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**June 23, 2012**

**United Family Services**

**Response to Findings by the Jury in the Jerry Sandusky Child Sexual Abuse Case**

United Family Services is grateful that the jury in the Jerry Sandusky Child Sexual Abuse case has returned with a verdict that holds the former Penn State football coach accountable for the sexual and emotional exploitation of multiple child victims.

Sandusky, 68, was charged with 48 counts and accused of molesting and raping 10 boys over 15 years.

Sandusky was found guilty on 45 counts and faces the prospect of life in prison. He is expected to be sentenced in about 90 days.

The Sandusky case lays bare the grim reality of child sexual abuse. An estimated one in four girls, and one in six boys, will be sexually abused by their 18th birthday. Ninety percent of victims know their offenders, often times quite well but will remain silent, never disclosing their abuse. The causes for that silence are multiple and complex – the threat of future physical abuse, fear that others will dismiss or judge them, and fear disclosure will cause them to lose the love and affection of other family members may all play a role. Children who do have the courage to tell a trusted adult are too often met with disbelief or an unwillingness to act.

We should not underestimate how difficult and how vitally important it is to disclose abuse – even abuse that occurred in the distant past. Absent intervention, the trauma associated with child sexual abuse leaves long-lasting scars. Victims are more likely to develop anxiety, phobias or other major psychiatric disorders; engage in self-harming or risky behaviors, including cutting, anorexia or bulimia, or attempted suicide; and become dependent upon drugs or alcohol.

“It is our job as adults to protect the children around us, and we are mandated by North Carolina law to report suspected abuse,” said Amanda Wilson, Chief Strategy Officer with United Family Services.

The United Family Services 24-hour Rape Crisis Hotline number is 704 –375 – 9900.

In disclosing the abuse, victims take the first step toward breaking the cycle. Thankfully, this community stands prepared to support them on that journey. If the victim is still a minor, United Family Services’ Tree House Children’s Advocacy Center in Union County works in partnership with other community partners to offer a comprehensive, community- based response. The Tree House conducts a forensic interview with the child, and a medical evaluation in an appropriate, non-threatening setting. The Tree House then coordinates the subsequent crisis intervention, advocacy, counseling, and court support services.

While our Children’s Advocacy Center is in Union County, United Family Services provides advocacy, court accompaniment, and trauma-informed counseling in all of our offices.

Adult survivors of child sexual abuse can also find support. Agencies like United Family Services offer trauma focused counseling and advocacy, working alongside survivors as they develop the coping skills necessary to rebuild lives of dignity and strength. Appropriate therapeutic intervention cannot erase an abusive past, but it can help a person understand that the abuse does not define them. That knowledge – whenever gained – empowers survivors to move forward with hope and healing.

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United Family Services assists more than 25,000 people annually throughout our geographic footprint that includes Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, South Iredell and Union Counties. We also reach thousands more through our educational and prevention programs as well as institutional advocacy efforts.

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