

Transforming Child Advocacy

Center for Hope's Pioneering Tele-Forensic
Interviewing Solution



Guardify

IRONBOW™
TECHNOLOGIES

A LIFEBRIDGE HEALTH GROUP

CENTER FOR HOPE





Center for Hope is a groundbreaking new LifeBridge Health program and facility

Based in Baltimore, MD, dedicated to addressing violence in all forms, including domestic violence, child abuse, and trafficking. This first-of-its-kind center in the nation collaborates closely with various responders to provide a unified and trauma-informed approach, ensuring that survivors of violence receive holistic support without being shuffled between different programs.

The team at Center for Hope

The team at Center for Hope including its Executive Director, Adam Rosenberg, along with Crimson Barocca, Education and Research Manager, recognize that violence is multifaceted and often co-occurs in various forms, necessitating a holistic and collaborative response.



The Role of the Forensic Interview

Building on its 35-year legacy as an innovative first responder for children exposed to violence and trauma, the former Baltimore Child Abuse Center (now known as the Center for Hope since 2019), continue to make a profound impact as Baltimore's accredited child advocacy center. As the first child advocacy center in Maryland and the third established in the United States, it stands as a pioneering force. The Center for Hope collaborates with law enforcement, social services, prosecution, mental health, and medical services to provide a comprehensive, trauma-informed approach to child advocacy, ensuring that every child receives the support and care they need to heal and thrive.

That is where the critical role of the forensic interview comes in. Forensic interviews are crucial to reducing trauma for children and helping them relay their experiences while ensuring first responders follow up as quickly and efficiently as possible without causing further trauma.

"A forensic interview is a legally defensible conversation between a trained professional (often clinician) who conducts conversations in a non-leading way, allowing the child or individual to share as much of their experience in their own words and take the lead in the process of the interview," Barocca said. "It also involves being developmentally appropriate as we want to give these individuals the best opportunity to share as much information as possible in the most reliable format."



"For over 35 years, we've been first responders for children who've been exposed to violence or trauma. At the center of our mission is trying to help a child or survivor say in their own words what has happened to them."

– Barocca said

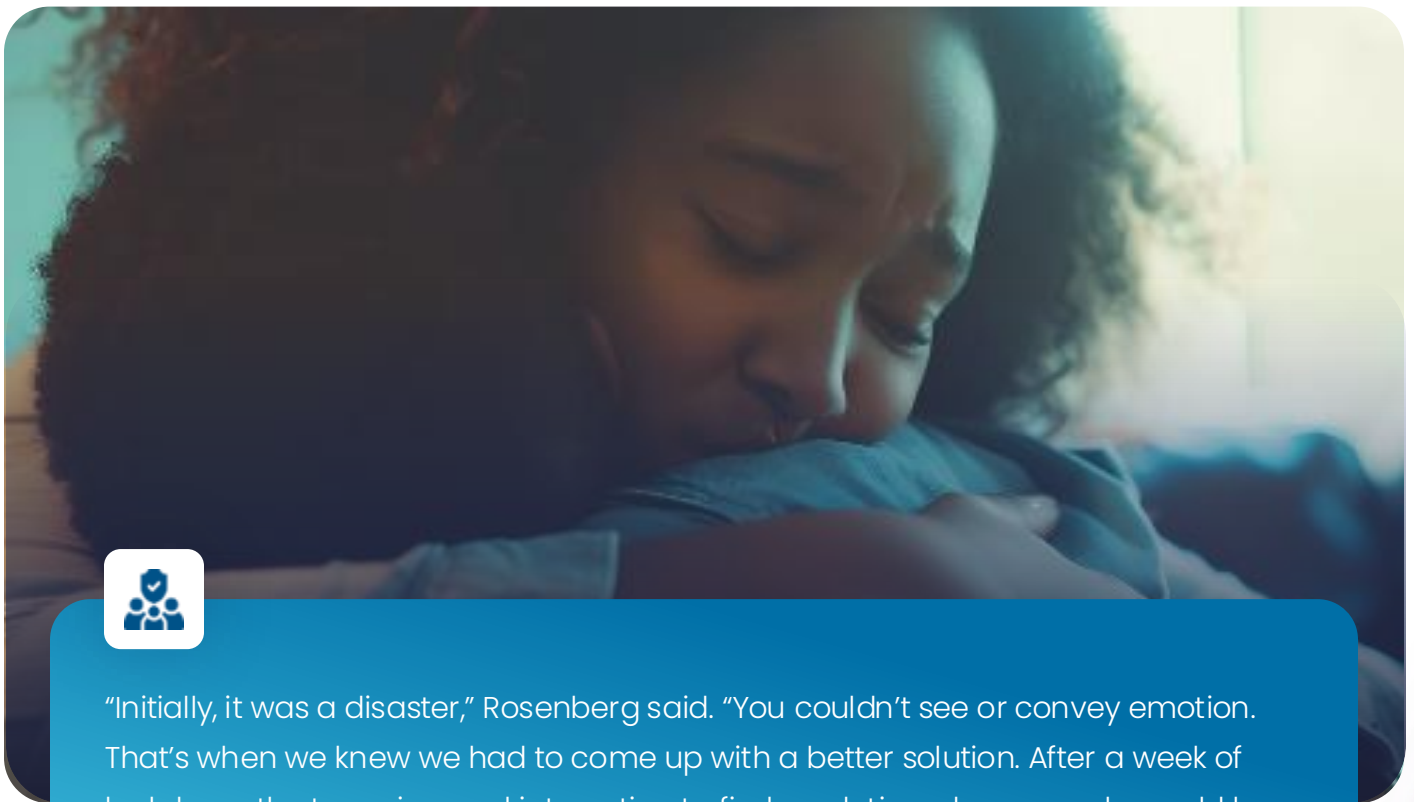
Not only is the forensic interview a critical tool in helping a child or survivor share their story but it also necessitates the next course of action from police and other legal and first responder teams.

