

FOR THE CHILDREN

By TIFFANY SMITH

Nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States — many times with their children watching.

Children are victims of domestic violence even if they are not directly experiencing the physical, verbal or mental abuse the victimized parent is facing.

Beginning in July, SafeSpace was able to better assist children across the Treasure Coast who were traumatized by domestic violence, thanks to funds that were recently awarded to the organization from the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV) to implement the Child Protection Investigation Project.

“As the only certified domestic violence center on the Treasure Coast, SafeSpace has been a longtime partner with the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence,” said Jill Borowicz, CEO of SafeSpace. “At SafeSpace, our mission is not only to save and change the lives of those who are survivors of domestic violence but also to sup-

port and help to heal the children of those survivors as well.”

With the mutual goal of protecting children from the effects of domestic violence, FCADV, the Florida Department of Children and Families, and the Office of the Attorney General of Florida collaborated to create this program in 2013.

The Child Protection Investigation Project is a highly successful pilot program and provides expert consultation in cases involving domestic violence to child protective investigators and supports permanency, safety and the well-being of children.

In 2014, the Governor and Florida Legislature allocated \$2 million to expand the project. This appropriation allowed for the expansion from 12 to 45 counties where a high volume of domestic violence-related child maltreatment removals occur.

In 2015, the legislature again prioritized survivor and child safety by including an additional \$2 million in the state’s budget to expand the Child Protection Investigation

SafeSpace awarded funds to protect young victims

Project to all 67 counties in Florida.

The project focuses on keeping the child safe in the home with the non-offending parent, while holding the perpetrator of domestic violence responsible for the abuse to the family.

SafeSpace effectively launched this project by establishing official partnerships with many organizations within the child welfare system throughout the Treasure Coast region’s circuit.

Additionally, two advocates were hired by SafeSpace specifically to implement the program in Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River Counties.

There is a measurable return on investment through the project.

From 2013 to 2014, FCADV’s ten Child Protection Investigation Projects enabled nearly 4,400 children whose families were involved in the child welfare system as a result of domestic violence to remain in the home with the non-offending parent.

These efforts have significantly reduced



Treasure Coast

Domestic Violence/Child Welfare Advocates Lourdes Mercedes and Stacy Shearer (right) with Michele Akins, Director of Programs

the need for foster care services and in 2014, produced a potential cost savings of nearly \$11.3 million.

As a result, the projects are expected to continue to make measurable and positive impacts throughout the community.

For more information, visit SafeSpace-FL.org or call 772-223-2399.