

2024

Impact Report

LA CROSSE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES



**Jason Witt, Human Services
Department Director**



LA CROSSE COUNTY

Seizing Opportunities

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



To continue to be effective, the pace of change in the Human Services Department must match that of the community. In 2024, the Human Services Department continued to adapt to meet our community's most pressing needs. Below are just a few examples of promising changes highlighted in this report.

Pathways Home

Leading communitywide homelessness response strategies has not always been a Human Services responsibility. It became a necessary one, however, as in recent years the City of La Crosse saw its unsheltered population grow to crisis levels. With the launch of the Pathways Home plan in January of

2024, team members from across Human Services stepped up in new ways. This included social workers spending time as "homeless outreach workers" and economic support specialists going to encampments or other locations to assist in making service connections. All of this contributed to building a more integrated homelessness response system.

Co-Locating with the Veterans Services Office

Military Veterans are among those who seek assistance from Human Services Programs. The La Crosse County Veterans Services Office also serves Veterans through its more specialized array of services and supports. Over the years our two agencies have coordinated efforts. In 2024, working together became easier as the Veterans Services Office relocated to the Health and Human Services building. Together, we strive to provide the best customer service possible for those who have done so much for our nation!

Expanding the Youth System of Care

The Youth System of Care (SOC) program, unique to La Crosse County, expands the toolbox of interventions available when youth engage in troubling behavior at school. The program started as a collaboration with the School District of La Crosse, and it is a testament to our community's strong spirit of collaboration and dedication to early-intervention. In 2024, the Youth SOC expanded so that City of La Crosse Law Enforcement may refer youth to the program, whether or not the troubling behavior is school based. This means more youth in La Crosse County will have the opportunity for services that can help them avoid future contacts with the criminal justice system.

Keeping our edge in serving the community demands a pace and scope of change that can be both exhausting and exhilarating. We sometimes say that we will slow down the change inside the Department once the change outside of it subsides. Until then we will remain flexible and ever evolving to bring exceptional services to La Crosse County's citizens!

Sincerely,

Jason Witt, Human Services Director

jwitt@lacrossecounty.org

2024 Department Overview

- Developed a comprehensive project plan to execute the **Pathways Home Plan** with the City of La Crosse to facilitate tracking and accountability.
- Expanded **Youth System of Care** Program into the La Crosse community through a State Innovation Grant. This exciting partnership with the La Crosse Police Department aims to improve responses to youth behaviors that previously resulted in tickets and/or referrals to La Crosse County Youth Justice Services.



- Answered **19,555 phone calls** from clients and community members with an additional 12,689 phone calls managed by Aging and Disability Resource Center, equating to approximately 50 calls per workday to connect community members to critical information, resources, and support.
- Enrolled 887 youth in the **Children's Long-Term Support Waiver (CLTSW)**, Birth to 3, and the Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) program, supporting youth with mental health, autism, and/or physical and developmental disabilities. Notably, 16% were enrolled in multiple programs. This area saw a 24% increase in CLTSW and CCS referrals from the previous year.
- Introduced a **dynamic data dashboard** for the community to track the success of the Pathways Home project and improve data-driven decisions.
- Streamlined vendor invoice processing, resulting in significant **cost savings**.
- Connected **21,259 individuals** to healthcare and/or FoodShare.
- Issued an average of \$1.6 million in monthly **FoodShare benefits** to La Crosse County residents.
- Provided a total of **16,300 rides** through the Specialized Transportation Program of the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)—a 26% increase from the previous year. These rides helped people maintain their independence, access healthcare, and participate in community life, resulting in 231,990 miles traveled and 12,849 hours of service—each reflecting a 17% increase from the previous year.
- Exited **33 children** from out-of-home care. Of those, five achieved permanency through reunification with a parent, 20 through a guardianship, and two aged out of care. There were also five terminations of parental rights hearings involving six children, who will reach permanency through adoption.

Employee Spotlights

NATHAN CHRISTENSEN AND SHELBY VINSON

Nathan and Shelby are dedicated Economic Support workers who go above and beyond to support members of our community. Their role involves helping clients access crucial public benefits, such as BadgerCare, FoodShare, Energy Assistance, and childcare. But they don't stop there. They also work closely with Pathways Home to ensure clients are connected to the resources they need to achieve stable housing. Nathan and Shelby spend a lot of time out in the community meeting clients, at local events, the REACH Center or the La Crosse Public Library. The outreach has paid dividends, helping them connect with clients who otherwise may not have made contact and gotten their questions about benefits answered.



