

2023 Impact Report



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This Impact Report provides a broad yet thorough look at the work CACTX undertook this past fiscal year—from September 1, 2022 through August 31, 2023—and the results of those activities. None of the progress made would have been possible without our statewide partners, including everyday Texans who play a vital role in our shared responsibility to protect children.

A Message from CACTX Chief Executive Officer

Dear friends,

Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX) and our network of children’s advocacy centers (CACs) were established nearly 30 years ago when a group of 13 community leaders came together because they believed Texas could do better on behalf of children who had experienced abuse. Prior to the existence of CACs, there was no formalized structure bringing child welfare agencies together to coordinate the response to crimes against children. Through collaboration, persistence, and courage, that original group of leaders established what is now the largest and strongest network of CACs in the nation.

CACTX was built on the belief that all Texas child victims deserve safety, justice, and healing. As you will see throughout this Impact Report, we have remained committed to and expanded upon this initial promise to Texas children. Alongside our partners, many of whom have worked with us since the beginning and reinforced their belief in this work this past year, we have drawn on that initial courage of our founders and have a new belief: that we can make Texas the best place to be a child.

Thank you for believing that change is possible and working alongside us. We can continue to go further together to uphold our promise and protect childhood for all Texas children.

With gratitude,



Joy Rauls
Chief Executive Officer



About CACTX

Since 1995, CACTX has established our leadership to effectuate change, empower communities, and make the safety of children a top priority in every community.

CACTX and our network of CACs have helped over one million children and their families impacted by crime achieve safety, justice, and healing in their most significant time of need. As we continue to scale our footprint to support high quality services to all children requiring our care, we also recognize the opportunity to cast our vision upstream and are leading effective strategies that specifically target the prevention of sexual abuse.

This dual approach safeguards childhood, building a future in which Texas children can thrive and reach their full potential.

We are imagining and building a better Texas, today.

Our Dual Approach to Safeguard Childhood

Justice & healing for child victims.

When a child is the victim of abuse or crime, child-centered case coordination and timely support services can help secure justice while opening up pathways to healing.

Ending child sexual abuse.

With greater awareness, Texans can learn to recognize, report, and prevent child sexual abuse – and together, we can work towards ending such abuse for generations to come.

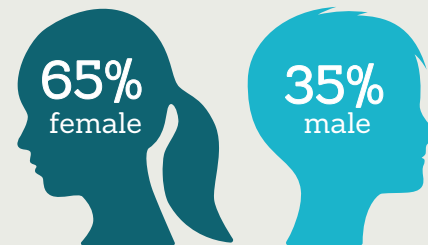
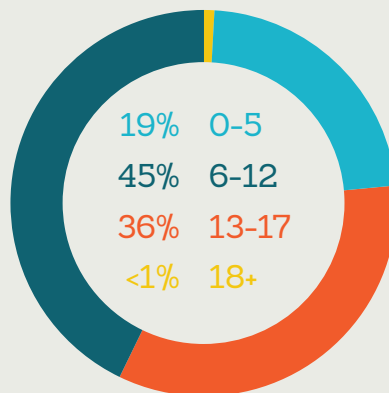
Justice & Healing for Child Victims

For nearly 30 years, CACTX has sustained the Texas CAC network's momentum toward our collective goal of reaching every child, providing every service, and making every effort to open pathways to justice and healing in the aftermath of abuse. As the steady and dependable leader in this movement, CACTX has led change across the state, orchestrating Texas' response to crimes against children and guiding Texas CACs in efficiently handling child-centered case coordination and timely support services for the whole family unit.

In fiscal year 2023:

**64,938 children
received critical
services at a
Texas CAC**

AGES SERVED:



TYPES OF ABUSE:

- 66% sexual abuse
- 17% physical abuse
- 7% neglect
- 6% child witness
- 2% sexual & physical abuse
- 2% other victimization
- <1% child fatalities

98% of child victims knew their alleged perpetrator

20% of alleged perpetrators were under 18 years old

2023 Activities & Outcomes | Strengthening the Response to Crimes Against Children

When Texas children are suspected victims of abuse or have witnessed a violent crime, our network of CACs are there to serve as the first stop and provide the highest quality support services. CACTX prioritizes maintaining the Texas CAC network's exceptional reputation as the gold standard in child abuse investigation facilitation and aftercare services across the state. Building a better Texas and protecting childhood requires a dynamic approach and this year, CACTX continued to improve our network's ability to address the needs of child victims.

