



PHOTO PROVIDED
Michael Ritchie

CHILDREN IN PERIL

Part 1: Violation of TRUST

Man faced myriad sexual misconduct allegations in decades-long career working with children



JOHN J. WATKINS, THE TIMES

Hobart resident Michele Bates' teenage son was allegedly sexually molested while living in a residential facility in Crown Point.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of two stories that resulted from a Times investigation into Michael Ritchie, a former region man who has worked with developmentally disabled children under a cloud of allegations pertaining to inappropriate relationships with the youth he was entrusted with serving. He has not been criminally convicted. The second story will run Monday.

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Michael Ritchie has been entrusted with the care of hundreds of children in his decades-long career.

The 61-year-old has worked as a teacher, Special Olympics coach, scoutmaster with the Boy Scouts, basketball coach, chess club sponsor and employee at a facility for developmentally disabled people, according to employment, court and police records obtained by The Times.

Where Ritchie has gone, allegations of

misconduct have followed.

Yet Ritchie has never been convicted of a crime, is not a registered sex offender and still has a valid teaching license, according to police and Indiana Department of Education records.

He's resigned from at least two local school districts amid accusations of inappropriately touching children, police and court records show. He also ran a website dedicated to pictures of young boys and has admitted having romantic fantasies about them, according to court records.

In-Pact Inc. recently reached a \$1.1 million settlement in a civil lawsuit stemming from allegations over Ritchie's conduct with boys while he was an employee at its facilities, Lake County Superior Court records show. In-Pact is a nonprofit organization that provides services to people with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Names withheld

Michele Bates gave permission for her full name to be used. Her son's name was withheld because The Times typically does not identify victims of sexual crimes. Other victims and victims' family members were not named in this report because they could not be reached for comment.

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