

APSAC Presidential Memories

Tricia D. Gardner, JD

In honor of APSAC's 25th anniversary, some of our founders and former presidents have shared their memories from their time of leadership. Some have served during times of prosperity and others during times of strife, but all have provided undeniable leadership and vision for APSAC. It is because of their great dedication and sacrifice that APSAC is still a strong and thriving organization today.

Jon Conte, PhD, President, 1987–1989 and 2001–2003
Professor, University of Washington School of Social Work

When I think back to the beginnings of APSAC, I recall more the feelings than the events. It was a time not all that long after the rediscovery of childhood sexual abuse in the late 1970s. There was a strong feeling of discovery and the excitement that each new research finding or professional collaboration seemed to generate in professionals meeting each other for the first time and brought together by a common purpose. There was a keen awareness of the need for new knowledge and a real sense of multidisciplinary collaboration and mutual support. While there was some resentment from colleagues who had been working in physical abuse with this new emphasis, over time this gave way.

Now I am struck with how what was originally our sole interest has become widespread among the public and in virtually every social and behavioral science and, indeed, much of the humanities as well. Virtually every discipline claims an interest and specialization in child abuse. Child maltreatment professionals have become increasingly fragmented. APSAC is hardly the only national or global organization committed to child abuse, and public more than professional interests define policy concerns dealing with child maltreatment.

Yet I am also struck with how important our mission remains. Multidisciplinary collaboration, dissemination of new knowledge, other supports for professionals, and most of all, a central focus on the victim of child maltreatment and the adults who influence their lives remain an urgent need here in the United States and around the globe.

David Corwin, MD, Founding Member

Professor and Chief of the Pediatrics Child Protection and Family Health Division, Primary Children's Center for Safe and Healthy Families, University of Utah School of Medicine

I've always hoped that APSAC would become the professional organization for those at the front lines in the effort to confront

child maltreatment and to promote the best possible response to those affected by child maltreatment. Many people think I was an early APSAC President, but actually I chaired the National Summit Conference on Diagnosing Child Sexual Abuse in October of 1985, where the first mandate for a new multidisciplinary professional society focused on child sexual abuse emerged. After that, the organizing meeting for APSAC was held at the Chicago O'Hare Airport Hyatt Hotel in September of 1986. Although there was originally an interest to focus mainly on sexual abuse (as indicated by the mandate), the final decision was to support the broader focus on all child abuse and neglect. While never President, I was the first Editor in Chief of the *APSAC Advisor* and the first Chair of the Professional Guidelines Committee that oversaw the creation of the first sets of professional guidelines.

The original name of the organization was APSVOC, American Professional Society on the Victimization of Children. When I returned to California after the organization meeting and met with Neal Snyder and others who had helped me found CAPSAC (originally the California Association of Professionals on the Sexual Abuse of Children, which was actually founded before APSAC and quickly grew to more than a 1,000 members), we decided that if APSVOC would agree to become APSAC then we could change the name of CAPSAC to the California Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, keeping it in parallel mission with APSAC. The new APSAC Board accepted that proposal and APSVOC became APSAC.

David L. Chadwick, MD, President, 1989–1990

Director Emeritus, Chadwick Center for Children and Families, Rady Children's Hospital, San Diego, California

I don't recall that anything very interesting happened during my year as President. I made my most important contribution at the meeting in New Orleans, where we defined the mission of APSAC. A substantial number of those attending wanted an organization that would concern itself only with sexual abuse. I argued that if that were adopted, we would need separate organizations for each of the recognized maltreatment forms and the organizations would then compete with each other. Perhaps the "March for Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy" would garner all the supporters. This argument prevailed, and APSAC's mission includes all maltreatment forms.

