



Kids deserve the best.

Children's Service Society of Wisconsin

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Children's Service Society of Wisconsin

For more than 135 years, Children's Service Society of Wisconsin (CSSW) has changed the lives of children and families through effective, empowering programming that strives to build, sustain and enhance a nurturing environment for Wisconsin's children and youth. CSSW has evolved to become the largest not-for-profit, nonsectarian provider of community-based child and family services and child welfare services in the state. Our work is a key part of advancing the Children's Wisconsin vision for our state's children to be the healthiest in the nation.

CSSW's service providers positively impacted the lives of almost 19,000 children and families in 2024 through our core service areas: community education and injury prevention, mental and behavioral health, family preservation and support, child welfare, and child advocacy and protection.

Our services, combined with the medical expertise of Children's Wisconsin, bring child health and welfare together to transform the health and well-being of children, families and communities — because kids deserve the best.

Dear friends and supporters,

As we reflect on 2024, I am filled with deep gratitude and pride for what we have achieved together. This year has been a powerful reminder of the strength, compassion and resilience of the Children's Service Society of Wisconsin (CSSW) community. Together, we navigated challenges, embraced opportunities and stayed focused on our shared commitment to the well-being of children and families across Wisconsin.

Along with our Children's Wisconsin health system partners, across all CSSW programs and services we believe that caring for kids means supporting every aspect of their health—physical, social and emotional. Our vision—that Wisconsin's kids will be the healthiest in the nation—continues to guide us, and our mission to provide care, advocacy, research and education alongside families has never been more important.

Throughout 2024, our teams adapted and evolved to meet the changing needs of those we serve. The unwavering commitment of our teams helped thousands of kids and families across Wisconsin access the tools, resources and support they need to build brighter, more stable futures.

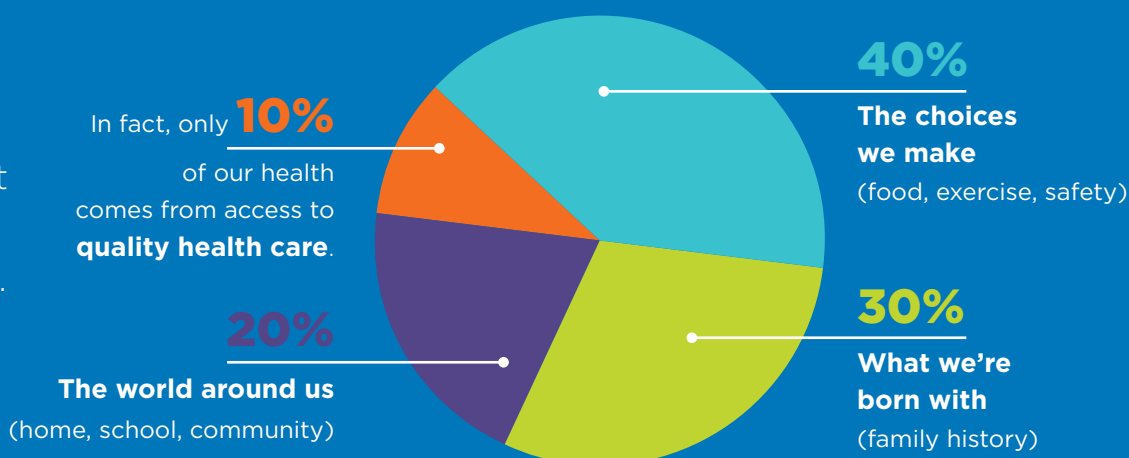
Here are a few highlights from the past year:

1. Continued Expansion of Mental Health Services In 2024, Children's Wisconsin deepened its commitment to the mental and emotional well-being of kids and teens across the state. By embedding mental and behavioral health services into clinics, schools and community settings, we are ensuring that more children receive the support they need—when and where they need it most. Our work focuses on

continued on next page »

Did You Know?

Staying healthy is mostly about what happens outside the doctor's office.



prevention, early intervention and healing, breaking down barriers to care and reducing stigma. Whether helping a young child build healthy relationships or guiding a teen through unimaginable trauma, our team walked alongside families on their path to hope and healing.

2. Deepening Community Partnerships

Collaboration remains central to our impact. This year, we expanded our work with community-based organizations, schools and health care providers to create stronger networks of support. These partnerships help ensure that no child or family has to navigate challenges alone. These partnership milestones are more than numbers—they reflect our deep commitment to collaboration and to earning the trust of those who share our vision for the health and well-being of Wisconsin's kids.