Shared Standards & Measurements of Success

Maintaining fidelity to the CAC model is crucial for reinforcing our network's credibility and providing the highest quality services to child victims and families. As part of this work, CACTX reviewed and revised the Texas Standards for CACs, a process occurring every five years, to reflect current research, laws, and practices, as well as to align with the Accreditation Standards of the National Children's Alliance. Our Texas Standards for CACs reflect the core competencies of the CAC model and provide our network with consistent, transparent guidelines for statewide standards of care.

41,411 children received a forensic interview, allowing them to tell their story of abuse to a specially trained professional in a safe, child-friendly environment.

6,836 children received specialized medical evaluations for proper assessment and treatment in cases of potential abuse.

54,013 families received victim support and advocacy services to help reduce trauma and improve long-term outcomes.



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CACTX utilizes data from across Texas CACs to illustrate and evaluate our network's impact. To enhance these efforts, CACTX launched a customized case management system that will be used by all Texas CACs to track service metrics. This innovative new system supports uniform data collection and will allow CACTX to better identify trends across the state, opportunities for growth, and systemic challenges in need of problem-solving. When CACTX efficiently identifies and addresses the needs of our CACs, our network is empowered to provide the children they serve with the best possible care.

CACTX compiled 280 reports of CAC metrics and held quarterly meetings to analyze results and identify opportunities to address gaps in services provided to children and families.

More than 1,200 users across all Texas CACs were onboarded to the new case management system.

In partnership with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), CACTX integrated reports of abuse from the statewide child abuse hotline directly into the new case management system. CACs will now receive this critical information in a timely manner, making it more efficient to assess which cases fit CAC service criteria while reducing manual data entry. This will allow CAC staff to spend more time serving children and families.

313,169 reports from the statewide child abuse hotline were received by CACs. CACs review these reports to identify cases meeting criteria for case coordination and services.



CACs in the Texas Family Code:

The strong foundation of the public-private partnership upon which the CAC model was established in 1995 is based on enabling legislation within the Texas Family Code. These statutes require that CACs and multidisciplinary team partners coordinate cases effectively and deliver the highest standard of care to children impacted by abuse.

Texas Family Code Section 264.401-411: Defines CACs; outlines mandates, requirements, and protections; allows for sharing of confidential case information.

Texas Family Code Section 261.3126: Promotes co-location of DFPS and local law enforcement investigators at CACs.

Sustainably Funding the Texas CAC Network

CACTX has the privilege of advocating for Texas children at the highest levels of government, shaping public policy and leading funding efforts with a unified voice. CACTX secures over \$80 million in public funds annually for all Texas CACs, providing them with resources to serve their communities. As steward of these resources, CACTX intentionally directs funds to CACs in a way that amplifies our collective impact and meets the most pressing needs of CAC clients. In fiscal year 2023, newly secured funding was targeted to strengthen CAC capacity to provide mental health services by adding more mental health professionals at local CACs, increasing diversification of training and modalities, and expanding accessibility through telehealth.

CACTX's strategic distribution of more than **\$10 million in new mental health funding** from the state led to a boost in access to and depth of CAC mental health services. In total, **25,953 child victims benefited** from this critical care, a **7% increase** from the prior year.

CACs also provided **8,742 caregivers with mental health services** to help all family members in need so they can find healing as a family unit.

New funds secured by CACTX were also used to steward coordinated responses to victims of child sex trafficking to address the unique needs and challenges these children face. Educating partners on the specific dynamics of child sex trafficking further assisted with the provision of CAC healing services for these incredibly vulnerable victims.

732 children served by a Texas CAC were identified as alleged victims of sex trafficking, a **7% increase** from the prior year.

During the 88th Texas Legislative Session CACTX successfully sustained and grew existing state funding for CACs by \$7.25 million annually. Additionally, CACTX led the charge to utilize state funding to bridge a \$115 million reduction in federal Victims of Crime Act funds threatening to impact CACs and many other victim services providers.

CACTX successfully championed a record **\$82.2 million in annual state and federal funding** for our network, **including a new \$1 million in state funds** to pilot a regional CAC support program ([learn more on page 15](#)).

