2019 Highlights
Dane County Department of Human Services
The Department of Human Services does incredible work to serve the Dane County community and provide a helping hand to our vulnerable residents—whether it be through after school programming, homelessness resources, immigration affairs, or other important county services.

In 2019, we continued to expand on successful partnerships with a clear priority on mental health and vulnerable youth—including Joining Forces for Families, Building Bridges, Early Childhood Zones, and emergency mobile mental health crisis services. We also bolstered our support for the Dane County Eviction Prevention Fund, The Beacon, the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), and many other impactful county programs.

These partnerships have strengthened in the early months of 2020 as we work to address the needs of residents, create social distancing, and reduce the spread of COVID-19. We’re also seeing increased needs from our community for economic support, such as FoodShare and Badger Care, during these challenging times for individuals and families. Through it all, the Department of Human Services has been on the frontlines, ready to provide support and services.

I want to thank all the staff and partner agencies who help carry out the mission of the Dane County Department of Human Services. We could not achieve these successes or lead our community through the COVID-19 pandemic without their hard work. The support of our community members has helped us reach new heights. We will get through this together.

Joe Parisi,
Dane County Executive

From the Director’s Desk

Hello friends,

Thank you for taking the time to read our first annual report in many years. We touch the lives of more than one in ten county residents. This report highlights just a small portion of the work done across all of Dane County that positively impacts our neighbors, coworkers, and families.

2019 was a year of change for the Department. I was named the Director of the Department on April 1st. I am excited to take on this work and help the Department continue to innovate and provide the most effective services to all residents. I had the honor to hire several new leadership staff in the first half of 2019, rounding out a leadership team that is energized, passionate, and equipped to tackle the future. I have been inspired by the compassion and dedication of the Department staff; each one works hard to ensure that everyone who needs help receives it in a timely and effective manner and they continually advocate for their clients, programs, and gaps in services they see.

The dedication of our staff and partners has enabled the Department and our partners to effectively respond to new and emerging needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a few short weeks we have launched telehealth options for behavioral health services, processed three times the number of FoodShare applications as normal, created social distancing at our homeless shelters, and provided meals to seniors in new and innovative ways. These efforts only amplify the incredible resources of our staff and community and I couldn’t be prouder to serve Dane County in this role. We will come out of these struggles even more resilient.

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Economic Support Specialist Uses Lived Experience to Provide Compassionate Service

Crystal has been an Economic Support Worker for 10 years. Her first contact with DCDHS was as a single parent working a full-time job and raising four children, including two with disabilities. Crystal credits the child care assistance, Wisconsin Shares, she received from DCDHS as well as interactions with DCDHS staff for her professional development.

The Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program supports low-income working families by subsidizing a portion of the cost of quality child care while parents or caregivers are working or participating in another approved activity.

Crystal remembers the stress of being a single mother and how her Economic Assistance and Work Services (EAWS) case worker always treated her with empathy and compassion. Through hard work, dedication, and help from Wisconsin Shares, Crystal built a successful and satisfying career with a local non-profit organization.

Because of her positive experience with DCDHS and her professional experience, when the opportunity presented itself, she jumped at the chance to work at DCDHS. “I remember how I was treated with dignity, compassion, and empathy and I make sure that I treat my customers the same way,” Crystal says.

For single parents like Crystal, the cost of care for one child could be as high as 36% of their income[1]. Without child care assistance, many single parents would not be able to continue to work. Research has shown that children who receive high-quality care early in their lives are more likely to do well in grade school[2].

As a result, they are more likely to graduate from college and earn higher incomes. They are also less likely to be charged with a criminal offense[3]. All these factors play an important role in helping families break the cycle of poverty.

Fostering Independence

The Independent Living Unit supports approximately 85 youth aged 14 and over who have been in foster care for six months or more in developing life skills and preparing for independence. One of those youth, Timeya, is a bright 17-year-old who entered care at age 15. In just 18 months, she completed an internship, was paired with a mentor, earned her driver’s license, developed financial literacy skills, and learned how to apply for financial aid for college.

Timeya and an Independent Living social worker discussed her goals and interests, then developed a plan for Timeya to achieve those goals as she transitions out of foster care. Timeya was connected with the Wanda Fullmore Internship through Commonwealth Development and successfully completed an internship with the City of Madison while receiving mentoring, support, and professional development.

