



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –
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DSS Conducts ChildFirst Interview Training Oct. 28

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – Cumberland County is leading the effort to make North Carolina a ChildFirst state. ChildFirst is a forensic interview training program designed to reduce the emotional trauma for children and in the process to achieve more favorable court outcomes for child victims.

The Cumberland County Department of Social Services will kick off the ChildFirst training on Oct. 28 with nationally-known attorney and child advocate Victor Veith, the director of the National Child Protection Training Center in Winona, Minn. The center, along with Cornerhouse, administers the ChildFirst program. Members of the DSS multi-disciplinary team, law enforcement officers and attorneys and paralegals from the District Attorney's office will participate in the training.

“ChildFirst is the best practice for interviewing children and minimizing the trauma to them by conducting one interview by an expert, instead of multiple interviews by different agencies,” said Heather Skeens, assistant director for children's services at DSS. “Through ChildFirst, we have also seen more successful prosecution of child abuse in less time.”

DSS and the Child Advocacy Center received a \$30,154 grant from the National Children's Alliance to assist with the \$58,000 cost of the ChildFirst training. A private donor, the Cumberland County Department of Social Services, the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office, Fayetteville Police Department, Bladen County DSS and Hoke County DSS are contributing to the remaining cost.

The ChildFirst certification process began in August and will be completed over two remaining phases in December and June. North Carolina is expected to be ChildFirst certified in June 2012. Afterward, as the ChildFirst North Carolina program coordinator, Cumberland County DSS will then offer ChildFirst training statewide.

“The goal is to have every social worker, district attorney's office staff and law enforcement officer dealing with juveniles to be ChildFirst trained,” Skeens said. “Anyone who receives this training can then become a forensic interviewer.”

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