CACTX secured a **\$225,000 grant from the Meadows Foundation** and a **\$25,000 grant from the T.L.L Temple Foundation** to amplify our advocacy efforts with the Texas Legislature and strengthen partnerships at the state and federal level to retain long-term support for CACs.

Equipping CACs to Better Serve Children

The success of the Texas CAC network has largely been built upon the reputation of, and fidelity to, the CAC model. CACTX preserves this standing through expert support, data-informed monitoring, and programmatic oversight to ensure CACs maintain a high standard of performance and are delivering the finest care for children and families impacted by abuse.

CACTX **conducted monitoring reviews for 23 CACs** to assess local programs, ensure compliance with Texas Standards for CACs, and provide recommendations for improvement so they can provide the best care.

Our multidisciplinary team partners, including local law enforcement and DFPS Child Protective Investigations, rely on our CAC network to provide specialized services. To maintain the expertise of CAC teams and ensure consistent quality in their response to crimes against children across the state, CACTX facilitates many training and professional development opportunities for CAC teams, leaders, and partners.

CACTX hosted **294 training and professional development opportunities for more than 3,500 CAC and multidisciplinary team professionals** to cultivate the skills to expertly meet the needs of children and families.

In addition to more than 1,400 CAC professionals, the Texas CAC network includes multidisciplinary team members from over 1,000 law enforcement agencies, more than 230 prosecutors' offices, every division of DFPS, all children's hospitals, and countless medical and mental health professionals.

CACTX strengthened CAC mental health services by training clinicians in diverse evidence-based practices to expand treatment modalities available at CACs, including Child and Family Traumatic Stress Intervention and Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, thereby expanding our CACs' ability to meet specific needs of all clients.

CACs provided children with **134,922 mental health sessions, a 10% increase from the prior year**, indicating a significant increase in the depth of services provided to help victims of crime heal.

CACTX offered Components for Enhancing Clinician Experience and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT) training for direct service staff and supervisors. This training is designed to reduce secondary trauma and promote clinician well-being, and in doing so improve the client experience while supporting CAC staff retention.

CACTX hosted seven CE-CERT trainings for **136 participants and 10 network consultation calls** for more than **100 mental health professionals**.



Convening Partners for Systems-Level Strategies

The Statewide Multidisciplinary Task Force (Task Force), which CACTX convenes to assist in our implementation of the federal Children's Justice Act (CJA) program, continued to meet throughout the year to focus on three strategic topics:

- Workforce Capacity, Expertise, and Sustainability
- Earlier Detection of Child Sexual Abuse
- Youth Who Have Initiated Sexual Harm

The Task Force roster includes 27 members with wide-ranging expertise and extensive involvement relating to the intervention, investigation, and prosecution of child abuse cases.

As part of the Task Force's workforce focus, CACTX partnered with rural communities to provide financial support, technical assistance, and program evaluation during a pilot program intended to increase specialized knowledge and expertise of child abuse investigators. CACTX will assess the outcomes of this pilot to share with other counties that may be interested in a similar program. Based on learnings from these initial pilots, CACTX is developing a toolkit that can be used across the state to further scale this effort.

13 jurisdictions throughout Henderson County are participating in this regional law enforcement pilot to advance the skills of child abuse investigators.

