

# Housing, Healing & Hope

## Empowering Our Community Together



COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

Where Meeting Basic Needs Inspires Hope



MILWAUKEE WOMEN'S CENTER

Where Abuse Ends and Hope Begins

*A Division of Community Advocates*

# Letter from Leadership

Dear Community Members,

It is with great pride and excitement that we present our Community Advocates Impact Report, highlighting the individuals we had the privilege to serve and the positive impact of our programs throughout 2024. This report embodies our theme for the year—Housing, Healing, and Hope – A Year of Impact.

This past year has been a remarkable journey, with our outreach efforts expanding in unprecedented ways. Community Advocates was honored as a BMO Cornerstone Award recipient at the 25th Annual MANDI Awards, recognizing our commitment to strengthening neighborhoods and making Milwaukee a better place for all. We hosted a community symposium and launched a Lunch and Learn series to bring greater awareness to homelessness and domestic violence. These initiatives have allowed us to share our story more broadly and connect more deeply with our community.

This year, we also celebrate a milestone—the 45th anniversary of the Milwaukee Women’s Center. This momentous occasion gives us an opportunity to reflect on the tremendous progress we have made in supporting women and families facing domestic violence and substance abuse. It is a testament to our ongoing commitment to providing healing and hope to those in need.

At the same time, we face significant challenges. Like other nonprofits, we continue to see an increasing demand for services as community needs grow. The lingering effects of the pandemic, with uncertainty around government funding, remain very real. Resources are stretched, and more individuals than ever are turning to us for help. Yet, in these difficult times, we remain committed to our core values—recognizing the inherent worth of every individual and ensuring they are met with dignity, respect and compassion. This is not just what we do; it is who we are.

As we enter 2025, we are reminded that many individuals and families in our community continue to face significant economic and social challenges. Your support and trust in Community Advocates are invaluable. Together, we can continue to make a meaningful impact by addressing the root causes of these challenges and fostering a community of empathy and understanding.

In Partnership,



Andi Elliott  
CEO, Community Advocates



Bryan House  
Board President, 2024

We thank Bryan House for his service to Community Advocates as our 2024 Board President. In 2025, we welcome Sharon Jordan as our new Board President. We are grateful to both Bryan and Sharon for their outstanding commitment to our organization and the people we serve.

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## Our Mission:

To provide individuals and families with advocacy and services to meet their basic needs so they may live in dignity.

# Our Impact



## Basic Needs

**26,186**

households received financial support and help making payment plans to maintain their utilities through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

**1,882**

individuals obtained employment through the FoodShare and Employment Training Program (FSET)

**12,417**

individuals sought resources, assessments, and support for basic needs challenges during daily walk-in hours at Community Advocates' Lovell Street Building

**5,917**

landlords and tenants received support resolving issues related to rental housing through the Housing Department

**97**

homeless families were assisted with assessment, case management, advocacy, and flexible housing-related financial assistance through the Homelessness Prevention Program

**41**

adults received temporary financial support while their disability benefits were being processed

**1,267**

adults and children received intensive case management services and support to enhance housing stability, school attendance, and financial well-being through the Siemer Program



**98**

Milwaukee homeowners avoided losing their homes due to unpaid property tax bills

**6,659**

residents accessed resources through the Milwaukee Rental Housing Resource Center to prevent or divert eviction

**85**

individuals with disabling conditions received protective payee and financial management services

## Behavioral Health

**21**

individuals experiencing street homelessness received critical outreach through the Homeless Outreach Program

**35**

individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and mental illness received stable shelter and supportive services through the Autumn West Safe Haven while working to secure permanent housing



**101**

Milwaukee residents experiencing chronic homelessness and living with a disability received immediate access to safe and affordable housing through the Autumn West Permanent Housing Program

## Milwaukee Women's Center

**233**

adults and children received emergency transportation, safe housing, and comprehensive domestic violence services through the Milwaukee Women's Center Domestic Violence Emergency Shelter

**860**

callers received telephone crisis intervention services for domestic abuse



**70**

families experiencing homelessness received safe shelter and assistance through the Family Support Center Emergency Shelter

