



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
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Guest Editorial

By Greg Abbott, Attorney General of Texas

Sometimes, the most profound adult lessons can be found in a children's story. My daughter and I recently saw a movie that emphasized our collective moral responsibility to protect the most vulnerable in our society. That protective message is particularly important this month, because April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The film was "Horton Hears a Who," which is based on the classic Dr. Seuss book. The main character, Horton, is a loveable elephant who hears a faint cry for help from some little creatures called Who's. These fuzzy creatures are so small, in fact, that Horton cannot see them. The Who's desperately tell Horton that he is their only hope, and beg him to rescue them from danger.

Horton doesn't hesitate, declaring, "I've got to protect them ... I'm bigger than they."

Despite many obstacles and other characters' refusal to lend a helping hand, Horton remains determined to get the Who's to a safe place. "A person's a person ... no matter how small," he says defiantly.

Ultimately, Horton saves the Who's by getting them to simultaneously yell with all their might—finally allowing their cries for help to be heard. Put another way, Horton saves the Who's by helping them find their voice.

Texans who soldier in the struggle to protect children from abuse can learn a lot from Horton. Abused children are in danger and they need our help. It is our duty to protect them and get them to a safe place. Their cries are often faint, which is why it is so important for everyone to listen. Ultimately, abused children need someone bigger to protect them and help them find their voice.

We must all stand ready to help and protect abused children. Parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers—we must all listen carefully for their cries, report any abuse, and help get these little victims to a safe place.

For abused children, few places are as safe as a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). Hundreds of Texas children walk through the door of a CAC every day. And quite remarkably, these little victims find the courage and strength to talk about the terrible trauma

they have suffered. Once their burden has been lifted, they can begin the long journey to recovery. CACs are uniquely equipped to help children find their way. They bring together a broad array of services—including law enforcement, child protective services, prosecutors, medical professionals, mental health experts and victims' advocates—under a single roof.

CACs like ChildSafe in San Antonio and Bexar County are making a big difference in the lives of young victims. Last year, 63 CACs in cities and towns all across Texas served almost 40,000 children.

Their success is due in large part to the support they receive from their local communities. The Office of the Attorney General also supports their good work. Last year, we provided \$6 million in grant funding to CACs across Texas.

But to end child abuse, more must be done. And the path to victory starts with people who are willing to report abuse when they become aware of it.

Unfortunately, not all children can count on a protective, caring family member to hear their cries for help and steer them safely out of harm's way. In these situations, a concerned neighbor, teacher or friend may be a little victim's only hope.

That was the case for 10-year-old Myra, who endured two years of sexual abuse from her brother. Sadly, Myra's mother ignored her cries for help. Finally, Myra told someone at school who actually listened and reported the abuse. Then, Myra was taken to the local CAC, where she told her painful story to a forensic interviewer.

Myra's journey down the path to recovery has been a difficult one. She no longer lives with her family, and she is still working through the betrayal and sadness wrought by her abuser. But Myra is finally in a safe environment with loving caregivers. The road ahead will not be easy, but the steps she has taken mark important and early victories over major adversity.

Thanks to a single caring soul's attentive ears, her own courageous cries for help, and the comforting presence of a local CAC, Myra continues her journey toward recovery. I hope all Texans will learn from Myra's plight: remain vigilant; listen when little voices cry for help; and make sure child abuse victims get the safety, security and support they need to embark on their own journey to recovery.

Greg Abbott is Attorney General of Texas. To find out more about ChildSafe in San Antonio, go to www.childsafe-sa.org or call Lynda Alston, CEO & Executive Director at (210) 675-9000.