

20
23

Impact Report

LA CROSSE COUNTY
HUMAN SERVICES



Jason Witt, Human Services
Department Director



LA CROSSE COUNTY

Supporting our Community

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



In 2023 our Human Services team continued to bring an **innovation mindset** to serving the community. Relentlessly pursuing continuous improvement is not easy, but necessary to meet ever-evolving community needs. It was a year where our rich history of innovation was recognized as we celebrated the **25th anniversary** of the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). Being one of the first counties to pilot the **ADRC** model back in 1998, La Crosse County was also one of the first to realize its benefits. In navigating a complex array of programs, adults with disabilities and aging individuals in La Crosse County have a “one-stop shop” for education and access to essential services.

2023 saw us build on our novel **partnership** with the **City of La Crosse Police Department**, launched in 2021, that pairs mental health crisis workers with specially trained law enforcement in a “co-response” model. We expanded the program’s hours in 2023 to 12 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday while earning a “**2023 Deer Creek Innovative Program Award**” from the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Accreditation Group.

The year marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter in delivering innovative human services solutions for the community. In recent years, the **homeless population** in the City of La Crosse has grown to unprecedented levels. With community frustrations high, in June the City of La Crosse and La Crosse County announced a bold partnership to address the crisis. Under the partnership, our two local governments will shift from what has been a history of providing financial support for a number of short-term emergency efforts to leading a **comprehensive and long-term** community strategy. After an aggressive planning effort, Pathways Home, a five-year homelessness response plan was delivered to the Mayor and County Administrator at year’s end.

Implementation of Pathways Home will start in 2024, with the City and County providing the “backbone” for a new community homelessness response system that will be more **aligned, accountable and effective**. The plan sets the ambitious target for our community to reach “Homelessness Functional Zero” by 2029. The Human Services Department is proud to be part of this effort, which will shape the evolution of human services for years to come.

Thanks to all our team members, community partners and policy leaders who make all we do possible!

Sincerely,

Jason Witt, Human Services Director

jwitt@lacrossecounty.org

2023 Department Overview

- ADRC Professionals participated in nearly **50 community outreach** events, in addition to the ADRC's Dementia Care Specialist who supported over 90 activities in the community and provided roughly 35 opportunities for persons with dementia and their caregivers to remain engaged in 2023.
- Adult Protective Services investigated **472 reports of elder abuse** in 2023, 25% increase since 2021.
- The average monthly **Food Share benefits** issued within La Crosse County in 2023 was \$1.9 million.
- The average number of individuals receiving **health care** and/or Food Share benefits in La Crosse County for 2023 was 24,956.
- In 2023, we had **53 children** exit out-of-home care. Of those 53 children, 30 achieved permanency through reunification with a parent, 21 through a guardianship, and 2 children aged out of care. There were also 6 termination of parental rights hearings that involved 8 children total, who will reach permanency through adoption.
- The collaborative **Crisis Co-Response** program created by the Integrated Support & Recovery Services (ISRS) Crisis Unit and City of La Crosse Police Department successfully expanded both in service hours and staff. The program now runs Monday through Friday from 12 p.m.-9:00pm and has four La Crosse County staff and two La Crosse Police Department staff responding to crisis calls in our community. This innovative program continues to receive statewide recognition, having just received the "2023 Deer Creek Innovative Program Award" by the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Accreditation Group. The award recognizes Law Enforcement Departments for their unique and innovative programs.
- An evaluation conducted in 2023 assessed the effectiveness of the **Adult Services Diversion program** run by Justice Support Services, which aims to eliminate criminal records for low-to medium risk individuals using community-based support. The program offers qualified individuals the opportunity to have their criminal charges dropped or dismissed if they successfully fulfill the conditions set out in their diversion agreement. The evaluation revealed that for the period between 2018 and 2022, Pre-Charge Diversion clients had a success rate of 70%, while Post-Charge Diversion clients had an even higher success rate of 87%.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: KEMESHA HARPER