Shelby adds: "The community of resources has made it possible to truly meet people where they are and provide greater access to the services that the unsheltered population needs to work towards and gain stable housing."

Nathan and Shelby's compassion, dedication, and commitment make a real difference in the lives of those facing homelessness and in need of support.

JOE WELIN & SARAH HARRISON

Joe and Sarah are social workers within the newly created Pathways Specialized Unit of Comprehensive Community Services within the ISRS section. With over 35 years of combined experience, they can provide education and connections to mental health and substance use treatment services to those in need. Joe and Sarah literally meet with people where they are at: on park benches, in marshes, parking lots and parking ramps, restaurant booths, and library alcoves. Their "office" is wherever they're needed most. Beyond their direct work with clients, Joe and Sarah are leaders within La Crosse County's homeless response system. They balance in-depth client support with building strong partnerships across County departments, City Hall, and numerous community organizations.

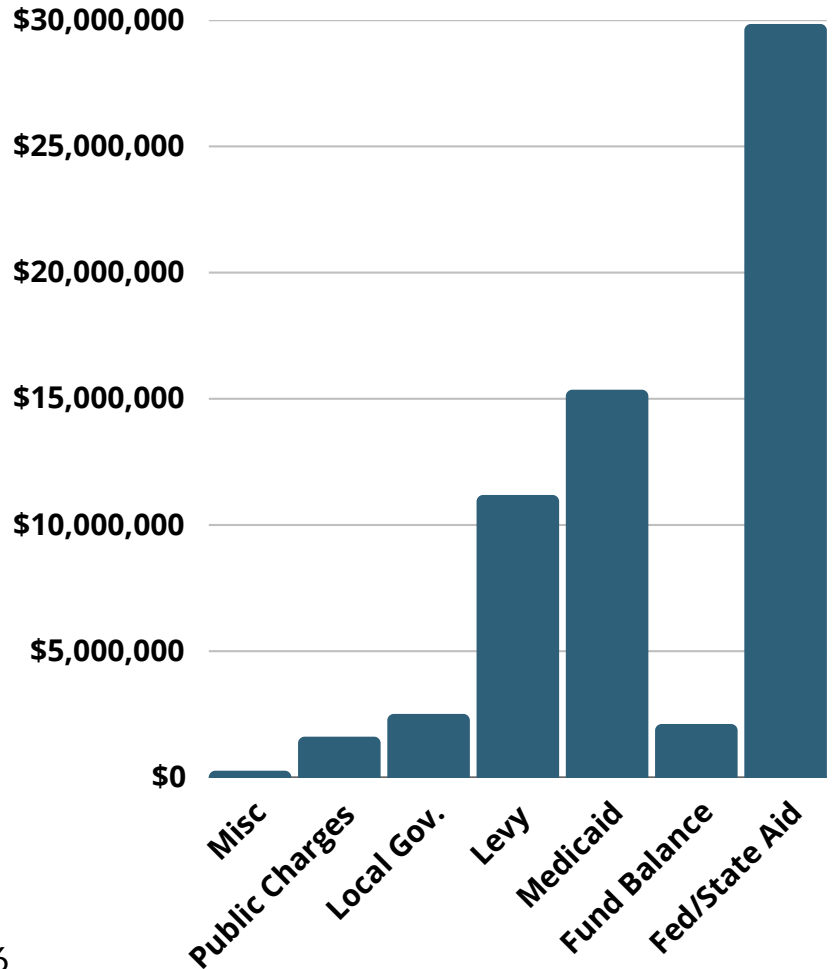


2024 Finances

REVENUE & EXPENSES

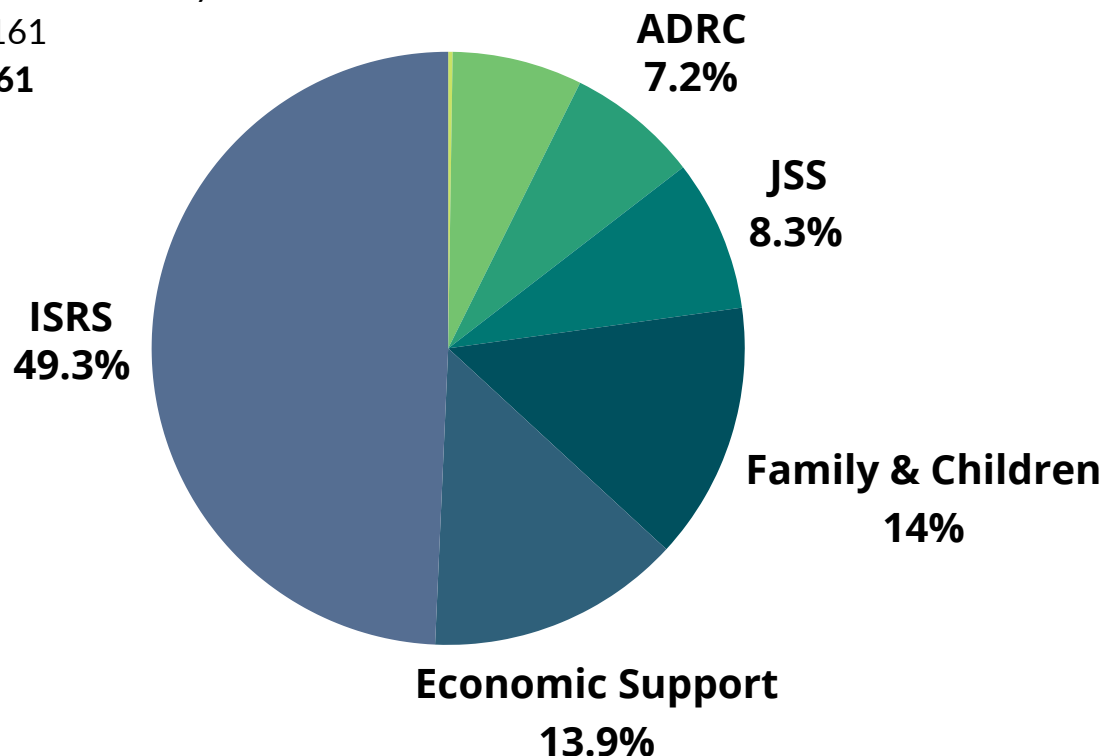
REVENUE

- Miscellaneous Revenues: \$265,371
- Public Charges for Services: \$1,613,544
- Local Governmental Payments: \$2,515,234
- Levy: \$11,189,924
- Medicaid Revenue: \$15,359,971
- Federal/State Aid: \$29,850,618
- Fund Balance: \$2,115,299
- **TOTAL: \$62,909,961**



EXPENSES

- Community Services: \$149,038
- HS Operations: \$4,467,536
- ADRC & Aging: \$4,534,463
- Justice Support Services: \$5,195,396
- Family and Children: \$8,833,026
- Economic Support: \$8,716,341
- Integrated Support and Recovery Services: \$31,014,161
- **TOTAL: \$62,909,961**



Welcome Jim Drees!



Jim Drees - La Crosse County
Homelessness Response
System Manager

What I do: My role is to lead the implementation of the Pathways Home plan, a collaborative City and County partnership aimed at enhancing the coordination of our existing homelessness response system to achieve functional zero homelessness.