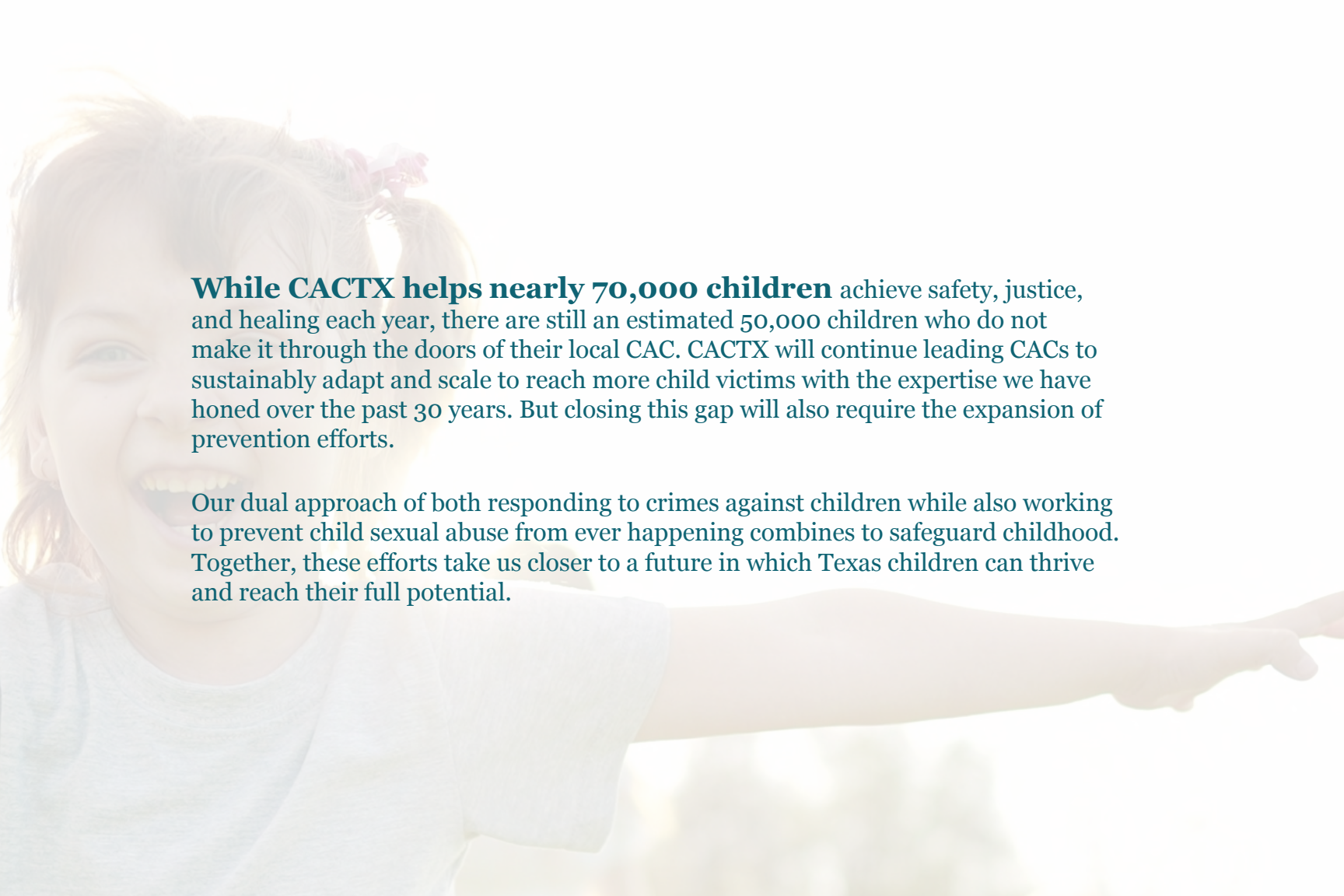
Children's Justice Act:

CACTX is the CJA Program Administrator for the state of Texas. CJA is a federally funded program overseen by the U.S. Department of Justice and awards are used to improve the handling of child abuse cases while limiting additional trauma to child victims.

CACTX and the University of Texas at El Paso completed a research study to gain insight into the handling of cases involving children who are alleged to have engaged in an act of child sexual abuse. This study will inform CACTX's identification of opportunities to improve the systems-level response and service provision for these children.

More than 350 multidisciplinary team partners participated in one-one-one interviews, focus groups, and surveys as part of this study.





While CACTX helps nearly 70,000 children achieve safety, justice, and healing each year, there are still an estimated 50,000 children who do not make it through the doors of their local CAC. CACTX will continue leading CACs to sustainably adapt and scale to reach more child victims with the expertise we have honed over the past 30 years. But closing this gap will also require the expansion of prevention efforts.

Our dual approach of both responding to crimes against children while also working to prevent child sexual abuse from ever happening combines to safeguard childhood. Together, these efforts take us closer to a future in which Texas children can thrive and reach their full potential.



Ending Child Sexual Abuse

With greater awareness, Texans can learn to recognize, report, and prevent child sexual abuse – and together, we can work towards ending such abuse for generations to come.