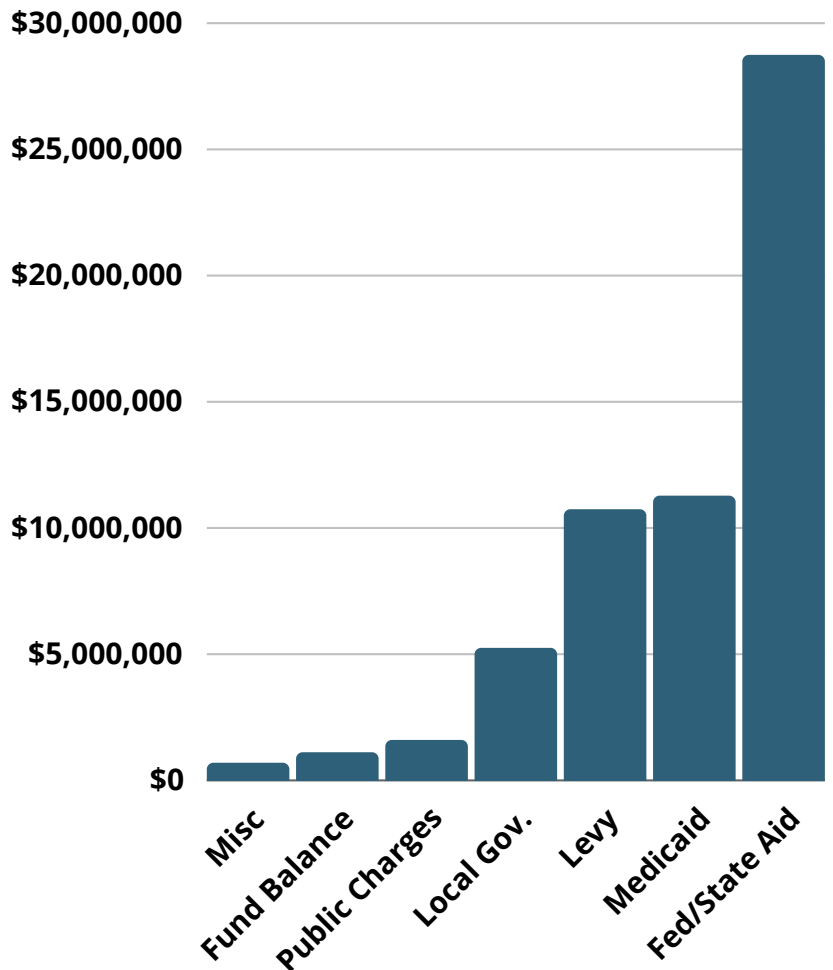
Kemesha Harper is an Economic Support Specialist working within the Law Enforcement Center/Justice Support Services. Kemesha's role has been critical towards ensuring individuals transitioning from incarceration have benefits they need to access health care and other important financial supports.

