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DONOR **IMPACT** REPORT

Protect. Heal. Care.



Willow Tree

Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center

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WORKING TOGETHER TO PUT CHILDREN FIRST

When a child is being abused or neglected, the investigation involves more than just law enforcement. It requires a team of professionals all working together to keep that child safe. This is called the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT), and it is the foundation of any successful Child Advocacy Center (CAC).

For more than 10 years, Willow Tree has provided a safe, home-like environment where children can disclose abuse and begin to heal. All involved members of the MDT are able to gather all of the necessary information at the same time, and the child only has to tell their story once to a specially trained child forensic interviewer. Questions are asked in way that does not lead or retraumatize the child, and the child can also receive a medical evaluation, counseling, and ongoing advocacy services.

With your support, each child can find the support to lift a heavy weight from their shoulders and look forward to a bright future!



A community partnership to
Protect, Heal, and Care for children
who experience abuse & neglect.

728
children
served last year

15+
partnering
agencies





TEAMING UP FOR BRIGHT FUTURES

*Kristie Sickel, Willow Tree Program Manager &
Child Forensic Interviewer*

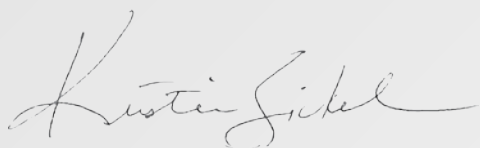
Another year has come and gone, and in that time Willow Tree was able to Protect, Heal and Care for 728 children. As we continue to move towards normalcy and a return to pre-pandemic levels of care, I can't help but reflect on the teamwork that not only made our work possible but resulted in a better experience for kids.

I think of the children who have continued to come back for therapy, and what a privilege it has been to see them move forward emotionally and physically with their support system by their side. I think of the kids that I interviewed who overcame tough emotions to feel the weight lift off their shoulders as they told me about a secret that had sometimes been kept for years. I think of Child Protective Services making arrangements for these children to be safe, while ensuring their basic needs are met.

I think of the 12-year-old-girl who was worried that she was pregnant, and the relief she felt after being told during her medical evaluation that she was not and that everything was ok with her body. I think of the 4-year-old boy who wanted to sit on his advocate's lap because he felt comforted by her. I think of the Sensitive Crimes Detectives telling children they are believed, while working day-in and day-out to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for what they did. I think about the little kids who have held my hand as I walked them back to the interview room, reassuring them that everything will be ok. I think of advocates listening to parents helping them understand the investigation and providing them with supportive services to move forward. And lastly, I think of all the children who have bravely told their story at Willow Tree - children who are now free from abuse and moving towards a brighter tomorrow.

Willow Tree could not have helped all of these children and their families without the dedication and support of our community partners or our dedicated supporters in the community.

You help children to be heard and believed. Thank you!



A young girl with curly hair is standing in a field of tall grass, holding a colorful pinwheel. She is wearing a blue denim dress with red stars and ruffles. The background is a textured blue wall.

MOTIVATION

An estimated 1 in 7* children are
abused each year. You help them
heal & become safe.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>

EMILY'S STORY

YOU EMPOWERED HER TO TELL WHEN READY

Emily* had just turned 4 years old.

She held her mom's hand as she came to Willow Tree to talk about an incident involving her dad, who no longer lived with them. From the moment they arrived, our team's main goal was to find out what had happened to keep Emily safe.

Emily drew pictures in the interview room with Kristie, her child forensic interviewer.

They colored and talked, and Kristie asked Emily to tell her why she was at Willow Tree. Emily's answers were short and in simple terms. She told Kristie that she had seen her dad with "no clothes on" and said that dad had taken a bath with her, but she wasn't able to expand further.

Investigators determined that Emily's statement was concerning enough to temporarily suspend visits with her father as the investigation continued. Before Emily and her mom left, their advocate helped connect them with a therapist closer to their home so Emily could get help processing everything.

Nearly a year later, the detective assigned to Emily's case contacted Willow Tree to report that Emily was now disclosing more details.

Emily came back to Willow Tree and when she did, she had her same advocate, her same detective, and her same forensic interviewer.

Once again Emily and Kristie colored while they talked. She was 5 now, and her language was a bit more advanced. She told Kristie about touching that happened to her body, to dad's body, and about him showing her a movie of "girls' and boys' private parts." She was very brave and matter-of-fact.

Emily's detective used the information to question Emily's father, who confessed to everything.