3. Enhancing Family Support Programs In 2024, our family preservation and support programs stood as a source of strength and connection for families across Wisconsin. Through home visits, in-person and online parenting support, trusted community partnerships and maternal health navigation, during their most vulnerable moments, our staff was there offering care, compassion and hope. Our Healthy Start for Growing Families program received renewed funding to serve parents and infants with life-changing care and earned the opportunity to expand into surrounding areas. All of this work is rooted in the belief that every child deserves a safe, nurturing start—and that strong families build strong communities.

4. Driving Advocacy and Awareness In 2024, our team used their voices to champion the health and well-being of children and families. We shared the impact of our work and the urgent need for continued investment in child health. Whether advocating for child abuse prevention, maternal health programs or family well-being initiatives, our team showed what it means to lead with purpose and compassion. Together with allies and policymakers, we are helping shape a future where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

5. Engaging Volunteers and Donors None of this work would be possible without you—our generous volunteers, supporters and dedicated team members. Your time, energy and gifts have fueled our mission and extended our reach. Your belief in our work is the foundation of our impact, and we are truly thankful.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on innovation, advocacy and responsiveness. We will continue to listen to families, adapt to community needs and lead with compassion. Together, we are building a future where every child can grow up safe, healthy and supported.

Thank you for your ongoing trust and partnership. I am honored to lead this incredible organization and to work alongside all who share our passion and dedication to the health and well-being of Wisconsin's children, teens, and those who support and care for them.

Karen Timberlake

President,
Children's Service Society of Wisconsin



Statewide Presence (as of Dec. 31, 2024)

Antigo

N4013 US Hwy. 45
Antigo, WI 54409
(715) 627-1414

Black River Falls

W11109 Rogers Rd.
Black River Falls, WI 54615
(715) 284-3001

Eau Claire

2004 Highland Ave., Suite M
Eau Claire, WI 54701
(715) 835-5915

Elkhorn

W4063 Hwy. NN
Elkhorn, WI 53121
(262) 741-1440

Janesville

32 E. Racine St., Suite 190
Janesville, WI 53545
(608) 314-9006

Kenosha

8207 22nd Ave., Suite 155
Kenosha, WI 53143
(262) 652-5522

6809 122nd Ave.

