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The recent random acts of violence in our country have understandably left parents anxious about their children's safety. Unfortunately the national press coverage overshadows serious concerns about children's safety in our own community. In 2011, DCFS substantiated 11,530 cases of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological maltreatment of children in Utah.

The Children's Center is the largest mental health provider for preschoolers in the state, annually receiving over 2,000 referrals from families gravely concerned about their children's emotional well-being. Over 40% of the children, ages 2-5, have suffered from, nearly 3 traumatic events. These include witnessing domestic violence, physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse, witnessing community violence, or suffering the loss of a caregiver through violence or suicide.

Our current system of mental health care is not capable of meeting the demand for services. Traumatized children struggle with poor impulse control, self destructive behaviors, verbal and physical aggression, sleep and appetite problems, inconsolable sadness, poor peer relationships, and an inability to concentrate in school. Evidence-based treatments are available, but parents and caregivers struggle accessing services due to the limited number of professionals specifically trained to work with traumatized children and their families.

The Children's Center provides comprehensive mental health care to enhance the emotional well-being of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. As a nationally recognized trauma treatment center, we actively work to educate our community, mental health providers, and our judicial system about the importance of mental health treatment for victims of traumatic events. We provide evidence-based trauma treatments and train therapists across the state.

The Children's Center goes beyond treating the individual child, we work closely with the entire family to ensure full recovery. Left untreated, traumatic events in early childhood have devastating effects on a child's mental and physical health. As adults, they are more likely to: be alcoholics, suffer from depression, die by suicide, be IV drug users.

Random acts of violence nationally deservedly get our attention. But they must not overshadow our dire mental health needs in our own state. The children in Utah are suffering from trauma daily. We currently lack the necessary training and resources to provide effective treatments that can help ensure a brighter future.