**86**

individuals striving to overcome substance use disorders received in-home, outpatient, or day treatment

**142**

men participated in the Nevermore Batters' Prevention and Intervention Program to break the cycle of intergenerational violence

**200**

fathers enrolled in the Milwaukee Fatherhood FIRE Program to become more effective and engaged partners

**500**

people seeking new employment opportunities received free career-appropriate clothing through the Bottomless Closet



**42**

older adults facing abuse received safe shelter and assistance through the Older Abused Women's Program

# Community Advocates Honored with BMO Cornerstone Award at the 25th Annual MANDI Awards



Community Advocates CEO Andi Elliott comes forward to accept the MANDI Award.

Community Advocates was grateful to receive the BMO Cornerstone Award at the 25th Annual MANDI Awards in Milwaukee. The award, to honor an organization or program with long-standing commitment to a neighborhood and demonstrated effectiveness over time, was accepted warmly. Community Advocates' CEO Andi Elliott, COO Maudwella Kirkendoll, and Board of Directors Vice President Sharon Jordan took the stage to accept the award.

The MANDIs, which stands for Milwaukee Awards for Neighborhood Development and Innovation, acknowledges and honors nonprofit organizations and individuals who are committed to the work they do to improve and enhance the community.

While we are all so focused on our missions to city and resident development, evenings like this provide a bright opportunity for collaboration and partnership. Nominees, finalists and winners truly compete not against one another, but against the challenges present in our neighborhoods. Networking turns to brainstorming, and we end these evenings wiser and more determined than when we arrived.

Community Advocates is honored to be recognized for our long-standing commitment to serving our community members who experience housing insecurity, lack of

resources, domestic violence, and substance misuse. None of the work we do is done for praise, recognition or awards, making moments like this both humbling and appreciated. Congratulations to all the finalists and winners in each category, and thank you to U.S. Bank, in partnership with LISC Milwaukee, who made the evening possible.



## Wilma's Story: Journey to Self-Sufficiency

Wilma's path to success began with the FoodShare Employment Training Program (FSET). In March 2024, she enrolled in Medical Assistant training. By May 2024, she proudly earned her Medical Assistant Certification.

Initially, Wilma started with a temporary staffing agency, but unstable hours left her discouraged. Recognizing her potential, our Job Developer and Case Manager helped refine her employment goals, updated her résumé, and explored new opportunities.

A pivotal moment came when our team connected Wilma with a recruiter from a local hospital. Inspired by this opportunity, Wilma reached out and took a leap of faith. Thanks to her perseverance and guidance, Wilma secured a Medical Assistant position in plastic surgery, earning \$23.68 per hour. She is now on her way to long-term stability and career growth.

Wilma's journey is a testament to resilience, support, and opportunity. Her success story showcases our mission—helping individuals achieve self-sufficiency, one step at a time.



# Community Partner Spotlight

## Milwaukee Rep Spreads Holiday Cheer



Community Advocates staff wrapped presents for families

As part of its longstanding tradition of serving the Milwaukee community, Milwaukee Repertory Theater selects a local nonprofit each year to benefit from the A Christmas Carol Families Program. Through this initiative, audience members donate to support families in need during more than 40 performances throughout the holiday season.

Community Advocates was honored to be chosen as the 2024 recipient. Thanks to the generosity of attendees, nearly \$50,000 was raised—providing gifts for families in need this holiday season and a direct donation to our organization. In addition, Milwaukee Rep staff dedicated hours of service, including shopping, wrapping, and delivering gifts for 26 Community Advocates clients providing a truly magical holiday.



**I am really grateful, and my kids enjoy everything that was given to them. I really appreciate it so much. The happiness on my kids' faces was priceless...**

Community Advocates' Stronger Families Milwaukee program staff wrote: "We are so grateful that we were selected to provide these presents to our families. These families are dealing with housing and mental health crises. They did not expect to be able to provide any presents to their children, so this was so important to them. It is also an opportunity for them to spend quality time together. We thank [Milwaukee Rep] for your generosity."

