



# Laying the Foundation:

Strengthening Court Practices

Under The Violence Against Women Act

March 4-5, 2026

Seven Feather Casino & Resort,  
Canyonville, Oregon



# Opening Words & Prayer

Opening Prayer - Cassandra Nava



# Coming Up | UNIT 1

## Building Effective Multi-Disciplinary Teams

**Leila Edwards**

Attorney, Guardian ad Litem Services



# Laying the Foundation:

Strengthening Court Practices  
Under The Violence Against Women Act

March 4-5, 2026  
Seven Feather Casino & Resort,  
Canyonville, Oregon



# UNIT 1

## Building Effective Multi-Disciplinary Teams

**Leila Edwards**

Attorney, Guardian ad Litem Services

# BUILDING EFFECTIVE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Leila K. Edwards, J.D.

Laying the Foundation: Strengthening Court Practices Under VAWA  
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians  
2026

# COPYRIGHT NOTICE

- This multimedia presentation contains the creative work of others and is used by permission, because of public domain, or under a claim of fair use pursuant to 17 USC 107. This presentation was prepared under the CONFU guidelines. Further distribution or use is not permitted.

# TRAINING OBJECTIVES

- Identify reasons to develop or enhance an existing Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) in your community.
- Describe the value of multidisciplinary collaboration in investigations and victim interviewing.
- Define the purpose and function of the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT).
- Appreciate the value of Case Review.
- Identify and develop tools for individual and group sustainability in roles with high trauma exposure.

# WHY ME?

- J.D. 1993
- Guardian ad Litem work since 2001
- Experience in court systems, both tribal and state
- Employed to develop a tribal-government-based child advocacy center from the ground up, 2007
- Facilitated the tribal multidisciplinary team for 9 years
- Family Law Guardian ad Litem in Spokane County, WA, for high-conflict family law matters, since 2018.

# WHAT IS A TEAM

A group of people with:

- Different skills and different tasks,
- Working together on a common project, service, or goal
- With a meshing of functions and mutual support.

IN A PICTURE...



TEAMWORK

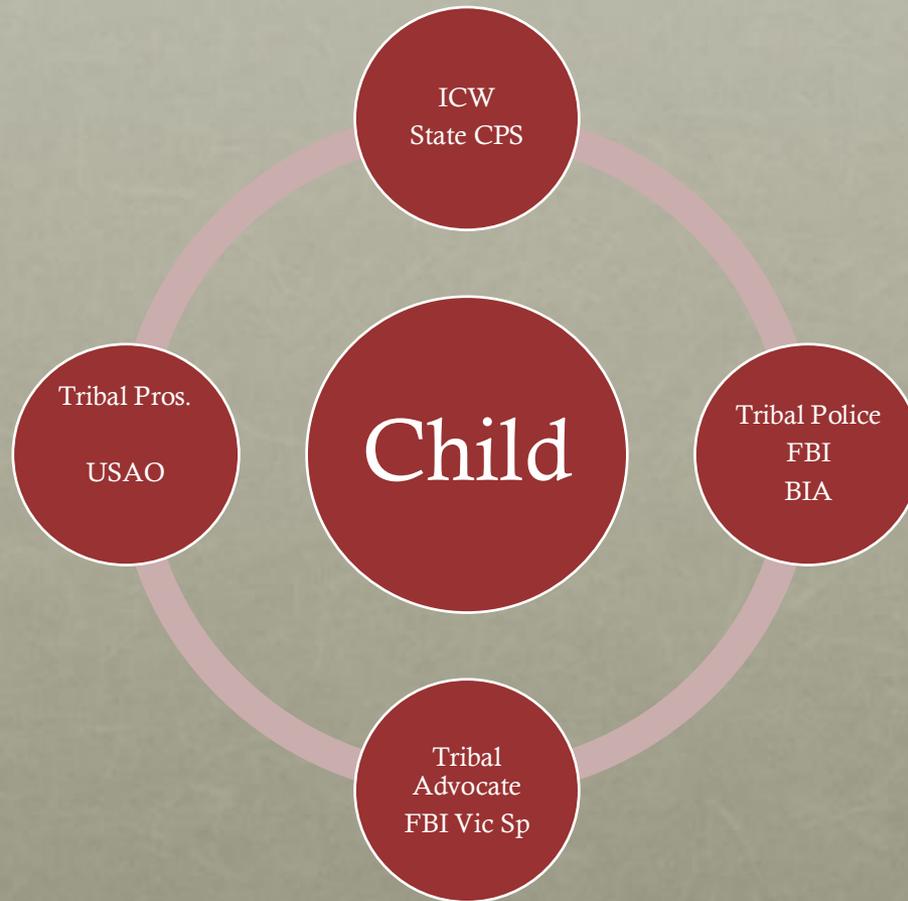
Because bullets can only go through so many bodies.

# BEGINNINGS OF MDT MOVEMENT: 1980'S -1990'S

- Professionals realized a different approach was needed
- Specialized investigative and prosecution units formed
- Joint investigations began between CPS and LE
- Focus on not duplicating child interviews
- The Children's Advocacy Center movement was born – 1985 – Huntsville, AL.



