

2023

Annual Report

CHITTENDEN UNIT FOR SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS

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TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS

Our Mission

Our mission is to protect and support all children, families, and adults by strengthening our community's response to abuse through investigation, prosecution and intervention while fostering professional collaboration to promote education and advocacy regarding the prevention of abuse.

Who We Are

The Chittenden Unit for Special Investigations (CUSI) is a multi-agency task force dedicated to providing criminal response to reports of sexual assaults, serious child abuse and child fatalities. For 30 years, the primary focus has been to protect and support all children, adults, and families. CUSI defined what is now known as a multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach to investigating crimes of this nature. The multidisciplinary team is the heart of CUSI and is composed of six police detectives, a unit director, a victim advocate, an in-house investigator with the Department for Children and Families (DCF), and a dedicated prosecutor from the Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office. We work jointly with mental health and medical providers, as well as with the Department of Corrections.

In addition, CUSI is co-located and partners with the *Chittenden Children's Advocacy Center (CCAC)*. CCAC collaborates with CUSI to emphasize the coordination of investigations and intervention. The CCAC is funded separately by local, state and federal grants.

The CCAC provides many benefits including:

- Prompt follow up to reports of abuse
- Consistent and compassionate support to the child and family
- A family friendly environment designed to create a sense of safety and security for children and adults
- Referrals to professionals with expertise in specialized disciplines
- Fewer victim interviews
- Increased successful prosecutions
- Victim Advocacy support on site

The Chittenden Children's Advocacy Center continues as an accredited member of the National Children's Alliance with the latest re-accreditation occurring in May 2024.

Current Staffing

Det. Lt. Richard Weinisch, CUSI Director, Burlington Police Department

Tara Gonthier, Executive Director of the Chittenden Children's Advocacy Center

Det. David Hurwitch, Vermont State Police

Det. Eric Dalla Mura, Burlington Police Department

Det. Daniel Boyer, South Burlington Police Department

Det. Nicole Peatman, Essex Police Department

Det. Tom Chenette, Burlington Police Department

Det. Elizabeth Fell, Colchester Police Department

Elizabeth Dziobek, Victim's Advocate, Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office

Meghan Swan, Family Services Worker, Vermont Department for Children & Families

What We Do

The fundamental goal of CUSI is to conduct the highest quality criminal investigations for these types of crimes while meeting the emotional needs of victims and families. CUSI and CCAC investigate crimes in Chittenden County which consists of a population of approximately 171,857 residents. On average, CUSI investigates over 160 cases a year. 70% of those cases involve child victims. In recent years we have noticed an increase in the complexity of cases given the substantial increase in computer usage, social media, mobile devices and drugs.

We currently have two detectives that coordinate the Chittenden County Sex Offender Registry Compliance Check. Per the Vermont Sex Offender Registry, <https://vcic.vermont.gov/sor> searching by County, there are approximately 257 sex offenders in Chittenden County. CUSI maintains information pertinent to sex offender compliancy checks in Chittenden County and works with VCIC sex offender registry, US Marshalls, Probation and Parole and all law enforcement agencies in Chittenden County.

CUSI Case Incidents & Sex Offenders by Location

July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

Town of Incident	CUSI Case Count	Sex Offenders
Bolton	0	0
Burlington	42	77
Charlotte	2	3
Colchester	18	22
Essex	17	49
Hinesburg	5	2
Huntington	0	2
Jericho	3	5
Milton	19	25
Richmond	3	5
Shelburne	5	10
South Burlington	15	18
St. George	1	0
Underhill	1	5
University of Vermont	1	0
Westford	1	2
Williston	9	9
Winooski	5	23
Out of County Assist	19	-
Out of State Assist	1	-
Unknown	12	
Community Service/SANE Kits	25	-
Total	204	257

OUR COLLABORATORS

The Chittenden Children's Advocacy Center, collaborating with CUSI, is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit entity offering a range of services to children and families affected by these crimes. The primary goal of *The Chittenden Children's Advocacy Center* is to ensure that children are not further traumatized by the intervention system intended to protect them. This program has many benefits, with an approach that allows for faster follow-up to child abuse reports, more efficient medical and mental health referrals, fewer child interviews, more successful prosecutions, and consistent support for child victims and their families. It is our goal to support them and meet their emotional needs.

CUSI works closely with the statewide *Internet Crimes against Children Task Force (ICAC)*. ICAC expertise is frequently used during cases of computer-facilitated exploitation or when computer-generated evidence may strengthen a CUSI case. CUSI detectives work with the ICAC team and have received extensive training in computer forensics and online undercover operations.

CUSI may also work with *HOPEWorks*, and the *Forensic Nursing Program* at the University of Vermont Medical Center, including the *Childsafe Clinic*. We continue to work with other collaborative partners throughout the county and our state as well.