A client whose family was chosen wrote: "I am writing this letter to say thank you so much for all the Christmas gifts my family and I got. I am really grateful, and my kids enjoy everything that was given to them. I really appreciate it so much. The happiness on my kids' faces was priceless, you have no idea how much this meant to me. I wish I could thank you in person because you made my kids' Christmas this year."



### Gabrielle's Story: Optimism During Tough Times

Gabrielle's remarkable positivity makes her unforgettable. Despite her optimism, she and her family faced hardship, becoming homeless.

By summer 2024, they lived in a tent off the I-94 freeway, enduring relentless heat. Forced out by rent increases, Gabrielle, with health issues and having aged out of Foster Care, faced additional challenges.

Fortunately, the Milwaukee Women's Center helped. At the Emergency Shelter, Gabrielle focused on rebuilding. She increased her employment, securing a full-time and a weekend part-time job within a month, moving towards financial stability.

Gabrielle attended weekly therapy sessions funded by Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) to address trauma from homelessness. These sessions helped her regain strength and provided tools to break the cycle of abuse.

Determined, Gabrielle worked with her case manager to find stable housing. By November, with support from Milwaukee County Rapid Exit funding and Community Advocates' Housing Supportive Services Program, she and her children moved to a permanent home. Gabrielle's journey is an inspiring transformation driven by resilience, belief in a better future, and support from the Milwaukee Women's Center.

# 50k

IN 2024, COMMUNITY ADVOCATES WAS THE RECIPIENT OF THE MILWAUKEE REP'S CHRISTMAS CAROL FAMILIES PROGRAM, WHICH RAISED NEARLY \$50,000 TO HELP MILWAUKEE FAMILIES.



**[Volunteering] fosters empathy, responsibility, and a deeper understanding of the importance of giving back.**

## Volunteer Spotlight Gratitude for Our Incredible Volunteers

In total, 293 volunteers gave their time in 2024, equating to roughly 2,050 volunteer hours, and for that we are truly grateful.

Katie Mullenbach explained why she and her children have provided and served meals for residents of the emergency shelter and organized holiday gifts, feeling a sense of community and hope during every shift.

“Volunteering at the Milwaukee Women’s Center, a division of Community Advocates, has been incredibly rewarding, made even more special by involving my children,” Katie said. “Watching young volunteers engage in kindness and service fosters empathy, responsibility, and a deeper understanding of giving back.”



Susan Nemetz, a long-time volunteer and donor, remains committed to Community Advocates through the Bottomless Closet, helping clients build confidence and self-esteem to make strong first impressions. Susan hopes her experience will inspire others to volunteer.

Community Advocates and the Milwaukee Women’s Center offer many volunteer opportunities for individuals and groups. For more information, contact Jeri Kavanaugh at [jkavanaugh@communityadvocates.net](mailto:jkavanaugh@communityadvocates.net) or go to the “How to Help” section on [communityadvocates.net](http://communityadvocates.net).

## Program Spotlight Autumn West Safe Haven

For individuals experiencing homelessness while navigating mental illness, Autumn West Safe Haven provides more than refuge.

The Autumn West Safe Haven is a temporary alternative to traditional shelters, offering 20 furnished studio apartments, case management, and longer lengths of stays to allow guests to take steps to stability and independence at their own pace. It’s designed to recognize participants’ need for sensitive, flexible care planning and prioritizes safety, privacy and community.

The program stands out with its trauma-informed and client-centered approach. Staff are trained in de-escalation and Motivational Interviewing, ensuring residents are met with compassion. “The safe haven exemplifies serving through dignity in each component of programming, whether that be in the comprehensive client-directed care planning, high standards and quality of the facility itself, extensive food program, or engagement activities that sprinkle the monthly calendars,” says Supportive Housing Programs Director Matt Raymond.

Success is measured through permanent housing transitions, further health stabilization, and connections to long-term support. In 2024, the program provided stabilization, income support, and housing assistance to 35 individuals, including veterans, young adults, older adults, and chronically homeless persons. 74% of those served at Autumn West in 2024 either exited to permanent housing or were safely residing at Autumn West at the end of the calendar year. Community members can support this work through advocacy and monetary or in-kind donations. In a world where stability can feel out of reach, Autumn West is a place of healing and hope.