Thanks to your support, Emily was able to disclose the full story when she was ready and capable of doing so. She is no longer being abused and she and her mom are moving forward toward a bright future!

*client name changed for confidentiality

100%

of parents and caregivers surveyed said their **child felt safe** at Willow Tree.



MIA'S STORY

YOU HELPED MIA PUT HER NEEDS FIRST

7-year-old Mia* was very protective of her mother.

Mia's mom had a long history of drug use, and she often left Mia with different relatives or other people for long periods of time. Child Protective Services became involved and an interview and medical evaluation were scheduled for Mia at Willow Tree to make sure she was being taken care of.

Mia had a hard time sitting still in our lobby and talked a mile a minute.

She was skinny, had a short attention span, and did not look well taken care of. Her assigned advocate, Samantha, spent time helping her get comfortable.

During the interview, Mia often tried to minimize her mother's actions and drug use. This is common in cases of neglect. She talked about how her and her mom would sometimes sleep in a car at the park or in a parking lot. Next, Mia walked down the hall to see one of our nurse practitioners from Children's Wisconsin, who found that Mia had missed several well-child exams and needed dental care.

While Mia received services, Samantha gathered items from our donation closet. She picked out new clothes, shoes, hygiene supplies, and head bands for Mia to wear. Samantha also talked to Mia's case worker about scheduling counseling for Mia at Willow Tree, to help her work through some of the emotions and behaviors she was struggling with.

Mia's case worker reviewed the information that was gathered and decided it would be best for Mia to be placed outside of her mom's care.

It was a tough road at first, but every person who has cared for Mia since that day has worked together so that Mia could keep coming back for counseling: her relatives, her foster mom, her school, her case worker, and her advocate, Samantha.

Everyone is noticing a positive change in Mia as she bravely works through her emotions and past experiences with her therapist. She's calmer, she is happy, and the signs of neglect that were once so apparent are slowly fading.

Mia's true self is shining through and, thanks to you, she continues to discover just how strong, worthy, and capable she is!

*client name changed for confidentiality

Of the children
receiving therapy
at Willow Tree,

85%

demonstrated
signs of
healing.

Physical Abuse
was a presenting
concern for

20%

of the children
you helped
last year.



CARTER'S STORY

YOU SUPPORT SAFE CHILDHOODS

What happens when a child is too young to tell us if abuse has occurred? At Willow Tree, our staff and our partners have a plan in place to get to the bottom of what happened.

Carter* was 6 months old when doctors alerted the authorities to their concerns that he may have been physically abused.

He had been brought to the hospital with bruising on his face. It was minor but not easily explained, which was a red flag. Additional imaging found that Carter also had four internal rib fractures that were healing.

Law enforcement and Child Protective Services immediately began working together on a joint investigation. They talked to Carter's parents and found that there were two older siblings also living in the home. Both kids were said to be present when Carter was injured, so the team arranged for the children to be interviewed at Willow Tree since their baby brother couldn't be.

One at a time, Carter's siblings spoke to a child forensic interviewer. This gave them a safe space to talk, away from their parents, to reduce any fears of getting into trouble. The younger of the siblings, who was just 2 years old, was also able to get a medical evaluation at Willow Tree to check on his safety. He did not have any injuries.

The siblings were so brave. Although their interviews didn't reveal the cause of Carter's injuries, they did help the team obtain a timeline for when Carter's injuries occurred and who was caring for him at the time.

Based on the information gathered at Willow Tree, Child Protection determined the best course of action was safety planning and education. They continue to check in on the family and connected the parents to outside help to prevent future injuries.

Thanks to you, Carter and his siblings are being carefully watched over and their parents are accepting of the help they need to know how to provide a safe and nurturing home.

**client name changed for confidentiality*

IMPACT









The background of the entire page is a photograph of two children, a girl and a boy, standing in a field and holding hands. They are silhouetted against a bright, hazy sky at sunset or sunrise, with warm orange and yellow light. The girl is on the left, and the boy is on the right. The overall mood is hopeful and resilient.

By helping children heal,
we begin to break the cycles of trauma
& abuse that exist in our
community.

Empowering Personal Growth & Healing

Your support gave more than 500 children the opportunity to be heard and believed with a child forensic interview at Willow Tree this past year. This was a 20% increase over the number of children interviewed during the height of the pandemic.