"The Center for Hope is a one-stop-shop where the child comes in for victim advocacy, forensic, medical services, and more," Barocca added. "The forensic interview serves as the launching point of the investigation, so the different disciplines observe the interview in real time and then work with the forensic interviewer who's in the room or on the call with the child to get all the information needed for criminal investigation, child protection, and other vital services."



Capturing Emotion & Full Experiences

At first, Center for Hope used expensive repurposed security and police equipment for recording forensic interviews. Equipment would quickly become outdated over the last decade as advances in digital recording blossomed. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to tele-forensic interviewing to overcome the challenges posed by masked, in-person interviews. The first attempts failed, with muffled communication and a lack of emotional connection.



“Initially, it was a disaster,” Rosenberg said. “You couldn’t see or convey emotion. That’s when we knew we had to come up with a better solution. After a week of lockdown, the team jumped into action to find a solution where people would be able to go safely into separate rooms, take their masks off, and have a real conversation with survivors of violence who needed our help.”

Barocca and the team quickly adapted, developing a solution that allowed safe, mask-free conversations in a controlled environment.

“We were able to have concise answers and have conversations with survivors over a secure video connection and still find out what had happened. Setting it up the correct way enabled the team to convey and share empathy, see faces, retain a forensically sound and legally defensible environment, and get to the heart of what had or hadn’t happened.”



SOLUTION

The Tele-Forensic Interview

Now, technology plays a crucial role in evolving forensic interviews, providing children and survivors with the help they need and deserve.

“Historically, children were repeatedly asked about their experiences in non-conductive settings by untrained professionals,” Rosenberg said. “What child advocacy centers did was aim to talk to children in a trauma-informed and more sensitive manner. Forty years ago, it was done with a one-way glass or closed-circuit camera. Over the decades, we’ve continued to use technology to get the answers out there and help children and other survivors say what happened to them in their own words. Additionally, when necessary, the team can participate remotely in a way that doesn’t cause more harm or stress on the child or victim.”

A tele-forensic interview can be vital for ensuring more accurate testimonies and efficiencies for the responding team while also providing children who have been victims a greater sense of agency. Barocca, who leads the Forensic Interview and Education Program, works to unite research and practice to help children feel more comfortable sharing their experiences.