# INDIAN COUNTRY MDT

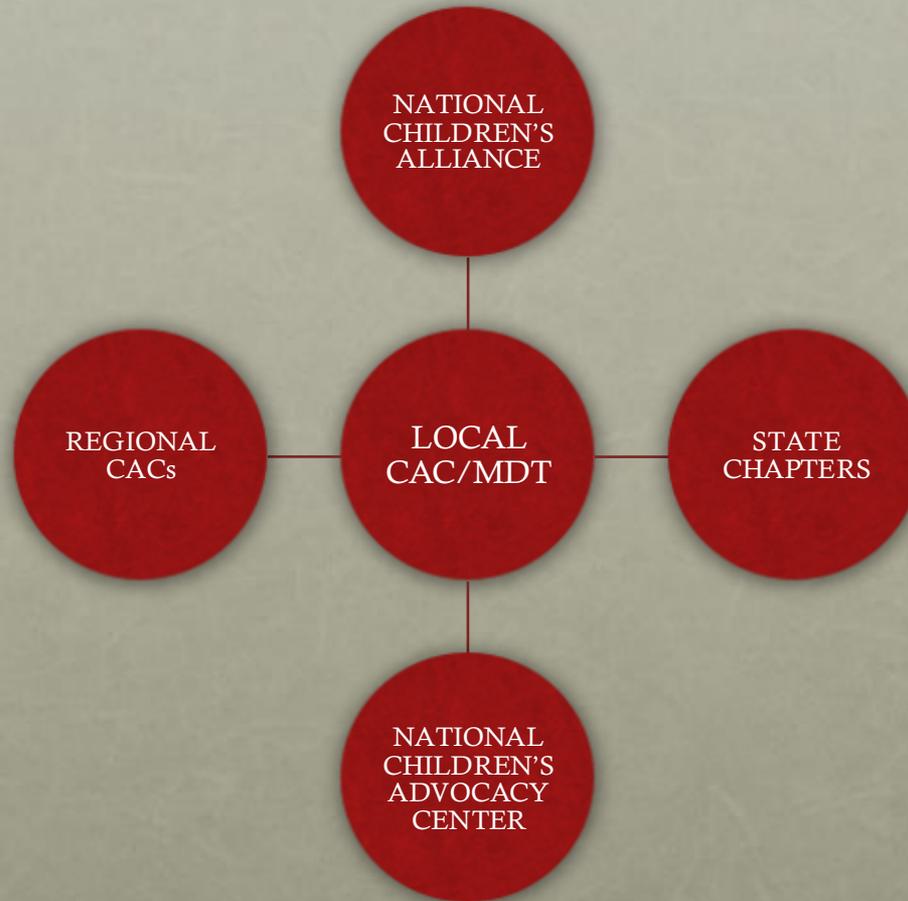


# MDT BENEFITS

- Increases likelihood maltreated children receive medical care
- Increase victim's access to mental health treatment
- Increased parent/caregiver satisfaction with the investigation and prosecution of their child's case
- Increased rates of prosecution
- Reduction in length of time to disposition in child abuse cases
- Cost effective and efficient.

- Snapshot 2017 – Advocacy, Efficacy and Funding in CACS – NCA – Walton Family Foundation – December 2016

# CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTERS & RESOURCES



# NCA ACCREDITATION STANDARD - MDT

- “ A functioning and effective multidisciplinary team (MDT) is the foundation of a Children’s Advocacy Center(CAC). An MDT is a group of professionals from specific, distinct disciplines that collaborates from the point of the report and throughout the child and family’s involvement with the CAC. MDT’s coordinate intervention so as to reduce potential trauma to children and families and improve services overall, while preserving and respecting the rights, mandates and obligations of each agency.”

# WHO IS ON AN MDT?

- Law Enforcement
- Child Welfare
- Prosecution
- Victim Advocates
- Mental Health
- Forensic Interviewers
- Medical Providers

\*Administrative and Program Staff: by special invitation only.

# KEEPING THE VICTIM AT THE CENTER



# THE MDT: COMMON CHALLENGES

- Different agencies with various mandates
- Different professional cultures
- Politics – within and between agencies
- Different policies and procedures may be confusing
- Different timelines can lead to friction and misunderstanding between team members
- Rotation of team members in and out of MDT
- Inconsistent orientation and training to new team members.

# THE MDT & DISCIPLINE CULTURE

- The MDT requires that you adapt your discipline culture and perspective to integrate with those of your other team members
- The MDT may require that you “let go” based on your role and responsibilities
- The MDT has to experience this truth: WE CAN DO TOGETHER WHAT WE CANNOT DO ALONE...and it's the best way to be victim-focused.

# EFFECTIVE TEAMS

- Defined Roles
- Investment in agreed upon Protocol
- Open and Clear Communication –
  - Authentic
  - Be Fully Present
  - Assume Positive Intent
  - Take Responsibility – everyone has a part in conflict – whether we create, promote, participate or allow it
  - No labeling
  - Winning isn't everything.



