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## Clare County gets canine advocate to help child victims



Courtesy photo Trigger, a Golden Retriever, is the latest employee of the Northern Michigan Child Advocacy Center in Harrison. He is a canine advocate who will help child victims get through the court process.


By Susan Field, [sfield@michigannewspapers.com](mailto:sfield@michigannewspapers.com), [@sfield\\_msun](#) on Twitter

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Talking about crimes against them is a traumatic experience for children, and testifying in court is even more scary.

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Child advocates are there to help, and do their best to calm the fears of child victims, providing care and protection.

But sometimes, the best help can come in the form of a furry, soft friend who can't talk but can offer sympathetic eyes, kisses and comfort.

Child victims in Clare County now have a new way to cope with their fear and stress.

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Trigger, a Golden Retriever canine advocate, is the latest employee at the Northern Michigan Mobile Child Advocacy Center.

Trigger is part of a growing number of dogs across Michigan how have become canine advocates, working with prosecutors and other related agencies to help assist child victims moving through the emotionally wrenching process of participating in court proceedings, according to Bethany Law, executive director of the NMMCAC.

A canine advocate named Kindle, a Labrador Retriever whose pedigreed name is Picadilly's Unforgettable Fire, was called upon to help a young girl who was sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend get through the court process in Isabella County last year.

Trigger was purchased by the NMMCAC and the Clare County Prosecutor's Office.

"This is a great program and I am very happy that we were able to split the cost for Trigger with the advocacy center," Prosecutor Michelle Ambrozaitis said. "We see the emotional trauma that victims undergo as their day in court arrives and they have to testify.

"Trigger will help ease some of that emotional stress."

The Michigan Canine Advocacy Program was started in 2010 by Dan Cojanu, who spent decades working with children in Oakland County courts.

He started the program when he retired as a way to reach out to children and other victims of violent crime, to offer them comfort during the time they need it the most, Law said.

All of the canine advocates have undergone training as a guide through Leader Dogs for the Blind, but for different reasons they were unable to make it through that training program or could not be successfully paired with a partner.

Their training, however, makes them perfect for the canine advocacy program.

Leader Dogs for the Blind provide the dogs to the Michigan Canine Advocacy program for free.

The handler pays a fee for the dog and then provides for all of the costs associated with the animal.

Hollie Nash, program director and victim advocate at the NMMCAC, is glad to have Trigger on staff to help children feel more comfortable and help them feel at ease.

“Trigger will give children a positive to take away from a horrible situation,” Nash said.

Many businesses in the community have already come forward to help with Trigger’s care, and Law, Nash and Ambrozaitis are grateful for the assistance from Old 27 Veterinary Clinic, Johnston Elevator, and Doggy Dipity Dos.

Donations from the community to help with Trigger’s care are welcomed, and the link can be found at the NMMCAC website, [www.mikids.org](http://www.mikids.org).

Trigger also has a Facebook page, [triggernmmcac](#).

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