



Wisconsin Community Services, Inc.
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY

WCS Connection

June 2024



From the desk of the WCS President & CEO:

How WCS Succeeded in the First Half of 2024

The first six months of 2024 have been a busy time for Wisconsin Community Services (WCS) as we explore new and innovative strategies to carry out the agency's mission and to serve people more effectively in communities across southeast Wisconsin. Please join me for a brief look back at some of the programmatic initiatives we launched during the first six months of the year and how we celebrated the contributions of people working for the organization. The list is not exhaustive, but we hope it provides somewhat of a view of how WCS meets myriads of needs for children, youth, adults, and families in our communities while advocating for justice and community safety and providing innovative opportunities for individuals to overcome adversity.

Entrepreneurship Pilot Program

Working under a grant through Employ Milwaukee, WCS began providing entrepreneurial training for men and women at the Milwaukee County Community Reintegration Center (MCCRC). The training program equips individuals with the skills and resources needed to succeed in launching their entrepreneurial initiatives upon their release from the MCCRC. The first graduating cohort recently celebrated the culmination of their hard work and determination to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams and build economic self-sufficiency. Upon release from the MCCRC, individuals will work with the WCS Employment & Training Center for additional training and wraparound services.

Expanding Electronic Monitoring to the Waukesha County Sheriff's Department

On May 31, WCS launched a new electronic monitoring program with the Waukesha County Sheriff's Department. The program was implemented because Waukesha County closed its Huber Facility and now provides electronic monitoring 24/7/365 as an alternative to incarceration. The program serves approximately 100 people at any given time. This new initiative will support cost savings for Waukesha County and provide opportunities for people to safely return to their communities of residence.

Nova House Supportive Housing

Responding to the critical need for supportive housing, WCS opened NOVA House in March. The facility located in Milwaukee at 22nd and Atkinson will provide supported housing to 14 adults who are continuing their substance use recovery after completing a 90 day stay at WCS Sankofa House residential living center and outpatient treatment services.

Peer Training Academy

Working in partnership with Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Services Community Access for Recovery, WCS launched an initiative to provide four peer specialist training sessions annually, as well as ongoing training and support throughout the year. The first training was held in April and additional training sessions will occur throughout the year. INPOWER, a social impact and marketing agency based in Milwaukee's Harambee neighborhood, is providing marketing, processing applications, screening applicants, and conducting informational sessions. The WCS implementation team will also receive training in Wellness Recovery Action Planning and offer that training continuously. This initiative will continue to expand ongoing efforts at the state and local levels to build workforce capacity and integrate people with lived experience in recovery services for people with behavioral health needs.

Prison and Aging Research Project

WCS will work in collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Tulane University, and the University of California San Diego to conduct initial research on unique challenges adults aged 55 and older with physical and cognitive impairments encounter as they reenter the community from incarceration. This project will run for about 18 months to identify unique reentry challenges faced by older adults, which will lead us to explore strategies supporting a successful transition back to the community for people who are aging and have accompanying physical and cognitive impairments.

Recruiting and Developing Peer Recovery Coaches

WCS is one of 10 agencies across the county selected and funded to recruit, train, supervise, and deploy paid Family Centered-Peer Recovery Coaches (FC-PRCs) and increase workforce capacity. To assist those victimized by neglect, abuse, or violence because of a family member or caregiver's substance use, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, in collaboration with JBS International, Inc. (JBS), and with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Comprehensive Opioid, Simulant, and Substance Use Program, sought applications to implement an FC-PRC model supporting children, youth, and families, including kinship and grand families. The award funds the costs for the new additional training curriculum over 28 months.

Youth Crisis Stabilization Facility (Matz Center)

Working in collaboration with Jefferson County Department of Human Services, WCS began providing staffing and operations for a new Youth Crisis Stabilization program at the Matz Complex in Watertown. This is a voluntary community-based resource for youth ages 13-17 experiencing a mental health crisis. Jefferson County Human Services holds the license for the program and WCS provides the staffing and supervision.

Honoring Employees at the WCS Annual Employee Recognition Event

Finally, where would WCS be without our dedicated, passionate, and committed team members providing services to over 17,000 people annually? In June, we held our annual WCS Employee Recognition event at the Milwaukee County Zoo Peck Center. During the event, we recognized 105 WCS employees who achieved 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 years of service. We appreciate all our team members who make WCS a very special place to work and who support our efforts to have a positive impact on the communities we serve.

See the below to read about special awards given out at this event.

