



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Child Forensic Interviews Boost Courtroom Success

Willow Tree Child Advocacy Center has reached a milestone of 1,000 child forensic interviews completed, providing key evidence in court and minimizing trauma to the child.

(Green Bay, Wis.) – After just three years of operation, Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center recently completed its 1,000th child forensic interview. This not only marks a milestone for Willow Tree; it also represents a significant change in the way child abuse cases are handled in Northeast Wisconsin.

Prior to having a Child Advocacy Center in our community, a child who disclosed abuse would have to tell their story multiple times to social workers, health care, law enforcement and other professionals involved in the case. With the opening of Willow Tree, a specially trained interviewer can now coordinate with all involved to provide one recorded account of the alleged abuse, in a child-friendly environment that helps to reduce trauma for the child.

“The child forensic interview is the first step into the investigation of a child abuse case,” says Susan Lockwood, Director of Willow Tree Child Advocacy Center. “The interview provides an unbiased, age-appropriate method of gathering statements from the child about the alleged abuse. The interviews are recorded and provided to law enforcement to be used as evidence if the child’s case goes to trial.”

With the number of child abuse reports on the rise in Brown County, the forensic interviews have had a significant impact on the criminal justice system and how cases are handled in court. The videos provide admissible evidence at a preliminary hearing so children no longer need to take the stand and testify.

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“The Child Advocacy Center has helped law enforcement agencies, and the District Attorney’s Office, keep children safe by minimizing the trauma incurred by victims and by holding more offenders accountable for their actions,” says Brown County District Attorney, David Lasee.

“Willow Tree’s credibility and professionalism in the field of forensic interviewing has translated to great success in the courtroom and a reduction in the number of cases that proceed to jury trial.”

In collaboration with local law enforcement and Child Protective Services, Willow Tree has served over 1,000 children since opening in January 2011. This includes advocacy, counseling and medical services for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, or other types of trauma. Of the 511 children served at the center in 2013, 337 (66%) were girls and 174 (34%) were boys. The most common case was child sexual abuse (65%), followed by physical abuse (16%), witness to violent crime (15%), and drug endangerment, child enticement, and neglect (4%). The average age of a child served at Willow Tree is 9, with the vast majority (84%) under the age of 13.

“Willow Tree has taken a leadership role in developing and fostering collaboration between agencies to continually improve our community’s response to child maltreatment,” Lasee says. “We’re creating a much more child friendly system and working together toward the best possible outcome for kids and families.”

Willow Tree is located at 503 South Monroe Avenue in downtown Green Bay. For more information, visit www.willowtreecac.org.

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FOR THE EDITOR

About Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center:

Willow Tree began operations on January 3, 2011, working with law enforcement, Brown County Child Protection Services and other community professionals to assist victims of child abuse. The center provides a refuge for abused children and their families to seek help and heal throughout the investigation and prosecution of their case. All components involved in child abuse cases, including the medical exam, forensic interview, victim advocacy, and ongoing therapy, are located within this one centralized facility to increase ease and comfort for the child.

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