2024 Overview:

The Pathways Home plan was launched in January of 2024. In our first year we focused on enhancing and coordinating the systems that form the backbone of our existing homelessness response system. These interlinked and interdependent systems benefit greatly from project management tools, which are essential to building a comprehensive plan. The lines of

effort in the Pathways Home plan define clear project deliverables and tangible work products that strengthen our system. We identified and sequenced the workstreams to develop a project plan with over 150 tasks that we track weekly.

Another aspect of enhancing the system is defining clear and coordinated processes. We have established key pathways for case management and support services. Additionally, we have defined housing navigation processes that enable our housing navigators to better match individuals to the appropriate type of housing for their needs. We have also established operating rhythms to ensure our network of City, County, and community agencies can effectively collaborate and share key information.

We launched our initial Pathways data dashboard (lacrossecounty.org/pathwayshome) mid-year and upgraded it to display trending data. This data set is regularly updated through interactions with our homeless population by the Homeless Outreach Team, our Specialized Unit, and our community partners. We improved the security and stability of all data captured in our Pathways to Housing tracking tool. This data is used to make informed decisions and is posted on our website to allow everyone to track our current state and progress to functional zero.

Our focus for 2025 is ending the crisis of unsheltered living in our community. Key elements include releasing a specialized housing plan and establishing a temporary surge shelter, ensuring that no one is turned away from having a shelter bed as we build the needed specialized housing capacity.

107

Households have gone from homelessness to housing since the launch of Pathways Home last year.

428

Average days experiencing homelessness among those on our Pathways list.

86%

Of homeless people on our Pathways list last had housing in La Crosse.