Clarence Johnson



WCS Names Jen Wittwer as their 2024 Friend of the Friendless

In 2001, WCS established the Friend of the Friendless Award to recognize individuals and organizations that have demonstrated a long-term commitment to meeting the needs of those considered ostracized from the mainstream of the community. The term "Friend of the Friendless" refers to those special individuals who support, assist, encourage, empower, and advocate for those who are seeming outcasts in our communities.

The recipient of the 2024 WCS Friend of the Friendless award is Jen Wittwer, Director of Community Access to Recovery Services (CARS) at Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Services.



Jen began working at CARS in 2009 and has been a key leader supporting community-based mental health and substance use services for adults in Milwaukee County. She is an innovative leader who is deeply committed to serving and meeting the needs of people, and truly cares about the community. Jen is thoughtful in her approach to reaching people experiencing significant mental health, substance use, and life needs.

Jen's career in behavioral health administration expands beyond her work with Milwaukee County, as she began serving over 30 years ago. After earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Cornell College in 1991, Jen was employed at the Guest House of Milwaukee, where she supervised the daily admissions process for the homeless shelter. She was hired by Wisconsin Community Services (known at that time as Wisconsin Correctional Services) in August 1995 to be a case manager in the Forensic Community Support Program. It was during these nearly six years of working with people experiencing mental health needs and justice involvement that Jen's passion for serving others truly blossomed. Jen's experiences at WCS and other community-based organizations shaped her career and passion for developing creative programming to meet the needs of the community. It was during this period that Jen had the opportunity to earn her Master of Social Work from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Using the experience she gained at WCS, Jen worked as an integrated service coordinator for Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division, Service Access to Independent Living (SAIL) Unit, followed by employment at Transitional Living Services, where she was the Director of Clinical Services.

"Jen's creative approach has led to an investment in new services and support," said Chad Meinholdt, Vice President of Behavioral Health Services at WCS. "She has championed peer specialist services and embraced the power of utilizing lived experience to engage people in care and services. Jen is passionate about serving people, supporting agencies, and empowering communities. Her commitment and leadership are evident throughout the adult behavioral health system in Milwaukee County."

3 Win Leadership Awards at Annual Employee Event



Three WCS employees were honored with leadership awards at the agency's 2024 Employee Recognition Event. Dulce Torres (left) was the recipient of the inaugural WCS Servant Leadership Award. Susan Collyard (middle) and Melissa Heath (right) were each awarded a WCS Outstanding Leadership Award.

Successful CDLRE Fundraiser Held at AmFam Field



The "On The Road Again" fundraiser organized by WCS raised over \$40,000 for the Center for Driver's License Recovery & Employability program. Pictured on the left is WCS CEO and President Clarence Johnson with Cecelia Gore, Executive Director, Brewers Community Foundation. Pictured in the center is WCS Vice President of Court and Community Reintegration Services Sara Carpenter. Pictured to the right is WCS Board of Directors President Andreas Pack with his wife, Anne Mueller.

Sunny skies and warm smiles greeted WCS Board of Directors members, friends, staff, and sponsors attending the WCS "On the Road Again" fundraiser on May 23rd at American Family Field. The event raised awareness and provided funds for the Center for Driver's License Recovery & Employability (CDLRE), a WCS program which provides case management and legal services that help people recover a valid driver's license after suspension or revocation for failure to pay fines.

The event was held in the stadium's Northwestern Mutual Legends Club thanks to the generosity of the Brewers Community Foundation. In total, over \$40,000 was raised. None of this would be possible without many sponsors and supporters. Top level Platinum and Gold Sponsors included:



We are very grateful for the generous sponsorship support received from each of these entities and all our other sponsors and supporters.

Many unique items donated by individuals and businesses were sold in a silent auction which raised \$3,000. Other activities included a 50/50 raffle that reached \$1,000, delicious food, and an appearance from a couple of the team's Famous Racing Sausages.

The great program featured the stories of two people who received services and were positively impacted by the CDLRE. They spoke with gratitude about the life-changing services and how they continue to benefit from their involvement with the CDLRE. They said that having a valid license means being able to transport their child and having the freedom to visit friends living a few hours away.

Funds raised during the event will go directly to the CLDRE so it can provide the case management and legal services needed to help people recover a valid driver's license after suspension or revocation for failure to pay fines.



Bakari Youth Provide Thought-Provoking Performance

Members of the public grappled with the impact marijuana legalization could have on the community after viewing a rousing theatrical performance from a group of Bakari Residential Care Center youth. Written and performed by the youth, The Mack Theater Group production "They Don't Realize What Can Happen After They Legalize" told the story of a television news reporter tasked with providing live interviews of community members living in a fictional version of Wisconsin where recreational marijuana use is legal. The performance of each boy demonstrated the different ways marijuana legalization could negatively impact young people.