Kenosha, WI 53142
(262) 653-2266

Madison

1716 Fordem Ave.
Madison, WI 53704
(608) 221-3511

Marshfield

503 S. Cherry Ave., Suite 4
Marshfield, WI 54449

Central Avenue Clinic

725 S. Central Ave.
Marshfield, WI 54449
(715) 387-2729

Merrill

712 E. 2nd St.
Merrill, WI 54452
(715) 539-9228

Milwaukee

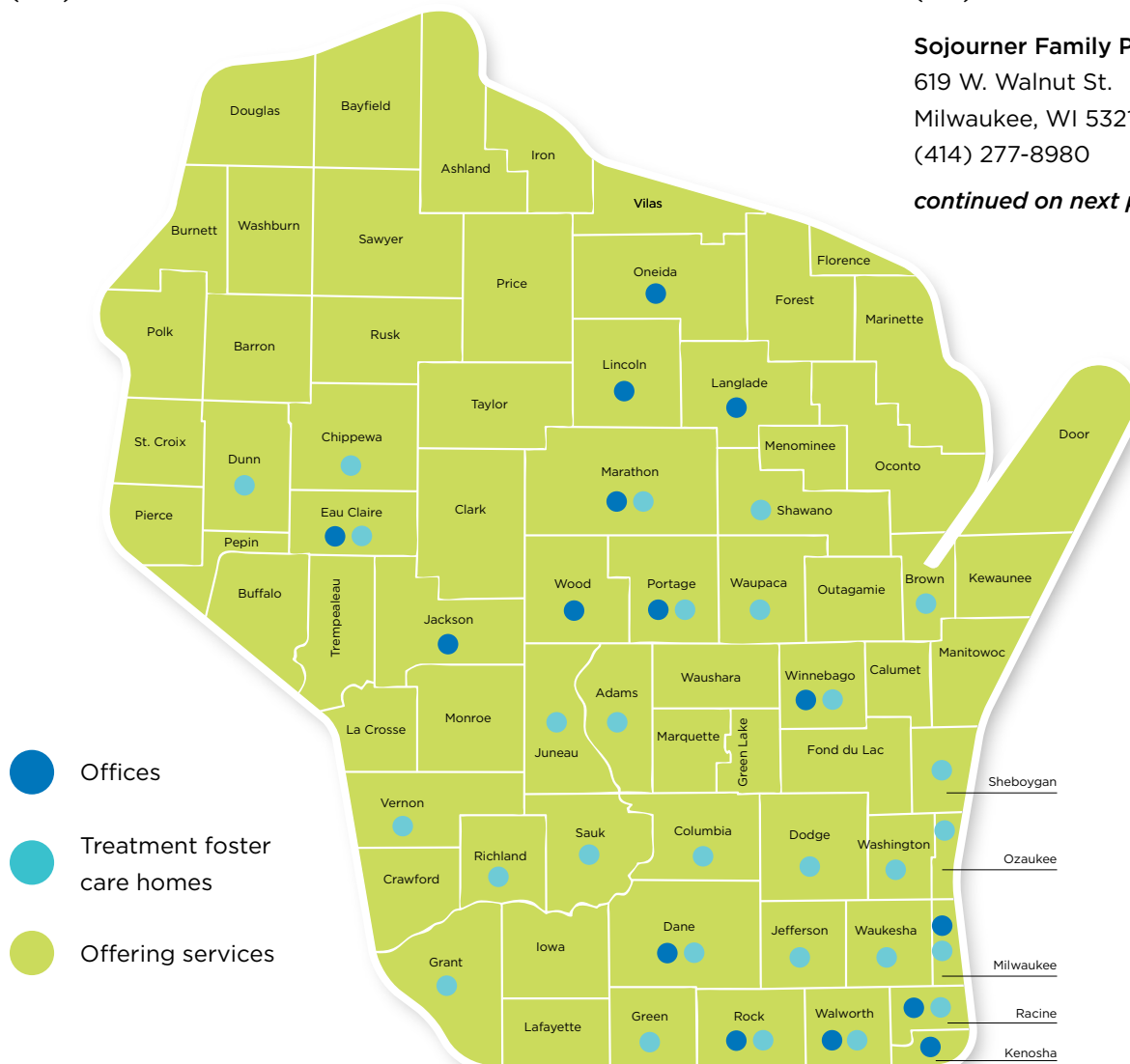
76th Street Office

620 S. 76th St., Suite 120
Milwaukee, WI 53214
(414) 453-1400

Sojourner Family Peace Center

619 W. Walnut St.
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 277-8980

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Neenah

333 N. Commercial St., Suite 400
Neenah, WI 54956
(920) 967-9127

Racine

8800 Washington Ave., Suite 100
Mount Pleasant, WI 53406
(262) 633-3591

Rhineland

3716 Country Dr.
Rhineland, WI 54501
(715) 361-6300

Stevens Point

1466 Water St., Suite 2
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 341-6672

Taylor

N7532 County Road P
Taylor, WI 54659
(715) 670-1378

Wausau

705 S. 24th Ave., Suite 400
Wausau, WI 54401
(715) 848-1457



For a current list of
services provided at
each location, please see
childrenswi.org/locations.

By the Numbers

Community Education and Injury Prevention

1,426

families and kids served

Project Ujima 1,426

Mental and Behavioral Health

8,656

families and kids served

Includes individual counseling, psychological testing,
group counseling and school-based mental health

Family Preservation and Support

5,521

families and kids served

Home Visiting and Healthy Start for Growing Families
(early childhood services)..... 914
Family Support, Education and Employment
Specialist programs, and Youth Innovations..... 801
Family Resource Centers
(including group-based programming
and Triple P) 3,912

Child Welfare

2,783

families and kids served

Ongoing services 1,392
In-home services..... 121
Project Home..... 95
Respite 367
Public adoption..... 373
Treatment and regular foster care..... 265
Supervised visitation 170

Child Advocacy and Protection Services

1,074

families and kids served

Includes services provided at Child Advocacy Centers



Your Support Makes a Difference

We're determined to make Wisconsin's children the healthiest in the nation, but we cannot do it alone. While we receive funding from government contracts, United Way and client fees, we could not continue providing many services without the generous support of individual, corporate and foundation donations. Critical services, such as mental and behavioral health care and Child Advocacy Centers, are only partially funded by sustainable revenue streams and depend on financial support from other sources. Your support helps us improve the health of our most at-risk children and families across the state.



2024 Financial Results

Operating Revenue

Service fees	\$9,232,915
United Way	\$984,308
Fundraising	\$2,961,232
Purchase of service	\$42,026,643
Other	\$103,297

Total operating revenue **\$55,308,395**

Operating Expenses

Community Education and Injury Prevention	\$2,076,331
Mental and Behavioral Health	\$16,911,027
Family Preservation and Support	\$8,348,964
Child Welfare	\$33,251,810
Child Advocacy and Protection Services	\$1,839,790
Institute for Child and Family Well-Being	\$433,518
Other	\$4,407,167

Total operating expenses **\$67,268,607**

Income (loss) from operations **\$(11,960,212)**

Net nonoperating gain (loss) **\$(17,718)**

Excess (deficit) of revenue over expenses **\$(11,977,930)**

Community Education and Injury Prevention

Factors outside the doctor's office impact a child's health — from home, school and neighborhood environments to choices about food, exercise and safety. That's why Children's Wisconsin embraces opportunities to reach and support families outside of medical settings. Community Health and Education programs and services strive to improve the health of children, families and communities.