Joyce Thomas, RN, MPH, PNP, FAAN
President, 1990–1991

President and CEO, Center for Child Protection and Family Support, Washington, DC

As one of the founding members of APSAC in 1989–1990, it was my distinct honor to serve as an early President of this newly established multidisciplinary professional organization. The seed idea to form APSAC grew out of an organizing meeting that was held May 14–17, 1986, in New Orleans, Louisiana, during the Fourth National Conference on Child Sexual Victimization, and this greatly influenced my involvement as one of the early leaders. I remember that in the 1980s, several high-profile child sexual abuse cases hit the national media, and we all recognized the need to establish greater credibility in the field of child maltreatment. I specifically recall that social workers and others involved in the investigation and treatment of young children from the McMartin preschool in Manhattan Beach, California, came under attack, and the creation of APSAC was critical for quality assurance in practice and research.

Two key efforts stand out in my mind from the time I served as President. First was my role to engage APSAC in addressing cultural competency in the field; second was my job of creating an environment for the formation of state chapters. In both situations, APSAC was entering uncharted territories, and our approach on how to proceed was not always clear. For example, in 1989, through firsthand practice experience and publications of early research articles from many professionals, the field began to uncover the problems of racial disparity in maltreatment rates and overrepresentation of African American and Native American children in out-of-home placement. During those days, almost every major child abuse institution began to dialogue about the gaps and need for ethnic-minority leadership development and training of child welfare providers, as well as the importance of increased public awareness and the implications of research on cultural factors. In 1990, the first major federal grant on cultural competency in child welfare was awarded to the Center for Child Protection and Family Support (CCPFS) in Washington, D.C., and the People of Color Leadership Institute (POCLI) was established.

As the first African American President of APSAC, I believe that one of my most significant accomplishments occurred when the APSAC Board established working groups to address issues of cultural competency in both the organization and the field. I remember being extremely active in partnering with others to motivate, encourage, and strengthen systems intervention for African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian-American children and their families. This was a conscious choice—one that continued long after my presidency ended.

State chapter formation was another major effort that began while I was President. I recall that following the highly visible Manhattan Beach child abuse case, California became the first state to organize and form a state chapter. This was known as the California Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (CAPSAC). APSAC Board agendas focused on matters related to formation of structures, state by-laws, fiscal issues, and relationship of state chapters to the national organization. This dialogue continued well into the future of APSAC.

Charles Wilson, MSSW, President, 1992–1993

Senior Director and Sam and Rose Stein Endowed Chair in Child Protection, Chadwick Center for Children and Families, Rady Children's Hospital, San Diego, California

My days in APSAC had a profound impact on my professional identity and my vision of a nation of professionals working together on behalf of children and families. I have been involved in many efforts in my 40-year career, but I don't think I have ever been prouder than with my small role in helping build the foundation of APSAC and my association with a fine group of leaders.

I must admit to being a bit overwhelmed and quite frankly flattered to be asked to join the Board of APSAC in 1987. APSAC was still very young and still being incubated by its founders from Jon Conte to David Chadwick. I was directing child welfare in Tennessee at the time, and the APSAC Board was composed of genuine heroes of the child abuse field. The rest of the Board lived on an intellectual plane far above my world, and I was honored to be among them. I listened a lot and learned. On the Board and at the early APSAC gatherings in San Diego, I found a rich intellectual engine that was feeding upon the mutual energy. The collective influence of APSAC permeated all my work in Tennessee and across the nation. By 1989, I was drafted to serve on the APSAC Executive Committee as we really began to chart a course to independence, struggling with the wisdom of launching our own journal and conference. We had to weigh mighty decisions—from the danger of financial disaster to what to call the conference, settling on the term *colloquium* as “a gathering of professionals” to set us apart.

By 1991, I was in line to follow Joyce Thomas as APSAC President. I must admit that John Briere and I tended to cut up in the back of the Board meetings that year, like a couple of sixth graders, trying Joyce's patience at times. But she managed to focus us all to really propel the organization and field forward. In 1992, I moved to the President's role and found an incredible partner in Theresa Reid, our Executive Director. In fact, my term of presidency was comparatively easy, highlighted by outstanding staff leadership in Chicago, a growing membership, and being surrounded by really smart people. We sought to further expand not only the membership but also the impact of APSAC, and we succeeded.

I can look back on those days with pride because we not only laid a solid foundation for APSAC but, as the organization emerged, also true national leadership that was stronger and more influential than any of us could possibly be alone.

