IT TAKES A VILLAGE

LIFE THROUGH THEIR EYES

While these stories are true, names and images have been changed to protect the youth and families involved.

Finley is a sweet child who is on his school's honor roll and is described by his peers as an outgoing friend who makes everyone around him laugh. If you were to see Finley out with his family, you would see a child who appears happy and loved. What you would not see are the bruises and scars he wears on his body and the hurt hiding behind his smile.

The suspected abuse was not reported to law enforcement until Finley's teacher noticed a troubling change in his behavior. She also observed that he had suddenly begun wearing long pants and sweatshirts during gym class. After law enforcement and DHHS confirmed signs of abuse, an investigation was opened, and Finley was removed from the home and placed in temporary foster care.

A SAFE SPACE TO SPEAK THE TRUTH ABOUT TRAUMA

Today is Finley's tenth birthday. But instead of celebrating with friends, enjoying cake, and opening presents, he is being interviewed at Eagle Village's Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). Finley is nervous and fearful upon his arrival. But unlike a hospital, courthouse, or police station, the CAC's homelike setting helps calm him down. Finley is warmly greeted by the CAC team and escorted into a waiting room filled with toys, books, and a comfortable couch covered in stuffed animals. He looks around the room and notices the infinity game table. Soon, he is immersed in one of its interactive games.

After he has had time to relax, Finley is invited into the interview room. It feels just as welcoming as the living room. He notices fidget toys and snacks sitting on a coffee table, along with a color-changing sphere and a white noise machine on a nearby shelf. Emily, an Eagle VIllage forensic interviewer, asks if he would like to change the sphere's color and hands him the remote. Finley chooses green and excitedly explains how much he loves that color. He settles onto the floor and selects a fluffy, green dinosaur to hold. Emily joins him on the floor.

With a gentle voice, she points out different features of the room. "Over there is the door, and if at any point you want to stop the interview, just let me know and we can leave the room." Emily points toward a black lens on the ceiling. "That up there is a camera. It allows my partners to join us without being in the room. There's also a microphone in the wall right next to you." Finley waves at the camera and grins. "Hi, other people! Can you see me? Test, one, two, three."

Now it is time to start the interview. Emily has the extremely difficult task of ensuring she asks the necessary questions while making sure Finley understands what she is asking of him. She must remain calm because one poorly phrased question or statement could compromise the entire interview. She begins with simple questions. "Tell me about your mom. How would you describe her?" Finley smiles. "She's nice and sweet. I like her cooking a lot, and she takes care of me." Then Emily asks about his father.

Meanwhile, in another part of the building, an Eagle Village CAC team member, a DHHS worker, and a dectective from a County Sheriff's office sit around a desk watching a live feed of the interview. They listen carefully, hoping to better understand Finley's home life and determine how best to protect him.

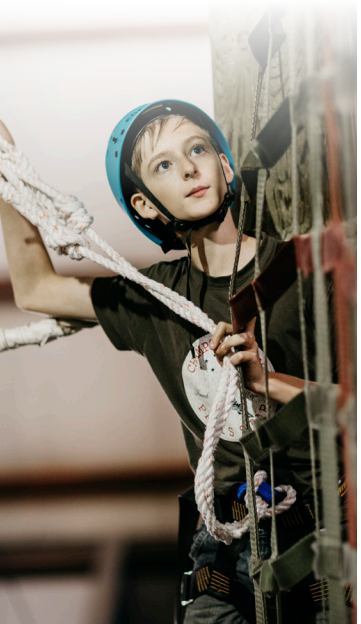
(STORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)


CAC WAITING ROOM


CAC INTERVIEW ROOM


CAC OBSERVATION ROOM

YOUTH CHALLENGE WEEKENDS



For youth ages 8 to 17, this program creates positive experiences that encourage success, connects participants with caring adult mentors, & helps develop the skills needed to build resilience & thrive.

STEP UP, STAND STRONG
Session 1: November 6-7 | Session 2: November 13-14

RESPECT STARTS WITH ME
Session 1: January 15-16 | Session 2: January 29-30

BUILDING STRONG BOUNDARIES
Session 1: February 5-6 | Session 2: February 19-20

TRUSTING MYSELF & OTHERS
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Session 1: April 9-10 | Session 2: April 23-24

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LIFE THROUGH THEIR EYES: FINLEY

Back in the interview room, Finley clutches the stuffed dinosaur and slouches lower to the floor. Emily notices the change in his body language. She gently shifts the conversation. “Would you like to make a cheeseburger?” Finley looks up immediately. “Make a cheeseburger? Here?!” Emily pulls out play food: lettuce, tomato, pickles, cheese, a hamburger patty, ketchup, mustard, and two buns. Finley eagerly begins assembling the perfect cheeseburger. “What do you like on your hamburger?” he asks.

As he continues to play, Emily calmly returns to her previous inquiry. “Tell me more about your dad.” After a brief pause, Finley begins to tell his story. At first, his words come slowly. Staring down at the cheeseburger in his hands, he quietly explains that things change when his father is around. Emily listens carefully, allowing Finley to talk at his own pace. She does not interrupt or rush him. Instead, she gives him the time and space he needs to feel safe. Finley describes moments when he felt scared in his own home. He talks about times when he tried to be extra good, hoping it would stop the abuse. He explains that he never wanted to tell anyone because he was afraid of what might happen to his family.

The team in the other room all let out a sigh of relief; a relief that Finley can continue to be protected and the abuser prosecuted.

Throughout the interview, Emily continued to remind Finley that he isn’t in trouble and how important his details are. For the first time in a long time, Finley feels heard, believed, and safe. Talking about painful experiences is not easy for anyone, especially a ten-year-old child. When Finley leaves the interview room, **he is no longer carrying the burden alone.**



Healing begins when a child is heard.

Since 2024, hundreds of children ages 3 to 17 have walked through the Children’s Advocacy Center’s doors scared, confused, and unsure of what comes next.

At the CAC, they find a safe, child-friendly environment, compassionate professionals, and a team dedicated to their protection and healing.

Please consider making a gift to the Eagle Fund to help ensure these vital services remain available to every child who needs them.

THE CARING PROFESSIONALS BEHIND THE CHILDREN’S ADVOCACY CENTER (CAC)

Emily, MA in Min, Child Advocacy Specialist & Lead Forensic Interviewer

Since 2024, Emily has conducted 249 of the 401 forensic interviews completed through the program. Drawing on her background in ministry, experience with youth affected by abuse and neglect, and specialized forensic interviewing certifications, she helps children feel safe, heard, and empowered to share their stories.

Chad, LMSW, Clinical Manager

Chad leads the CAC Program with extensive experience in human services, mental health, and administrative leadership. He has served in leadership roles at Eagle Village for the past six years and previously spent 22 years with Community Mental Health, helping ensure children and families receive high-quality, compassionate support.



JOIN OUR TEAM

Eagle Village is family.

While we celebrate that all year long, every August we go the extra mile by hosting special events for our staff and youth. This year, we brought back a favorite: Fun in the Sun!

This event brings together the extended Eagle Village family, friends, and loved ones. It’s a chance for our families to meet our work family, experience the unique Eagle Village environment, and see our mission in action.

At Eagle Village, we’re more than a workplace. We’re a community dedicated to making a difference in the lives of youth and families every day.

If you’re looking for something more than just a job, we invite you to explore our current career opportunities at eaglevillage.org/careers.





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