In Texas, **1 in 6 high school students under 18 anonymously reported sexual abuse in their lifetime.**

CACTX is committed to changing these numbers so that fewer children are impacted by sexual abuse.

2023 Activities & Outcomes | Building the Foundation to Protect Texas Children

With decades of expertise, CACTX has the reputation and leadership needed to drive change on a statewide scale. But this work requires collaboration to create a lasting impact for generations to come. As part of our robust plan to end child sexual abuse in Texas, CACTX recognizes the importance of galvanizing partners and the public to prioritize this issue and understand their unique role. Child sexual abuse is a preventable issue that demands a solution, and CACTX is working to empower communities across Texas to protect children from harm.

Convening & Galvanizing Partners

A central role of CACTX is as a convener. We bring together an extensive network for cross-sector collaboration, evaluation of current efforts, and exploration of more effective methods to serve and protect children. To officially launch our initiative to end child sexual abuse in Texas, CACTX brought together CAC leaders, statewide partners, funders, legislative leaders, and community members for our End Child Sexual Abuse Summit. There CACTX shared updates on progress made, outlined next steps, generated discussion, and facilitated thought partnership to inspire change.

195 partners and supporters from across the state attended CACTX's summit to launch our initiative to protect Texas children from sexual abuse.



Amerigroup and Driscoll Health Plan joined CACTX in our commitment to Texas children and served as presenting sponsors for the End Child Sexual Abuse Summit.



CACTX launched the Founders Circle, a giving group committed to ending child sexual abuse by financially supporting our exploration and development of prevention strategies.

Building Public Engagement to Protect Children

CACTX partnered with the Metropolitan Group, a respected social change agency, to strategize a statewide campaign to engage communities around child sexual abuse prevention. The campaign will build public will to prioritize this issue and raise awareness that child sexual abuse can be prevented. During this initial phase, we conducted research to discover what messages resonate with Texas communities and which techniques motivate them to take action.

More than **1,200 Texans participated in focus groups and surveys** to share their beliefs, ideas, and personal stories about the prevention of child sexual abuse with CACTX's research partners.

While only 57% of caregivers surveyed reported that they have talked with their children about boundaries and body safety, **90% said they are willing to teach this to their children**. Closing this gap is a tremendous opportunity to protect more children from sexual abuse.

CACTX assembled an **Advisory Panel of nine partners** to help guide and inform our work to create a statewide messaging strategy that builds public awareness.

Insights gained from this research will be used to educate Texans on high-impact actions they can take to promote healthy and safe environments for children. As we continue measuring the impacts of this work, our research will influence and guide all CACTX's prevention efforts, ensuring that each step we take cultivates a long-term, sustainable impact on our state. *(See page 16 for more about where this work is headed.)*



For ten years, members of the Women of Courage giving circle have served as ambassadors in protecting childhood and play a role in our efforts to spread public awareness.

Developing Effective Prevention Education

Over the past year, CACTX has engaged in extensive discovery, research, and relationship-building to inform the future development of prevention curriculum to be used throughout Texas to protect children from child sexual abuse. *(See our next steps for this work on page 17).*

CACTX secured a **\$273,611 grant from the T.L.L. Temple Foundation** to support the discovery, research, and partnerships needed for the creation of statewide prevention education curriculum.

To further establish CACTX as a leading voice and trusted expert in this field, we took an active role in Texas Education Agency work groups and are partnering with staff from multiple Education Service Centers, the Texas School Safety Center, and the Texas Association of School Boards.

CACTX provided a training on child sexual abuse prevention for the annual Texas Public Charter Schools Conference. With more than 700 public charter schools in the state, engagement with this community will greatly benefit future efforts to reach as many educators and families as possible.



A Look at the Year Ahead

Crafting a Blueprint to Reach Every Child

CACTX strives to reach every child in need of CAC services. To achieve this goal, CACTX launched the development of a multi-year, statewide strategic blueprint for CAC services that will be created with critical input from our CAC network and partners.

This blueprint will chart a path to **close the gap of the approximately 50,000 children** impacted by abuse who are currently missing out on CAC services for a variety of reasons.

To steer the implementation of our strategic blueprint, CACTX is building a new team to pilot a regional support initiative to strengthen the CAC network. Given the diversity and complexity of the Texas network, our regional support team will work closely with CACs to understand challenges and opportunities faced at a granular, local level, and provide them with targeted, data-informed guidance.

