**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

# Milwaukee County
# Credible Messenger Evaluation

Prepared by: DHHS Monitoring & Evaluation Operations

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# Executive Summary

Milwaukee County Credible Messenger (CM) Pilot Evaluation demonstrates efficacy of the effort. The findings are to inform resource collections, program development and support partnership sustainability. Due to the maturity of this effort, the evaluation will focus heavily on process and outcomes. The evaluation was guided by the following core questions:

- How does the community understand Credible Messenger?
- How does the Credible Messenger impact the community?
- How do systems and process impact the implementation of CM?
- What are unexpected outcomes of this effort?
- What impact/value of persons with lived experience have on youth life outcomes?

## Summary of Findings

1. Community stakeholders understand the Credible Messenger effort to be more than a program but a diverse stakeholder with a common agenda and mutually aligned activities greater—a collective impact effort.
2. The collaboration and coordination amongst the CM partner agencies result in many unintended outcomes including community capacity building and information sharing. The collaboration has resulted in community-level violence prevention.
3. System engagement is a key factor to addressing the lack of visibility and awareness that limits effective processes and communication for achieve CM expectations.
4. The Credible Messenger mentors are saving the lives of Milwaukee most vulnerable youth by means that are not accounted for. The lived experience of the mentor gives them the ability to positively impact youth in ways that many with the responsibility cannot. They pull the heart strings of youth, remove killing bounties, better parent-child relationships, inspire academic success, and more.
5. Youth feel Credible Messenger mentors as often the only reliable person they have. Their mentors boost their confidence, shift their mentality to be more positive and responsible.
6. Having Credible Messenger mentor is a positive reinforcement that fosters productivity, mental and physical well-being.

## Recommendations

A. Develop and implement an awareness effort though expanded resources and youth and family engagement.
B. Focus strategies and goals to increase the visibility and awareness of the Credible Messenger effort.
C. Clearly refined the effort by defining measurable goals through strategic planning process involving partner agencies.
D. Strengthen relationships amongst CM partners and stakeholders.
E. Ensure stakeholders are clear on the objectives of the CM efforts and are involved in the redesign and co-creation of indicators to be measured.
F. Maximize incentivized agreements to enhance and expand the most useful and valuable partnership aspects driving the success of the effort.
G. Expand community capacity by ensuring Milwaukee youth-serving agencies have organizational capabilities to advance CM goals.
H. Invest in technical resources to build staff capacities and streamline data collection processes.
I. Involve community stakeholders to promote commitment and to generate action for aligned strategy, effective policy, efficient processes, and valuable resources.

## Background

Incarcerated youth embody a vulnerable population for whom social determinants often have a detrimental impact on their lives and health (Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 2011). Insufficient access to food and stable housing, quality educational and economic opportunities, secure family and community environments, adequate recreation and transportation infrastructure, and community-based social and health-care services are crucial factors in how and why many young people become involved in the criminal legal system (Artiga, 2018).

Milwaukee communities have been affected by an increase rate of violence withing the last year which has a significant impact on families. The need to provide a broad spectrum of programs and services for youth before, during and after involvement in the Milwaukee County Justice System is imperative. The well-being and safety of youth and those involved in the Youth Justice System involves youth dysregulation, parent/child conflict, group and pain-based violence mediations.

Milwaukee County Credible Messenger effort (CM) launched in 2020 to promote public safety and supportive positive outcomes for Milwaukee youth—within an emphasis on those in the youth justice system. 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 includes:

- West Care Milwaukee
- 414Life
- Milwaukee Christian Center
- Running Rebels
- Youth Advocate Program
- Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- DHHS Children Youth and Family Services (CYFS)
- Office of Violence Prevention
- Milwaukee County Children's Court
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- Others

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 Youth Justice System
- Reduce 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

2

- community engagement,
- youth advocacy,
- family involvement,
- resource coordination,
- partner collaboration, and
- system partnership

The effort is in the first development phase, which is outlined in figure A. Based on the funding agreement, the effort is currently centered on building system capacity with experienced transformative mentors. Also, known as Credible Messengers or mentors, these individuals are rooted in the community and support youth through collective work and their ability to connect with families, communities, and leaders to prevent and interrupt violence.

