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Caregiver

The firm's clients in Lake, Porter and four other counties primarily are those with mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism and epilepsy.

Grulke said the caregiver charged with molesting a 20-year-old man with Down syndrome was suspended July 16 – the day InPact learned of the allegation – and was fired Aug. 31 – the date InPact was informed of the results of the police investigation.

The caregiver, Michael Ritchie, 57, of 931 Hampton Court, Valparaiso, is charged with criminal deviate conduct and sexual battery. He is set to make his initial court appearance on the felony charges today in front of Porter Circuit Court Judge Mary Harper. If convicted of the charges, Ritchie faces up to 23 years in prison.

Grulke said InPact does background checks but those checks don't catch those with no prior criminal convictions for sex crimes, such as Ritchie. There were uncharged allegations that Ritchie engaged in inappropriate behavior at two area school systems that previously employed him, but such allegations would not appear on a background check. And Grulke said when one organization calls another to check references, prior employers can face liability if they report anything beyond a person's job title and dates of employment.

"It's hard to pry this information out ... unless there's a criminal conviction," Grulke said.

Grulke said InPact is licensed and regulated by the state Board of Health, and he said employees are trained that if an alle-

gation against a co-worker surfaces, they are as guilty as the offender if they fail to report it. In the case of Ritchie, the reported victim stated he told an employee and she told him to sit on a couch.

"We're trying to track that one down ourselves," Grulke said.

"We have a lot of stones to turn over in the next week."

Grulke said InPact is re-evaluating its policies and looking at possible changes.

Ritchie was charged with engaging in sex acts with a 20-year-old man with Down syndrome at an InPact Inc. home in Valparaiso. The charges came after a family member of the resident reported the alleged abuse. Grulke said many families are involved and that serves as an additional line of defense for the clients.

Police said their investigation showed Ritchie had a Web site with photo albums of small boys, many wearing only underwear or swimsuits. Porter County police said they uncovered numerous reports in which Ritchie was accused of molesting young boys with learning disabilities, including one report made to Valparaiso police and two made to Indiana State Police.

Police said they asked Ritchie about the allegations and he told them he resigned from his job as a teacher in Lake Village after being accused of groping a boy and left Lake Central School Corp. after he was accused of inappropriately touching a child there. He told police he also may have fondled his stepson while drunk.

After news of the charges was published, a Hobart woman told police in Lake and Porter counties that she believes Ritchie molested her mentally challenged 13-year-old son at an InPact group home in Crown Point.