

# Everything under one roof

## Where abused children from Queens can find help

The UBS Optimus Foundation is supporting an innovative child advocacy center in the United States

**The sexual abuse of children is a growing problem, particularly in industrialized countries. The City of New York is no exception. In the borough of Queens, the number of cases of abuse is particularly high. One Safe Horizon's child services center has introduced an extremely innovative practice: all service providers and authorities have been brought together under one roof.**



Two young boys are playing basketball. They seem to have not a care in the world: they are laughing, and challenging and encouraging one another. John and Brian are two brothers, aged eight and ten years old. This time on the playground is just a fleeting period during which they can forget and don't have to think about their father, who has been sexually abusing them for several years. John and Brian live in Queens, a district of New York.

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What can be worse for the victim than the act of violence itself? The necessity of constantly repeating your terrible story to all sorts of authorities. The Child Advocacy Center in Queens (QCAC) is actively engaged in eliminating this unreasonable and additional burden on the children. The center follows an innovative approach and brings all the necessary authorities together in one location: the police, the district attorney, counselors, social workers and doctors.

The children are welcomed and introduced to a Safe Horizon counselor who acts as their personal advocate. Instead of traveling to different locations to tell their story, children are interviewed once at the center by one of the QCAC partner agencies. For example, when John and Brian gave their statements at the center, their case was immediately referred to the New York Police Department who were then able to arrest the boys' father. The district attorney is hand-

ling the case against the father while the boys receive counseling at the center.

The QCAC also provides support and guidance for non-offending family members of the victims. John and Brian's mother, for example, can participate in family and individual counseling at the center.

### Safe Horizon: where victims become survivors

Safe Horizon was founded in 1978 as a non-profit organization and has been at the forefront of helping victims of crime and abuse during crises. It also manages the Queens Child Advocacy Center, as well as two other CACs, for physically and sexually abused children in close collaboration with the public authorities and other private organizations in New York City.

A Safe Horizon study found that sexually abused children had to recount, and relive, their ordeals an average of eight times for different agencies and institutions – and as often as 24 times. This increases the risk of traumatizing the children even further, and does nothing to help them cope with their terrible experiences and start the healing process. Also, even tiny discrepancies in their statements can prevent a successful prosecution. Safe Horizon has responded by developing its pioneering model of child advocacy in the borough of Queens.

The UBS Optimus Foundation is supporting this project with an annual contribution of CHF 100,000.

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