Barbara Bonner, PhD, President, 1993–1994

Professor of Pediatrics and CMRI/Jean Gumerson Endowed Chair Director, Center on Child Abuse and Neglect University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

My first inkling that there was going to be a new national organization for professionals involved in child abuse and neglect was at the National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect sponsored by the Children’s Bureau in New Orleans in 1988. Everyone was abuzz with rumors about a special group that was meeting at the conference to plan the new organization, recruit members, and establish an organization for the multiple disciplines involved in maltreatment cases. When I received information about the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, I immediately joined in 1989. I joined the Board of Directors in 1989 and was President from 1993 to 1994.

These years were during the height of the discovery, frenzy, and backlash of child sexual abuse. APSAC was to make significant contributions to managing the fire storm that arose during the next 10 years. Thousands of mental health professionals leapt to provide services to victims, some of whom had minimal symptoms; medical information was published that was later retracted due to a lack of research; statements by professionals were made such as “If you think you’ve been sexually abused, then you’ve probably been sexually abused”; forensic interviewing of children came under increasing scrutiny and criticism; cases were prosecuted and then overturned at the appeals level; accused adults were forming organizations to denounce the accusers, often their own children or grandchildren; ritual abuse was reported to be at epidemic levels; and slogans such as “Believe the children” were promulgated in an effort to support children’s reports of sexual abuse.

It was a time of high controversy and few answers that had any empirical basis. Prosecutors didn’t know whom to prosecute, judges and juries didn’t know whom to believe, professionals didn’t know how to properly interview children, mental health professionals were being charged for mishandling cases—it was a turbulent, unsettling period in the history of this very young field.

APSAC was an emerging resource during this difficult time. While working rapidly to establish a Board of Directors, raise finances to fund much needed research, and provide information to the field, the new organization had massive requests and responsibilities. APSAC responded through providing guidelines, holding open meetings at conferences to discuss current controversies, publishing a newsletter, responding to the media, and setting organizational policies to maintain independence and objectivity in the maelstrom.

Professionals began using their membership in APSAC to establish their credibility in court cases. State chapters were established to organize training at the state level. The organization matured, the membership increased, an annual conference was scheduled, a journal was initiated, and the professionals settled in with a strong commitment for the long haul to intervene and prevent the maltreatment of our children. APSAC brought the level of professionalism to the field that was direly needed at the time.

Professionals in the child abuse field tend to be committed, have a great sense of humor, and work with a sense of urgency. The members I served with on the APSAC Board are still working in the field, still committed to protecting children, still training the next generation, and still members of APSAC. I am honored to have served and to have the life-long colleagues and friends that I met through my association with APSAC.

Patti Toth, JD, President, 1994–1995

Program Manager, Child Abuse Training Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission

I had recently moved from the west coast to the east coast and started my job at the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse in 1987 when I heard about APSAC—this brand new organization dedicated to multidisciplinary collaboration. “*What a great idea!*” I thought and rushed to join as a charter member. At that time, I knew the founders only by reputation, but I knew that this was something I wanted to be a part of. Little did I realize how important APSAC would become to me.

Despite the fact that I was not a PhD, a researcher, or a professor, I was welcomed and quickly came to know the smartest and most caring people in the field as both colleagues and friends. Being part of APSAC challenged me to work harder, to open my mind, and to learn more about other disciplines and how important it was for all of us to find ways to work together more effectively. I was fortunate to be elected to the Board and then chosen as President during a time when APSAC was just starting to hold its annual Colloquium and was contemplating publishing its own journal. I made it my mission to try to increase law enforcement involvement in APSAC and to continue APSAC’s leadership in educating child interviewers, passions I continue to pursue on behalf of APSAC.

My APSAC colleagues were there to throw me a baby shower at the Colloquium held in Tucson a month before my daughter Katie was born, then a year later to welcome Katie as the youngest attendee at the Colloquium held in Chicago. When Katie died following heart surgery at 20 months of age, APSAC established the Katie Toth Memorial Education Fund, which means the world to me. Through this memorial, APSAC is now able to offer scholarships for law enforcement officers from small communities to attend its Child Forensic Interviewing Clinic.

