



CHAMPIONS OF TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

Linda Davis



Linda Davis has been a champion of children’s rights for many years, and she has provided generous financial support to fund training and development of trauma informed care at St. Aemilian-Lakeside and its subsidiary, Integrated Family Services.

Linda has served on myriad government and private panels regarding improvements in the child welfare system and foster care, poverty prevention, early childhood education, health care and similar issues of concern to children and families in Wisconsin. Her passionate efforts in defense of vulnerable populations have garnered her many awards, from entities as diverse as the Wisconsin County Human Services Association to the Milwaukee Business Journal and Milwaukee Magazine. This Mequon mother of two and grandmother of one says she has devoted more than two decades of her life to such endeavors because, “children have no other voice but the adults who have often let them down. Since children do not vote or pay taxes, they have no lobbyist other than those who care so much for them. Working with vulnerable populations is something everyone can participate in and make a difference.” Linda says trauma informed care is so important because it is logical and supported by empirical data. “For those of us who have been victims, trauma informed care gives us another tool to go from victim to survivor to someone who thrives in the world.”

Rhonda Howard

Rhonda Howard is a treatment foster care mother who has embraced trauma informed care and helped her foster daughter achieve astonishing results. Although Rhonda had experience with children as a day care worker for about 15 years and prided herself on understanding children, she was not prepared for what happened when, at age 44, she decided to bring a treatment foster child into her home. She thought that if she showed enough love everything would be all right. But this 9-year-old



girl had suffered severe abuse, and she acted out violently – and regularly. That was a year ago. Now, with Rhonda’s nurturing and through a variety of sensory interventions she learned and regularly practices, the girl has gone from having about 60 episodes a month to none last month. Rhonda says she learned that what the girl was experiencing was rooted in her prior trauma and in fear. She says that she is amazed at the simplicity of the rhythmic and repetitive techniques she was taught and how they helped her foster daughter. Her hope is to continue to learn and grow, and to help other parents realize that “these simple things really work! And if we can make a difference in just one child’s life, and keep them out of residential treatment, that’s success.”



A non-profit subsidiary of St. Aemilian-Lakeside, working to support the dreams of Milwaukee Child Welfare



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Lisa Roberts and Jesse Mireles



Lisa Roberts and Jesús (Jesse) Mireles work for the Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services. He is the Children and Family Division Human Services Manager and she is the Permanency Services Unit Supervisor. Jesse is a Racine native who has a degree in sociology and more than 30 years of experience in social work, with almost 25 of those in management. He has a background in community advocacy and has worked with numerous community partners including the Waukesha County Juvenile Court, school districts, community-based organizations, other counties, tribes and the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Lisa's degrees are in psychology, and she has been a licensed professional counselor for more than 15 years. In 1997, she began her work at Waukesha County as a crisis therapist in the outpatient mental health clinic, later coordinating the Children's Mental Health Outreach Program. For the past eight years, she has been in her current position, and she continues to provide after hours on-call crisis therapy services through the Mental Health Association in Waukesha County on the weekends.

Jesse and Lisa are the driving force behind an endeavor called the Trauma Informed Care Partnership of Waukesha County. The group now includes more than 50 different public and private organizations that employ trauma informed care in their work. Participants meet bimonthly to share information, support and training opportunities, with a goal of creating a trauma informed system of care. As this unique and exciting group moves forward, more people are coming to the table to learn more about trauma informed care, network, and help foster a philosophical and perspective shift on its overall value to individuals, families and to the community.

Paul and Stacie Nikolaus

Paul and Stacie Nikolaus of West Allis have been treatment foster parents through St. Aemilian-Lakeside for 15 years, serving 25 children with severe emotional and behavioral challenges. They currently share their home with two teen-age boys, both of whom have suffered substantial trauma, and their 10-year-old biological daughter. They say that the training they received on trauma informed care has greatly helped them get a better understanding of their treatment foster children, and it has resulted in dramatic changes in the boys' behavior and lives. Paul and Stacie are both from large families and always wanted to take in foster children. Stacie notes there are struggles and challenges, adding, "All in all, we are better people because of those challenges." Stacie and Paul are still in contact with almost all of the children they have fostered over the years and say it would be hard for them to think about not having foster kids in their home. "We're helping them, and sometimes I feel we're the ones rewarded more. Our home will always be open to foster kids."