Project Ujima aims to stop the cycle of community violence by supporting youth and families on their journey of healing and recovery. When patients are admitted to Children's Wisconsin Emergency Department and Trauma Center for an injury due to violence, program staff members are swiftly engaged to support the youth and their families through this traumatic experience. This voluntary, family-centered program offers a wide variety of services and resources, including crisis intervention and case management, mentoring, and mental health and medical services over approximately 12-15 months. This transformative program has been shown to increase participants' resilience and reduce their risk of reengaging in violence.

Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin (PCAW)'s mission is to build community resources, provide training and public awareness, and advocate for programs that strengthen and support families to reduce child abuse and neglect. In 2024, PCAW successfully completed and passed its recertification process with Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA). PCAW is a chapter of a national network of state chapters aimed at strengthening families to prevent child abuse and neglect. Chartered chapters, like PCAW, complete a strengths-based recertification process every four years that

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Strength Begins with Support

Project Ujima team members stepped in to support a young girl, Paris Lee, who was referred to **Project Ujima** through the EDTC

after experiencing a physical assault at school. Through the collaboration with her school and family, a crime victim advocate launched weekly school visits

that helped her reduce

altercations and opened up conversations about her future goals. This led to reduced incidents at school and an improvement in behavior and grades.

A turning point came when she learned about Project Ujima's summer camp and youth groups. She expressed excitement and saw it as a chance to build friendships and enjoy a positive summer. In addition, the youth groups introduced Paris to positive coping mechanisms and communication skills when faced with difficult interactions at school. Paris and her mother were invited to share her story at the Rally Round listening session, hosted by the Children's Wisconsin Foundation team, where she was able to reflect on her experience and interest in joining summer camp again in 2025.



includes staff from PCAA and peer reviewers from other state chapters. This process involves submitting documentation that demonstrates strengths in nine core areas and represents a comprehensive approach to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, as well as promotion of child, family and community well-being, and includes a two-day on-site visit.

The 2024 Together for Children conference was held in person for three days with over 200 professionals attending two keynote sessions and 24 workshops. Seminars offered topics such as forensic interviewing and innovative strategies for preventing and responding to child neglect. There was a strong focus on caring for the caregiver and worker resiliency. One keynote was titled Helping the Helpers: Combatting Burnout, and a breakout session focused on resiliency with first responders. The conference also featured a Serenity Room, where attendees could decompress from the sometimes-difficult information shared in workshops. Day 2 included a keynote on the federal landscape titled Preventing Child Maltreatment through Policy and several breakouts focusing on primary prevention, community awareness and community collaboration.



Marquette University's Kappa Delta-Theta Lambda Chapter held its annual fundraising gala in November 2024 to raise money and support for PCAW.

PCAW continues to provide materials for parents to connect with their children. These can be accessed by families on PCAW's website or by professionals working with families, which includes Children's clinics, community Family Resource Centers and home visitation programs. Materials available include culturally diverse coloring sheets, Warm Fuzzies and Kid Coupons, and a Family Fun activity book. In 2024, PCAW continued to promote April as Family Strengthening Month. In partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB) and other state partners, PCAW produced a Family Strengthening Month Toolkit to help individuals, organizations and communities promote the importance of strengthening and supporting kids and families.



In the United States, it is estimated that at least one in 10 children will experience sexual abuse before they enter adulthood (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). Child sexual abuse is preventable. By changing the conditions in organizations and communities that allow sexual abuse to persist, we give youth the chance to live, learn, play and grow without the adversity of child sexual abuse and the challenges associated with its impact.

Awareness to Action (A2A) is committed to the health and well-being of kids and families by activating adults across the state to stay ahead of this epidemic with primary prevention strategies. We strive to see that kids have far more positive childhood experiences than they do adverse, giving them the foundation needed to remain healthy and well throughout their lives.

Across Wisconsin, Awareness to Action program staff and trainers facilitate a half-day workshop for organizations where children are in the care of adults and older youth – faith communities, school districts,

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mentoring programs, youth sports and arts programs, and various others. Through this education, we teach adults to care for kids by using best-practice policies and procedures. Following the half-day workshop, participants are tasked with implementing the plan that they create for child safety during the workshop.

During 2024, 139 individuals representing 54 organizations or programs participated in Awareness to Action's "Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in Organizations: Policy and Procedure Training" half-day workshop. These programs were held in 22 counties across the state. Notably, two workshops were held in Tomahawk, WI, giving 12 organizations the opportunity to make a commitment to child well-being and abuse prevention.