# NCA STANDARD – CASE REVIEW

- “Case review is the formal process that enables the MDT to monitor and assess its independent and collective effectiveness so as to ensure the safety and well-being of children and families.”
  - Experience and expertise is shared
  - Collaborative efforts are fostered
  - Formal and informal communications are fostered
  - Mutual support
  - Protocols and policies reviewed
  - Informal collective decision making looking forward

# CASE REVIEW: STRUCTURE

- Regular MDT review of cases
- Every MDT decides what works best for them
- Monthly or weekly
- Cases may be highly complex, challenging or even frustrating. Examples of complex cases:
  - Physical or sexual abuse to an infant or toddler
  - Multi-victim
  - Technology facilitated
  - Clear evidence of abuse but a recanting or non-disclosing victim.

# CASE REVIEW: STRUCTURE

- Updates on cases
  - Corroborating evidence
  - Suspect confessions
  - Trial outcomes – pleas, convictions, not guilty verdicts. We can learn something from each outcome
  - Are the kids safe, in therapy, protected. How is the non offending caregiver doing?

# CASE REVIEW: TOOL FOR SELF-EVALUATION

- Was there a breakdown in the MDT process?
- Is the team having trouble communicating effectively with the child's family?
- Is there lack of follow through?
- What more can we do or should we do to move this case forward?
- What resources haven't we pulled in?
- Would we do something differently if we had to do it over?

# THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES:

## All Volunteers are Non-Speaking Roles

You represent a person a child encounters in the systems we use to address child victims after a disclosure

- Volunteers: the child victim
- The School Staff Member: a teacher, admin, nurse, or school counselor
- The first Law Enforcement contact, and referrals.

# CASE REVIEW: IMPACTS ON PROFESSIONALS

- Able to share reactions and emotions with others who can relate and understand
- Celebrate successes
- Recognize the impacts of trauma exposure and traumatic stress on the MDT
- Professional support, sense of team responsibility, and connection is KEY to longevity and staying healthy.

# WHAT ABOUT THE MDT? SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

- Secondary Traumatic Stress - Refers to the emotional effects incurred when MDT professionals work with child victims and their families
- MDT members may experience “alterations in their thinking about the world, their feelings, their relationships and their lives “ as a result of STS
- Moving from compassion satisfaction to compassion fatigue is natural and a human experience.

Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit – January 2013

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network – [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org)

# COMPASSION FATIGUE

“The profound emotional and physical exhaustion that helping professionals and caregivers can develop over the course of their careers as helpers. It is the gradual erosion of all the things that keep us connected to others in our caregiver role: our empathy, our hope and of course our compassion – not only for others but also for ourselves.”  
p. 8

Francoise Mathieu (2012)

The Compassion Fatigue Workbook

# CORE FEATURES: SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

- Emotional depletion
- Intrusive thoughts about case material
- Hyperarousal (irritability, sleep disturbances)
- Physiological stress reactions (startle response, etc.)
- Blunted emotional response, numbing

**Symptoms mirror PTSD, but exposure is secondhand.**

# KEY DISTINCTIONS

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress:** trauma exposure from graphic testimony and evidence, and symptoms are similar to PTSD
- **Burnout:** systemic stress is driven by heavy dockets/caseloads, administrative burden, and sustained pressure. Symptoms present as cynicism and exhaustion
- **Compassion Fatigue:** empathy that is eroded over time, and represents the combined effect of both.

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Recognize how you may be affected. Any warning signs?
- Request and expect regular and reflective supervision
- Stay connected – seek out supports and sources of enjoyment and inspiration
- Examine how personal experiences and trauma may be activated by your work
- Stress management: destructive or healing and satisfying?

# RESILIENCE, BALANCE & MEANING:

Practical and effective approaches for  
“Supporting our lives and our work in high  
stress, trauma-exposed workplaces.” – Patricia  
Fisher, Ph.D.

“The expectation that we can be immersed in  
suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it  
is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through  
water without getting wet.” – Rachel Naomi Remen,  
Kitchen Table Wisdom

# SELF CARE IN YOUR WORKPLACE & PERSONAL LIFE

- Questionnaire part 1 covers your work place habits.
- Questionnaire part 2 covers your personal life habits.

Resources for Further Exploration

[www.tendacademy.ca](http://www.tendacademy.ca)

OVC website Vicarious Trauma Toolkit: [ovc.ojp.gov](http://ovc.ojp.gov)

Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit:

[www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org)



QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!

LEILA K. EDWARDS, J.D.

[LKEDWARDSLAW@GMAIL.COM](mailto:LKEDWARDSLAW@GMAIL.COM)

**509-688-7470**



# Laying the Foundation:

Strengthening Court Practices  
Under The Violence Against Women Act

March 4-5, 2026  
Seven Feather Casino & Resort,  
Canyonville, Oregon



## Coming Up | UNIT 2

# Bridging Tradition and Law: Cultural Considerations in Tribal Court Cases

**Gina South**

Juvenile Division Chief and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney,  
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



# Laying the Foundation:

Strengthening Court Practices  
Under The Violence Against Women Act

March 4-5, 2026  
Seven Feather Casino & Resort,  
Canyonville, Oregon