Integrated Support Recovery Services



John Manke - Integrated Support and Recovery Services Manager

What we do: Integrated Support Recovery Services (ISRS) provides comprehensive services for adults and children, addressing mental health, substance abuse, and intellectual and physical disabilities. Our youth programs offer individualized support for children to thrive at home and in the community. We believe everyone has the potential to overcome challenges and lead fulfilling, meaningful lives. Our experienced team delivers tailored, empowering services to support each person's unique recovery journey.

2024 Overview: In 2024, we contributed to the Pathways Home Plan by offering integrated case management services for individuals who are

unsheltered to support transitions into housing. We expanded co-response hours with the Crisis Unit and La Crosse Police, for joint crisis responses. Other highlights included:

- We received 226 new youth referrals and 673 requests for Adult Services (excluding crisis calls).
- In our Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) case management program, we served 699 participants, with 172 admissions and 175 discharges (78% of whom completed the program successfully).
- The Children's Long-Term Support Waiver (CLTSW) program enrolled 639 youth, with 151 new admissions in 2024.
- Our Crisis Unit responded to 4,366 active crisis calls, 535 of those were co-response with law-enforcement. Total admissions were 1,157.
- In the Outpatient Clinic, 551 consumers received services, averaging 132 for mental health prescribing, 37 for therapy, and 127 for AODA treatment monthly.
- The substance use treatment team funded room and board for 78 individuals, totaling about 2,000 days of residential treatment.
- We partnered with the OWI court program for therapy services, and our psychologist completed 61 evaluations. New in 2024, we funded opioid use disorder medication (methadone/ suboxone) for incarcerated individuals, serving four people and supporting the goal to maintain treatment upon release.



We contract with vendors for three major services areas:

- The Care Center admitted 148 La Crosse County residents, providing short term crisis stabilization.
- The Family and Children's Center provided the highest intensity case management services to an average of 50 people through Comprehensive Community Support (CSP).
- The Parenting Place administers the Birth to 3 programs, enrolling 270 children with over 50% showing speech and language delays.

Economic Support



Lorie Graff - Western
Region Economic
Assistance Manager

What we do: The WREA Consortium (Western Region for Economic Assistance) determines eligibility for public assistance programs, including FoodShare, Medicaid, BadgerCare, Wisconsin Shares Childcare Assistance, and the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP).

2024 Overview: In the first half of 2024, WREA completed the rollback of temporary COVID-19 policies that had been in place during the public health emergency. By the end of June, the redetermination process for Medicaid and BadgerCare eligibility was successfully completed, marking WREA's full transition back to regular operations.

In 2024, WREA transitioned to Genesys, a new statewide Call Center platform hosted by the Department of Health Services. This system, used by all consortia across the state, offers enhanced stability and features that improve call-handling efficiency. While initially unavailable, the callback feature was reintroduced a few months after implementation, allowing customers to opt for an automatic call back rather than waiting on hold. This feature has improved customer service. In 2024, WREA handled 108,957 calls, with hundreds of customers utilizing the callback option each week.

La Crosse County's Community Economic Support Specialists continued to provide in-person assistance throughout the county, regularly meeting with customers at the REACH Center, library, Warming Center, and Head Start. During the summer, these two Economic Support Specialists joined the Pathways Home team, bringing services directly to homeless individuals in the community. They assisted with applications for FoodShare and healthcare, answered program-related questions, and ensured broader access to support.

- WREA served 21,259 individuals in 2024.
- Medicaid & BadgerCare: 18,685 individuals in La Crosse County enrolled in 2024.
- FoodShare: 10,230 individuals received benefits, totaling \$18.9 million issued within La Crosse County in 2024.
- Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP):
 - 3,407 households received financial assistance in 2024.
 - Over 1,700 households received crisis payments to prevent disconnection or to restore heat during 2024.
- Wisconsin Shares Childcare Assistance: Provided almost \$2.1 million in benefits to help La Crosse County families with childcare costs in 2024.



Justice Support Services



Tonya Van Tol - Justice Support Services Manager

What we do: Justice Support Services (JSS) provides crucial interventions for youth and adults at risk or already involved in the criminal justice system. Our programs include early intervention/prevention and adult services aimed at minimizing further involvement in the justice system. We also offer family engagement programs to prevent involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS).