Timeya took advantage of the Independent Living Unit’s mentorship program that facilitates permanent connections for youth that can provide positive impacts on their mental health, educational attainment, peer relationships, and outcomes in life[5]. Timeya’s foster mother became her forever home and through that relationship, she acquired her driver’s license. Timeya also participated in a six-week financial literacy course hosted by the Independent Living Unit. “The financial class helped me learn to save money better and I even learned a little about the stock market,” Timeya says.

Timeya will graduate in June and dreams of becoming a medical doctor. Because of Timeya’s drive to succeed, the support she received, and the connections she made through her Independent Living worker and forever home, Timeya is applying to five colleges and has the tools for her future success.
Northside Early Childhood Zone...Ready Set Go!

Aerial, a mother of an adorable little boy, was wanting a better life for herself and her son. She was introduced to the Northside Early Childhood Zone (NECZ), a home visitation program focused on serving pregnant people and children ages birth to four.

Home visitation provides services in clients’ homes to promote healthy pregnancy and positive parent-child relationships. It also offers assistance to secure and maintain stable housing, obtain education and employment services, and support health and wellness. These wrap-around services are provided by a co-located team of professionals that are accessible to families living on Madison’s Northside through the NECZ program. Aerial decided to attend the Ready Set Go Education and Training Program (RSG) since she was interested in learning new skills and meeting other people to expand her social network beyond her family.

She joined the RSG class and soon found out that it would be of a great benefit to her and her son. She comments, “It opened me up to think of better opportunities. It was also helpful to hear from others and how we were in similar circumstances, yet looking for something better.”

Upon completion of Ready Set Go, and with support from her home visitor, Aerial interviewed for employment as a Patient Care Technician. She was offered a full time position at a competitive wage and has been employed for seven months in a job she truly loves.

“It opened me up to think about better opportunities.”

Through hard work and effort she has changed the course of her, and her son’s, life and observes, “I am proud of myself.”

In 2019, the NECZ served 80 families composed of 321 people.

Early Intervention Program Supports Children with Disabilities and Their Families

The Children’s Long Term Support (CLTS) Program provides services to children with intellectual, physical and/or emotional disabilities from all socioeconomic, cultural, and racial backgrounds.

Jessica is an example of one of the many children in Dane County who receive CLTS services. Her story illustrates how investment in effective case management and carefully targeted CLTS services can save thousands of dollars.

In the words of Jessica’s father, “Our daughter Jessica has both Mosaic Down Syndrome and Autism. These diagnoses have challenged her everyday life at a very high level.” In light of these difficulties, Jessica’s CLTS team prioritized Home Safety, Access to the Community, and Sustainable Family Caregiving in Jessica’s CLTS plan.

In 2019, the CLTS program served 1,222 youth.

98.7% of youth lived with their immediate or extended family.

Access to the Community
Jessica loves to be outdoors and especially enjoys making trips to the park. Due to her mobility limitations, this is challenging. Jessica’s case manager found a stroller custom made for Jessica’s disabilities and worked with the family to use CLTS funds to purchase it. The stroller enables access to all kinds of ordinary places (like the park, stores, library, etc.) in her community. “The impact this stroller has on her quality of life is enormous,” Jessica’s father says.

Sustainable Family Caregiving
Families need periodic breaks from caregiving to avoid burnout and to sustain employment. Jessica’s CLTS plan allocates funding to hire trained respite workers. Jessica’s dad shares that, “The respite services provided through CLTS give us a much-needed break and opportunity to relax. We feel strongly that when we feel more supported this helps Jessica get the maximum love and dedication that she richly deserves from her parents.”

Investment in cost-effective CLTS services enables children like Jessica to remain living with their families, which is best for the child’s welfare and avoids much more expensive out-of-home placements.

73% of caregivers who were unemployed obtained employment during the service episode.

58% of these caregivers obtained full-time employment.

In 2019, the NECZ served 80 families composed of 321 people.
Focusing on students with disabilities, the Vocational Futures Planning and Support (VFPS) Program uses a highly individualized approach to identify jobs that are a good match for each young adult’s unique skills.

Take Alex, a 21-year-old high school student who had always dreamed of working in a laboratory. VFPS staff partnered with school staff and Alex to create an inventory of Alex’s work skills and to identify a company willing to customize a laboratory position for him. Luminex, a Madison bio-tech firm, worked with the VFPS team to identify tasks it believed would enhance lab efficiency and be a great match for Alex. After taking a tour, Alex gave a “thumbs up” and Luminex hired him as a part-time LabTechnician!

Like all youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities who participate in VFPS, Alex can take pride in becoming a contributing citizen of Dane County and, over time, reduce his reliance on government benefits. Alex will be happier, healthier and less socially isolated because he has meaningful work. And because he’s productively engaged during the work week, Alex’s family members are better able to sustain their caregiving role.