My involvement with APSAC has impacted me in a profound way and provided immeasurable support, both personally and professionally. The friends I've made and the lessons I've learned will be with me for life.

Linda Williams, PhD, President, 1995–1996

Professor of Criminal Justice and Criminology
University of Massachusetts—Lowell

APSAC had a critical impact on my career as a researcher in the field of child maltreatment. From the time of the early formative meetings of the organization, I was keenly aware of how much APSAC was needed in our field. Of course, there was the need for a professional organization dedicated to addressing child abuse and neglect in the United States. However, many of us, whatever our specialty, were marginalized in our own disciplines (e.g., there was little attention to child maltreatment in my field of criminology and sociology in the late 1980s, and colleagues representing other disciplines shared the same experiences). Happily, due to the work of APSAC members, this is not as true today, and there is significant attention to child abuse in our disciplines and sub-specialties. In the 1980–1990s, we knew that if we were to find effective ways to address child abuse, then interdisciplinary collaborations, professional-peer support, and rigor in research and practice were needed. Soon it became clear that for many who have found a home at APSAC, work on child abuse issues is not something on the margins of our existence but in the center of what we do.

There are numerous ways in which APSAC has supported this work. One of the highlights is the peer-reviewed journal *Child Maltreatment (CM)*, which in the years since it was inaugurated in 1995 has become an authoritative voice in the field. I have been fortunate in my career to have had an opportunity to provide service to APSAC and was honored in 2001 to receive the APSAC Award for Outstanding Service. I have been a member since 1987 and on the Board of Directors in 1991–1997. In 1995–1996 I served an 18-month term as President and was Vice President in 1993 and 1994. Critical to the research that has been the focus of my work, I cochaired the research committee with Ben Saunders in 1992 and 1993. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to coedit two special issues of *CM* and was honored to serve with Patti Toth as cochair of the First National Colloquium in June 1993 in Chicago and to chair of the Second National Colloquium in May 1994 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

One of the proudest moments of my career was when I was received APSAC's Research Career Achievement Award. While the award recognizes repeated, significant, and outstanding contributions to research on child maltreatment, the support of APSAC and APSAC colleagues deserves much credit for my success as a researcher. Indeed, APSAC has supported the contributions of many in our field today. I have been privileged to serve

APSAC and to work with so many smart and dedicated colleagues. I applaud APSAC for encouraging research and building a knowledge base for professional practice designed to help children and families affected by child abuse and neglect. APSAC provides important support for those working in the field, and I urge all professionals concerned about the issue of child abuse and neglect to support APSAC by becoming a member and working for the organization.

Deborah Daro, PhD, President, 1996–1997

Senior Fellow, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

When asked to describe the factors that went into establishing program evaluation as a “field of practice,” one scholar suggested three things were key—a set of instructional courses that could be offered to students outlining the underlying theories and skills needed to conduct evaluations, a professional society in which like-minded individuals could gather to share their experiences, and an academic journal that provided a peer-reviewed, written record of what was being accomplished as well as highlighted outstanding questions and concerns. Although child maltreatment as both a field of practice and a focal point of public policy predated APSAC by some 20 years, the new organization played a central role in solidifying the practice and the professional identity of those of us confronting child abuse. We were not just social workers, psychologists, physicians, or lawyers. We also were engaged in building a new area of practice and research, one which would improve the public and societal response to a serious threat to child well-being.

APSAC provided a forum where we could learn to do our work better. Since its inception, the organization has provided high-quality training through its symposia and advanced training institutes; it has built learning networks among those engaged in this work through its conferences, listserv, and state affiliate organizations; and it has fostered new thinking through its publications, including the *APSAC Handbook*, *APSAC Advisor*, and *Child Maltreatment*. On many fronts, APSAC serves as an important catalyst in better understanding the underlying causes of maltreatment, its consequences, and most importantly, how to mediate its impacts and reduce its incidence.

