



# Working to Solve Child Abuse and Neglect



National Catholic School of Social Service, Consortium for Catholic Social Teaching, Center for the Advancement of Children, Youth, and Families

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## Q: What is child abuse and neglect?

**A:** "Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm." –CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010

## Types of child abuse and neglect

**Neglect:** Failure of a caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs (physical, medical, educational, emotional)

**Physical Abuse:** Nonaccidental physical injury inflicted by a person with responsibility for the child (e.g. parent or caregiver)

**Sexual Abuse:** Activities by a parent or caregiver such as incest, rape, exploitation (e.g. prostitution or pornography)

**April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month!** Each year in April, the President of the United States issues a proclamation to announce National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Many State Governors also issue proclamations to encourage public awareness of child abuse and neglect, recommit State resources to the cause, and promote community involvement through State and local activities.

## Quote from the 2016 Presidential Proclamation

All children deserve to grow up in a caring and loving environment, yet **across America, hundreds of thousands of children are neglected or abused each year**, often causing lasting consequences. Although effectively intervening in the lives of these children and their families is an important responsibility at all levels of government, **preventing abuse and neglect is a shared obligation**. During National Child Abuse Prevention Month, we recommit to giving every child a chance to succeed and to ensuring that every child grows up in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment that is free from abuse and neglect.

**Preventing child abuse is an effort that we must undertake as one American family**, and in our schools, neighborhoods, and communities, we must look after every child as if they are our own. **Between four and eight children die every day from abuse or neglect**, but together we can prevent these tragedies from occurring. Children who are being abused or neglected may display constant alertness, sudden changes in behavior and school performance, or untreated physical or medical issues. Child abuse may take many forms, including neglect and physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. We must all join in the work of uplifting and safeguarding our youngest individuals and ensuring they are limited by nothing but the size of their dreams and the range of their aspirations. This month, let us aim to eradicate child abuse from our society, and **let us secure a future for our children that is bright and full of hope, opportunity, and security**.

## Child Abuse Prevention Timeline

**1974** Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

• CAPTA was the first federal child protection legislation, signed by President Nixon on January 31, 1974. The legislation provided federal assistance to states for prevention, identification, and treatment programs.

**1982** 1<sup>st</sup> National Child Abuse Prevention Week

• June 6-12 was designated as the first National Child Abuse Prevention Week

**1983** 1<sup>st</sup> National Child Abuse Prevention Month

• President Reagan proclaimed April to be the first National Child Abuse Prevention Month. The Bureau's National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect coordinated activities at the federal level, including the creation and dissemination of information.

**1991** "We Can Make A Difference"

• Summer 1990: Dr. Sullivan created an initiative to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect. In December 1991, a meeting called "We Can Make a Difference: Strategies for Combating Child Maltreatment" encouraged participants to develop local action plans.

**2001** "Embracing Diverse Cultures"

• This year, the 13<sup>th</sup> national conference titled "Faces of Change: Embracing Diverse Cultures and Alternative Approaches" was held. It was recognized that our diversity enables us to bring a multitude of approaches to the field of child welfare.

