

2021

Impact Report

LA CROSSE COUNTY
HUMAN SERVICES DEPT.



**Jason Witt, Human Services
Department Director**



LA CROSSE COUNTY

Building Trusted Relationships

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



In 2021 teams across the Human Services Department strove toward a bold shared vision of “putting the human back in human services.” Over the years, the variety of human services supports we manage has grown both in size and complexity. For our citizens who depend on these services, seeking help and navigating the system can be intimidating. As a helping agency, we are committed to never losing sight of the fact that what lies at the center of health and healing are strong and trusted relationships.

The pandemic unfortunately has been a perfect storm that has undermined supportive relationships through increased social isolation and economic hardship. The result we saw in 2021 was increased needs across our human

services spectrum. Our response was not only to do more, but to be flexible and willing to do different, always keeping relationships at the center. We were proud in 2021 to be the first in the state to reopen congregate dining sites for our seniors, enabling vital social connections. We also continued facilitations of important neighborhood relationships through the System of Care mom’s group. To help individuals and families with pandemic-related economic challenges, our economic support team effectively managed eligibility for an array of enhanced federal benefits. Along with our City of La Crosse law enforcement partners, we began a pilot program where mental health professionals from our crisis response team ride and respond side-by-side with police officers to certain situations where mental health challenges are present. Our Family and Children’s Services team began a program that employs the latest science to assist youth in healing from past trauma and forming lasting familial connections.

In serving our community during such a challenging time, we are far from alone. The difficult human service needs of our community can only be addressed through strong partnerships and a collective approach. We would like to thank our fellow helping agencies and elected leadership for their continued partnership and support!

Jason Witt

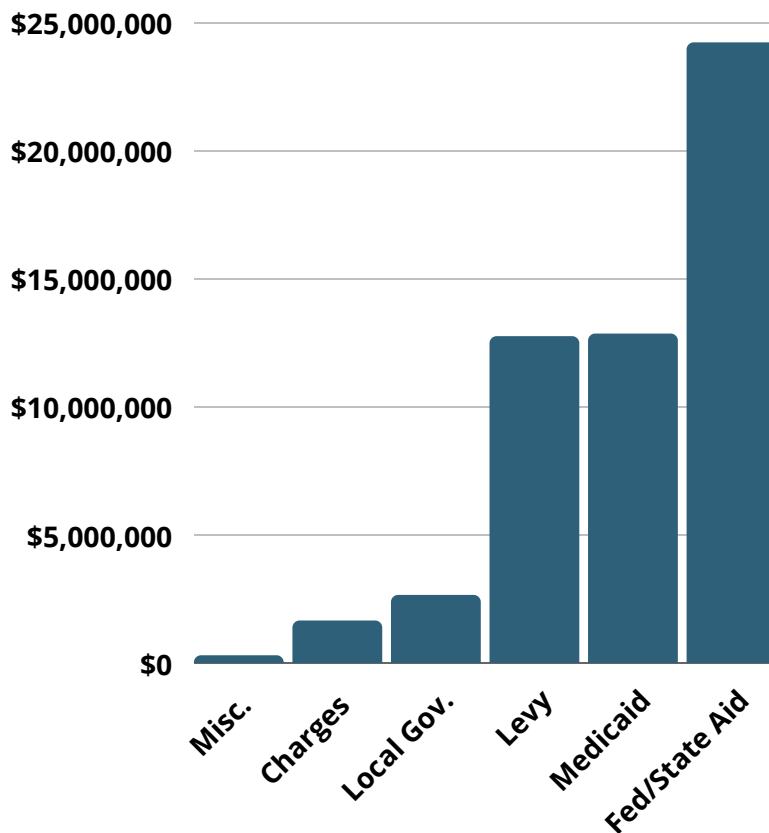
La Crosse County Human Services Director

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

- **15,207** households in La Crosse County received Economic Support services in 2021. The number of households receiving assistance in La Crosse County has increased by almost 3,000 during the pandemic.
- Our Integrated Support & Recovery Services (ISRS) Crisis Unit partnered with the City La Crosse Police Department to implement a **Co-Response program** where Mental Health Crisis Specialists partner with law enforcement officers to respond to crisis calls in our community.
- The Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) continued to experience growth in its Senior Nutrition Program, serving a total of **79,957 meals to 834 community members** in 2021.
- Our La Crosse Area Family Collaborative Community Response **social workers** successfully partnered with 48 families comprised of 155 individuals. A total of **434 family needs** were worked on with 80% of them being met. Community Response provides outreach to families who were referred to child protective services, but did not rise to that level of need.