2024 Overview: In 2024, JSS Adult Services teams enrolled 257 participants in GPS monitoring, an alternative to incarceration that enhances public safety and supports community integration, employment, family support, and treatment for mental health or substance use. The Drug and OWI Treatment Courts admitted 58 new participants and saw 46 graduates. We served 132 people in the Pre-Charge Diversion

program and 160 in the Post-Charge Diversion program. Additionally, JSS Social Workers conducted 447 Intoxicated Driver Program assessments to aid in driver's licenses reinstatement.

Youth Justice (YJ) received 193 referrals for 106 unique youth served in 2024. YJ Social Workers focused on family support systems and community-based interventions to keep youth within their communities.

The La Crosse County System of Care (SOC) addressed school-based behaviors, including misdemeanor battery, disorderly conduct, assault, and theft. In the 2022-23 school year, an impressive 71% of the youth completing SOC programs demonstrated no new focus act behaviors, proving the effectiveness of SOC interventions in reducing Youth Justice referrals.

In 2024, La Crosse County also invested in two full-time Community Response (CR) social workers. CR reaches out and provides voluntary interventions to families reported to CPS but not meeting statutory requirements for intervention. In total, 110 families received services through CR.

Additionally, 214 families sought support from La Crosse Area Family Collaborative (LAFC). Primary areas of need identified by families included: housing, transportation, parenting skill development, mental health, and child education supports.



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.

2024 Overview: Child Protective Services (CPS) is dedicated to ensuring children's safety and, in 2024, continued its efforts to support families by keeping children safely at home whenever possible. This is achieved by developing in-home safety plans with families. If children cannot stay safely at home, we work to find relatives or like-kin for placement.

In 2024, CPS received 1,619 reports of child abuse and requests for services. We served 64 families or 132 children at home through state-provided wraparound funding. Of those, 111 remained safely at home with the provided support and services. For those who could not stay safely at home, 23% were placed with relatives. We averaged about 63 children in out-of-home care each month. Out of home placement costs are an area we closely monitor within CPS. Many youths have complex needs and behaviors requiring higher care. We averaged 5.5 youth per month in Residential Care Centers and 2.75 youth per month in Group Homes. These placement costs range \$266/day to \$879/day depending on the youth's needs, behaviors, and the facility.

We continue to see many families who are experiencing housing instability within CPS. One way we address this is through The Family Keys program. With 13 new families enrolled in 2024, impacting 56 individuals, the program remains a critical resource. One participant shared, "As far as the Family Keys program goes it's hard to really put it in words, because I shudder to think what would have happened to me and my daughter if it wasn't for the program. I am certain my daughter would have ended up in foster care." Family Keys continues to rent four housing units to families, while others can access services like Housing Navigation. The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) oversees the pilot program. After a recent meeting, DCF shared feedback that "La Crosse County provides exceptional services and truly cares about the families. The way families are spoken about and treated demonstrates genuine attention and compassion." As the Family Keys pilot program concludes in June 2025, it will join forces with Thriving Families to ensure the support and housing resources provided continue and expand.

In 2024, Western Regional Adolescent Services (WRAS) took proactive steps to adapt and optimize its available services. During this period, we strategically concentrated our resources on operating the Secure Detention Facility while temporarily closing the Shelter Care Facility. Although staffing shortages presented challenges, this allowed us to tailor our approach, exclusively accepting male youth and maximizing our impact with this group.

We redirected our efforts towards enhancing the CORE (Community Option for Re-Engagement) Program, which offers comprehensive treatment services and placements up to 365 days. This strategic focus enabled us to deepen our impact, culminating in five youth placements in the CORE program by the end of 2024, including four from out-of-county and one from La Crosse County. This shift has reinforced our commitment to long-term, impactful rehabilitation of youth in our care.

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.

2024 Overview: In 2024, the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of La Crosse County continued its legacy of empowering older persons and individuals with disabilities by providing accessible resources, innovative programs, and personalized guidance. As the ADRC celebrated 26 years of service, it remained committed to adapting and growing to meet the community's evolving needs.

A major focus in 2024 was the development of the 2025–2027 Aging Plan, a strategic roadmap to enhance services and supports for older persons in La Crosse County. This plan was shaped through robust community engagement, including surveys, and listening sessions, ensuring it reflects the priorities of residents. It emphasizes inclusivity, accessibility, and targeted solutions to challenges such as transportation, caregiver support, and social engagement.

The ADRC expanded its program offerings by introducing Mind Over Matter: Healthy Bowels, Healthy Bladder, an evidence-based program designed to empower participants with tools to improve their health. Nearly 30 participants attended three workshops in 2024, gaining strategies to live with greater confidence and independence. Due to its high demand, additional workshops are already planned for 2025, further demonstrating its impact and value to the community.