CACTX secured an additional \$1 million in state funding to pilot this regional support initiative to reach every child.



Mapping Systemic Improvements with Statewide Partners

Every three years, CACTX conducts a statewide assessment as part of our role as Program Administrator for the state of Texas' CJA program (*highlighted on page 8*). Input from our CACs and multidisciplinary partners statewide will be integrated to create a robust and accurate picture of the current landscape. This assessment will help inform CACTX's areas of focus in upcoming years, ensuring our efforts are directed toward the most impactful strategies.

813 multidisciplinary team partners from across the state responded to a survey to share their thoughts on the handling of child abuse cases. These responses will help guide CACTX in developing the next CJA Three Year Assessment and allow CACTX to track trends and progress over time.

Refining Mental Health Services for Texas Children

CACTX is planning to launch a project to assess mental health services provided by Texas CACs and other key entities within this space. Ultimately, recommendations from this project will inform a strategic plan to engage and further cultivate partnerships with influential leaders in the children's mental health space to enhance community awareness of CACs and to increase access and utilization of critical mental health services.

For the past decade, **CACTX has strategically strengthened mental health care for victims** and the CAC network has seen a **63% increase** in the number of children receiving these much-needed services.

Mobilizing Texans to Protect Children

The next phase of CACTX's work to build public engagement will leverage our initial research insights and data ([highlighted on page 13](#)) to inform the development of a strategic statewide campaign. The campaign will kick off with pilots in diverse regions of Texas and in partnership with our local CACs. CACTX will utilize outputs from our pilot programs to inform our multi-year plan to influence positive changes in behavior and social norms that mobilize Texas communities to take effective action.

While **90% of parents said they are willing to learn the red flags that a person might be at risk of sexually harming a child**, only 44% report having taken steps to learn the information to do so. CACTX's strategic efforts will help close gaps like this to better protect all children.

Amplifying Impact with Health Care Partners

A significant insight gained from the research conducted in partnership with the Metropolitan Group was that health care providers rank among the most trusted sources of information for preventing child sexual abuse. CACTX will leverage this finding by creating educational resources for healthcare providers so they are equipped to engage caregivers in these critical conversations.

49% of caregivers surveyed said they were most likely to seek information about preventing child sexual abuse from health care providers.

52% of caregivers surveyed trust information on preventing child sexual abuse when their healthcare provider shares it.