*For the purpose of this document, Credible Messengers or mentors will be referenced as Credible Messenger mentors (CM mentors).*

Youth are connected with CM mentors through a referral process that involves partner agencies. Other community-level contribution from the Credible Messenger mentors include:
- respond 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

The CM mentors are expected to attend training to cultivated skills. They are expected to complete various reports and forms, follow DHHS-CYFS policies and procedure, collaborate with social workers and complete resource referrals.

**Core activities of the pilot efforts:**
- Coordinate resource referrals
- Build trust with individual and family
- Conduct violence meditations
- Facilitate career explorations and readiness techniques
- Provide Family conflict resolution skill education
- Civic engagement education
- Participate in cross agency activities and events

**Outcome Indicators**
- No new chargers –of same or higher severity
- No new re-injuries (gun violence)
- No new gun-related re-injuries
- Create space for positive youth engagement and community voice

Many of the expected outcomes are contingent upon motivation and ability of youth to engage.

3

Additionally, the effort's success is strongly influenced by awareness CM within government systems and the resource coordination amongst the collective. The targeted youth are referred by government agencies—however, the effort began during the COVID-19 crisis which impacted implementation. Specifically, youth referrals were delayed resulting in stalled activities.

**Figure A:** Logic Model of Credible Messenger Pilot

## Transformational Mentoring— *Credible Messenger*

| Input | Activities | Outputs | Short-Term Outcomes | Intermediate Outcomes | Long-term Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Mentor person (based on criteria)<br>• Community-based referrals<br>• Administrative Agency<br>• Partnering Agencies<br>• Youth involved w/ MCYJS<br>• Census Report<br>• Referral Form<br>• Incident Report<br>• Youth Progress Report<br>• Reporting Workbook<br>• Consent Form<br>• DYFS Policy x Procedures<br>• CM and PCITI Trainings<br>• HSW<br>• Community Crisis Response Protocol<br>• Case planning | Engage youth in pro-social activities | X number of Youth will receive a minimum of 26 weeks or 78 hours of time with Credible Messenger | Youth are engaged in an positive pro-social activity<br><br>Youth are engaged with a positive pro-social person | • Impact youth at all points of systems involvement<br>• Violence Prevention and Interruption | Promote public safety and supportive positive outcomes for Milwaukee youth |
| | On-site resource distribution | # of Resource referral | Cultivated space for positive youth engagement and community voice | | |
| | Conduct violence meditations | # of mediations | Youth receive no new chargers (of same or higher severity), while receiving services. | | |
| | Participate in cross agency activities and events | # of community partner activities or events | Cultivated space for positive youth engagement and community voice | | |

## Purpose

The Credible Messenger Pilot Evaluation demonstrates efficacy of the effort. The findings are to inform resource collections, program development and support partnership sustainability. Due to the maturity of this effort, the evaluation will focus heavily on process and outcomes. The evaluation was guided by the following core questions:

- How does the community understand Credible Messenger?
- How does the Credible Messenger impact the community and input?
- How do systems and process impact the implementation of CM?
- What are unexpected outcomes of this effort?
- What impact/value of persons with lived experience have on youth life outcomes?

DHHS will use the evaluation findings to learn how to enhance the effort for sustainable partnerships, efficient processes, and effective resource allocation. Community partners will use

the evaluation findings to learn how their collaborative efforts impact expected outcomes. The results will demonstrate the value of the efforts and how to address areas of improvement. The findings will guide the refinement of the scope of work, expected outcomes and expectations of partners. Also, the evaluation results will drive effort to increase awareness of Milwaukee County Credible Messengers effort. Reliable information is based on the accurate representation of input shared those doing the work.