We credit this increase to the fact that more children continue to be reconnected with the trusted adults in their lives, such as teachers, social workers, extended family members, mentors and more. These connections open the door to child disclosures of sexual or physical abuse, neglect or other concerns within the home. These trusted adults also play a crucial role in spotting the warning signs of abuse in children who do not disclose.

 <p>551 CHILD FORENSIC INTERVIEWS</p> <p>were completed at the CAC in collaboration with the MDT.</p>	 <p>6-7 YEARS OF AGE</p> <p>was the age seen most among children served in 2021.</p>	 <p>263 MEDICAL EVALUATIONS</p> <p>with our nurse practitioners from Children's Wisconsin.</p>	 <p>95% OF REPORTED OFFENDERS</p> <p>were known to the child, including 262 parents or guardians.</p>
 <p>67% OF CHILDREN INTERVIEWED</p> <p>live in Brown County. The rest live in nearby counties or out of state.</p>	 <p>345 SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS</p> <p>were served. Sexual abuse was the No. 1 issue reported.</p>	 <p>317 GENEROUS SUPPORTERS</p> <p>gave children the help they need to build a bright future.</p>	 <p>57 CHILDREN IN THERAPY</p> <p>gained skills to help them process and heal from their trauma.</p>

Serving the Youngest Victims

Over the past few years, we've seen the average age of the children we serve continue to go down. This is largely due to the fact that more children under the age of 5 are being brought to Willow Tree. In 2021, your support helped 45 of these youngest victims.

While the numbers and ages of the children are disheartening, we believe that this trend may be due in part to our prevention education efforts starting in Kindergarten. The earlier a child is taught what unsafe touches are and who to tell if someone is hurting them, the sooner we can help that child become safe.

At Willow Tree, our child forensic interviewers are specially trained to interview children as young as 3 years old in a way that is developmentally appropriate. The child can also be medically evaluated by one of our nurse practitioners from Children's Wisconsin to document any signs of abuse. If the child has older siblings, we can interview them as well to gather corroborating evidence and find out if any other children in the home are being harmed. All of these factors can contribute to a stronger criminal case, if the case goes to court.

It is thanks to you and your support that more children under age 5 are being heard, believed, and their abusers held accountable!



A Model Example

When the beginnings of the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) first assembled in Brown County in 2007, we worked together to create a set of protocols that would apply to all cases involving child maltreatment. Our goal was to reduce the trauma a child would experience through an investigation and provide them with support and resources to heal.

Today, more than 90%* of cases involving substantiated reports of child sexual abuse in Brown County utilize our services at Willow Tree. This success has led to agencies in other surrounding counties modeling their own protocols after ours. Many of them are utilizing our services at Willow Tree.

In 2021, Door County became the latest to develop a response specifically for survivors of sexual violence, including childhood sexual abuse. In all cases where sexual abuse is reported, children will now have an advocate present for support. If a child is 12 or under, an interview will be scheduled for them at Willow Tree with the option to also receive a medical evaluation while they are here.

Trainings for this protocol started in 2022. We are proud to share that law enforcement officers in Door County completed their initial training in April and are partnering with Willow Tree and our sister program, the Sexual Assault Center of Family Services, to make sure that child victims know they are believed, they are brave, and they will have help to heal!

**According to the most recent data collected in 2017 across all Brown County jurisdictions.*



Prevention Added to Core Curriculum

Research has shown that children who receive child abuse prevention lessons are less likely to be abused. Perpetrators often seek out young children who do not have the knowledge or understanding that what is happening to them is wrong. By teaching children what abuse is, when and how to say no, and who to tell if someone is hurting them, they become safer against perpetrators.

In the spring of 2021, conversations began about making our child abuse prevention presentations required for grades K-5 in Green Bay Area Public Schools (GBAPS). District officials wanted to make sure that starting in Kindergarten, all children would have access to the same developmentally appropriate information.

Throughout the summer, a team was created to vet the educational materials. The partnership was finalized in time for the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

By working together to add Prevention Education lessons in GBAPS, we have ensured that all students in the district will have access to important body safety information and an understanding of good vs. bad secrets. More than 4,500 children received these lessons last year, and we anticipate even more will benefit in 2022 thanks to your support of Willow Tree!

SPECIAL THANKS TO

*Green Bay Public
School District*



PREVENTION TESTIMONIAL: EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO TELL

"From my own experiences at Danz, in addition to what other counselors have shared, there have been instances in which students have disclosed abuse following the prevention education presentation by Willow Tree. Students have shared that they felt comfortable doing so because of what they learned and heard in the prevention lesson.