I have always considered membership in APSAC is being akin to voting—it is simply what you do if you want to be an active, informed citizen. I joined APSAC in 1988 because it was the price of admission to a field I was committed to shaping. By the time I became President in 1996, child abuse was a visible and salient public policy concern and APSAC membership topped 5,000. During my presidency, we promoted a bold goal for the organization—“10,000 by 2000” or “Bring a Friend to APSAC.” While we had good intentions in setting this numerical goal, we clearly lacked a viable implementation plan.

Today, APSAC faces more competition for a professional's "membership dollar" than it faced in the late 1990s. Those working in this field are often drawn to other interdisciplinary groups that target important but broader issues than child maltreatment—trauma for some, positive child development for others. One challenge APSAC faces is reminding those working with victims as well as those who focus on preventing maltreatment that we have more in common than we sometimes think. Strengthening the professional response to child abuse and neglect remains a function of skill development, shared experiences, and new learning. APSAC continues to be well-positioned to do all three. So, "10,000 by 2020" anyone?

Harry Elias, JD, President, 1997–1998

Judge of the San Diego Superior Court

APSAC has been a great organization that brings together parties from all fields who care about the welfare and safety of children. The mid- to late '90s was squarely in the midst of another "backlash" movement in the field of child abuse. APSAC was continuing to pursue best practices and try to provide additional education, through conferences or publications, to practitioners in the field.

Working with the Board was an exciting time for me. I was able to try and take what we discussed at meetings and conferences and bring these into the courtroom, both in criminal cases and, more importantly, child welfare cases. Even though some of us had been around for a while, the organization and exchange of ideas was exciting. I remember most the efforts to try to make APSAC more open and inviting. I developed a number of friendships that exist and are strong to this day.

Diane DePanfilis, PhD, MSW

President, 1998–1999

Professor and Associate Dean for Research
Director, Ruth H. Young Center for Families & Children
University of Maryland School of Social Work

I joined APSAC close to the beginning of its launch and am still a member because I firmly believe that every child and family affected by child maltreatment deserves the best possible professional response. APSAC has been at the cutting edge of establishing and promoting the best interdisciplinary practices, disseminating innovative research findings through its journal, *Child Maltreatment*, and providing training for professionals at all stages of their careers. As President, I particularly worked to increase APSAC's presence within CPS agencies—something that is still needed because this system affects more maltreated children and their families than any other service system. I also believe in the importance of bridging the gap between policy, practice, and research. By speaking to all of us through the *APSAC Advisor*, I do believe that we are all in a better position to collaboratively practice more effectively. Congratulations to the current leadership for this celebration of APSAC's birthday!!

Veronica Abney, PhD, President, 1999–2000

Private Practice, Santa Monica, California

When I think about APSAC, many, many memories arise—some good and some not so good. I really loved being part of APSAC. The 10 plus years of my involvement with the organization were probably the most exciting of my career. I learned so much about child abuse and about running a nonprofit organization. I think the memory that sticks out the most is the year that we had the first Colloquium's Cultural Institute. We were meeting in Miami where we did not know many professionals of color, which made it difficult to advertise on the level we may have liked. If I remember correctly, we needed 100 people to attend, and we did not think we were going to come close to that. Those of us on the cultural diversity committee wanted the larger organization to see the importance of cultural issues and that "if we build it, they will come."

The morning of the Cultural Institute, I was very anxious. I went down to the conference room where the Institute was being held. Participants were starting to arrive, and we soon had a long line of professionals wanting to register on site. I was amazed! We had to add chairs, and at some point there was standing room only. In short, the Cultural Institute was a tremendous success. Each year when I look at the Colloquium brochure and see that the Cultural Institute continues, I feel pleasantly surprised and proud.

Sandra Alexander, MEd, President, 2000–2001

Child Maltreatment Expert Consultant,
Division of Violence Prevention, U.S. Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta, Georgia

I was recently introduced by a colleague with "She knows everyone in the field of child maltreatment." While this is a tremendous exaggeration, it did make me think about how my network of professional colleagues and contacts has been greatly expanded due to my participation in APSAC over the years. Through APSAC, I have been able to meet, learn from, and work with most of the key contributors to child maltreatment prevention, intervention, and treatment work in the country. This has not only enhanced my knowledge but also facilitated access to experts for conference faculty and other professional endeavors over the years. APSAC's multidisciplinary focus and commitment to training for a diverse field of professionals has made a significant contribution to the field of child maltreatment. And although "match-making" is not listed in APSAC's mission, through my participation on the APSAC Board I had an opportunity to get better acquainted with someone I had previously known only casually as an "expert" in the field and a colleague of some of my friends. Now, we have been married for over 10 years.