“Once established, one of the first things the program realized was that when talking to kids, we could give them choices about how they communicate with their interviewers,” Barocca said. “They can choose to speak with their interviewer via video or face-to-face. Kids often have limited choices, and during the process of being victimized, they had none. It’s crucial to provide interviewers and researchers with more tools to maximize these children’s comfort and sense of agency.”



Ultimately, using tools as simple as iPads and web cameras, Center for Hope found tele-forensic interviews to be just as effective, if not better than face-to-face interviews as they allowed for greater flexibility in conducting them.

Results Through Tele-Forensic Interviewing Solution 3.0



The Center for Hope uses a new tele-forensic interviewing solution developed in collaboration with Iron Bow Technologies, that includes high-quality cameras and audio, a one-touch recording solution, and the ability to integrate with Guardify's video conferencing product – Live Sessions. This setup allows for high-quality storytelling and emotional capture during interviews, improving the overall effectiveness and reliability of the process.



Meeting Specific Needs

The tele-forensic interviewing solution addresses the need for a collaborative approach, enabling team members to join interviews remotely and make immediate decisions based on live observations. This system also simplifies the process, allowing for traditional two-person or one-on-one interviews, and provides children with the choice of talking via video or in person, enhancing their sense of agency and comfort.



Technical Aspects and Usability

Interviewing "pods" are designed to enhance the interviewing process by providing isolated, soundproof spaces for interviews and observation. Each pod includes a meeting room, an observation room, and an interview room, ensuring privacy and security for the child. The system's user-friendly design has made it easy for staff to adapt, improving workflow and collaboration.



Over 800 Tele-Forensic Interviews Conducted

Barocca and Rosenberg shared that over 800 tele-forensic interviews have been completed since, allowing them to interview children across the country, in remote areas, or with situations that don't permit an in-person interview.



Reduced Time to Action

Using a cloud-based service the new system has significantly streamlined the process. Previously, staff had to manually upload each video, taking up to 10 minutes per video. In the days of VHS, producing one copy could take over two hours.



Seamless Integration

The collaboration between Iron Bow and Guardify enabled the smooth integration of prosecution technology, supporting MDT (Multidisciplinary Team) sharing and real-time video upload. This exemplifies the power of cross-organizational collaboration—where aligned goals and technical compatibility come together to deliver cohesive, real-world solutions.

"A few weeks after this setup we had a kid who was in Baltimore who was reportedly abused in Chicago," Barocca said. "The prosecutor, detective, and child protection worker all watched this interview live halfway across the country and were able to make charging decisions within minutes of this interview. Previously, that could have taken months."

"We couldn't believe that from the first moment with one-touch recording that [the solution] could actually work," Rosenberg said. "It took off running from there. Rarely do you scope something out and have it turn out exactly the way you thought it would, but this did."

While the team was initially concerned about the new technology, their hesitation quickly turned into enthusiasm as they realized how easy to use, intuitive and effective the system was. "The team was definitely concerned about the new technology at first but found it to be highly user-friendly," Barocca added.



About Live Sessions

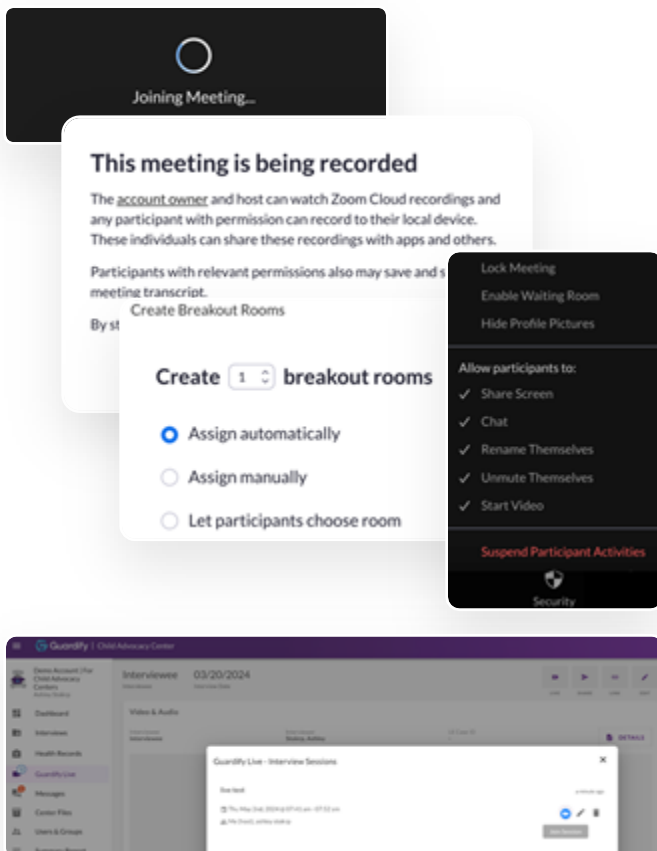
Guardify Live Sessions are a premium add on feature for Guardify | Child Advocacy Center