This past year, I had a student who disclosed right after the prevention lesson. She was very anxious about the next steps and the interviewing process. She recognized Becca when she went in for her interview at Willow Tree and shared that this alleviated some of the anxiety she was having. She felt better seeing that there was an adult she knew and recognized working in that building."

Jennifer Brooks,
Danz Elementary School Counselor

SUPPORTERS



Your support empowers children
to disclose abuse and neglect.

YOU help them see the
hero that lies within!

\$25,000+

Associated Bank on
behalf of Lois Grace
Golde & Philip B. Flynn
Cornerstone Foundation
of Northeastern
Wisconsin

\$10,000 - \$24,999

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Dance, Inc.
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\$5,000 - \$9,999

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Perren
WPS Health Insurance

\$2,500 - \$4,999

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\$500 - \$999

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Medicine Specialists of
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Resar
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Kaari Truttmann
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MDT PARTNER TESTIMONIAL: HELPING CHILDREN & FAMILIES HEAL

"Not only do children experience trauma when victimized, but so do their protective family members and caregivers. These caregivers all frequently experience apprehension and concern on how to proceed with the next steps of providing proper care for the child's needs through the course of an investigation.

WillowTree is an important team member for law enforcement. It provides a neutral, child-safe environment that alleviates these concerns through comprehensive services of listening to the child's experience, attending to the child's medical needs, mental health, and ongoing victim advocacy. These services are invaluable to law enforcement, as it allows us to focus on conducting an appropriate investigation."

**Detective Sgt. Matt Guth,
De Pere Police Department**

\$1 - \$249 (Cont'd)

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Philip B. Flynn
Dawn & Hal Goodman
Fredric & Barbara
Gromacki
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Hammerbeck
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Christine Woleske
Ashley Wolfgram
Michael Wozniak,
In Memory of
Dorothy Wozniak
Cherie Yenchsky
Shanna Zeitler

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR MDT PARTNERS

The multi-disciplinary team is comprised of representatives from a wide range of disciplines and agencies within our community. Thank you for helping us Protect, Heal, and Care for children!

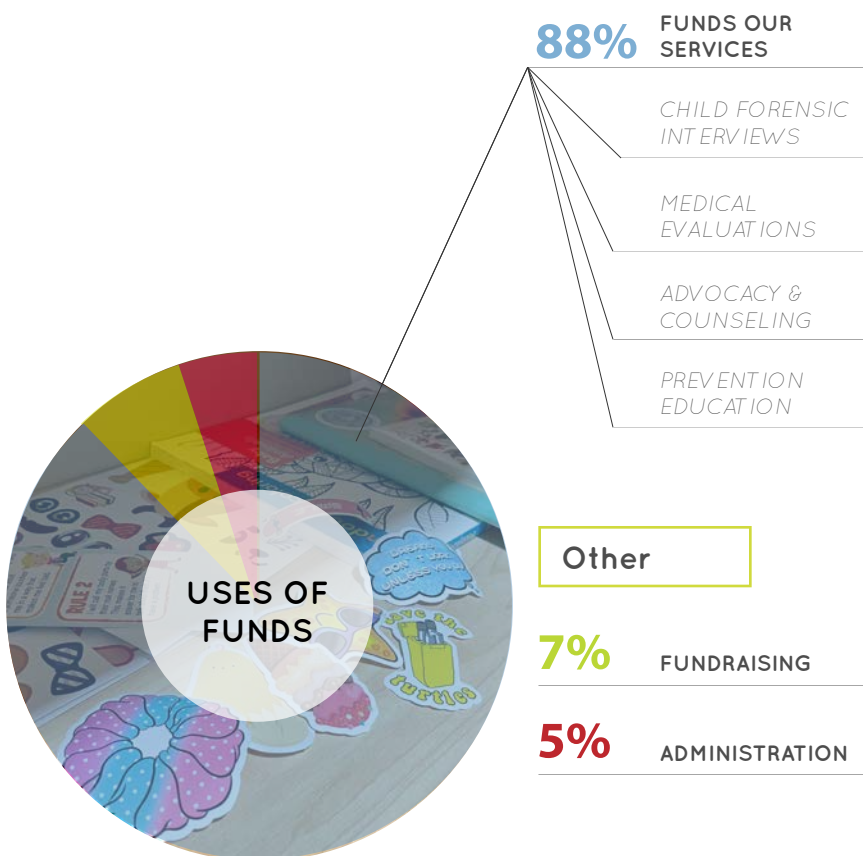
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As a program of Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Willow Tree relies on the generosity of our community and funding through various grants and government contracts to keep our services for children thriving!