I was APSAC President during what was probably one of the most difficult periods in APSAC's history. Within a very short period of time, the organization had to lay off staff, close the

Chicago office, and develop a plan for how to keep the organization alive and responsive to members while sorting out multiple financial issues and developing an organization and sustainability plan. This basically meant that a handful of extremely dedicated Board members stored files in their homes and offices and assumed the role of day-to-day operations of the organization in addition to their full-time jobs. That the organization came through this period and continued to get stronger over the next few years is due to the passion and commitment of those Board members and the support of many members who just refused to let it die. They brought the same dedication to “saving APSAC” as they brought to their work in child maltreatment.

Tony Mannarino, PhD, President, 2004–2005

Professor of Psychiatry and Vice Chair
Department of Psychiatry, Drexel University College of Medicine.
Director of the Center for Traumatic Stress, Allegheny General Hospital, Pennsylvania

Having been involved with APSAC from the very start of the organization, I have so many wonderful memories. First and foremost, most of the dear friends and colleagues that I have in the child trauma field have come through APSAC. Through the years, we have all participated together in meetings, dinners, and informal get-togethers, and these experiences have enriched my life in more ways than I could have ever imagined. Now that we are the “senior” group in APSAC, it is fun to look back and see how it all started.

I was President of APSAC during the years 2004–2005 and was on the Board for a total of 5 years. These were challenging times as APSAC’s financial situation was less than stellar, and we were faced with trying to right the ship. It was gratifying that we were able to do some things to improve the financial situation.

I believe that the greatest asset of APSAC is its true interdisciplinary nature. There is no other organization in our country dedicated to improving the lives of children and families affected by maltreatment, trauma, and violence that brings together professionals from the legal, medical, and mental health arenas the way that APSAC does. And APSAC does a wonderful job in promoting a deep respect between all of these groups that has ultimately contributed to major strides in the child maltreatment field.

Jordan Greenbaum, MD, President, 2006–2007

Medical Director, Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Georgia

What I remember most about being on the Executive Board of APSAC (2003–2008) is the sense of camaraderie. There we were—a group of professionals of all types, from all parts of the country, with all sorts of backgrounds—trying to work together to build the organization and to push it to the next level: lots of good ideas and very little money; lots of projects and very little

time to devote to them. It was a microcosm of our work in child maltreatment. But despite the challenges, we learned from each other and made good progress. As a team, we pulled APSAC through a crisis and came out the other side a bit battered, but stronger and better able to meet future challenges. The Bandy’s helped us to bring order to APSAC management and paved the way for major changes.

I’m proud to be a member of APSAC and truly believe the organization plays a critical role in the professional lives of those of us working in child maltreatment. A multidisciplinary organization is the natural leader of a multidisciplinary field. The more we learn from each other through APSAC activities, the better we’ll collaborate in the field.

Michael Haney, PhD, NCC, CISM, LMHC

President, 2008–2009
Executive Director, APSAC

The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children is one of the most outstanding groups of professionals that I’ve ever had the privilege and honor of participating with. I joined APSAC in 1995 and then was elected to the Board in 2005. I served two terms as Vice President and then a term as President for 2008 and 2009. More recently, I was overwhelmed by the Board’s support when they asked me to serve as Executive Director.

This organization has so much to offer and is made up of the finest individuals in the United States—all dedicated to serving children and, in particular, the professionals who serve children and their families. Serving as a Board member, President, and now Executive Director constantly reminds me of how this organization makes a difference in the lives of children. The quality individuals whom I’ve met and who have served on the Board have made an even greater impact on me as professional colleagues and much more as my friends.

About the Author

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