Workshop participants shared:

- Was very beneficial and I want more!
- The workshop was so helpful. I feel a better direction and hope with moving forward. Thank you, Laura and Mary!!
- Interactive and informative, facilitators did amazing at engaging participants and relating content back to the work we do. Thank you!
- Fantastic presentation. Visuals, handouts and presenters were informative, engaging and clear.

Beyond the workshops, four Community of Practice sessions were hosted by Awareness to Action, with 38 participants across the sessions. One session featured guest speaker Maggie Ingram from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, talking about children and youth with problematic or illegal sexual behaviors.

Awareness to Action also continued to engage in impactful state partnerships, collaborating on presentations, publications and community engagement with multiple agencies across the state. Along with Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin (PCAW), Awareness to Action joined the Department of Corrections – Sex Offender Registry Specialists in creating a prevention messaging strategy for several National Night Out events across the state. Awareness to Action and PCAW provided

print materials to engage the community in conversation about family strengthening and stopping sexual abuse before it happens. Two staff members also engaged with communities at National Night Out events alongside Department of Corrections colleagues.

In collaboration with the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, a resource was developed to support the community's understanding of the dynamics of child sexual abuse and the importance of accurately sharing this information. *Understanding Grooming: Impacts of LGBTQ+ Misinformation* is a supplemental handout to *Understanding Grooming: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers*. Through this partner project, our communities have more access to the information needed to keep all youth, families and communities safe.

As we look toward 2025 and beyond, Awareness to Action remains committed to getting ahead of child sexual abuse before it impacts our kids and families. We look forward to continuing partnerships, educating organizations and leading the state toward safer communities.

Awareness to Action is grateful for their funding partnerships with the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board that supported this work in 2024. A special thank you to the Steering Committee member organizations for their guidance and partnership in prevention:

- Child Advocacy Centers of Wisconsin
- Children's Wisconsin
- The Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Board
- Thriving Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- Wisconsin Department of Children & Families
- Wisconsin Department of Corrections – Sex Offender Registry
- Wisconsin Department of Health Services – Injury & Violence Prevention
- Wisconsin Department of Justice – Office of Crime Victim Services
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Mental and Behavioral Health

Children's Wisconsin Mental and Behavioral Health's (MBH) vision is that every child and teenager in Wisconsin will receive the right support for their developmental, mental and behavioral health at the right time in order to grow up healthy and thriving. We are focusing our work on four major strategies to advance this vision: early detection and prevention, reducing stigma, increasing and creating equitable access, and advancing research and education. Children's Wisconsin 2027 strategy commits us to advancing every aspect of child and adolescent health, including mental health. Our investment in child and adolescent mental and behavioral health demonstrates our commitment to transform whole child and adolescent health by wrapping mental health resources around all of the work that we do across Children's Wisconsin. This allows us to identify and detect mental health concerns, regardless of where a child is treated and oftentimes sooner, providing families with appropriate intervention and treatment options.

In 2024, the Counseling team provided **93,932 visits**, both in person and via telehealth, to **11,459 kids and families** across the state!

Children's Wisconsin implemented an innovative approach to integrating mental and behavioral health (IMBH) within most settings where we provide care. Integrating MBH resources is a critical component to expanding access and reducing stigma. **Over 7,000 kids** received care at the Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in 2024. We have integrated MBH therapists in all of our CACs across the state as part of the multidisciplinary teams caring for kids who may have been abused. CACs help minimize trauma, break the cycle of abuse, and help kids and their families find a path to safety and healing.

The **Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH)** program promotes social and emotional well-being and healthy development in children under 6 years old by providing culturally responsive care that emphasizes nurturing caregiver relationships. In 2024, ECMH was in six clinics across the state with 11 providers supporting care. They provided more than **9,500 early childhood mental health visits** to more

than 800 kids in 2024. ECMH continues to expand programming through a \$2.5 million SAMHSA grant and fee-for-service contracts with the Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health (WIAIMH), the Milwaukee Health Department, United Community Center, Jefferson County Head-Start and Acelero, as well as some funding through our community services departments, to develop best-practice standards and training materials. ECMH is also building the future infant and early childhood mental and behavioral health workforce by expanding our partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison by supporting multiple therapists and/or consultants in completing the Infant, Early Childhood and Family Mental Health Capstone Program, and over 20 therapists/consultants in completing the Trauma Informed Child-Parent Psychotherapy (TI-CPP) training since its inception.

