



## WCS Connection

March 2020



# Sankofa House

Learn more about  
Sankofa House  
in the article below.



*From the desk of the WCS Executive Director:*

### WCS and COVID-19

The recent COVID-19 Public Health Emergency has caught many of us off guard and unprepared to deal with a global pandemic of this magnitude. The COVID-19 pandemic will dictate how we operate and provide services for many months to come. Some of the protocols established to help Human Services and Criminal Justice providers navigate through this difficult time will become standard practice and will better enable us to deal with similar events in the future. Clearly, there is nothing like real-life experience to teach us what we don't know, what we need to do better, and what works. From the perspective of WCS as an organization, we have been reminded of just how vital and essential many of the services are that we provide to high-need and high-risk individuals in the community. When Governor Tony Evers issued his "Safer at Home" directive on Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> in an effort to slow down and stop the spread of COVID-19, it meant that all non-essential businesses and services should close until further notice. The order also appropriately classifies Human Services organizations, like WCS, as essential to provide needed services.

WCS operates many essential programs that, for the most part, go unnoticed by the general public. Many of the residential programs operated by WCS are required by local, state, and federal governments to continue to operate during times of crisis. Other programs such as the WCS Electronic Monitoring program monitor the safe movement of hundreds of individuals in our communities and some participants are required to report in when there is a significant violation of their program's protocols. Our Community Based Mental Health programs serve hundreds of individuals with significant mental health needs, some requiring almost daily contact by a care coordinator to ensure their health and well-being. All these programs require committed staff to carry out essential duties, putting themselves in potentially harmful situations, so that needed services are available and delivered.

I am very proud of how our WCS staff is performing during this unprecedented and challenging time. My interaction with staff during this time has found them to be focused, concerned, and determined to provide the very best services possible. I am especially proud of and would like to give a shout out to all of the WCS staff who are providing direct services in the midst of the "Safer at Home" order. They are making sure that public safety concerns are addressed and that critical, needed services are continued. It is at times like

this when the true heroes among us are revealed—we seem to have many such heroes at WCS.



*Clarence Johnson*



## Two Years of Hard Work Pays Off in OARS Program

“Mr. Peter Jones\* is a true success story and I was very happy to have worked with him in his transition back into the community over these past two years,” declared Brittany Taff, WCS case manager. Mr. Jones was a participant in the WCS Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (OARS) Program. The OARS program provides intensive wraparound case management services to high risk/high need individuals with mental illness who have been released from the Wisconsin State Prison System. The focus of the program is to improve public safety by reducing recidivism and reconviction rates. Mr. Jones was dedicated to his treatment and sobriety during the two years he spent in the program at WCS. Throughout this time, he became more and more independent, gaining access to long-term programming including Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) and employment services through Project Access.

OARS is a unique program that addresses mental health and substance use treatment needs in conjunction with an individual’s criminogenic factors. Case management focuses on successfully guiding released individuals to become self-sustainable participants in their community. “Mr. Jones continues to have a positive mindset about what he hopes to achieve and I have no doubt that he will be successful in doing so moving forward,” Taff said. Funded by the State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services, WCS provides OARS programming for qualified individuals in Jefferson, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, Walworth, and Waukesha Counties.

\*Name changed to protect privacy



## New Programming at WCS - Sankofa House

Sankofa House is a short-term, recovery-oriented, peer-driven program with a mission to provide a safe, structured, supportive living environment for individuals in recovery. The program provides a positive, substance-free environment for 18 adults who need something more than an outpatient level of care to be successful in their recovery. Services at Sankofa House are provided by peer specialists who offer their unique recovery experiences to inspire hope and empower individuals to reach their recovery goals. In addition to on-site group and one-on-one services, residents attend weekly outpatient counseling sessions at Unlimited Potential, the WCS outpatient clinic.

Sankofa House Program Manager, Torre Johnson, hopes to inspire each resident to have the desire and tools to live a productive and drug-free life. According to Torre, “I am hoping that Sankofa House will become a place where people will begin to find success. I want Sankofa to become highly respected because of our outstanding outcomes. Our team is working to create a program that past and present residents will appreciate for years to come.”

Torre's dedication comes from his own lived experiences which have led him to be committed to serving others and his community. Torre and the Sankofa Team will work to help each resident fill the void they feel, knowing that, as Torre says, "only we can save us!"

Sankofa House residents are referred exclusively through the Milwaukee County Community Access to Recovery Services (CARS) Division. Most individuals will stay in the program for three to four months. Sankofa House admitted its first two individuals the week of March 6<sup>th</sup> and is looking forward to serving approximately 40 individuals during 2020. Sankofa House will continue to build its program to help each person improve their life. According to Torre, "We recognize that anytime someone is willing to accept help, it gives them a greater chance to succeed."

Sankofa is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The literal translation of the word is "it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind." The Akan believe the past serves as a guide for planning the future. To the Akan, it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong future. The word is symbolized by a mythical bird with its feet firmly planted forward and its head turned backwards.



## BMAC Black History Month Luncheon

On Wednesday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, the WCS Black Male Advisory Council (BMAC) hosted its Annual Black History Employee Potluck Luncheon in recognition of Black History Month. This potluck was not only to recognize Black History Month, but it was also a time for fellowship and for WCS employees to connect with one another.

To begin the luncheon, Milwaukee County Supervisor Supreme Moore Omokunde led us in an African Libation Ritual. He spoke of the purpose of libation and how it promotes oneness and balance of beings and things in the universe. He further explained how it represents the action of showing respect for elders and the ancestors, hope, healing, unity, and harmony all through the reinforcement of common bonds.



Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor  
Mandela Barnes

Keynote speaker, Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes, shared his journey from where he started to where he is now. He is the first African American to serve as a Lieutenant Governor in Wisconsin and the second African American to ever hold statewide office. Lieutenant Governor Barnes talked about his broad vision of racial justice and how citizens should think about the impact of policy initiatives at all levels of government on the trajectory of the justice system.



## Career Opportunities at WCS

WCS is searching for hardworking and caring individuals to fill these positions:

### Assistant Program Director – Youth Shelter Care Program

The Assistant Program Director supervises the staff and operations of the WCS Youth Shelter Care Program in

## Did You Know?

In 2018-2019, WCS received funding from 30 different sources, including the Greater

conjunction with the Program Director, overseeing two separate state-licensed Shelter Care facilities. This individual serves as a mentor and role model to the youth in the program. A minimum of five years of experience working with teenage youth, three years of supervision experience, and a bachelor's degree in social work, psychology, sociology, criminal justice, or a related field is required.

#### Lead Family Coordinator – Wraparound

This position promotes coordination and integration of family-driven care to ensure the involvement of the participant and the entire family in the program. The coordinator provides one-to-one peer support utilizing unique lived experiences to build relationships with the youth and families in the program, and works with family members to provide education and support during a crisis. Applicants must be trained as a peer specialist or a parent peer specialist, as well as possess a minimum of five years of experience serving children and families with mental health, substance use, or co-occurring needs.

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*Wisconsin Community Services, Inc. (WCS) advocates for justice and community safety, providing innovative opportunities for individuals to overcome adversity.*

WCS is a 501(c) 3 non-profit agency that provides services in southeastern Wisconsin.  
WCS has been serving the community successfully for over 100 years.

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