## Approach

The evaluation project involved stakeholders of the effort in the process. This participatory approach helps to identify relevant evaluation questions, improve accuracy and relevance of reports, improve performance, empower partners, build capacity and sustain network learning and growth. This allowed stakeholders to participate in every component of the process as described below. Also, the approach included rapid, real-time feedback using diverse, user-friendly feedback techniques with encouragement of learning. Lastly the data collection methods included a heavy emphasis on storytelling.
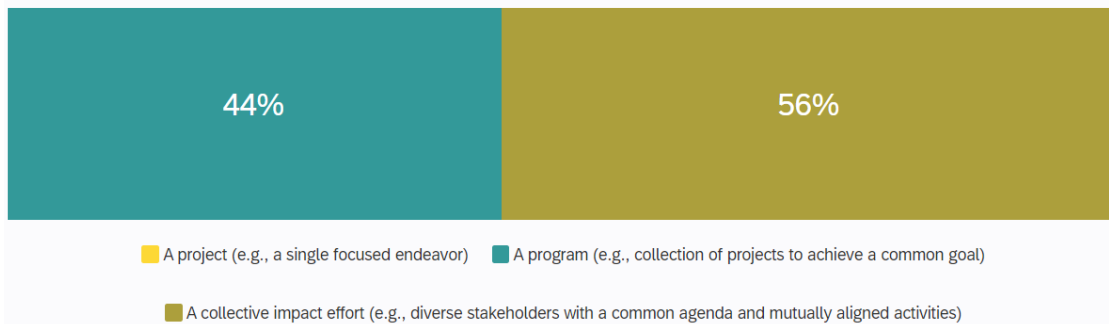
| Data Collection Method | Source of Data |
|---|---|
| Program Logic Discussion | Program Logic Synthesis |
| Existing (Secondary) Data | OVP Community Education Series, CM success story. Email responses |
| Partnership Feedback Survey | CM Partner Feedback Results |
| Youth Feedback | Youth Conversations |
| Weekly report | CM data spreadsheet |

## Key Findings

### Awareness

Beneficiaries and staff of partnering agencies have varying understandings of the Credible Messengers efforts as a program, collective impact effort and beyond.

**Figure B**: Distribution of how the Credible Messengers effort is serving the Milwaukee community.



| 44% | 56% |
|---|---|

■ A project (e.g., a single focused endeavor)   ■ A program (e.g., collection of projects to achieve a common goal)

■ A collective impact effort (e.g., diverse stakeholders with a common agenda and mutually aligned activities)
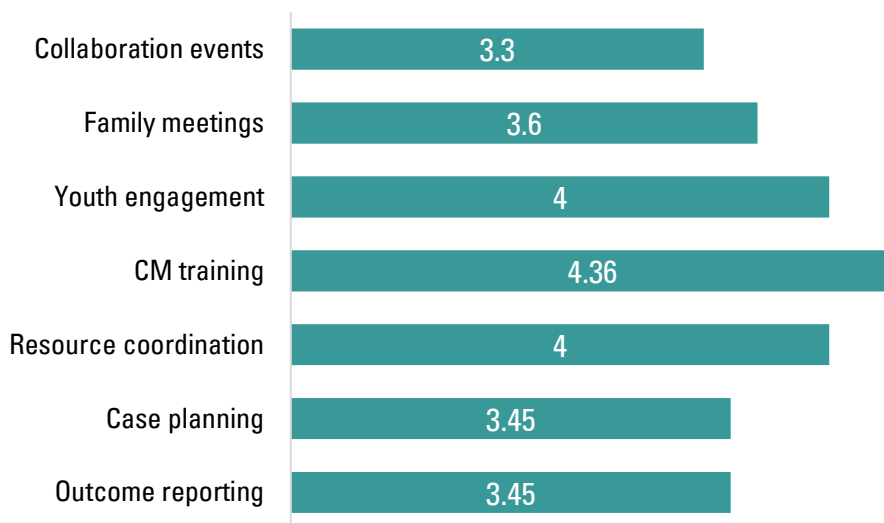
*"It doesn't feel like a program"-Youth 2*

Functioning as Intended

CM mentors are expected to conduct the specific activities. Figure C indicates how effective these activities are in advancing the Credible Messenger effort's goal.