Our **School-Based Mental Health (SBMH)** program partnered with **75 schools** across Wisconsin in 2024, which is more than double the sites from 2019. SBMH provides individual, group and family therapy to students, as well as education and consultation to teachers, staff and caregivers. In 2024, SBMH provided more than 24,000 visits. We are discovering that over time, schools with school-based mental health services experienced decreased disciplinary incidents and improved detection of more subtle problems in children, namely depression and anxiety.

The **Therapist In Training** program trains the next generation of pediatric psychotherapists by hiring and providing experience and on-the-job education needed to earn their license, ideally within two years. We began our program in 2019 with a goal of supporting at least 30 therapists by 2024, and our MBH program has trained **45 therapists** to date, exceeding our goal by 50%! Most trainees have been retained by Children's Wisconsin as fully-licensed therapists and are placed in our Outpatient clinic, School-Based Mental Health programs, Walk-In and Primary Care clinics.

Children's continues to lead in the advancement of **research** for pediatric and adolescent mental and behavioral health, under the leadership of

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Dr. Michael S. Gaffrey, PhD, the Craig Yabuki Research Chair and Director of Mental and Behavioral Health Research at Children's Wisconsin. With a focus on screening, early intervention and prevention, Dr. Gaffrey and his team are working to establish standardized screening protocols and develop innovative digital tools to support early identification of mental health risks or emerging challenges. These digital innovations aim to enhance clinical decision-making, improve adherence to evidence-based care practices and support providers across the health system in delivering timely, effective and safe mental health care. These efforts directly support Children's mission to provide the best and safest care by integrating cutting-edge technology with best clinical practices, ensuring that every child receiving care, regardless of the reason for their visit, is appropriately screened and supported to achieve optimal mental and behavioral health outcomes.

In 2024, therapist Ashley began providing **mental health therapy services** to a teenage girl who had been repeatedly sexually assaulted by her father, and she had become pregnant as a result. Her mental health therapy was able to address the trauma of the abuse, as well as her emotions about the pregnancy and her decision to place the child for adoption. This teen client benefitted from the support and therapeutic work, and she was able to move on past therapy, with the understanding that she can return for services at any point if there are future triggers to her trauma.





Seven children were honored at the **KinderReady** graduation ceremony that was held in downtown Madison at the Children's Museum. The event featured a singalong, activity and lunch.

KinderReady is operated through the Home Visiting program of Children's Wisconsin Dane County. This interactive family event highlighted those children who will enter kindergarten in the new school year. Each graduate received a backpack in honor of their achievement.

The KinderReady program has offered these children and their families school readiness tools, strengthening their gross motor skills and setting them up for academic success in the future.



Family Preservation and Support

Our statewide family preservation and support programs promote safe and stable families in a variety of ways. Our **Home Visiting** programs work individually with pregnant and parenting families by providing information, resources, support and education. We follow evidence-based models, such as Healthy Families America and Parents as Teachers.

Healthy Start for Growing Families is a federal grant-funded program aimed at eliminating health inequities for women and children with the goals of reducing infant mortality, increasing access to early prenatal care and removing barriers to health care access. Partnering with the Black Child Development Institute of Milwaukee, we established a Community Consortium that includes Healthy Start grant partners, community stakeholders and Healthy Start program participants working to create community-level change for health disparities. The program uses family health navigators to support mothers, fathers and babies by promoting and enhancing physical and behavioral health, helping address basic needs and providing community resources for concerns like family violence. In 2024, with the start of our new five-year grant cycle, we now service **12 City of Milwaukee zip codes and all of Racine County.**

Our **Family Resource Centers** provide parents and caregivers with empowering information and support programs — all free of charge to families — to promote the healthy growth and development of children and strengthen family relationships. All Family Resource Centers facilitate parent education classes that follow evidence-based models, such as ACT Raising Safe Kids, Triple P or Nurturing Parent. Our Play and Learn classes follow the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. Most centers also offer parenting phone support, delivering tailored and confidential parenting information and resources to callers over the phone.

Maria was referred to the Healthy Families Milwaukee County Home Visiting Program through the **Healthy Start for Growing Families Program** within Children's. Maria had recently left her relationship with father of baby and was feeling very isolated. Maria was expecting her first child but had little support as her family resides in another country. Maria enrolled in the program shortly before delivering her healthy baby girl. Early postpartum, Maria began struggling with mental health concerns. With the support of our team's Mental Health Consultant, Maria's Home Visitor was able to assist Maria through those challenging first days until her mother arrived for support. Maria's Home Visitor began working with mom to build her community, introducing Maria to various supports and community resources near her. With support of her Home Visitor, Maria gained confidence as a mother. Recently, Maria sent our program eight referrals of other mothers looking for support.



