scenes work of our HOPE class volunteers.

HOPE class is just one of our many services that I am proud to be a part of. It is truly staff led and volunteer driven.

This holiday season I am so very thankful for all the things – big and small – that make HOPE class happen.

Painting a Brighter Future

A special thank you to **Jenny Cody** from the **Hickory Museum of Art** for volunteering her time and creativity at HOPE class this month! Jenny joined us to lead an art project with our older children while parents participated in HOPE class. We're grateful for community volunteers like Jenny who make these experiences possible.



Staff Spotlight: Karen Henson, Outpatient Therapist

What motivates you to work with children who have experienced trauma?
Children who have experienced trauma deserve someone who is willing to walk with them through the discomfort, pain and journey toward healing. I am honored to be able to do that as a therapist and member of the team at the CAPC. I do this work because I believe children can recover from trauma, but they need to be able to process that trauma openly. I want children to know that they are no longer alone. I believe I have tools and information that can help them move forward, and I enjoy cheering them on the whole way.

What common challenges do you help children navigate in therapy?
Therapy is an active process and isn't always easy. Most common challenges I help children navigate are related to managing their thoughts-checking them for accuracy and helping them learn they can control their thoughts with practice. Kids often feel a sense of guilt, shame and responsibility for the abuse telling themselves: "I should have told sooner", "I broke up the family", "It's my fault my siblings don't have their father". Helping correct those thinking errors is critical in improving their sense of self and self-confidence. Another challenge is helping them manage their emotional response to the trauma and its aftermath (i.e. flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, sadness, anxiety, poor sleep). Processing their experience, which means talking about "the hard stuff", can be a challenge. I want children to learn they can do hard things; learn they can manage their thoughts and feelings, know they can overcome what's happened to them and be proud of their efforts.

What inspires you most as you walk alongside children on their healing journey?
When 10-year-old Ashley looked at me on her treatment "graduation day" and said that I've "taught her to have a voice," or when 17-year-old Diana said, "You never gave up on me, and I knew you really cared," or when 12-year-old Christopher said he learned "to not let his fears get the better of him"... These words inspire me and give me all the reasons I need to do this work!

Outside of the work you do here, what is something that brings you joy or makes you feel most like yourself?
Outside of work, I enjoy concerts and live music. I am a sports fan, Go NY Giants! I like to read and bake. I find relaxation in nature and enjoy hiking, mountain views and sitting at the ocean listening to the waves. I'm always up for fun with friends. Most of all, I love when my house is full of family and I get time with my son, his wife and my 2 grandsons!

Volunteer Highlight

A special thank you to **Holly Sigmon**, **Lisa Crump**, **Mollie Bowman**, **Lauren Redd**, **Andrea Benfield** and **Becky Less** for helping with childcare and providing thoughtful and delicious meals for families at HOPE class this fall!

Center News

Giving Tuesday, a day dedicated to giving to worthy causes, is **December 1, 2026.** Your gift that day will go towards helping with the cost of transportation for caregivers accessing services such as ongoing therapy and HOPE classes.

We're so thankful for your continued support and commitment to our mission.
Because of you, children and families know they have a community that cares and stands beside them.

Thank you for reading!

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