

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: August 15, 2025

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Executive Director, Department of Health and Human Services

Subject: A report from the Executive Director, Department of Health and Human Services, regarding the 2024 Credible Messenger Impact Report for the Children, Youth, and Family Services

File Type: Informational Report

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**REQUEST**

In May 2020, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) began offering training to community partners committed to performing youth interventionist work using a “Credible Messenger” framework. In October 2020, the department entered five purchase of service contracts with agencies selected to pilot this approach, with work beginning in May 2021. In 2023, the Credible Messengers (CM) were expanded into six agencies and seven teams, to include a crisis response team and a girl’s specific team.

The CMs continue to expand the work across the Community Violence Intervention strategies and increase collaboration through intentional efforts. The 2023 Impact Report was shared with the Milwaukee County Board under File 24-710 in September 2024. The purpose of this report is to share the results and outcomes from the 2024 Credible Messenger Impact report, which highlights the impact of this work across Milwaukee County.

**POLICY**

Milwaukee County Board Resolution	File No. 24-710
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**BACKGROUND**

Milwaukee County’s Credible Messenger effort (CM) launched in 2020 to promote public safety and supportive positive outcomes for Milwaukee youth who are in the justice system or are referred from community partners in need of additional support. The effort focuses specifically on impacting youth at all points of system involvement by coordination amongst various partners, including community-based organizations, public health entities, academic institutions, and government agencies. DHHS contracts with the following partners to implement this intervention:

- West Care Milwaukee
- 414Life
- Milwaukee Christian Center
- Running Rebels
- Youth Advocate Program
- Glow 414

The CM partner agencies work collectively to provide prevention and intervention with youth, keeping them from both entering the youth justice system or having deeper involvement with the justice system. They also support the youth to reduce desistence and recidivism and offer preventive education, along with positive youth engagement with a pro-social support system. Together, CM partners advance the following strategies:

- transformative mentorship
- community violence prevention & intervention,
- community engagement,
- youth advocacy,
- family involvement,
- resource coordination,
- partner collaboration, and
- system partnership

Other community-level contribution from the CM mentors include:

- Response to neighborhood/community-level trauma,
- Create positive youth engagement and community voice,
- Serve as change agent for racial equity and policy issues that plague the youth, families, and community

### **Purpose and Key Findings**

The Credible Messenger 2024 Impact Report includes information about the national CM movement, as well as local Milwaukee County approach and implementation efforts, community and youth impact and discussion of what's next for Milwaukee County. This work is focused on prevention work (community-based youth) and intervention work (justice involved youth) to build resilience and reducing the population of violence involved youth.

There were 199 youth served in 2024 across the CMs and of the 199, 112 referrals came from CYFS, 69 referrals came from community partners for youth who were not justice involved, and 18 were referred from other sources. Community and other sources of referrals include, but are not limited to, parents, self-referrals, law enforcement, other community service providers, school districts, and child protective services. Of the 199 youth served, the majority were Black (71%), male (66%), between the ages of 16-17 (37%), and 23% were from three zip codes (53206, 53210, 53216).

Research indicates that justice-involved youth must participate in a minimum of 26 weeks of mentoring services to positively impact their outcomes and of the total youth served in 2024, 132 (66%) received the recommended 26 weeks, or more, of the CM mentoring service. All of the CMs combined served youth for over 12,000 hours during 2024.

Of 199 youth served, 151 (76%) had no referral or re-offense while in programming and four (2%) youth reported an injury while engaged in programming. Of the 69 community-referred youth served, 81% had no reported offense while in programming - this means 81% of youth who were at risk of entering the youth justice system did not enter the youth justice system during programming. Of the 112 CYFS-referred youth served, 71% had no new reported offense while in programming - this means 71% of the youth in the youth justice system did not reoffend during programming.

Along with youth specific impact and outcomes, there was also a collective community impact and making connections to community resources for the youth and their families. Youth were able to participate in a wide variety of community events, pro-social connections made via volunteer opportunities, educational supports, employment opportunities, and services provided. The agencies developed new community agency relationship and collaborated together to meet the program and youth needs.

The 2024 Impact Report also included information on additional needs and future state of the CM Program. This reflected data collection enhancements, strategic focus to increase community awareness and visibility, expansion of community capacity, additional funding and resources, and additional training and supports for the CMs.

## **Conclusion**

The Milwaukee County Credible Messengers continue to have a significant impact on the lives of the youth served in the program, their families and their communities. The CMs also have significant touch points with others not directly referred to the program through their contacts with the schools, community events, and other opportunities. They also have contact with individuals through their crisis response teams that have assisted with connecting to other resources and intervening and stopping any violent activities.

## **ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

This item achieves several key components of the County strategic plan by addressing institutional and policy barriers to persons with previous justice involvement and diverse contractors. Additionally, it expands the provider network to serve youth with grassroots and culturally responsive practitioners and interventionists. The strategy employed requires the breaking down of inter-governmental silos and community partners of color.

## **FISCAL EFFECT**

This report is informational and there is no fiscal effect.

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Shakita LaGrant-McClain, DHHS Director  
David Muhammad, DHHS Deputy Director  
Kelly Pethke, CYFS Administrator  
Regina Whiyee, Deputy Administrator  
Vaynesia Kendrick, CVI Program Manager

**PREPARED BY:**

Kelly Pethke, CYFS Administrator

**APPROVED BY:**

*Shakita LaGrant-McClain*

Shakita LaGrant-McClain, DHHS Director

**ATTACHMENTS:**

None

cc: County Executive David Crowley  
Hon. Karl Ashley, Chief Judge