Designed to meet the specific needs of Forensic Interviewers and Multi Disciplinary Team members, providing a Guardify secured, real-time, video collaboration and a recording tool that can be used across agencies to host virtual meetings and stream live interviews.



Live Sessions can be created, managed, scheduled and joined at the account level from the Guardify Live main menu or from within a specific Interview associated with that particular Live Session.

In all cases, only authorized and logged in Guardify users, with shared access to associated Interviews, will be able to join these secure HIPAA compliant Live Sessions.



Live Sessions offer many advanced video conferencing features and settings to support a variety of Forensic Interviewer and MDT member needs.

And because we understand the unique needs of CACs, Forensic Interviewers, MDT members, and the children and families they serve, we have preconfigured Live Session Security and Recording (if selected) settings to help provide the most secure, HIPAA compliant and error-free set up possible.

Default settings empower users to focus on their work while confidently hosting and recording meetings, taking advantage of chat, and breakout rooms to collaborate confidentially.



Live Sessions Value & Pricing

Purpose built for:

- 1 **Real-time collaboration** with remote MDT members in preparation for, during and/or after a Forensic Interview – accessible only to authenticated Guardify users
- 2 **Emergency field interviews** inclusive of MDT's observing and collaborating in real-time
- 3 Regularly scheduled **MDT Coordination Meetings** and **Peer Review Sessions**
- 4 **On the go** video collaboration and audio and video recording via Guardify | CAC Mobile

The perfect compliment to your CACs everyday* video conferencing solution



More Secure – Creating and/or participating in a Live Session is limited to the same Guardify user account level access and security that your CAC is currently using to manage the uploading and sharing of your center's interviews, keeping all your interviews related security protocols intact.



HIPAA Compliant – Live Sessions have been pre-configured to support HIPAA and your BAA with Guardify is inclusive of Live, ensuring you are maintaining compliance.



Seamless Guardify Integration – Live Sessions are scheduled and initiated within Guardify.

- Sessions can be created from within, or associated with, a specific Interview so that users can participate in the Session and access the Interview simultaneously.
- Live Sessions are not tracked as part of the Interview History, unless the user chooses to record and save a Live Session recording as part of the Interview record.



Unlimited Users per Live Session license – each license can be shared across multiple authorized Guardify users. Additional licenses are required to enable concurrent sessions.

Live Session pricing is per year, paid annually in advance, designed for a single concurrent license to protect privacy and confidentiality. Please speak with your Guardify representative to determine the appropriate number of licenses for your CAC's specific needs.

**Live Sessions is not intended to replace your organization's everyday video conferencing solution. Unlike commonly used solutions that license per user, do not default to HIPAA compliant settings, and allow for meeting link-sharing and forwarding to unauthenticated users, Guardify's Live Sessions is purpose built to support Forensic Interview and related MDT collaboration specific workflow and security needs.*



AWS GovCloud (US)





Inspired to Learn More?

If you're interested in discovering how the Center for Hope's pioneering tele-forensic interviewing solution can transform child advocacy, we invite you to connect with our team of experts.



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Together, we can drive innovation that empowers survivors and enhances the effectiveness of child advocacy efforts.

Contact us today to learn how we can support your mission and make a lasting impact in the lives of those who need it most.

Visit www.lifebridgehealth.org/center-for-hope or
www.ironbow.com/techsource/center-for-hope to learn more!

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