# 74%

**OF THOSE SERVED AT AUTUMN WEST IN 2024 EITHER EXITED TO PERMANENT HOUSING OR WERE SAFELY RESIDING AT AUTUMN WEST.**

# Advocacy Spotlight

## Public Policy Institute



Community Advocates' leadership created the Public Policy Institute (PPI) in 2008 to address the root causes of poverty through policy advocacy and community collaboration on economic and public health issues.

PPI's Child Welfare Program expanded in 2024 with our first full year of the Milwaukee Family Intervention Services, in addition to our Stronger Families Milwaukee pilot program. Staff provides strengths-based case management, peer support, and group and family therapeutic interventions for families seeking extra support with maintaining a happy and stable household.



PPI delivered 66 Mental Health Awareness workshops in English to 952 attendees, with 96% saying they learned how to help someone who may be having a mental health or substance use issue.



PPI oversaw the facilitation of 50 Escucha Tus Emociones/Listen to Your Emotions workshops in Spanish/English to 400 attendees.



The Southeast Region of the Alliance for Wisconsin Youth, convened by PPI, provided 2,400 drug deactivation pouches and medication lock boxes to partners to prevent overdoses.



The City of Milwaukee Tobacco Free Alliance conducted 139 retailer checks in Milwaukee to see if stores were complying with regulations on sales to minors.



PPI's Brighter Futures Initiative-Milwaukee and Stay Strong MKE provided life skills-building programs to 1,843 youth to prevent substance misuse.



46 families at risk of formal Milwaukee County CPS involvement successfully completed supportive case management services, peer support, and home visitation by PPI's Stronger Families Milwaukee Program.



The RISE Drug Free MKE coalition, convened by PPI, held its 7th annual International Overdose Awareness Day event in August 2024 in conjunction with Healing Starts Today's Rhythm & Soles' 5K Walk/Run. The pre-event press conference at City Hall featured Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson, Milwaukee Common Council President Jose Perez, Milwaukee Fire Chief Aaron Lipski, and City Health Commissioner Mike Totoraitis.





The care, respect, encouragement, and strong sense of security I will never forget. I was able to do everything I needed to do to become stable and get my kiddos and I a home.

## Our Partners



For a complete list of Community Advocates' supporters, go to [communityadvocates.net](http://communityadvocates.net).

## Leadership

### Andi Elliott

Chief Executive Officer

### Maudwella Kirkendoll

Chief Operating Officer

### William Koch

Chief Financial Officer

### Jennifer Patrick

Human Resources Director

### Kari Southern

Public Policy Institute

Deputy Director

### Matt Raymond

Supportive Housing Programs

Director

### Deborah Heffner

Strategic Partnership

Director

### Steve Schultz

Strategic Development

Director



## Board Leadership

### President: Bryan House

Foley & Lardner, LLP

### Vice President: Sharon Jordan

Direct Supply

### Treasurer: Sandra Samse

BDO

### Secretary: Natasha Dotson

Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative

## Board Members

### Nicole Angresano

Community Volunteer

### Anne DeLeo

Community Volunteer

### Valerie Gabriel

Community Volunteer

### Gary Ingram

Igary Events

### Pamela Klein

Community Volunteer

### Jim Liedtke

Community Volunteer

### Kate Venne

Brady Corporation

### Jodi Wire

Community Volunteer



## DONATE

Scan the QR code or go to [communityadvocates.net](http://communityadvocates.net).

## CONNECT

Visit [communityadvocates.net](http://communityadvocates.net) to sign up for our newsletter.

## JOIN US

To become a volunteer, contact Jeri Kavanaugh, [jkavanaugh@communityadvocates.net](mailto:jkavanaugh@communityadvocates.net) or call (414) 270-2984.

For a link to the online version of this Community Impact Report with additional information about the organization and our Impact in 2024, please go to [communityadvocates.net](http://communityadvocates.net) or scan the QR code below.



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