

The Milwaukee Office of Community Wellness & Safety

2023 Annual Report

Community Wellness & Safety

The Community Division of OCWS is a comprehensive initiative designed to address and mitigate the root causes of violence within our community. OCWS uses evidence-informed strategies to reduce violence through tailored community-centered initiatives. By fostering collaboration among residents, local organizations, law enforcement, and government agencies, OCWS aims to create a safer, more resilient environment where all individuals can thrive. The program focuses on reducing incidents of violence, enhancing community engagement, providing support services, and promoting long-term peace and stability.

Three challenges faced by the division:

- 1) Staffing issues presented a significant challenge for the OCWS community division, impacting the effectiveness and impact of programs and services. For a large part of 2023 there was only one community coordinator. This impacted the reach and the quality of services and support provided to the community. This can leave some community members underserved, particularly those who might be in most need of assistance, such as marginalized or vulnerable populations.
- 2) OCWS has three credible messenger programs that work primarily in our Promise Zone areas. Credible messengers are individuals who are trusted by the community and play a crucial role in fostering trust and engagement. However, establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of these messengers can present several challenges.
- 3) The perception of violence prevention initiatives can be challenging to manage and can significantly impact their success. OCWS officially changed the name from the Office of Violence Prevention due to the assumptions of what that work entails. If the outcomes of violence prevention efforts are not immediately visible or measurable, the community might perceive them as ineffective. This can be particularly challenging in areas where violence is pervasive and long-standing, as incremental progress may not meet community expectations.

Three accomplishments achieved by the division:

- 1) OCWS has increased and improved our data collection efforts which has significantly enhanced its impact and effectiveness. We have the tools to be more intentional with how we mobilize our outreach teams across the City of Milwaukee. In 2023, OCWS conducted a widespread survey analyzing community needs and resources. We are now prioritizing initiatives that will have the most significant impact as identified by the communities we serve. With data, resources can be allocated more efficiently. Understanding where the greatest needs are and which strategies are most effective ensures that time, money, and efforts are well spent. The data allows for more transparency and accountability. It shows that the project is based on real needs and that its impact is being monitored and reported accurately. As ARPA resources come close to an end it's critical to demonstrate the impact of the work to attract more funding and

support. Donors and partners are more likely to invest in initiatives that show clear, data-driven results.

- 2) In 2023, OCWS worked diligently to develop and create several large initiatives within the intervention and prevention ecosystem in Milwaukee. We have expanded our street outreach efforts with our Promise Keeper teams who focus on primary prevention efforts. We also have established our Critical Response Team. They focus on secondary prevention efforts specifically dealing with retaliatory, interpersonal, and gang violence. can significantly bolster their effectiveness and reach. With more staff, the project can engage with more community members, fostering deeper connections and involvement. This can result in higher participation rates and stronger community support. Overall, increasing staff capacity can significantly amplify the project's positive impact on the community.
- 3) OCWS collaborated with the Milwaukee Bucks to create the OCWS Youth Ambassadors. We had over 50 youth participate. We understand that direct involvement of youth in violence prevention programs has been linked to lower rates of youth violence, gang involvement, and bullying. By participating in these programs, young people develop skills to manage conflict non-violently and become advocates for peace among their peers.

Goals for the Community Division:

- 1) Reduce Incidents of Violence
- 2) Increase Conflict Mediation
- 3) Enhance Community Engagement
- 4) Strengthen Partnerships
- 5) Improve Support Services
- 6) Enhance Youth Outreach
- 7) Increase Awareness and Education
- 8) Improve Data Collection and Analysis
- 9) Reduce Recidivism Rates
- 10) Enhance Community Safety

Family Wellness & Safety

The Office of Community Wellness and Safety is committed to coordinating healing, violence interruption and providing a safety net for families impacted by violence. The Family Division of the Office is that safety net. We conjoin with families and individuals who are hurting, angry, suffering to

meet basic needs and those who want to continue their life's journey in a more healthy manner. We coordinate the Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, we monitor grants with the focus on parenting, training families to make healthy choices, supporting professionals in learning how to address and help victims and ensuring the police foster a safe environment where victims are honored and trusted. We of the Family Division support the other two divisions in spreading the positive messaging. The Family Division supports a violence free family, which will in turn support a violence free neighborhood, which creates a violence free community, which lays the foundation for a violence free City.

Three challenges faced by the division:

- 1) Making sure all services expected within a grant scope can be challenging. With turnover at social service agencies, it is difficult to create a continued and sustainable model for service delivery when the staff changes regularly.
- 2) Ensuring all partners within a grant are pulling in the same direction for the same purpose can be challenging and time consuming. Some partners are really committed and in tune and others require more direct guidance and support than initially anticipated during the procurement process.
- 3) Being able to lean on other professionals who are committed to the very difficult work of changing a community/city. Those of us who know the depth of need in the community can sometime get discouraged. Keeping the shining light can be difficult when not supported.

Three accomplishments achieved by the division:

- 1) April 2024 Sexual Assault Awareness Month event wherein survivors and thrivers shared their personal journeys to a receptive audience and the feedback was that the event was life altering for some and emotionally gripping for others.
- 2) February 2024-a Podcast led by young persons who shared their difficulties within relationships, how they navigate interpersonal violence and gave support and love to one another in the process. The podcast was live streamed in FB and other platforms. Having young people show courage and share intimate thoughts and fears is powerful and healthy to witness as the next generation brings their talents to this difficult work.
- 3) Impacting individual families who have suffered with violence within their immediate circle has been rewarding and also directly related to the mission of the office and family division. We have directly impacted 5 families this year thus far.

