



Speaking for Children Who Can't

Two Wylie Detectives
Bring Passion to
Children's Advocacy Center

By Judy Truesdell

Det. Helen Taylor and Det. Amanda Villalobos of Wylie PD investigate crimes against children as part of the Children's Advocacy Center of Collin County team.

It's no accident that Det. Helen Taylor and Det. Amanda Villalobos of the Wylie Police Department are serving as part of the Children's Advocacy Center of Collin County team. It's where they both wanted to be and where their considerable talents and passion are being put to good use.

The two detectives complement each other, bringing different strengths to the job. The self-proclaimed "talker," Taylor uses her communication skills to draw out the victims, putting them and their family members at ease despite the circumstances. Villalobos is more technical, drawn to the objective, evidence, fact-based side of their responsibilities, dealing with suspects and search warrants.

The CACCC reached out to the Wylie PD in January 2014, asking the department to provide a detective to the Collin County Child Abuse Task Force. At that time, the task force was made up of two Allen PD detectives, four investigators from the sheriff's office and a supervisor. Taylor saw it as the perfect opportunity.

"I spent six years on patrol answering various calls for service and enforcing traffic laws. I found the work rewarding, but I entered into law enforcement with the purpose of becoming a crimes against persons investigator," she said. "I took multiple trainings for investigating family violence and crimes against children."

The Wylie case load grew, and in the summer of 2015, Villalobos joined the task force. Her path to the CACCC began in the emergency medicine field. She worked as an EMT for eight years, including Children's Medical Hospital of Dallas. "Many of the patients I cared for were hospitalized due to severe child abuse or neglect. Even though I was helping them to heal, I knew there was so much more involved. It was difficult to work in

a capacity that was only reactive. I wanted to prevent this from happening to them again or ever happening at all. At that point, I knew it was time to make a career change, and I felt working in law enforcement would make the greatest impact."

In fall of 2015, the two Wylie detectives joined with the two Allen detectives to create their own task force, focusing on their cities' cases. Each detective is on call one week at a time, but, when one of them is summoned in the middle of the night, the other one joins her. "Sometimes we'll know ... this is going to be an all-nighter," Taylor said.

The detectives investigate crimes against children including sexual abuse, physical abuse and injury, physical neglect, substance abuse exposure and child deaths. As horrifying as the offenses are, the detectives praise the dedicated team made up of Child Protective Services personnel, medical professionals, therapists, community resources personnel, family advocates, the district's attorney's office and forensic interviewers. The FBI and Secret Service have also flown personnel to the area to assist when needed.

"This work is their passion, and it becomes ours too," Taylor said of the other professionals. "We do not and could not work these cases alone; it takes a team to make sure these children get all of the services they deserve. We are not special. We're a spoke in a wheel."

Part of the challenge of their role is that, as the law enforcement component of the team, they must take the offender out of the home, often upsetting the entire family structure. Though the abuse stops and their intervention redeems many situations, they are removing an offender who may be defended by other family members. "If there was no Advocacy Center, we would

be going in, breaking the family apart, and then just walking away,” Taylor said. “Instead, they get the care they need with medical personnel and counselors, and we’ll be with them as long as they need us.”

The detectives are under the command of Lt. Scott Stowers. “Both Det. Taylor and Villalobos are very dedicated to the work they do,” he said. “They are passionate about the victims of child abuse. Many of the investigations they conduct involve some of the most heinous crimes one could imagine. Because of this, they are highly trained professionals in their field of criminal investigation and produce a very high conviction rate.”

He said they also work closely with investigators from surrounding agencies and have filed cases in all three counties, Collin, Rockwall and Dallas, within Wylie’s jurisdiction. “The tools they bring through their connection with the center are an important resource for the Wylie Police Department and the community we serve.”

In a perfect world, there would be no need for the Children’s Advocacy Center of Collin County. Since that is not the world in which we live, knowing professionals such as Taylor and Villalobos are contributing time and talent to defend those who can’t defend themselves is a beacon of hope.

“The most rewarding thing for me is seeing a child have the courage to talk about their abuse,” Villalobos said. “Their strength is amazing. The child is the one who changes their circumstances. We really are just support for these kids. They are the true heroes.”

A wall in the advocacy center says: “Real heroes don’t wear capes.” Maybe the capes are hidden by detectives’ shields. •

Photos by Craig Kelly



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