**Figure C**: Average scores for how for how effective expected activities are to advancing the Credible Messenger goal. *(1=low, 5-high)*
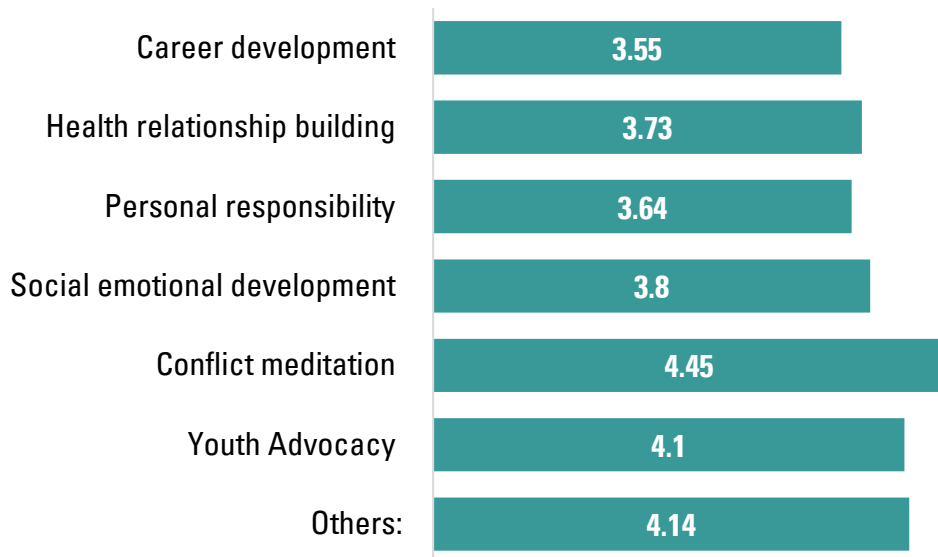


Although a high indication of effectiveness, these expectations only graze the support CM mentors provide to youth and the Milwaukee community.

CM mentors are transforming the lives of youth with activities that are not explicitly expected or thoroughly captured.

- Career development: (job connections, resume building, etc.)
- Health relationship building: (parent coaching, communication techniques, conflict resolution, etc.)
- Personal responsibility: (financial literacy, grocery shopping, goal setting, self-advocacy)
- Social emotional development: (self-awareness, coping, self-reflection)
- Conflict meditation: (resolve bounties, deescalate verbal/physical conflicts, group-based violence interventions)
- Youth Advocacy: (civic engagement, system navigation)

On average, these activities highly impact on youth who are served by this effort as indicated in figure D.

**Figure D**: Average scores for how for how impactful expected activities are to advancing the Credible Messenger effort. *(1=low, 5-high)*

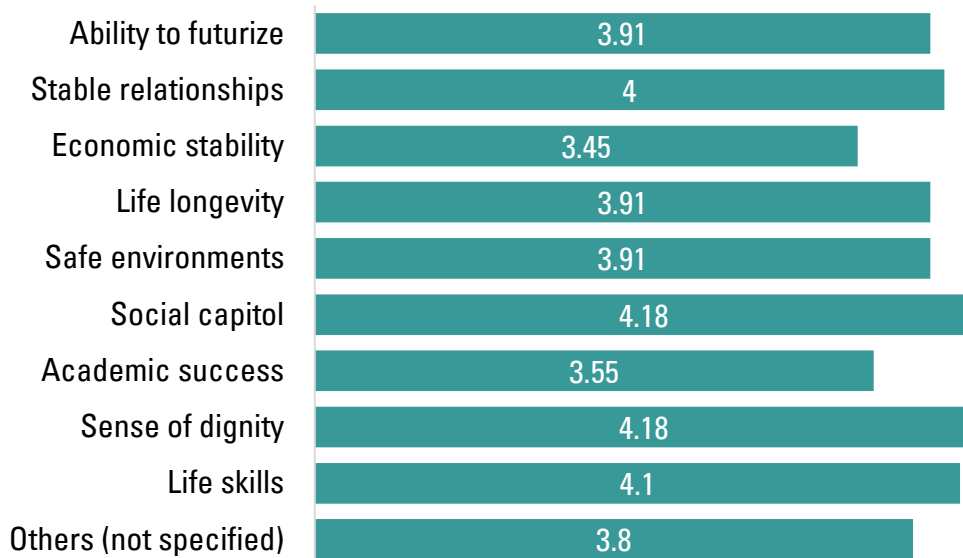| Activity | Score |
|---|---|
| Career development | 3.55 |
| Health relationship building | 3.73 |
| Personal responsibility | 3.64 |
| Social emotional development | 3.8 |
| Conflict meditation | 4.45 |
| Youth Advocacy | 4.1 |
| Others: | 4.14 |