**2005** Year of the Healthy Child

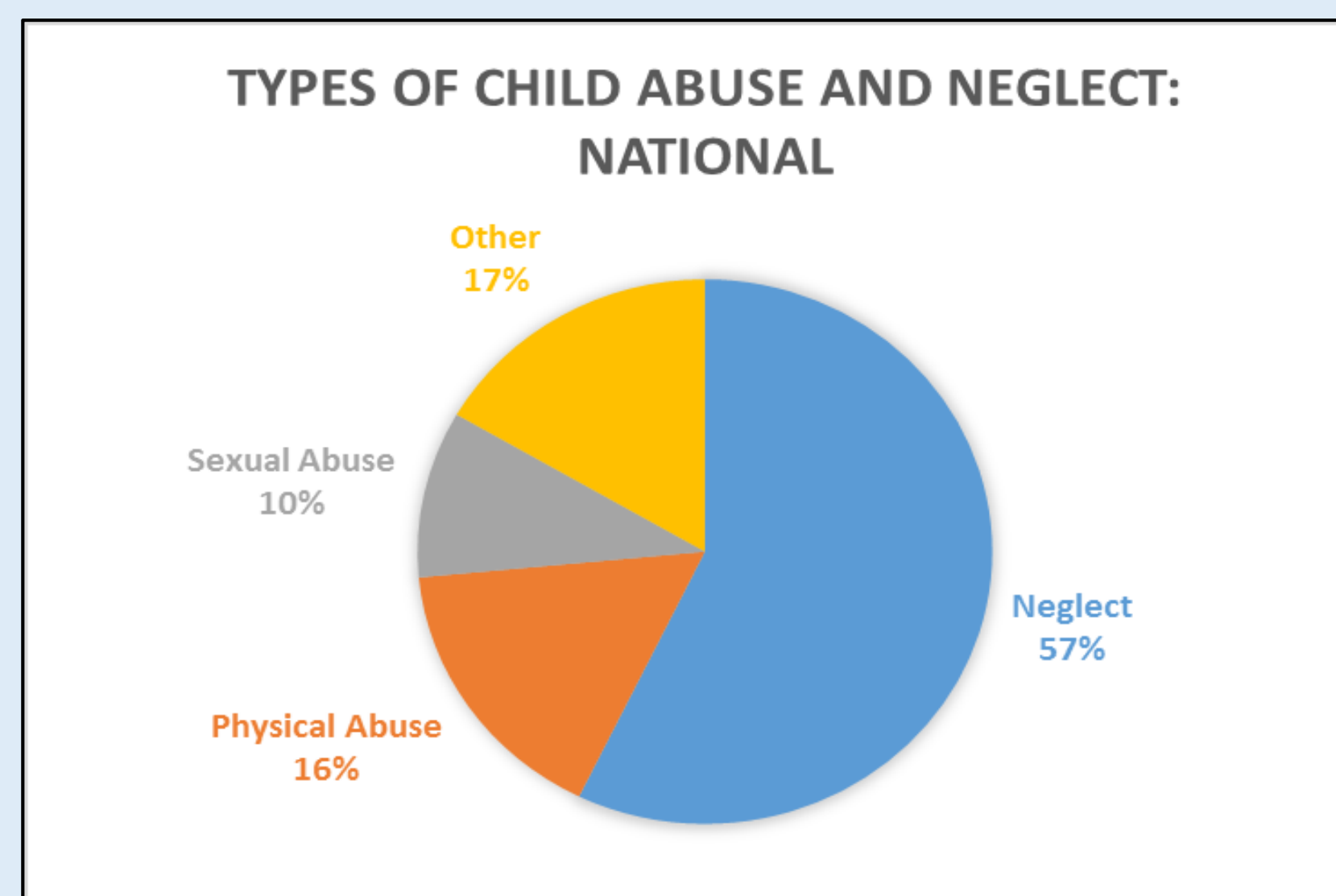
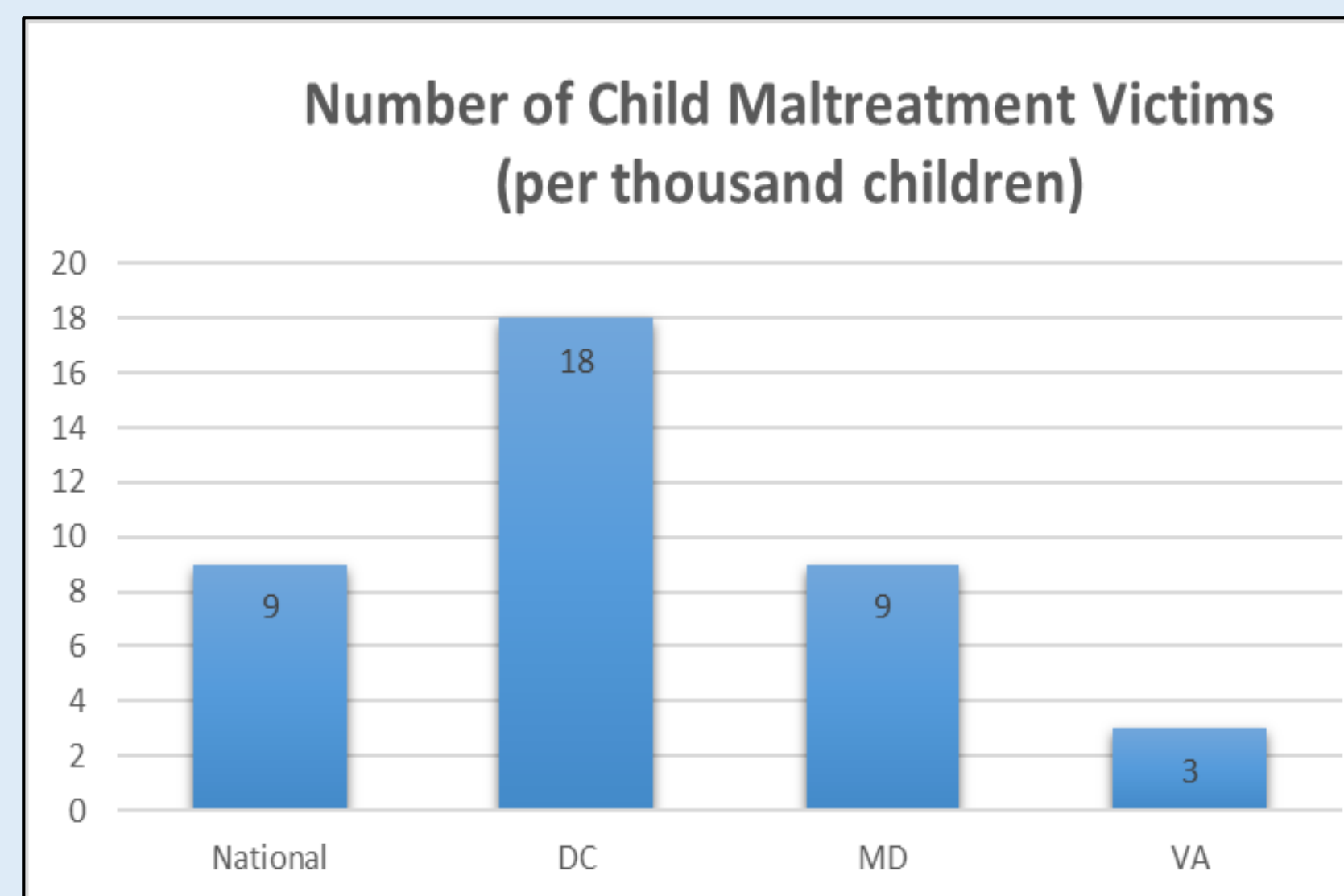
• This year there was a renewed commitment to make child abuse prevention a national priority. The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (OCAN) focused on making safe children and healthy families a shared responsibility.

