



# WISCONSIN FAMILY TIES

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## **Trauma-Informed Care is the Opposite of Abuse Statements from Lincoln Hills Staff Reveal Misconceptions**

Madison, WI – According to news reports, the Wisconsin Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are investigating a long list of alleged crimes by staff against juvenile residents at the Lincoln Hills School for Boys, including child abuse, second-degree sexual assault, child neglect, abuse of inmates, strangulation and suffocation, intimidation of victims, and use of pepper spray to cause bodily harm. Since the vast majority of juvenile residents come to Lincoln Hills having already experienced significant adversity in their lives, these alleged crimes represent re-traumatization for young people who were already at immense risk. Recently-published statements from current and former Lincoln Hills staff have revealed deep misconceptions regarding trauma-informed perspectives and practices at their facility.

From 2012 to 2014, Wisconsin Family Ties partnered with the Division of Juvenile Corrections and the Department of Health Services on a grant-supported initiative to increase family involvement and incorporate trauma-informed principles and interventions at Lincoln Hills School. The need was evident, as a majority of youth at the facility had backgrounds that included elements of severe neglect, abandonment, physical abuse, sexual abuse, witnessing violence, and disruption of family and community ties. Trauma-informed care brings an understanding of the extreme reactions that grow out of such trauma histories, which can be exacerbated by the challenges of detention, and how to minimize and de-escalate such reactions. There is considerable research evidence that in a system-wide and comprehensive implementation, trauma-informed care increases safety and trust for both juveniles and staff.

Unfortunately, as revealed by staff comments that seek to make trauma-informed care a scapegoat for the abuses now under investigation, resistance to change and new perspectives runs deep.

“Let’s keep in mind that we’re talking about allegations of abuses that include sexual assault and strangulation,” cautioned Hugh Davis, executive director of Wisconsin Family Ties. “Blaming trauma-informed care for perpetrating additional trauma defies all common sense.”

“Perhaps,” Davis continued, “there should be some consideration of a concern revealed within the grant reports, that some staff were not open to the trauma-informed care approach, and that the training was far from universal, resulting in misunderstanding and misinformation.”

Amid the uncertainty and confidentiality of the ongoing investigation, a trauma-informed perspective would dictate that care for the young victims, and prevention of further abuses, must be the highest priority. Wisconsin Family Ties will continue to support trauma-informed initiatives across child-serving systems in Wisconsin.

*About Wisconsin Family Ties*

Wisconsin Family Ties, Wisconsin's family voice for children's mental health, is a statewide, parent-run nonprofit serving families that include children with social, emotional or behavioral challenges. Founded in 1987, its mission is to change lives by promoting children's mental health.

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