2023 Finances

REVENUE & EXPENSES

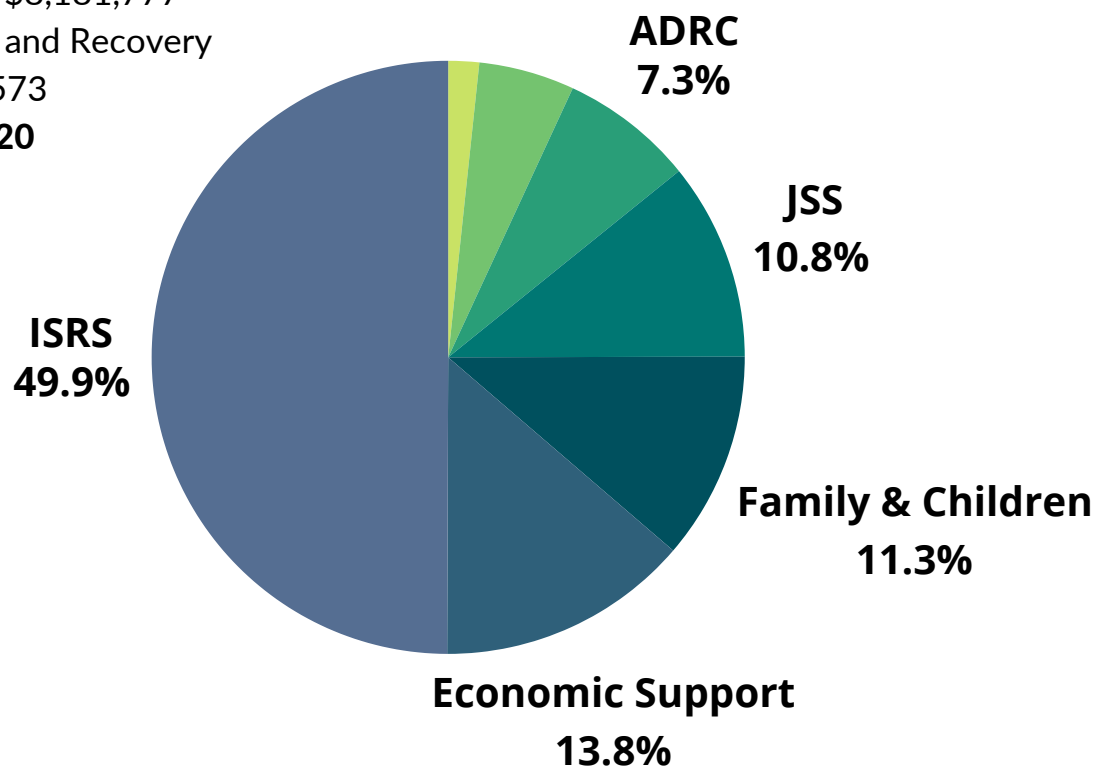
REVENUE

- Miscellaneous Revenues: \$699,846
- Fund Balance Usage: \$1,115,383
- Public Charges for Services: \$1,603,364
- Local Governmental Payments: \$5,250,865
- Levy: \$10,743,535
- Medicaid Revenue: \$11,281,810
- Federal/State Aid: \$28,745,017
- **TOTAL: \$59,439,820**



EXPENSES

- Interdepartmental (Transfers Out): \$1,000,000
- HS Operations: \$3,103,834
- ADRC & Aging: \$4,332,956
- Justice Support Services: \$6,400,764
- Family and Children: \$6,734,916
- Economic Support: \$8,181,777
- Integrated Support and Recovery Services: \$29,685,573
- **TOTAL: \$59,439,820**



Integrated Support Recovery Services



Christin Skolnik - Integrated Support and Recovery Services Manager

What we do: Integrated Support Recovery Services (ISRS) provides services for adult and children's mental health; adult and children's substance abuse; and children with special needs.

2023 Overview: Connecting people to mental health and substance abuse resources within our community and State has been at the forefront of the ISRS section's work in 2023. This year, ISRS continued to make a positive impact by partnering with the La Crosse County Jail and OWI Treatment Court Teams to provide weekly mental health support and AODA (Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse) groups for men and women residing in the jail, as well as weekly outpatient therapy and case management to recently released individuals. Individual in-person and online individual and group

treatment options for OWI Treatment Court participants are helping connect people to the right services and resources at the right time. An average census of the clinic's service includes serving 41 therapy consumers, 177 AODA consumers and 217 prescribing consumers. Those receiving prescribing services by the Advanced Practice Nurse Prescribers also received 2,000 supportive contacts from our Registered Nurses this past year.

The ISRS section also walked alongside 537 Comprehensive Community Services program participants, 593 Children's Long-Term Support program participants, answered 640 intake requests for service, responded to 18,651 crisis calls, and partnered with the La Crosse Police Department on 396 Co-Response interactions. 2024's focus will be continuing to participate in community and statewide conversations surrounding homelessness, community mental health supports, and the reduction of substance use and overdose deaths. We are also looking forward to exploring how our Comprehensive Community Services program can further support through case management individuals who are experiencing homelessness.



Economic Support



Lorie Graff - Western
Region Economic
Assistance Manager

What we do: The Western Region for Economic Assistance (WREA) consortium helps residents apply for public assistance programs such as FoodShare, BadgerCare, WHEAP (heating assistance), and more.

2023 Overview: WREA was busy in 2023 with the Unwinding. The Unwinding is the term used by the federal government to describe the steps for Medicaid agencies to replace temporary policies established during the COVID-19 emergency with regular eligibility, enrollment and benefits management processes. The goals of the unwinding have been to implement a successful return to routine operations for our programs and keep La Crosse County residents covered, whether through Medicaid or BadgerCare, insurance from an employer, or a plan from HealthCare.gov. Many of the Medicaid and

Food Share policies and eligibility renewal requirements that were suspended for the past three years returned in mid-2023.