FUNDING

The *Chittenden Unit for Special Investigations* maintains a specialized approach of improved protection and services for victims in our community. This Unit promotes cooperative efforts between the various agencies that are involved in the prevention, investigation, advocacy, medical, therapeutic treatment, and prosecution of cases to better protect and serve victims and their families. Part of that cooperative effort includes contributions from towns in Chittenden County to help sustain this specialized unit. The contributions help pay for space for this specialized unit to all be under the same roof, training, specialized forensic testing and help run our day-to-day operations. CUSI is unique as it is the only Special Investigations Unit in Vermont that is all under the same roof. We are very fortunate. Being able to do this helps cut down on retraumatizing the victim and their families.

The current funding formula is based on population and excludes those communities that contribute one or more full-time detectives to the CUSI operation. Town contributions are determined by the budget required to fund the CUSI organization for the year allocated proportionally to communities not contributing in kind services based on total population. CUSI is able to remain a successful unit due to the continued support of town contributions and without it we would not be able sustain this specialized unit which would be a huge detriment to the community.

CUSI Director's Year In Review

2023 was a big transition year for CUSI and the CCAC that sparked a lot of positive change for the organization. We onboarded two new detectives for CUSI that replaced the two most senior detectives in the unit that had a combined 10 years of experience at CUSI. This change has given the opportunity for new CUSI detectives to expand their professional careers with this important role and they get to attend some of the best specialized trainings available that would not otherwise be possible without the funding that is available to our organization.

The CCAC Executive Director role underwent a transition from a long tenured person to the appointment of the current ED, Tara Gonthier. Tara proactively stepped up in an interim role during a tough period of vacancy and has done a great job in working to rebuild the CCAC back to the high level of service that everyone has come to expect from this organization.

VA Dziobek proactively created a partnership with Eden Valley, a local mental health organization that specialize in youth trauma. This partnership provides Eden Valley with a location to host youth group sessions and provide CUSI with an ongoing relationship with a very coveted resource in the space of youth therapy. This allows for the prioritization of some of our most vulnerable child victims to obtain services that otherwise may have a wait list of a year or longer.

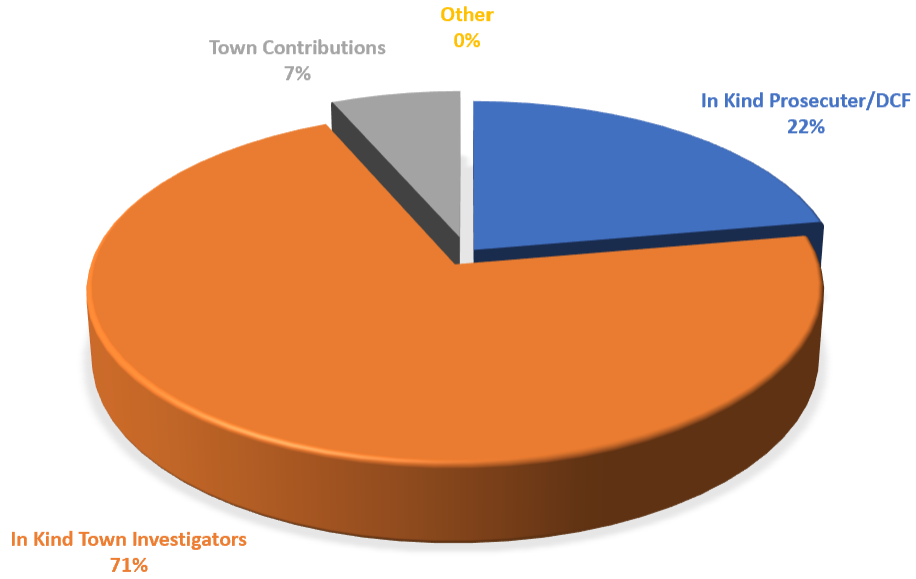
The team at CUSI has been working to update and upgrade our workspace to ensure that we maintain a comforting space for victims, professional partners, and everyone that uses our workspace. This includes amongst other things, new furniture, repainting of rooms, updated children's play space, etc.

Finally, CUSI underwent a technological advancement by transitioning to an IT company that specializes in Criminal Justice Information Security (CJIS). This ensures that our organization is CJIS compliant and is well protected from potential cyber-attacks and other information system threats. Equipment upgrades include the transition to a modern IP phone system, updated Wi-Fi services, and much needed server maintenance and upgrades.

We celebrated our 30th Anniversary this past year. We are proud and committed to our work and to the communities we serve. We thank you for your continued support.

CUSI Annual Financial Report

CUSI 2022/2023 INCOME \$1,200,063



CUSI 2022/2023 EXPENSES \$1,231,808