**2008** Increasing Knowledge about Home Visiting

• The Children's Bureau launched 17 cooperative agreements to increase knowledge about evidence-based home visiting programs to prevent child abuse and neglect, including obstacles and opportunities for their wider implementation.

**2016** "Building Community, Building Hope"

• This year is the 20<sup>th</sup> National Conference. The theme acknowledges the tremendous power in communities to address the problem of child abuse and neglect. It also reflects the goal of providing a multidisciplinary forum to ensure children reach their full potential.



## SIGNS:

### Sexual Abuse

- Child has difficulty walking or sitting
- Child suddenly refuses to participate in physical activities or change for gym
- Child reports bed wetting or nightmares
- Child runs away
- Child attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults
- Child becomes pregnant before the age of 14
- Parent is unduly protective of child
- Parent is secretive and isolated
- Parent is jealous/ controlling with family

### Physical Abuse

- Child has unexplained burns, bruises, broken bones or black eyes
- Child seems frightened of parents
- Child reports injury from parent or adult caregiver
- Child abuses pets or animals
- Parent (or caregiver) offers conflicting or unconvincing explanations for injury
- Parent describes child negatively
- Parent uses harsh physical discipline
- Parent has history of abuse as child
- Parent has history of abusing animals or pets

### Neglect

- Child is frequently absent from school
- Child steals food or money
- Child lacks necessary medical or dental care
- Child is consistently dirty/ has severe body odor
- Child doesn't have appropriate seasonal attire (e.g. no winter coat)
- Child abuses substances
- Child states no one at home provides care
- Parent appears indifferent to child
- Parent seems apathetic or depressed
- Parent behaves irrationally or bizarrely
- Parent is abusing alcohol or drugs