Another highlight of the year was the Legislative Town Hall hosted in June, which brought together policymakers, community leaders, and residents to address key issues affecting older persons. Topics included investing in ADRCs, supporting caregivers, safeguarding senior nutrition programs, reducing falls, and increasing funding for specialized transportation. The event underscored the importance of advocacy and strengthened connections between the community and elected officials.

As the ADRC looks ahead, it is energized by the opportunities outlined in the 2025–2027 Aging Plan. Building on the successes of 2024, the ADRC will continue to foster a community where every individual has access to the resources and support they need to thrive.



Administrative Support



Jennifer Buchholtz -
Human Services Office
Supervisor

What we do: The Administrative Support staff are the backbone of our organization, ensuring seamless operations and enhancing the efficiency of our services. We are the first point of contact for visitors and clients as they enter our buildings or call into our main phone line. We manage client interactions with empathy and professionalism, schedule appointments, maintain accurate and confidential records, and coordinate communication between staff and clients. Our focus is on creating a supportive and welcoming environment.

2024 Overview: We remained focused on providing exceptional customer service and ensuring everyone feels heard and respected.

- We welcomed Veterans Services to the Health and Human Services building and integrated a system of communication that provided an avenue for Veterans Services clients to check in for appointments or ask questions of Veterans Services staff.
- We assisted with various departmental meetings by reserving rooms, tracking agenda items, preparing agendas, sending out meeting notices, taking notes, transcribing, and distributing meeting minutes, and maintaining rosters and contact information.
- We transcribed reports, forms, correspondence, and medical reports. Tracked and processed various licensing, reporting, and personnel-related requirements for agency staff. Maintained equipment inventories and assisted with purchasing supplies and furnishings.
- We received and distributed incoming mail, scheduled clients for appointments, and scanned and managed electronic records for filing.

Fiscal Section



Kate Summers - Business
Strategy and Analysis
Manager

What we do: The Fiscal section is crucial in managing the department's financial operations. Our responsibilities include budgeting, audit coordination, grant management, and financial planning. We develop and manage the budget, monitor expenditures, and provide periodic updates to stakeholders. Additionally, we prepare detailed reports to track performance and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. These reports provide insights into the department's financial health and support informed decision-making.

- The Fiscal section also assists with audits, addresses findings, and ensures alignment with government standards and best practices. We manage grant funds, assist in grant applications, adhere to conditions, and report on expenditures to effectively utilize external resources.
- Moreover, we conduct financial analyses and forecasts to support strategic planning, evaluate risks, identifying cost-saving opportunities, and plan for future financial needs.
- The contract team, part of the Fiscal section, handles contracts by drafting, negotiating, managing compliance, and addressing modifications or disputes. They maintain vendor and contractor relationships to ensure smooth execution and resolve issues. These efforts ensure resources are utilized efficiently and effectively while adhering to legal and regulatory standards.

Overall, the Fiscal section ensures the financial integrity and stability of the department, allowing it to operate efficiently and fulfill its mission of providing essential services to the community.

Looking Forward

2025 KEY INITIATIVES

- Grow the **Pathways Home** case management team by expanding the number of social workers from three to six and welcoming three new peer support specialists.
- Expand **outreach sites** and events for Community Economic Support Specialists to actively engage and strengthen community partnerships, increasing accessibility and ensuring seamless connection with Economic Support services.
- Train **JSS Adult Social Services Specialists** to provide community resource navigation, helping participants access services, fulfill court requirements, and achieve personal goals. This initiative aims to enhance public safety, reduce recidivism, and improve long-term outcomes through a holistic approach to services.
- Release a **Specialized Housing Plan** outlining how the community can achieve the housing capacity necessary for the Pathways Home plan to succeed.
- Implement a **performance measurement program** to collect and leverage data for informed decision-making, aligning with the county's strategic plan for data-driven decisions.
- Increase the number of **relative/like-kin placements** for youth who cannot safely remain in their home and need out-of-home care.
- Reopen the Western Regional Adolescent Services' **shelter care** facility.
- Integrate **ISRS programs** with the Western Regional Adolescent Shelter to improve crisis response for youth in our community.
- Stand up a temporary **surge shelter**.
- Continue the collaboration with YWCA La Crosse to develop an **intergenerational center** offering daytime activities for children and adults with mild to moderate dementia at the newly renovated Hillview Health Care Campus. The center will foster meaningful connections and shared experiences across generations.
- Improve **claims processing**, saving time and money.





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