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Funds drying up for Douglas County program

ROSEBURG, Ore. (AP) - A Douglas County program to protect abused children faces an uncertain future because of dwindling state support and private donations, officials say.

The Douglas Child Abuse Response & Evaluation Services conducts medical evaluations, videotapes interviews with victims and offers crisis counseling, education and victim support and advocacy.

In the 10 years since the center was established, many of the offenders charged with abuse have pleaded guilty or been convicted of their crimes.

"Without support we may not be able to keep on," said Mary McAbee, an executive assistant at the center.

The nonprofit center is primarily funded by the Oregon Department of Justice, the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, National Children's Alliance, private foundations and donations.

It was created in 1994 by the local Child Abuse Multidisciplinary Team, and has expanded to offer services to other counties in southwest Oregon.

"They fill a really big gap in services," said Douglas County sheriff's Lt. Curt Strickland. "We have no regular place to handle all the needs of kids who've allegedly been abused."

A counseling team interviews children while police watch on a closed-circuit television. The group also offers medical exams using a special instrument to detect evidence of sexual abuse.

In the past seven years, the center has interviewed 756 children in abuse cases, counseled 2,822 family members, and performed 211 medical examinations for child sex abuse victims.

Sam McAbee, Mary's husband and executive director, said funding is becoming more difficult to find even though the center provides the only service of its kind in Douglas County.

"We're not an obvious choice for people to contribute to, because we work behind the scenes," he said. "But what we do is valuable and important for children."