For people with disabilities who need ongoing assistance, support at community jobs costs less than at jobs in facility-based work centers in terms of cost per hour worked ($10.45 vs. $15.91) and cost per dollar earned ($1.75 vs. $6.72).

Dane County residents with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities who work in the community earn a total of $3.9 million or more per year, almost all of which is spent locally.

In 2019, 27 new foster parents received mentoring from other experienced foster parents.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families has also embraced the idea of mentoring new foster parents, and has provided grant opportunities to counties to fund this initiative. Annual feedback/appreciation meetings allow DCDHS to tweak and grow the program to meet the changing needs of Dane County foster parents.

Foster Parent Mentoring Program: What Sets Us Apart

One of the biggest challenges Dane County has faced is how to retain foster parents and enhance their skills to meet the needs of our foster youth, particularly teens. Veteran foster parent Bernadette Cole states that when she “started out 23 years ago, I was able to vent and obtain advice from a fellow foster parent, which kept things real for me.” Other long-standing foster parents say support from fellow foster parents made all the difference for them, too.

That fueled the Foster Care Unit’s desire to develop a mentoring program, and on April 1, 2018, the Foster Parent Mentoring Program launched. The program reimburses foster parent mentors for time spent with each new foster home, and asks mentors for a three-month commitment once their mentee receives their first foster placement. Mentors and mentees often transition to friendship once their commitment is met.

The additional support makes it more likely that these new foster families will continue to foster past their initial two-year licensing period. In a survey conducted after the program’s first year, new foster parents responded that they felt better prepared to accept a placement, participate in shared parenting opportunities with birth parents, and “less alone.”

Bernadette now mentors Samona as she begins her own journey fostering teens. “It feels good to have a go-to person anytime I have a question or need support,” Samona says.

“There is nothing Bernadette doesn’t know, and she has helped me learn to meet the kids where they are at.”

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Investment in Vocational Program Helps Young Adult Land His Dream Job

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Take Alex, a 21-year-old high school student who had always dreamed of working in a laboratory, VFPS staff partnered with school staff and Alex to create an inventory of Alex’s work skills and to identify a company willing to customize a laboratory position for him. In a great example of public-private collaboration, Luminex, a Madison bio-tech firm, worked with the VFPS team to identify tasks it believed would enhance lab efficiency and be a great match for Alex. After taking a tour, Alex gave a “thumbs up” and Luminex hired him as a part-time LabTechnician!

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“Thank you for making my son’s dream come true!”
—Anna, Alex’s mother

94% of Dane County high school students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities graduated with one or more paid jobs in the community, earning on average $647 per month.
Supporting our Immigrant Neighbors, Friends, and Family

Javier has lived in the United States for more than 15 years, residing in Madison with his wife and their four children, who are U.S. citizens. An undocumented immigrant, he was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and incarcerated at the Dodge County Detention Center. Like the majority of undocumented immigrants\(^7\), Javier was the primary breadwinner. His family suffered tremendously during his detention, which lasted a month because they couldn’t pay the $20,000 bond. Javier’s family contacted Dane County Immigrant Affairs Specialist Fabiola Hamdan, who was able to provide them with critical wraparound support.

The Dane County Immigrant Assistance Collaborative is a partnership of service providers that support and advocate for immigrants and refugees. One such partner, the University of Wisconsin Immigrant Justice Clinic (IJC), began representing Javier and successfully advocated for a significant reduction in the bond – which the family paid with assistance from the Dane County Immigrant Assistance Fund. Javier reunified with his family and will pursue his application to remain in the country lawfully. Without IJC’s advocacy and the critical support provided by Dane County, Javier would have been forced to fight his case from detention, unable to care for and support his family.

Undocumented immigrants in Wisconsin comprise about 1.9% of the state’s workforce in 2014 and paid an estimated $71.8 million in state and local taxes in 2014\(^8\).

Transitioning from Homeless to Community Fixture

Gloria and her son James came to The Beacon Day Resource Center in November 2018 after living in their car for an extended period. A Chicago native, Gloria left to seek better services for James, who is developmentally delayed and has severe medical problems.

Gloria had no faith in the system when she arrived at The Beacon. Staff asked for a chance to earn her trust and within a week Gloria and James had health insurance (Badger Care) and assistance to help purchase food (FoodShare). Sarah Marty, The Beacon’s Guest Services Specialist, began advocating for Gloria and James and developed a trusting relationship with them.