## Unexpected Outcomes

*"A Credible Messenger is a community valid person who is trusted by the community who is not a system partner but can work on behalf of the community members to get them what they need, when they need with without individuals having to go deeper within the criminal/legal system."*—System Partner Agency Leader

Those with the role as a Credible Messenger describe themselves as a violence interpreter, youth interventionist, community social worker and/or family supporter. This indicated the opportunity to expand the reach of the effort to account for those serving youth.

## Lived Experience Impact

With these activities, CM mentors are achieving outcomes beyond what was intentionally intended—indicated in Figure E. These accomplished, indicate the impact that youth supported by those with lived experiences have on their lives.

7

**Figure E**: Average accuracy scores of how Credible Messenger mentors impact youth. *(1=low, 5=high)*

| Category | Score |
|---|---|
| Ability to futurize | 3.91 |
| Stable relationships | 4 |
| Economic stability | 3.45 |
| Life longevity | 3.91 |
| Safe environments | 3.91 |
| Social capitol | 4.18 |
| Academic success | 3.55 |
| Sense of dignity | 4.18 |
| Life skills | 4.1 |
| Others (not specified) | 3.8 |

- Ability to futurize: "My mentor changed my whole mindset on life."—Youth 2
- Stable relationships: "I have someone I can rely on."—Youth 4 "they talk with my mom to help her understand me."—Youth 6
- Economic stability: "I have a job now."—Youth 5
- Life longevity: "He saved me life. I would still be on here in these streets doing the same thing, probably still stealing cars"—Youth 3
- Safe environments: "I am not always in the house anymore so I more talkative and have positive to do"—Youth 8
- Social capitol: "help get me out of trouble"—Youth 7, "he brought me a bag full of name brand clothes…I was like man, nobody has ever did nothing like this for me"—Youth 3
- Academic success: "he told me I would have to do the work at some point, might as well do it now so I don't have to do it and be working at the same time. Yeah...that motivated me to start going back to school"—Youth 7
- Sense of dignity: "I used to have a musty attitude…She made me feel lovable.
- Life skills: "I gained confidence, speaking skills—I am more social and make responsible decisions"—Youth 1. "Helped with my anger"—Youth 2
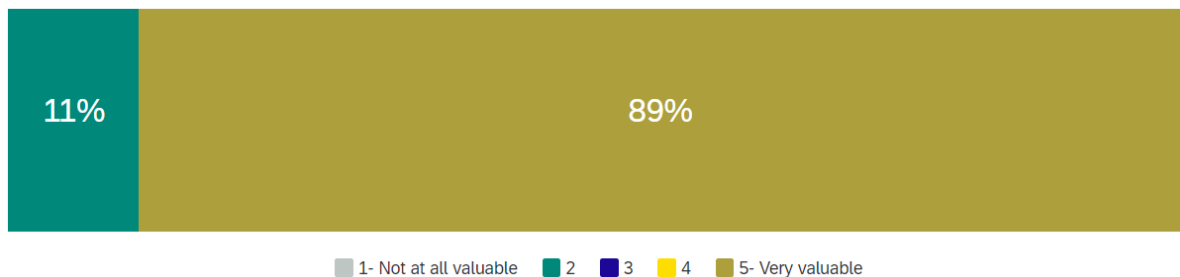
8

Partnership Value

This effort is implemented within a complex system which involves a number of interacting and interdependent factors—which makes the solutions address youth involvement in the justice system uncertain and key stakeholders have various lens on how to execute. However, the success of this work relies heavily upon the coordination community-level and system-level agencies. Partner agencies implementing CM activities have differing capabilities and expertise that address the various needs of youth served.