After the performance, the actors received the Mack Theatre Group version of an Academy Award and praise from Dwayne Mack, a Recovery Coach and Certified Peer Specialist at Joshua Glover House and founder of Mack Theatre Group. You may contact Mack Theatre Group at macktheatregroupwi@gmail.com.



Chyra Trost Honored with Award for Service Excellence

WCS Strategy Planning and Program Implementation Manager Chyra Trost was presented with the annual "In Search of Excellence" award at the Wisconsin Family Based Services Association's 36th annual conference.

The award was presented in appreciation of and recognition for Chyra's outstanding contributions and efforts to serve families and the community, as well as her service on Wisconsin Family Based Services

Association's board of directors.

Chyra Trost has a long and distinguished career as a practitioner, innovator, and leader serving the needs of children, youth, adults and families in southeast, Wisconsin," said WCS President & CEO Clarence Johnson. "Receiving the 'In Search of Excellence Award' is recognition by the Wisconsin Family Based Services Association of the commitment and passion that she has demonstrated coupled with her hard work and belief that we all can make a positive difference in our community. "



WCS Awarded Another Harm Reduction Vending Machine

WCS is furthering its commitment to life-saving measures by hosting a second harm reduction vending machine through a partnership with Milwaukee County. The new machine will be at the WCS Wisconsin Avenue Campus this August.

In 2023, WCS was selected to host a harm reduction vending machine, in the lobby of the WCS Substance Use Services and Community Based Peer Specialist suite at its North Avenue Campus. The supplies in the vending machine are free to the local community and include fentanyl test strips, Naloxone, gun locks, and more. The WCS vending machine has supplied hundreds of people with lifesaving harm reduction supplies.



[Fox 6 recently discussed the positive results of the vending machines at the WCS North Avenue Campus](#) with Startina White, Assistant Director, Community Based Peer Programs at WCS.



Looking for People to Join the WCS Team!

Are you a dedicated, diligent, and caring individual? Why not work at WCS and become part of the team in one of the following positions:

[Recovery Navigator – Hub & Spoke](#)

Make an impact on the lives of community members with substance use and co-occurring mental health needs as a Recovery Navigator in the Hub & Spoke Health Home program. Candidates can engage people through a strength-based, trauma-informed, person-centered approach. The recovery navigator will provide direct service to approximately 12 people. To be considered for hire, candidates must have a high school diploma or GED/HSED and knowledge and/or experience serving people with substance use needs. A bachelor's degree in social work, psychology, nursing, or social services is preferred.

[Case Manager II – Parsons House Residential reentry](#)

Help others achieve their treatment goals as a case manager at Parson House, a residential reentry center emphasizing employment services for people returning from the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The position requires individual counseling and case management for up to 30 residents. The case manager maintains public safety by ensuring the actions of each resident comply with various policies and procedures. Qualified candidates will possess a bachelor's degree in social service and at least two years of counseling experience.

Clinician – Jefferson County Youth Crisis Stabilization Facility (YCSF)

Improve the lives of youth living in the YCSF by providing individual therapy and supervising milieu group therapy. The person hired for this position will deliver service coordination in collaboration with the Youth Treatment Specialist team. They will interview, assess, screen, and approve admissions of youth ages 10-17 years old. A master's degree in social work, psychology, or a behavioral science field is required. Qualified candidates will have two years of fieldwork experience or employment experience working with children or families with significant life needs. A sign-on bonus of \$5,000 is available.

Certified Peer Support Specialist – Court Services (Part-Time)

Help those in your community by working as a Certified Peer Support Specialist. In this role, you will provide 1:1 support to people in the Forensics and Conditional Release Program. This involves promoting each person's recovery, improving their ability to deal with challenges and problem-solve crises, and enhancing their stress management capabilities. To qualify, candidates must have a high school diploma, valid state certification in Peer Support Services, have lived the experience of mental health, substance use, or co-occurring needs, and be in recovery. The work is performed in the community 20 hours per week with some evening and weekend shifts.

Case Manager – Waukesha OWI Treatment Court (OWITC)

Use your skills to improve public safety by becoming a case manager in the Waukesha OWI court. This job involves case management with intensive support, supervision, and monitoring of third and fourth-offense-intoxicated drivers who have been adjudicated and are participating in OWITC. The person hired will be responsible for case management from intake evaluation through discharge, providing structure, accountability, and support for recovery. Candidates should have a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, social work, or a related field. Case management and criminal justice system experience is preferred.

We invite you to visit www.wiscs.org/careers to view a full list of current job openings at WCS.



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WCS**

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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 111 years.

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