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The house at 56 Wisdom Way at the entrance to the Green River Cemetery. Recorder/Paul Franz [Purchase photo reprints »](#)

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GREENFIELD — By January 2015, victims of child abuse and sexual assault in Franklin County will have a safe and comfortable place to report the incidents to police and medical professionals.

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The Northwestern Children's Advocacy Project, is renovating an old house on Wisdom Way to serve as a child-friendly center where a multidisciplinary team consisting of Department of Children and Families workers, police, medical and mental health professionals, prosecutors and victim advocates can meet to coordinate a response to allegations of child sexual and severe physical abuse.

The house at 56 Wisdom Way will serve as the place where professionals can meet, interview and examine victims from Franklin County and the North Quabbin region.

The independent nonprofit has a 15-year lease to rent the building. The house on the property of the Green River Cemetery has been vacant for years. It was previously used as the cemetery caretaker's residence and later housed Honor Court, a program for recovering alcoholics.

The house is designed to be less intimidating and reduce stress for victims of child abuse, half of which are younger than 12 years old, through the investigation and intervention process. It also reduces the need for children to repeatedly tell their story to different professionals by coordinating a single forensic interview to gather the information needed by each member of the multidisciplinary team.

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The Children's Advocacy Project expects 200 area children to use the center.

In the past, a child victim would be brought to the police station and the District Attorney's office to give statements and then to the Department of Children and Families or hospital.

"It would cause additional trauma and stress," said Susan Loehn, director of the Children's Advocacy Project.

It is the first Greenfield house. For 10 years, the Children's Advocacy Project has had a center in Northampton.

Victims of Franklin County, on the other hand, go to a meeting room at the Northwestern District Attorney's office to be interviewed.

"It can be a scary place for a child. People are walking in suits and state police are coming in and out," Loehn said.











Children have to go to Baystate Franklin Medical Center to receive medical exams for sexually transmitted diseases or UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, where a trained doctor provides forensic exams and collects evidence for sexual assault.





The Children's Advocacy Project is also planning to train a doctor at Baystate Franklin in forensic exams to visit with victims at the Greenfield house.







Like the Northampton home, the Greenfield house will be equipped with a children's interview room, a team observation room, a family waiting room, and a medical examination room.

The \$150,000 home renovations are underway now.

Much of the work is being donated. The Children's Advocacy Project has raised \$92,000 in community donations, plus a gift from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts to buy furniture. The nonprofit still needs to raise \$58,000, but Loehn is confident it can through donations, grants and in-kind contributions.

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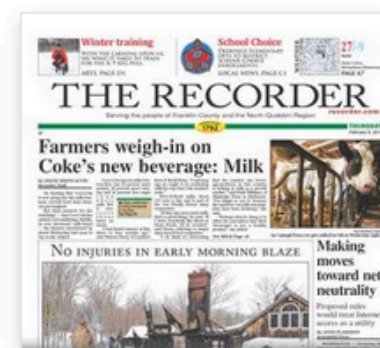
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