

First Lady Walker: Visits Camp Reunite

Posted on Wednesday, Jun 27, 2018

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MADISON – First Lady Tonette Walker with Elizabeth Hudson, Director of the Office of Children’s Mental Health, visited Camp Reunite today to see Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) in action. The camp brings children who have incarcerated mothers together for a trauma-informed summer camp where mothers and children reunite for the afternoon. “Reunite” in the camp’s title, references that not only will the kids experience an enriched sleep-away camp, but will also have one day when the children are “reunited” with their mothers for a shared positive experience.

“When I was introduced to the concept of Camp Reunite and the way they were intentionally embedding TIC values – Trust, Safety, Choice, Empowerment, Collaboration – I knew they were spot on,” said Mrs. Walker. “By understanding more about someone’s experiences, we are better able to provide healing and build resilience – that’s what Camp Reunite is doing for these kids. It’s the approach I would like to bring to every corner of Wisconsin.”

Camp Hometown Heroes created Camp Reunite with the awareness that these children would likely need additional support in a camp setting and, like all children, could benefit from the chance to explore nature, make new friends, and experience outdoor challenges surrounded by other children with the shared background of having a mother who is incarcerated.

“Statistically, children who have incarcerated parents have higher Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). In fact, these children are likely to report, as adults, having experienced at least 4 additional ACEs,”* reported Elizabeth Hudson who provided guidance during the initial design of the project.

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections and Taycheedah Correctional Institution Warden Sarah Cooper gave tremendous support to Camp Reunite to help reunite the parents and kids and give them time together to share a meal or play games.

First Lady Walker has been a leading advocate for Trauma-Informed Care at the state and national level for several years. The First Lady and Fostering Futures have worked together to implement TIC in nine Wisconsin state agencies, 20 county human service systems, two tribal nations, one medical college department, and one nonprofit. On the national level, the First Lady encouraged the passage of House Resolution 443 and helped create the House of Representatives Trauma-Informed Care Caucus. She also aided in the passage of Senate Resolution 346 which recognizes May as Trauma-Informed Care Month and May 22nd as Trauma-Informed Care Day.

*ACEs in WI: 2011-2015 BRFSS Findings