Building Upon Prevention Education Efforts

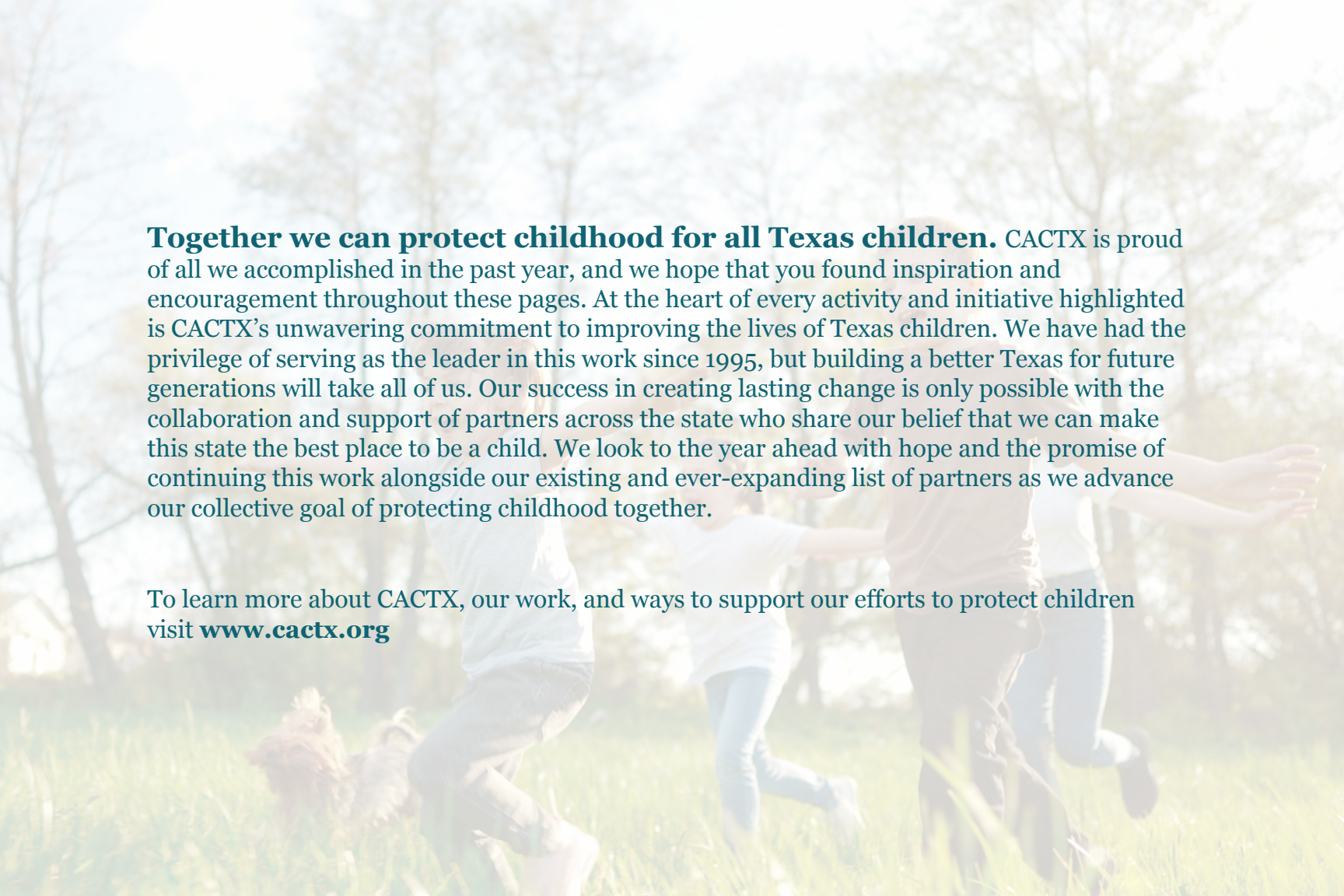
CACTX will continue to build and strengthen relationships with statewide partners to foster our credibility related to prevention education and facilitate the future dissemination of our curriculum. CACTX will also partner with the Texas Education Agency to develop an online training program for Texas public school staff on child abuse. Texas Education Agency's decision to partner with CACTX demonstrates the reputation we hold as a trusted expert on this topic and as a leader in the work to end child sexual abuse.

Exploring New Program Opportunities

CACTX plans to explore our role in detecting and preventing child sexual abuse online and in youth-serving organizations. This work will involve identifying program strategies to promote safety for children online, as well as evaluating partnership opportunities with youth-serving organizations to help create and promote uniform guidelines and best practices for keeping children safe in their care. To enhance and amplify this work and all other CACTX programming, we will continue to invest in robust data and evaluation efforts to ensure we are achieving intended outcomes and targeting the highest impact strategies.

In addition to our role in crimes against children cases, the Texas CAC network is often called upon during the initial response to mass violence cases involving children across the state. The CAC network has a statewide footprint to provide expert services critical in cases involving violence and trauma, and is uniquely situated to provide victims and impacted communities with timely, sustainable, ongoing support. CACTX plans to work on determining our role in this area, including state-level partnerships and training opportunities.



A background image showing the lower half of several children running through a grassy field. They are wearing light-colored clothing, and their arms and legs are in motion. The background is a soft-focus view of trees and a bright sky, creating a warm, natural atmosphere.

Together we can protect childhood for all Texas children. CACTX is proud of all we accomplished in the past year, and we hope that you found inspiration and encouragement throughout these pages. At the heart of every activity and initiative highlighted is CACTX's unwavering commitment to improving the lives of Texas children. We have had the privilege of serving as the leader in this work since 1995, but building a better Texas for future generations will take all of us. Our success in creating lasting change is only possible with the collaboration and support of partners across the state who share our belief that we can make this state the best place to be a child. We look to the year ahead with hope and the promise of continuing this work alongside our existing and ever-expanding list of partners as we advance our collective goal of protecting childhood together.

To learn more about CACTX, our work, and ways to support our efforts to protect children visit **www.cactx.org**



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