> "Our team can't do what 414Life does—but I know I can call because we are in this together" — System Partner Agency Leader

> "We work within the school—so we don't have the street relationships. But that's how we work together" —CM mentor C

**Figure F:** Distribution of scores for how valuable the CM partnership is to ability to advance the CM goal.



| 11% | 89% |

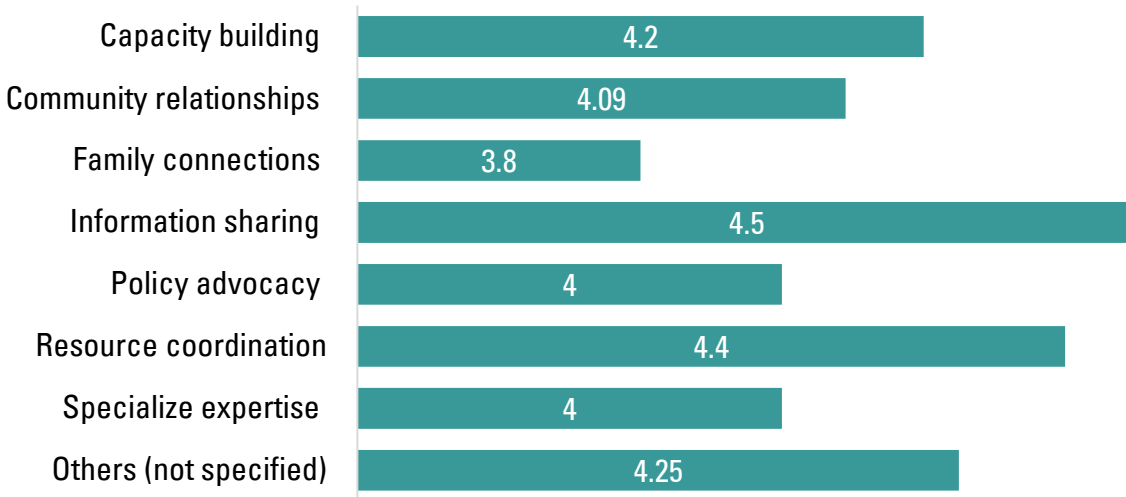1- Not at all valuable   ▮2   ▮3   ▮4   ▮5- Very valuable

The partnership that existing amongst the CM agencies is very valuable. The value of the partnership involves the following aspects.

- Specialize expertise (violence interruption, mental health, street outreach, legalities)
- Community relationships (employers, health providers, education supports, etc.)
- Family connections (parent/guardian relationships, peer outreach, etc.)
- Information sharing (frequent meetings, sensitive intel, access to sources)
- Resource coordination (e.g., filling gaps to meet youth needs)
- Policy advocacy (e.g., elevating needs to system agencies)
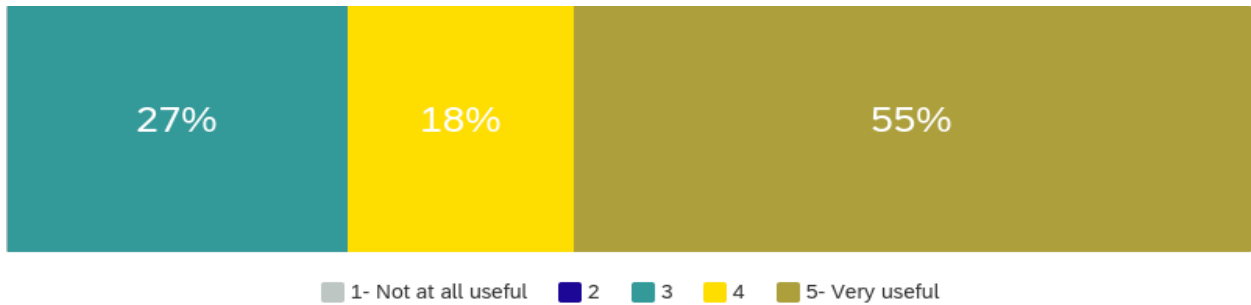- Capacity Building (support to do to the work better)

The extent of how these factors add value is included in figure G with information sharing as the highest value add to the partnership.