Child Welfare

Children's is committed to ensuring that every child has a safe and stable home. To advance that goal, we provide an array of child welfare services in Milwaukee County under a state contract administered by the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services. CSSW has partnered with the State to administer public child welfare services in Southeastern Wisconsin since 1998. We have provided Ongoing Case Management, In-Home Services, Foster and Adoption Services, Foster Care Recruitment and Licensing, Permanency Services, and Placement Matching since the inception of the public/private partnership in Milwaukee County. Our primary charge is to ensure child safety, permanency and well-being. Our child welfare services are guided by our family-centered practice: Our priority is to keep families intact and maintain family connections.

Our **In-Home Services (IHS)** program partners with families to ensure child safety in the home while simultaneously providing services to enhance parents' protective capacities. Families in our **Ongoing Services (OGS)** program are served under the jurisdiction of the Milwaukee County Children's Court, with the goal of reunifying families as quickly and safely as possible. When children need to be placed in out-of-home care, we prioritize placement with biological family members; however, when that is unable to occur, our foster care licensing and placement program matches children to caregivers equipped to meet their needs. Our Family Support program works closely with our IHS and OGS programs to support in-home safety plans and timely reunification of parents and children when separated. Our trauma-informed, evidence-based services focus on safety measures, parenting education, mobility mentoring and strengthening family interactions. In 2024, our child welfare program facilitated **346 permanencies**, including 167 reunifications, 82 transfers of guardianship and 97 adoptions.

Our statewide **Treatment Foster Care (TFC)** program is designed to address the comprehensive well-being of children. Offered throughout Wisconsin's 72 counties, our TFC program is a community-based, child-centered, family-focused approach that

provides out-of-home care placement and services for those children and youth who have significant special needs that require specialized treatment services beyond the scope of basic foster care.

The TFC program utilizes the evidence-informed Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) framework as its program model. The ARC model is a framework for working with youth and foster parents/caregivers of youth who have been affected by trauma.

Beginning in late 2023, the TFC program enhanced its service delivery by creating specialized clinically based staff positions to provide concentrated services to teens and their foster families. Assigning small caseloads allows staff to work more intensely with teens and their foster parents to address needs and goals, and work toward stability and permanency. This targeted work is increasing the average number of teens we are placing and serving in the program.

Through our contract with the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, Children's Wisconsin has offered **public adoption** programming to 18 Wisconsin counties for the past 25 years. Our staff have developed expertise in the many components of adoption work: adoptive home licensing, matching/placement, education and community supports linkage, case management, and adoption finalization court work. The primary goal of our adoption program is to provide all foster children who are in need of a permanent home with an adoptive family that will offer them:

- The rights and protections that are derived from a legal parent-child relationship
- The opportunity to experience the emotional security, growth and development resulting from sound family relationships
- The social status and identity derived from being part of a family entity
- The protection, nurturing and care necessary for physical growth, development and well-being





In 2017, Sarah and Tony were informed that their niece and nephew were in foster care in the state of West Virginia. They immediately started the process to try to bring the children to live with them in Wisconsin. They worked with their county to get licensed as foster parents and then with Interstate Placement Services for the children to be placed in their care. Once this happened, the case was then transferred to the **Public Adoptions Program**. The family was assigned a worker, Lindsey, who stayed with them through the adoption home study process as well as the adoption finalization, which took approximately 9 months. The family was able to finalize the adoptions in Wisconsin with extended family and friends there to celebrate.

In January of 2022, the biological mother of their two adopted children gave birth to a third child in the state of West Virginia. This child also was placed in foster care. Sarah and Tony again started the process to get placement of this child. At this time, they were already parenting their two adopted children, ages four and five, as well as their 10-week-old birth child. Having been through this process before, Sarah reached out to Lindsey, who worked with them previously. Sarah and Tony navigated the process of being licensed again, this time in a new county because the family had moved. Once the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) was granted in West Virginia, Lindsey was again assigned and worked with the family until an adoption was able to be finalized in July of 2023. At this hearing, Sarah and Tony joked with the judge that this would be the only time they would be seeing him in court since their family was complete.

Well, seven months later Sarah and Tony received word that another sibling to their adopted children had been born. This child was born premature and in the NICU in West Virginia and would be placed in foster care once healthy enough to be discharged. Though they said their family was complete, Sarah and Tony opened up their hearts and home once again and added this new child to their home in April of 2024. Sarah had already reached out to Lindsey, who advised that she would be able to be their adoption worker once again. This final adoption happened in July of 2025.

Sarah and Tony were able to grow their family through the help of the Public Adoptions Program. They were also able to ensure that siblings born over the course of seven years are able to grow up together, as siblings, in a safe and loving home. Navigating multiple systems within the state of Wisconsin can be difficult, but adding in a second state with its own rules and regulations makes things even more complicated. The Public Adoptions Program was able to ensure that Sarah and Tony were supported throughout the adoption process. They felt fortunate that they were able to have the same worker, who was familiar with their family, with them through all four adoptions.