## IMPACT:

### Cognitive:

- Risk of cognitive delay and emotional difficulty
- Diminished ability to cope and thrive
- Impaired brain development

### Psychological

- Fear, isolation, and inability to trust
- Low self-esteem, relationship difficulties
- Depression
- Poor mental health (more than 50% of women who experience childhood trauma attempt suicide)

### Social

- May lead to antisocial traits
- Attachment issues

### Physical

- Bruises, cuts, broken bones, hemorrhage
- 28% of victims experience chronic health conditions

### Behavioral

- More likely to engage in substance abuse, delinquency, truancy, risky sexual behavior, and abusive behavior

### Societal

- Direct cost: Prevention is cost effective, treatment costs \$124 billion per year
- Indirect cost: increased health care, criminal activity, mental illness and domestic violence

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS:

Q: What is a protective factor?

A: Characteristics of individuals, families, communities, or society which foster healthy development and well-being

### Individual Protective Factors:

- Emotional and behavioral regulation
- Involvement in positive activities
- Youth competence socially, emotionally, and cognitively
- Youth resilience
- Social connections and support

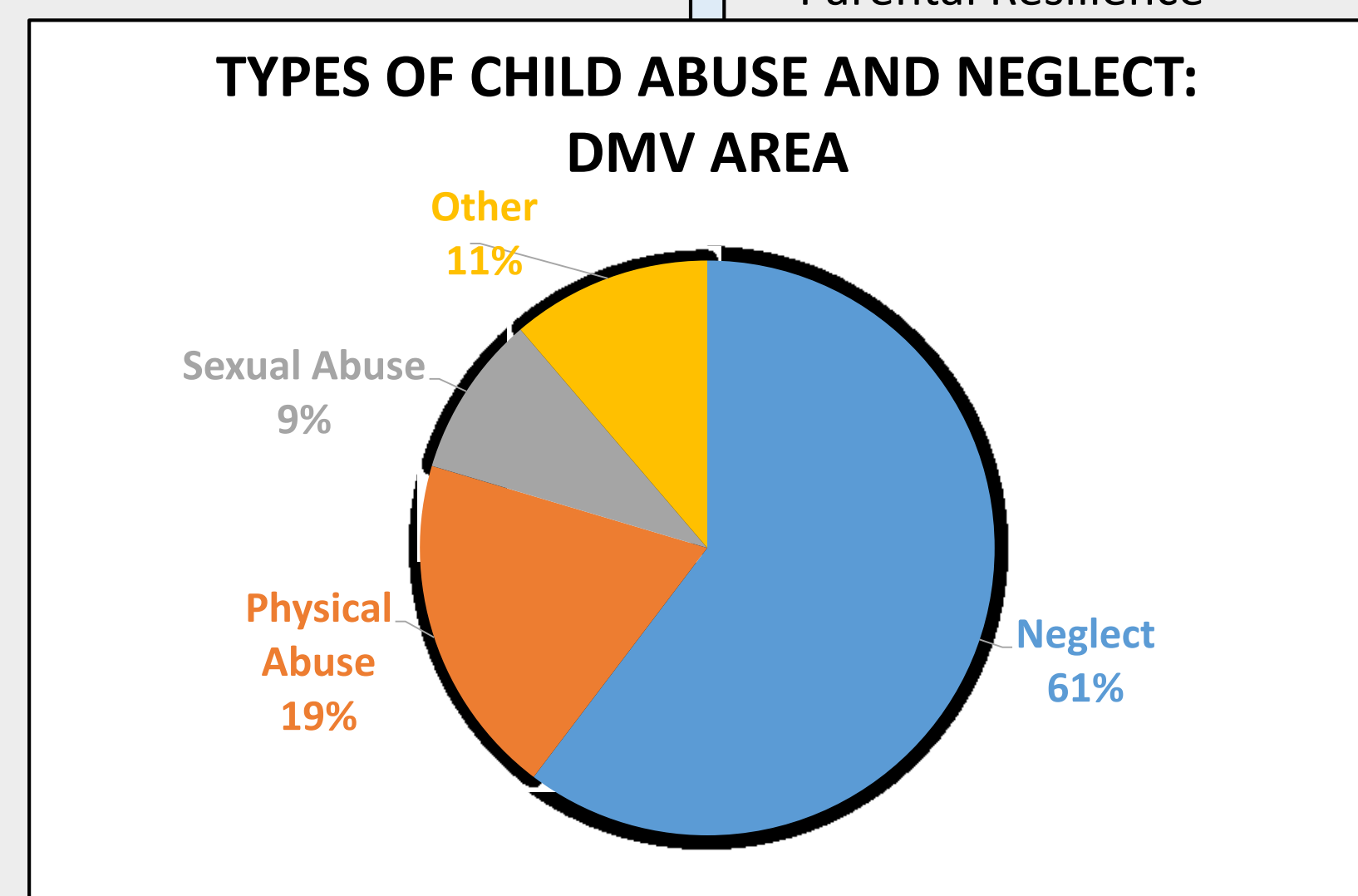
### Relational Protective Factors

- Positive parent-child interaction
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Social Emotional competence of children

- Knowledge of youth development
- Social connections
- Positive peers
- Caring adults
- Concrete support in times of need

### Societal Protective Factors

- Positive community
- Awareness and commitment to support a nurturing environment
- Social connections
- Economic opportunity



## Want to learn more?

- Child Welfare Information Gateway [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)
- Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline [www.childhelp.org/hotline/](http://www.childhelp.org/hotline/)
- Prevent Child Abuse America [www.preventchildabuse.org/index](http://www.preventchildabuse.org/index)
- Children's Bureau [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb)

## How can you help?

- Get to know your neighbors
- Reach out to children in your community
- Teach children their rights
- Volunteer in your community
- Join your neighborhood watch
- Learn signs of neglect and abuse
- Manage your own stress
- Report suspected abuse or neglect

## We Can Overcome: One Family's Story of Success

I served as guardian *ad litem* (representing the best interests) for a young girl who was removed from the custody of her mother at age 11. She was left alone by their mother, who suffered from drug addiction, for long periods of time. The child welfare agency removed my client from her mother's custody and placed her in foster care. Her mother participated in outpatient drug addiction counseling and other rehabilitation services. After a little over one year, my client was returned to her mother's custody under the protective supervision of the agency.