**Figure G**: Average score for how partners add to each other's ability to advance the CM work. *(1=low, 5=high)*

| Category | Score |
|---|---|
| Capacity building | 4.2 |
| Community relationships | 4.09 |
| Family connections | 3.8 |
| Information sharing | 4.5 |
| Policy advocacy | 4 |
| Resource coordination | 4.4 |
| Specialize expertise | 4 |
| Others (not specified) | 4.25 |

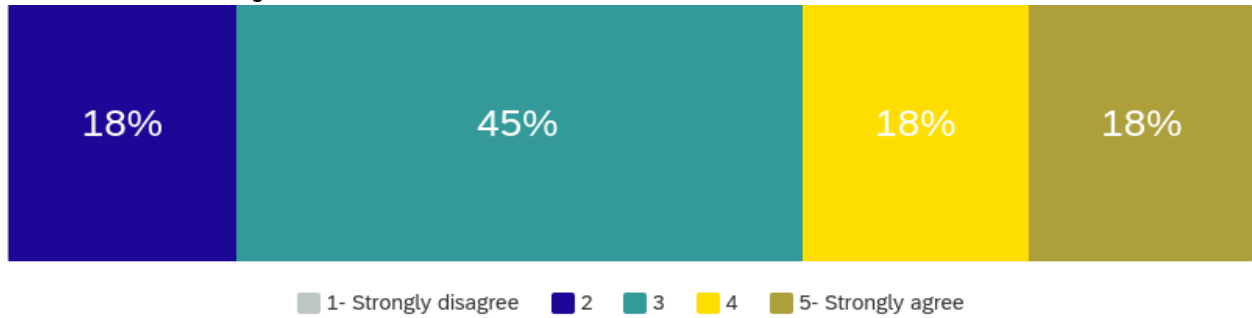A key piece to the partnership's success is related to incentivized partner agreements as indicated in figure H.

**Figure H**. Distribution of scores for how useful incentivized agreements are to the ability to partner.

| 27% | 18% | 55% |
|---|---|---|

☐ 1- Not at all useful  ■ 2  ■ 3  ☐ 4  ☐ 5- Very useful

The Credible Messenger effort has an immeasurable impact on its intended target audience—youth, as well as families, and community. The collaboration occurring amongst the partner agencies has system and community level implications which is an indication of the value of the Credible Messenger effort.
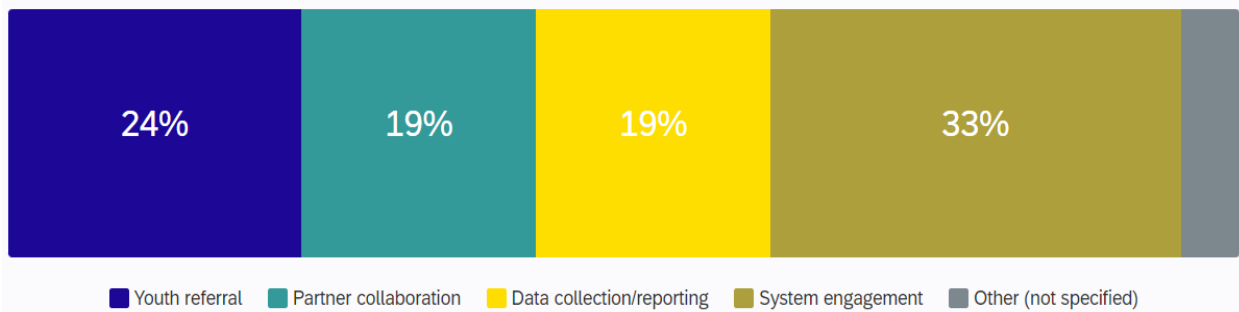
Ideally, process improvements are expected when implementing a pilot effort as such. Figure I indicate the need to enhance processes and procedures.

**Figure I**. Distribution of scores for how current processes and procedure support their ability to advance the Credible Messenger effort.

| 18% | 45% | 18% | 18% |
|---|---|---|---|

1- Strongly disagree  ■ 2  ■ 3  ■ 4  ■ 5- Strongly agree

Furthermore, specific areas of improvements are demonstrated in Figure J and highlight system engagement as greatest opportunity. Which indicates the opportunity to better engage government agencies, academic institutions, and healthcare agencies as partners.