Sarah’s first priority was to make sure that James received the services needed so he could live a fulfilling and happy life.

Sarah Marty, The Beacon’s Guest Services Specialist, began advocating for Gloria and James and developed a trusting relationship with them.

Of those, 22.7% exited to permanent housing.

Sarah connected Gloria and James to multiple partner agencies – Access to Independence, Care Wisconsin and the Aging & Disability Resource Center of Dane County, to name a few – that provide on-site services at The Beacon. These agencies and others were able to stabilize Gloria and James. However, they were still homeless and there were no guarantees they would get into the shelter each night. This was extremely difficult for James because of his epilepsy.

Sarah called landlords on behalf of Gloria and James, and within a few weeks of arriving in Madison, Gloria learned she had been approved for housing. Months later, Gloria and James are thriving in the community, Gloria returns to The Beacon to thank staff and to speak to other guests about the resources that changed her and James’ lives.
It’s About Recovery

When Dashun first began “feeling the schizophrenia,” he felt out of control of his thoughts. He was overwhelmed with anxiety and he became very withdrawn and couldn’t cope with his “wild thinking.” Afraid of burdening his family, he left home with nowhere to go and no plans for his future.

Dashun was admitted to a psychiatric institution several times before being referred to Comprehensive Community Services (CCS), a voluntary, community-based program that offers a wide array of psychosocial rehabilitation services to individuals with a mental health and/or Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) diagnosis. CCS participants engage in traditional and non-traditional therapies and activities that help them achieve their goals and promote recovery.

Thanks to the support received from his CCS recovery team, Dashun says he “finally feels back to normal, like myself again.”

Dashun says working with a Peer Support Specialist has helped him the most. Peer specialists use their own history and lived experience with mental illness and recovery to motivate and encourage participants through connections.

Since coming to CCS, Dashun has been losing weight, managing his blood sugar levels by eating healthy, taking medications, and “working on myself.” With support, Dashun is able to live in his own apartment and engage in his community. He likes picking out healthy food, playing basketball at a local church, and living life.

Statewide, CCS has been shown to decrease the need for psychiatric hospitalizations and crisis intervention services both during and after the individual’s enrollment [10]. CCS has also been shown to reduce corrections system involvement, emergency detention, and harm to self and others [11].

Partnering for Success

Joining Forces for Families (JFF) is a community-based program that works with local partners to strengthen families and communities through creative problem-solving, advocacy, and connection to resources. JFF also works with communities to create safer and healthier places to live.

Mary started working with JFF four years ago after she left an abusive marriage. Mary and the JFF community social worker started with the basics: applying for Badger Care, FoodShare, and child care benefits. With those needs met, Mary secured a full-time job as a child care provider. With stable employment, the support of two faith-based pilot housing programs, and a JFF connection with a local landlord, Mary and her children were able to move into a permanently subsidized four-bedroom apartment.

With the support of her JFF social worker, Mary completed her divorce, obtained sole custody of her children, and received a low-cost loan for a quality used car. Mary’s daughter will be able to vote in the next election because of free legal services that helped her obtain proof of citizenship. Mary’s son has thrived academically and emotionally after changing schools due to Mary’s and JFF’s advocacy. JFF and the school worked with Mary to connect her other daughter to mental health services. Now, Mary plans plan to enroll in a culinary arts program as she pursues her dream of owning a bakery.

“[In Laurie [JFF social worker],] I found a good, warm heart,” Mary says. “She is a member of the family now. We trust her and we know she is not going to let us down. When I left my husband, we started from an almost suicide situation—no money, no home, no nothing—and look at us now, living happy.”

JFF works with local partners to strengthen families and communities through creative problem-solving, advocacy, and connection to resources.
When Joe was referred to the Neighborhood Intervention Program (NIP) for community supervision services, he wasn’t sure what to think. “I knew it was just something I had to do,” he says.

NIP offers prevention and intervention programs to youth involved, or at risk of involvement, with the youth justice system, and their families. Services such as the intensive community supervision Joe received seek to redirect youth by holding them accountable for their choices, building skills, and protecting the community.

Joe soon started meeting regularly with his NIP Intensive Supervision Social Worker, Bobby Moore, and seeing Bobby pop up at his school or home to check on him. While he wasn’t initially thrilled with the extra attention, Joe began to see Bobby as a friendly face.

“He’s really cool, he’s fair,” Joe says. “He was someone I knew was in my corner if I needed anything.”