WREA also continued to develop our community partnerships in 2023. We continue to have two Economic Support Specialists working at different locations across the county. These staff meet in person with customers to answer questions, process applications, and resolve eligibility issues. Our community Economic Support Specialists were also able to participate in various events within the community in 2023; for example, the annual Veteran's Bonanza and Western Technical College's back to school block party,

In 2023, an average of 24,956 individuals received Economic Support services in La Crosse County. 23,426 residents were enrolled in either BadgerCare Plus or Medicaid. A total of \$22.6 million in FoodShare benefits were issued in La Crosse County in 2023. We provided monthly Wisconsin Shares payments to an average of 198 families in La Crosse County, with a total of about \$1.9 million in benefits paid to help families with their childcare costs last year. Additionally, 3,821 households received Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) financial assistance in 2023.

WREA is looking forward to resuming regular post-pandemic operations when the 12-month unwinding ends after June 2024. We will continue to expand our partnerships within the community, both through adding locations and events that our Community Economic Support Specialists will participate in throughout 2024.



Justice Support Services



Tonya Van Tol - Justice Support Services Manager

What we do: Justice Support Services (JSS) supports, youth, families and adults at risk of being involved or involved in the criminal justice system. This includes early intervention/prevention programs, along with adult services that minimize the risk of becoming further involved in the criminal justice system.

2023 Overview: The Adult JSS Programs had a significant impact in 2023, with 343 unique participants enrolled in GPS monitoring. The Drug Treatment Court served 22 participants, with 5 successfully graduating from the program. The OWI Treatment Court served a total of 107 participants, with 28 successfully completing the program. Adult JSS Programs had 343 unique participants who were monitored on GPS. Youth

Justice had an average of 85 open cases per month and a total of 267 referrals in 2023.

In 2023, the La Crosse Area Family Collaborative expanded its reach into the community with the addition of its fourth neighborhood-based office located in the Schuh-Mullen Homes Neighborhood. This expansion underscores LAFC's commitment to providing accessible and community-based services. Throughout the year, LAFC's team of four neighborhood social workers provided invaluable support to 215 households. A significant portion of these families, 61%, sought LAFC's assistance due to housing-related issues, highlighting the ongoing housing challenges within the community.

The La Crosse County System of Care (SOC) continued to see an influx of referrals for youth who were chronically truant in 2023. In addition, SOC staff continued to address school-based behaviors known as "focus acts" which include misdemeanor battery, disorderly conduct, misdemeanor assault and misdemeanor theft. In the 2022-23 school year, an impressive 71% of the youth who participated in SOC completed the required programming and demonstrated no new focus act behaviors. This success rate underscores the effectiveness of the System of Care's interventions and programming in supporting youth and reducing recidivism.



Family and Children's Services



Tracy Puent -
Family and Children's
Manager

What we do: We provide Child Protective Services (CPS), Child Welfare Services, and run foster care, relative care, independent living for youth programs, and adolescent shelter/detention facilities.

2023 Overview: This past year was a year of growth and development in both positions and programs within the section. Within Child Protective Services (CPS) we welcomed four new Social Service Specialists (SSS). Programmatically, we brought the Family Interaction Program (FIP) "in-house" instead of primarily contracting out for this service. This change means we can provide supportive and educational services directly to families through our SSSs. Services include parent education, supervised visitation, transportation, and life skills coaching. In addition to the FIP, we

have also been developing and growing the Family Keys Program. The intent of this program is to engage families involved in the child welfare system, who are experiencing housing insecurity, by eliminating barriers to safe and supportive housing. Through this program we have built relationships with local landlords and strengthened our community partnerships around housing by collaborating with Safe Families for Children, Shelter Development, Munson Property Management, Dairyland Power, Kiwanis Club, and community members with lived experience. Our goal is to secure at least three housing units for families enrolled in the program.

The child welfare system in Wisconsin continues to work on transforming the system from out-of-home care to more in-home safety planning to keep children with their families. In 2023, we received 1,809 reports of child abuse and requests for CPS services and served 71 families or 121 children in their home through wraparound funding provided by the state. Of those, 105 were able to remain safely in their home with the funding support and services provided. When children could not remain in their homes safely, they were placed in out of home care. In 2023, an average of 59 children were in out of home care each month, with 31% placed with relatives.

