



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Milwaukee County Announces New Credible Messenger Program Providing Transformative Community-Based Mentoring for Justice Involved and High Risk Youth

--With a recent surge of violence against young people, Milwaukee County is launching a violence prevention program to provide support for youth in our community--

MILWAUKEE—Today, Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, alongside leaders from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), and youth-serving organizations, announced a new program, **Credible Messenger**, a community-based approach to youth justice that focuses on transformative mentoring and restorative justice in action. The Credible Messenger program will deploy 23 individuals from five community-based organizations who have been trained through the Professional Community Intervention Training Institute. The Credible Messengers have shared life experience with the youth they are mentoring and will focus on an Intervention or Prevention Track supporting justice-involved youth or young people identified as high risk by the community.

“Our young people are our future, but for a year they’ve been physically distanced from friends, family members, mentors, teachers, and others who all help contribute to keep our young people on the right path. We’re all feeling anxiety that comes from the uncertainty and instability over the last year, but it’s up to us, the adults our children look up to, to ensure our young people have the guidance they need to navigate this difficult time,” said County Executive David Crowley. “We need to do everything we can to ensure the success of the next generation. That includes exploring new ways to meet young people where they are, make connections, and mentor our youth. The Credible Messenger program is a holistic, comprehensive approach that supports our youth and improves individual lives. It rearranges the relationship between communities and the justice system and inspires change from within neighborhoods. This program builds transformative relationships based on trust by connecting young people with mentors with shared life experience.”

DYFS is partnering with five community-based organizations to launch the Credible Messenger pilot phase, including 414 LIFE, Milwaukee Christian Center, Running Rebels, Westcare, and Youth Advocate Program. Each partner organization has a unique area of focus. Credible Messengers will be available 24/7 to respond to the needs of high risk youth, their families, and incidents of community level trauma. Credible Messengers are visible community responders who can engage youth in neighborhood settings, empowering the community to use available resources to maintain public safety.

“This is a relationship-based intervention that allows people with lived experience, either formally justice involved persons or people with neighborhood credibility, who have demonstrated personal transformation, to work with youth in our community. This model has had proven success in cities across the country with the same challenges Milwaukee faces. I am truly grateful Milwaukee County is engaged at this level,” said David Muhammad, Deputy Director, Department of Health and Human Services. “As we enter the summer season, we want to ensure we have a coordinated effort to keep young people and our communities safe and provide alternatives to the violence we see hurting our city. It’s critically important to connect families to resources. If we don’t, the violence will continue.”



The Credible Messengers are experienced and transformative mentors who are rooted in the community and are able to connect with families, communities, and leaders to prevent and interrupt violence. Additionally, they will respond to neighborhood level trauma, create space for positive youth engagement and community voice. Further, they are change agents for racial equity and policy creation on issues that plague the youth, families and community.

“Many of the youth that we see in the justice system are reluctant to trust adults in positions of authority. Many of them believe that the system doesn’t work for them and that it does not work to support their interests. We need to change that,” said Mark Mertens, Administrator, DYFS. “In order to do so, we need to establish authentic engagement of youth with adults that can help guide youth in the pro-social pursuit of their goals.”

Credible Messenger program partners will measure success through the following outcomes:

- Successful completion of the case plan for youth assigned to their organization.
- No re-injury of youth.
- No additional involvement in gun violence/auto theft.
- No additional gun related charges.
- Tracking involvement in pro-social supports (during and after court/DYFS involvement).

“We are excited to be part of the Credible Messenger program. Our organization gives youth work experiences by partnering with neighborhood employers who allow us compensate program participants while the businesses provide on-the-job training,” said Chaz Fortune, Director, Youth Advocate Program. “We also connect young people and their parents and guardians with educational and tutoring opportunities, mental health services, food, and utility resources – whatever they need to build a foundation for their family.”

“The Office of Violence Prevention is proud to be a core partner with Milwaukee County in this effort to ensure that youth in our city can be supported by individuals with the care, concern, and credibility to make a real difference in their lives,” said TeAngelo Cargile Jr., Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator, City of Milwaukee Office of Violence Prevention.

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