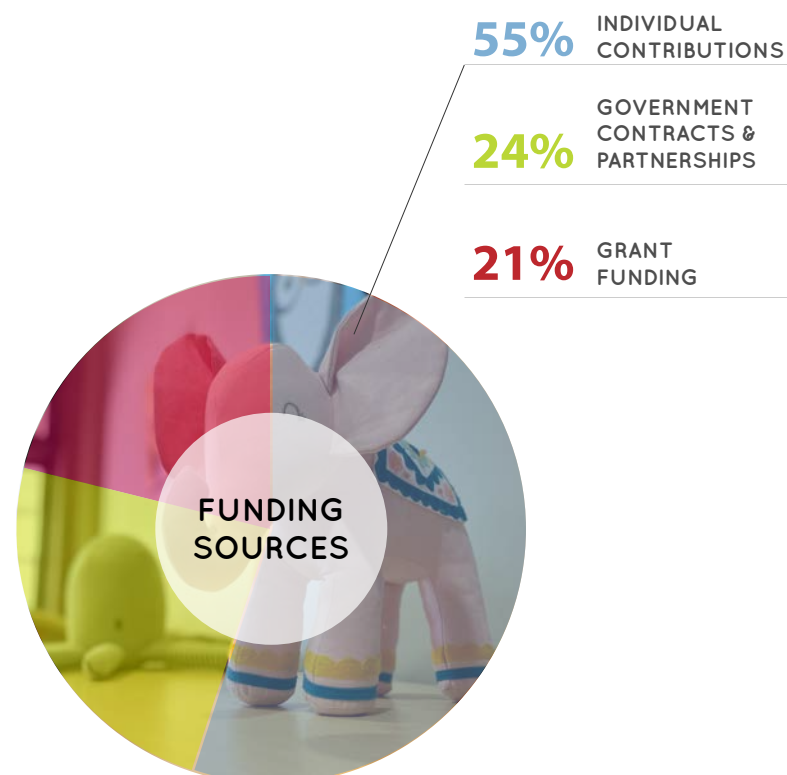
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Generous contributions from individual donors like YOU

account for more than 50% of Willow Tree's funding.

Thank you for supporting our Mission!



LETTER FROM THE CEO: CELEBRATING EVERY CHILD SERVED

Lois Mischler, President & CEO



When I see the number – 728 children seen at Willow Tree in one year, it can feel sad and overwhelming. I am angry that all children are not always safe from harm and all children do not have access to unconditional love and a trusted adult. However, beyond those feelings, I also am able to celebrate that 728 children were able to get help at Willow Tree.

I celebrate the tremendous courage of these children, who bravely talk about what happened to them. I celebrate a community response that works to make each child's disclosure affirming and healing for them. I celebrate each child being told that we believe them and will protect them – messages that will be part of the child's forever memory of this event. I celebrate community partners who prioritize children's comfort over efficiency. I celebrate the generosity of a community that supports these children, every day, by fostering and encouraging a life that is filled with the knowledge that they were believed, felt safe, and that their courage was recognized.

As I look forward it is through a lens of inspiration and gratitude. I am inspired by every child who walks through the doors of Willow Tree and by each professional that walks in beside them. I am inspired by the young lives that are changed for the better because of this compassionate, child-centric approach that promotes healing.

Finally, I am grateful for all of you and your support of the children and families that come to Willow Tree.

It is because of you that children have the opportunity to be heard, believed, and helped to heal at Willow Tree. Thank you!

To bright futures for every child,





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* Commenced service during 2021

† Stepped down from service during 2021

†† Stepped down from service during 2022

Together we can

put a stop to child abuse

and neglect.

DONATE. ADVOCATE. EDUCATE.

Each year, more than 500 children from across Northeast Wisconsin are interviewed at Willow Tree about allegations of abuse, neglect or other maltreatment. This would not be possible without the generous support of people like you in our community. For more ways to get involved and help power our mission to Protect, Heal, and Care for children please visit www.familyservicesnew.org/willow-tree.

Every effort was made to ensure the accuracy of this annual report. To report errors or omissions, please contact Cara Gosse, Vice President of Philanthropy & Communication, at cgosse@familyservicesnew.org or (920) 436-4360 x 1332.



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