Just before Christmas, the family's apartment caught fire and the family was forced to reside in a homeless shelter. At that point, the mother relapsed and began using drugs again. My client was placed in foster care once again. The government requested that the case goal change to adoption, given that the federal timelines require permanency after about 18 months in care. The judge denied the government's request and told the mother that he believed in her, and that given the circumstance that preceded her relapse, he would give her more time. The mother knew she had to seek more intensive treatment, and she enrolled in a residential treatment facility far from home. The program required a two-year commitment but promised housing and other supportive services after completion.

My client, now entering adolescence, began to get into trouble at school and act out. Just after the mother returned from her program, she attended a school meeting for her daughter at which the team was discussing how to help support my client and avoid expulsion.

The mother turned to her daughter and in a powerful plea, asked that her daughter meet her halfway, after her own significant efforts to keep their family together. About six months later, the mother completed the program, obtained employment, and moved into her own home. My client got back on track at school and was returned to her mother's custody. In a tearful closing hearing, the judge congratulated the mother on her perseverance (C. Liu, personal communication, April 6, 2016).

## Conclusion

This poster reviewed the prevalence of child maltreatment in our society as well its impact on children, families, and communities. We also wanted to provide historical context of our efforts to prevent child maltreatment. With information on signs of abuse and neglect, we hope that we all can take active roles in preventing child maltreatment and supporting families that may encounter challenges associated with child maltreatment, first by recognizing the symptoms of abuse and neglect and by learning different ways we can engage. As demonstrated in the personal story shared in the poster, it is very possible to prevent and get through the trauma of child abuse and/or neglect. It is imperative that not only parents, teachers, and government workers strive to support families, but that entire communities also embrace the goal of fostering child and family well-being. We can then reach the goal of eliminating child abuse and neglect in the United States.

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