**Figure J:** Distribution of scores for areas of improvement to enhancing and sustaining the Credible Messenger effort.

| 24% | 19% | 19% | 33% | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

■ Youth referral  ■ Partner collaboration  ■ Data collection/reporting  ■ System engagement  ■ Other (not specified)

Although unique attributes exist amongst partner agencies, they are not effectively incorporated in the youth referral process. Gaps within the youth referral process causes inefficiencies amongst collaboration opportunities and do always serve youth effectively.

> *"Sometimes we get youth who's needs are beyond what we can give"* —CM mentor

However, system-partners' lack of understanding and value perpetuates barriers the effort is designed to help youth outcomes.
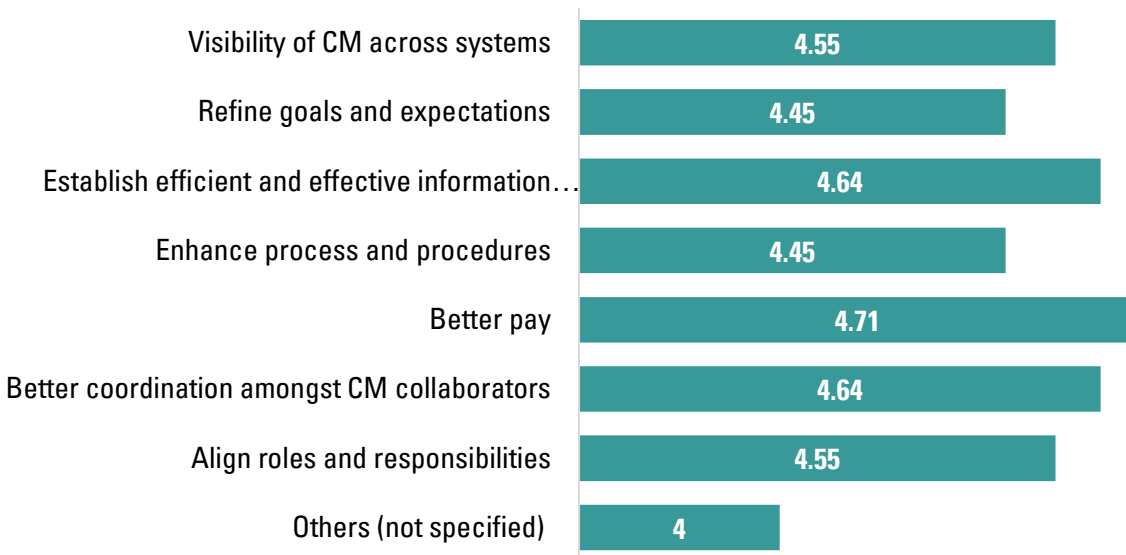
> *"I should be able to walk into {system facility} and they know who I am, as a Credible Messenger mentor."*—CM mentor

> *"Community referrals are often vague, and families do understand how they were referred to said programming. This often results in non-engagement."* —Youth interventionist

> *"Community Referrals (especially from MPD) can pose a challenge as they lack sufficient information."* — Youth interventionist

In addition to process improvements to better enhance the effort and sustain partnerships, the following essential aspects for the enhancement and sustainability of the Milwaukee County Credible Messenger effort.

**Figure K**: Average scores for aspects necessary for enhancing or sustaining the Credible Messenger effort. *(1=low, 5=high)*



| Aspect | Score |
|---|---|
| Visibility of CM across systems | 4.55 |
| Refine goals and expectations | 4.45 |
| Establish efficient and effective information… | 4.64 |
| Enhance process and procedures | 4.45 |
| Better pay | 4.71 |
| Better coordination amongst CM collaborators | 4.64 |
| Align roles and responsibilities | 4.55 |
| Others (not specified) | 4 |

## Conclusion

The results of the Milwaukee County Credible Messenger effort are well beyond what is expected and supported to impact the lives of youth. The greatest value of the effort is mentors' ability to transform youth and community capacity building and partnerships. Youth are healthier and safer because of this effort. Partner agencies are committed to collaboration and have demonstrated the positive effect incentivized agreements have on the ability to drive collective impact work. However—to sustain outcomes and enhance impact, more planning and resources are needed. Developing clearer goals and expectations will address many process inefficiencies, support a sustainable partnership, and increase visibility and awareness. Greater investments to this effort supports the ability to drive the goal and ensures quality outcomes are achieved.

12