Bobby is part of the high-risk unit at NIP, which is designed to give extra support and services to youth identified to be most at risk of recidivism. When a youth is identified as high-risk, an intensive supervision social worker and an ongoing youth justice social worker work together to provide intervention services and programs. This can include frequent check-ins at home and school, family support and conflict resolution, crisis response, and support in fulfilling community service and restitution obligations.

Bobby helped Joe accomplish his case plan goals, including completing his community service obligations and accessing mental health services. Joe achieved some personal goals with Bobby’s help, too.

“He helped me get a job and manage some situations at school,” Joe says. “When I felt stuck, I knew I could call Bobby, and he would listen to my side of the story.”

In 2019, 581 unique youth were referred by Law Enforcement Agencies to Youth Justice for intake and/or services.

Given the national shortage of paid caregivers[12] available to older adults, Caregiver Support activities focus on the tremendous demands placed on unpaid family and friends who help older adults remain living at home.

Caregiver Programs provide small financial grants and support to assist them in reducing isolation and feelings of loneliness and despair they may experience as they provide the majority of care to our community’s older adults.

Janet grew up with Gerald, whom she describes as “like my little brother,” and made a deathbed promise to his mother to care for him. Gerald has severe diabetes and dementia, and struggled living in his house where he was isolated, so Janet moved Gerald into the other side of her duplex. His bedroom is on the other side from her living space but he comes over to her side for meals and social time. Since Janet understood some of Gerald’s health issues were the result of lack of activity and poor eating, she engaged him in outdoor chores at home and took careful watch over his diet.

Janet enjoyed Gerald’s company but his level of dependence also meant that she became more isolated. She needed some time to focus on tasks important to her.

Janet was referred to the Caregiver Program by her case manager, and reached out to Jane De Broux, the Caregiver Specialist at the Area Agency on Aging of Dane County.

After her caregiver assessment, Janet decided adult day care offered the respite she needed while providing socialization for Gerald. “Adult Day Care has been a lifesaver,” Janet says.

The Caregiver Program supported 109 caregivers in 2019.
The “My Meal-My Way” restaurant option has raised senior nutrition in Dane County to a new level, and its success continues to grow. The first-of-its-kind program, a partnership between the Area Agency on Aging’s (AAA) senior nutrition program and local restaurants, offers meals at times not typical for the traditional nutrition program, such as an early breakfast or a combination of breakfast and/or lunch from 9a.m.–1p.m., allowing diners to choose when they prefer to eat with a choice of 5–12 meals on each menu. Diners may bring a child or grandchild and have them order from the standard menu at regular price while the older adult makes a donation of their choosing.

Since 2014, “My Meal-My Way” locations have opened in five restaurants and one grocery store in Dane County, resulting in a boom in participation (up 19.9%) as hundreds of older people who had never participated in the senior nutrition program now attend on a regular basis. The benefit of the healthy nutrition available in these meals can help avoid or delay older adult placement into costly long-term care facilities and they are far more cost effective considering a meal a day for one year costs $2,242 compared to the cost of an assisted living or nursing home at $60,000-$90,000 a year.

AAA Aging Program Specialist Angela Velasquez attributes the success of the program to the restaurant owners’ willingness to partner on a new venture, create exciting menus, give back to the community, and do so without making a profit. “They go above and beyond our wildest expectations to welcome older adult diners, provide the highest quality of freshly-prepared food, encourage social interaction in inviting spaces, and seek to grow and change with us as partners in the aging process,” Velasquez says.
In a recent satisfaction survey, 99% of residents report that the care received at Badger Prairie Health Care Center is excellent or very good.

In 2019, BPHCC had 120 beds and served 139 unique individuals.
2019 Budget
Dane County Department of Human Services

In 2019, the Dane County Department of Human Services adopted budget totaled $219,730,682; 60% ($132,043,382) is financed by Federal, State and Other outside sources and the remaining 40% ($87,687,300) is supported by county tax levy funds.

Citations


[4] ibid


[8] ibid


Key Phone Numbers

Dane County Department of Human Services

Aging and Disability Resource Center ........................................855-417-6892
Area Agency on Aging .........................................................................608-261-9930
Elder Abuse/Adults at Risk Hotline ..............................................608-261-9933
Badger Prairie Health Care Center ...............................................608-845-6601
Child Abuse reporting (business hours) ....................................608-261-5437
Child Abuse reporting (non-business hours) .........................608-255-6067
Foster Care Licensing .................................................................608-242-6333
Economic Assistance and Work Services .................................888-794-5556
Dane County Job Center ...............................................................888-794-5556

www.danecountyhumanservices.org