

WINTER HAVEN POLICE

125 N. Lake Silver Dr., NW • Winter Haven, FL 33881 • Phone: 863-291-5858 • www.winterhavenpd.com

Date: August 13, 2014
Time: 10 A.M.
Contact: Jamie Brown – Public Information Officer
Office - (863) 295-5905 Cell – (863) 559-0449

WINTER HAVEN – A 28 year-old Winter Haven mother is behind bars this morning after she let her four young children walk almost a half-mile to a local park, leaving them alone while she went to a food bank. Ashley Richardson (Fairfax Ct. NE, Winter Haven) was booked into the Polk County Jail on four counts of Negligent Child Abuse w/o Bodily Harm.

On 8-12-14 at approximately noon, a Winter Haven Officer on routine patrol in the area of the Lake Maude Nature Park (1751 7th St., NE) spotted four small children (ages 8, twin 7 yr olds and a 6 yr old) playing in the park. She noticed there was not an adult in the immediate area, so the officer parked her marked patrol unit across the road from the park facing the area where the children were playing.

After sitting for a few minutes, the officer saw the children waving her over in their direction. She immediately went to see what the problem was and found the 8 year-old boy stuck in a swing designed for toddlers. His legs were caught between the seat divider and the child was becoming more and more upset. The officer attempted to free the child, but was unable to do so. She contacted the Winter Haven Fire Department and personnel came and took the swing off of the frame ultimately freeing the crying child. The officer attempted to locate an adult, with no success. She quizzed the children and they initially were unable to say where they lived.

After fire department personnel left the area, the officer continued to watch for an adult. The children started playing again, ending up close to the roadway, climbing on a five-foot tall concrete sign and playing in water along the lakefront. Fearing for their safety, the officer once again approached the children and quizzed them for their home address or family information. They ultimately gave their names and ages and said that they lived across Ave. T and they walked to the park by themselves, leaving their home “in the morning.” (At this point, more than two and a half hours had passed since the officer initially encountered the children.)

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The officer called for assistance and while waiting for another officer to arrive, an SUV pulled in. The oldest child indicated that was their mother (Richardson) in the vehicle. Richardson was taken into custody and transported to the Winter Haven Police Department to be interviewed and then booked into the Polk County Jail. She stated she didn't think it would take so long at the food bank. It is still unclear when the children left their home to walk to the park or where the food bank Richardson went to was located.

"Our officer had great concern for the safety of these children," said Chief Gary Hester. "She gave ample opportunity for an adult to come forward. For anyone to think it is okay to allow small children to walk almost a half mile alone across a heavily-travelled road, not to mention left in unsafe conditions, is criminal and will not be ignored."