We filled a key leadership role and welcomed Jeff Wallace as the new superintendent for the Western Region Adolescent Services (WRAS). We will be undertaking strategic planning in 2024 to determine future of WRAS programming.



Aging and Disability Resource Center



Carissa Pagel-Smith - Aging & Disability Resource Center Manager

What we do: We provide unbiased information related to aging or living with a disability. We also run nutrition, caregiver support, and other programs to help our community stay independent and healthy.

2023 Overview: In 2023, the Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) celebrated 25 years! The ADRC of La Crosse County was one of nine counties to first pilot the model in 1998 and today, consists of several professionals and specialists to provide a variety of programs, services, resources, and supports.

In 2023, the Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) continued to enhance resources, adding three additional staff to their team, to better support the community's growing needs. Among these additions included two ADRC Professionals, one designated as an Options Counselor and the other, a Disability Benefits Specialist, and one Social Service Specialist designated specifically to support the largest of our Older American Act programs, Senior Nutrition. Collectively, the ADRC's team of Options Counselors assisted 6,138 customers (12% increase from previous year) who walked in and/or called the ADRC, and they made/received 16,175 unique contacts (8% increase from previous year). Additionally, the ADRC's team of Benefit Specialists assisted 1,158 clients (10% increase from previous year), Dementia Care Specialist supported more than 150 individuals/families, and roughly 160 local caregivers connected with the ADRC's Caregiver Support Specialist directly or through caregiver events or classes.

The ADRC also worked towards achieving its desired model for all Senior Nutrition Program dining sites where eligible individuals feel free to attend sites located within a facility that is safe, comfortable, clean, and has a cheerful, friendly atmosphere that promotes socialization and offers health promotion activities. With these efforts, transitioning operations solely to community centers, overall congregate dining participation has grown 72% since reopening after closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, the Senior Nutrition Program served a total of 73,654 meals to 930 individuals. Modernization of this program will continue into 2024 with exploration of a restaurant voucher model.



Looking Forward

PROJECTS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) will add a second **Dementia Care Specialist (DCS)** to help meet the growing need for increased support for people with dementia and their caregivers. Currently, there are about 2,800 people living in La Crosse County with dementia, with many supported by family caregivers at home. By 2040, that number is expected to double. The Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) will embark on the development of the next three-year aging plan, covering the period of 2025-2027, as defined by the Wisconsin Elders Act. Much of 2024 will consist of gathering input from the public to develop a plan with (not for) older adults.
- Economic Support will continue to focus on a successful unwinding, with the full transition to post-pandemic regular operations happening in July 2024. We plan to expand outreach sites and events that our **Community Economic Support Specialists** will participate in throughout 2024, strengthening community partnerships and providing easier access to Economic Support services to residents in need.
- A focus in 2024 for **Child Protective Services** will be on foster parent recruitment.
- A focus in 2024 for **Western Region Adolescent Services** will be on strategic planning for both shelter and secure detention to determine future programming that meets the needs of youth in our community.
- The creation of a specialized unit within **Integrated Support Recovery Services** to provide flexible case management and coordination of services to individuals with severe and persistent mental illness experiencing homelessness, or who have recently secured housing and need wraparound services to maintain their housing.
- Justice Support Services received a Department of Children and Families (DCF) Innovation Grant and funding from the City of La Crosse Police Department to support the expansion of **System of Care (SOC)** early intervention programming in 2024. This funding allows SOC to address the 4 “focus acts” (misdemeanor battery, disorderly conduct, misdemeanor assault and misdemeanor theft) that occur within the City of La Crosse. Previously, SOC focused services only in middle and high schools in La Crosse County. A primary goal is to reduce the number of youth who are ticketed for these focus acts by offering support and targeted interventions that address underlying causes. In addition, data will be collected and analyzed to monitor and measure the reduction of future involvement in the criminal justice system by the youth who are served.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: KARI LAWSON

Kari Lawson is an Economic Support Specialist working within the ISRS section. Customers of ISRS can directly access Kari to ask questions, apply for benefits or get help with their eligibility. Kari works closely with the ISRS section social workers to assist those in need of Medicaid or other ES services to resolve challenging eligibility issues so ISRS customers can access medical services.



LA CROSSE COUNTY

Exceptional services. Extraordinary place.



[Website](#)



[Newsletter](#)



[Facebook](#)



[Instagram](#)