Goals for the Family Division:

- 1) Reduce incidents of gender-based violence
- 2) Increase healthy relationship awareness and education
- 3) Improve support services for survivors
- 4) Enhance legal and policy frameworks
- 5) Increase access to safe spaces

- 6) Improve parenting skills
- 7) Increase access to resources
- 8) Promote Financial Stability
- 9) Improve Child and Adolescent Outcomes
- 10) Increase Educational Support

Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma (ReCAST)

To support the needs of communities across Milwaukee, OCWS utilizes the Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma (ReCAST) grant to implement resilience-building and healing opportunities for community members who are disproportionately impacted by violence. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides the ReCAST funds to assist high-risk youth and families and promote resilience and equity in communities that have recently faced civil unrest through the implementation of evidence-based violence prevention programs, community youth engagement initiatives, and trauma-informed behavioral health services.

Three challenges faced by the division:

- 1) Delayed and extended hiring procedures - First, delayed and extensive hiring procedures within the City of Milwaukee Health Department postponed the hiring of numerous ReCAST Team positions. Without the ability to hire staff expeditiously, the ReCAST Team did not have the capacity to implement programs and pursue new partnerships across the City.
- 2) Initiation and procurement of contracts –Second, the Milwaukee ReCAST Team encountered numerous and repeated challenges with the Milwaukee Health Department’s procedures to procure and initiate contracts. Without valid contracts in-place, the Milwaukee ReCAST Team could not fund programming that aligned with the ReCAST grant and establish long-term partnerships.
- 3) Paying Contractors – Third, the Milwaukee ReCAST Team experienced challenges paying the few contractors who completed work due to process delays within the Milwaukee Health Department. These delays caused significant reputational damage to the ReCAST Team and the Office of Community Wellness and Safety, and impeded opportunities to implement programs with grassroots organizations because they did not trust they would be paid in a timely manner.

Three accomplishments achieved by the division:

1. Implementation of Healing Hubs - to improve efforts to engage communities, CWS created the Healing Hubs Network in May 2023, a coalition of churches, grassroots organizations, libraries, and other trusted community spaces in Milwaukee that support survivors of violence. These 38 locations began hosting:
 - a. Violence Prevention and Response Trainings – Healing Hubs hosted free trainings that educated community members about violence prevention and response strategies, such as restorative justice, conflict mediation, traumatic hemorrhage control, and more.
 - b. Resource Provision - Healing Hubs hosted resources about violence prevention services throughout the City, focusing on topics like gun violence, domestic violence, suicide,

mental health care, substance use disorders, human trafficking, access to food, emergency housing, and more.

2. Implementation of the Summer of Healing - Many community-based organizations and leaders effectively utilize their established relationships to reduce violence in neighborhoods throughout Milwaukee. However, there are often a lack of resources available to facilitate strategies that promote healing, restorative practices, and resilience for youth, families, and residents in entire neighborhoods. In response, CWS created the Summer of Healing project to provide funds dedicated to support these leaders, improve their capacity, and positively impact their communities. As a result of this ReCAST-funded program, eleven youth serving organizations were selected to receive a total of \$395,000 to support their summer programming.
3. Implementation of Mental Health and Wellness Programs - In addition to the Summer of Healing, CWS sponsored numerous grassroots organizations that provided healing and resilience-building opportunities for people impacted by violence. These funds were vital to these organizations as they built capacity to meet the unique needs that survivors of violence have.

Key Performance Indicators:

Equity Focus Initiatives KPI

Goal - To ensure that all OCWS divisions and initiatives are inclusive and equitably benefit all community members, particularly those residing in underserved and marginalized areas, such as the OCWS Promise Zones

Metrics:

- 1) OCWS Initiatives in Milwaukee Promise Zones
- 2) Demographic Representation in OCWS Residential Participation

Community Engagement KPI

Goal - To measure the level of community involvement and participation in OCWS divisions and initiatives.

Metrics:

- 1) Event Participation Rate
- 2) Volunteer Engagement
- 3) Social Media and Online Engagements

Division Effectiveness and Impact KPI

Goal - To measure the direct impact and effectiveness of the programs and initiatives implemented by the Office of Community Wellness and Safety.

Metrics:

- 1) Outcome Achievement Rate
- 2) Success Stories & Case Studies (See attached data)

Interagency Collaboration and Partnerships KPI

Goal – To evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration and partnerships with other organizations, agencies and stakeholders to enhance the Office of Community Wellness and Safety.

Metrics:

- 1) Number of Active Partnerships
- 2) Joint Initiatives and Programs
- 3) Resource Sharing and Leveraging

OCWS 2024 and Beyond

- OCWS will establish a new office on the Southside, enhancing our presence in the area.
- Increasing internship opportunities for UWM and Marquette students.
- Growing a comprehensive volunteer and community contact information hub to easily share volunteer opportunities and community news.
- Creation of the ReCAST Advisory Panel.
- Initiation of Youth Leadership, Resilience and Healing Curriculum.
- Development of the Credible Clinicians and Healers Network.
- Three-year contracts for Summer of Healing awardees.