

Dept. of Corrections, Hometown Heroes: Host first-ever camp reunite

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MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Corrections partnered with [Hometown Heroes](#) to host a week-long summer camp for children of women incarcerated at Taycheedah Correctional Institution. The camp incorporates a trauma-informed approach, enabling children to build resilience and spend time with other children who have incarcerated mothers.

First Lady Tonette Walker and Fostering Futures are leading the way in integrating Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) principles into state government. The DOC has taken on these transformative efforts by identifying different opportunities to implement TIC. TIC is built on the idea that by understanding, preventing and addressing adversity, toxic stress and trauma, individuals and organization build resilience, resulting in improved outcomes for both consumers and staff.

Thirty-eight children and 25 inmates took part in the camp, which took place June 24 – 30. The campers stayed at Turning Rivers, a Department of Natural Resources-owned property in the Kettle Moraine State Forest. Turning Rivers includes a number of activities for campers, including swimming, dance, arts and crafts, archery, kayaking, fishing, and climbing. The children also participated in two half-day visits to Taycheedah Correctional Institution to spend time with their mothers, allowing them to spend time as a family.

An estimated [5 million children](#) nationally, including 88,000 children in Wisconsin, have had at least one incarcerated parent. Prior to Camp Reunite, 25% of the campers had never visited their parent at Taycheedah Correctional Institution. By helping campers cope more effectively with their parent's incarceration, DOC's hope is for them to increase their resilience and maintain their success in the community, avoiding the path that led to their mother's incarceration.

DOC Secretary Cathy Jess said: "From the moment an inmate steps into one of our facilities, our focus is on providing pathways that enable them to succeed in the community. As many incarcerated women have children, we recognize that maintaining a bond between mother and child is critical for the inmate's eventual release to the community. This camp is an innovative approach which benefits both mother and child, with the hope that both will lead crime-free lives in the community."

Camp Reunite Co-Founder Neil Willenson said: "For many of the children, Camp Reunite was the first place they could speak openly about having an incarcerated mother, as many children experience stigma and shame regarding their parent's incarceration. Camp Reunite cannot change the fact that these children have an incarcerated parent, but we can instill resiliency, coping, and conflict resolution skills that can positively affect their lives for decades to come. "