The Public Adoptions Program serves families by following cases from TPR to adoption. Another part of the program is working with families who have placement of children from other states.



Child Advocacy and Protection Services

Our **Child Advocacy and Protection Services** (CAPS) program is the nation's largest hospital-based network of Child Advocacy Centers (CAC), providing child abuse pediatrics and child advocacy across the state. All seven centers are accredited by the National Children's Alliance. The program also includes three medical satellite offices and a hospital-based advocacy team.

Our CAPS program consists of a team of medical professionals, forensic interviewers, advocate case managers, therapists and our support staff members, who work together to ensure that the evaluation of an abuse allegation minimizes the re-traumatization of a child. We collaborate closely with law enforcement and Child Protective Services to safeguard against a child having to tell their truth multiple times to multiple people. Our work helps to start the healing process for children and their caregivers.

Our mission is to promote and foster safety, healing and justice for children and families. Without effective therapeutic intervention, many children who have experienced trauma may suffer ongoing or long-term

adverse social, emotional, developmental and health outcomes. Kids and their families count on us for safety, healing and justice.

In 2024, CACs and other victim-serving agencies faced a predicted and significant cut in federal Victim of Crime Act funding across the country. In response, several CAPS leaders and the CACs of Wisconsin closely collaborated with Children's Wisconsin Government Relations team to advocate with legislators for increased state funding for statewide child advocacy centers. Due to the proactive work of this team, Act 241 was enacted into state law in March of 2024, increasing CAC funding from just \$17,000 per year to \$80,000 per year for fiscal year 2024-2025. The bill also increases funding to other victim-serving organizations, such as domestic violence and sexual assault programs, that often work collaboratively with the CAC in their community to provide holistic services to children and families. Together with the Government Relations team and our partners across the state, we are continuing to work to find more sustainable funding solutions to take care of our most vulnerable children.





Institute for Child and Family Well-Being

Strong Families, Thriving Children, Connected Communities

Child neglect reflects a convergence of poverty, isolation, systemic bias and fragmented support. In the United States, one in three children will experience a Child Protective Services investigation by age eighteen (about 37%) and one in four will face an investigation specifically for neglect. Among children placed in foster care, seven in ten have been separated from their families for reasons of neglect. In 2024, our work focused on four Critical Pathways: Economic Stability, Social Connectedness, Community Collaboration and Workforce Inclusion. This framework helps changemakers from across the state identify root causes, co-design practical solutions with families and service providers, and shift from isolated efforts toward sustained systems change.

A robust network underpins our progress. In May, we convened more than 120 practitioners, county leaders and parents at the Together for Children Seminar Day to share tools, talk about promising practices and discuss prevention strategies in interactive workshops. Our virtual learning community grew from 32 participants in 2023 to 84 by December 2024, reflecting both geographic expansion and deeper stakeholder engagement. On LinkedIn, we added 153 new followers in 2024, bringing our total to 773 by year end. These increases demonstrate growing interest in community-powered systems change.

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Storytelling and public commentary have broadened our reach. Season 2 of the Overloaded podcast delivered eight episodes that explored each Critical Pathway through interviews with policymakers, practitioners and people with lived experience. Downloads rose from 2,583 in Season 1 to 2,777 in Season 2. Our monthly column in the Milwaukee Independent debuted in February and continued through December, highlighting systemic barriers to preventing neglect, showcasing co-designed solutions and reaching readers across greater Milwaukee.

Our ongoing learning community on Reimagining Mandated Reporting has sustained dialogue and driven innovation. In collaboration with changemakers from Dane, Walworth, Waukesha, Rock, Brown and Milwaukee counties, we surfaced how current reporting laws can traumatize overloaded families. Presentations by medical social workers, law enforcement, school social workers and child abuse pediatricians illuminated systemic bias and opportunities for reform.

Simultaneously, we began planning a county-level Cost Analysis project that will launch in 2025. Neglect investigations are only substantiated 13% of the time in Wisconsin, which results in resource burdens, in addition to the negative impacts on families. In partnership with Brown, Dane, Rock and Waukesha counties, as well as our research collaborators at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, we will model the financial burden of unsubstantiated neglect investigations and compare it to investments in preventive supports. This analysis will provide policymakers and county leaders with concrete data to guide upstream investments and build the case for targeted change efforts in the year ahead.



Overloaded: Understanding Neglect has over 4,000 individual episodes to date, and can be found on Apple Podcasts, Amazon Music, Google Podcasts and Spotify.

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