2021 Finances

REVENUE & EXPENSES

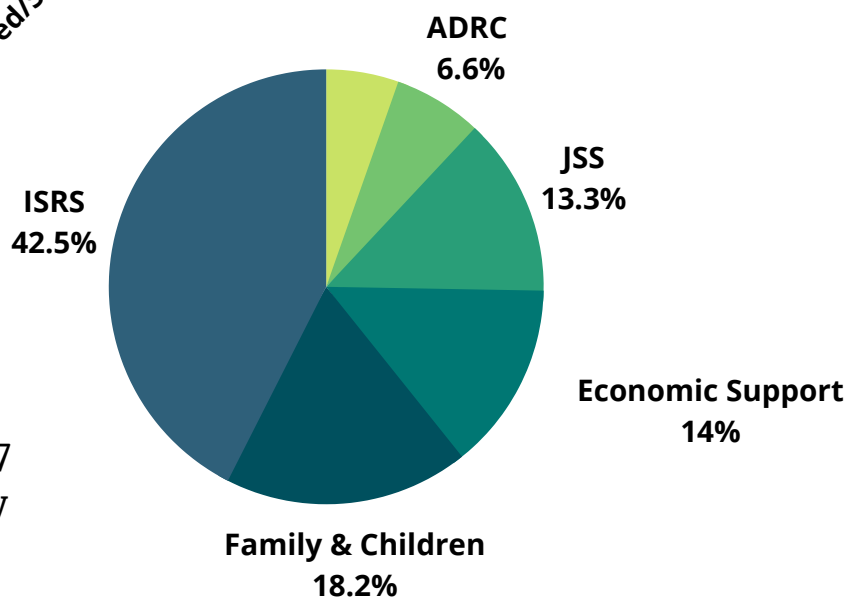


REVENUE

- Federal/State Aid: \$24,186,149
- Medicaid Revenue: \$12,820,698
- Levy: \$12,719,532
- Local Governmental Payments: \$2,619,738
- Public Charge for Services: \$1,620,600
- Miscellaneous Revenue: \$264,444
- **TOTAL: \$54,231,161**

EXPENSES

- HS Operations: \$2,908,048
- ADRC & Aging: \$3,562,309
- Justice Support Services: \$7,194,650
- Economic Support: \$7,559,689
- Family and Children: \$9,846,767
- Integrated Support and Recovery Services: \$22,992,511
- **TOTAL: \$54,063,974**



1 in 6

La Crosse County residents are served by the Human Services Economic Support Section

79,957

Senior Nutrition Program meals served in 2021 by the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)

24/7

Access to Human Service programs such as Mental Health Crisis and Child Protective Services

Integrated Support Recovery Services



Christin Skolnik -
Integrated Support and
Recovery Services Manager

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

2021 Overview: We added 11 new positions aimed at supporting the 90+ employee section of ISRS in 2021. We partnered with the La Crosse School District to hire two school-based Social Workers, walked alongside 557 Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) participants and 458 Children's Long Term Support (CLTS) participants, responded to 609 intake requests for service, served 322 within our Triage Clinic, and responded to 20,713 crisis calls. We also

put in the groundwork for some exciting 2022 plans. This includes an expansion of substance use recovery supports, such as offering non-traditional acupuncture treatments. We will also be partnering with a vendor to provide virtual offering to those needing to access treatment supports differently due to childcare, transportation, anxiety or other challenges. Additionally, we plan to hire two therapists who will support our Treatment Courts, along with funding supportive services for women residing in transitional housing programs.

Economic Support



Lorie Graff - Western
Region Economic
Assistance Manager

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

2021 Overview: WREA provided critical economic supports to those financially impacted by the pandemic in 2021. A total of \$32.9 million in Food Share benefits were issued within La Crosse County in 2021. There were a total of 22,177 La Crosse County residents enrolled in either BadgerCare Plus or Medicaid in 2021. We provided monthly Wisconsin Shares payments to 215 families in La Crosse County, with a total of about \$2.1 million in benefits paid to help families with their

child care costs in 2021. 5,894 households received Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) financial assistance in 2021 with a total of \$3.2 million issued.

Looking ahead, an expansion of in-person services within the community is planned for 2022. Two new community Economic Support Specialists were added for 2022. These staff will be working on-site in the community, answering questions and processing in-person applications.

Justice Support Services



Tonya Van Tol - Justice Support Services Manager

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

2021 Overview: JSS strengthened its community partnerships and welcomed new leadership in 2021. In collaboration with school districts, Youth Justice (YJ) and Systems of Care (SOC), we developed a county-wide response to chronic absenteeism. The preventative program supports children and families instead of using punitive, after-the-fact measures. We're excited to see the results of this partnership. We also welcomed Maurella Cunningham as the new superintendent for the Western Region Adolescent Services (shelter and detention). Looking ahead, we are launching a new model that will see social workers carrying cases from intake to conclusion. In the past, we had separate intake and ongoing social workers. We also will work in 2022 on strategic planning to improve services for adults involved in treatment courts, pretrial services and post-conviction.

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 and independent living for youth programs.

2021 Overview: The Family & Children's Section launched two new programs in 2021. The Intensive Permanency Services Program is designed to help youth heal from past trauma and build lasting familial connections. The Safe Babies Treatment Court Program is designed specifically for children between the ages of 0-3 years old. During this time, infants and toddlers are most in need of safe, nurturing, and predictable environments. In 2021, we received 1,351 reports of child abuse and requests for CPS services. We averaged 85 children in out-of-home care each month. A transformation in child welfare programming is underway that is shifting the system from out-of-home care to more in-home safety planning with families. This follows research that shows that children have far better outcomes when they are with family. In 2021, we served 45 families or 86 children through wraparound funding we receive from the state. We hope to increase this number in 2022 as we continue to strive to keep all children safely with their family.

Aging and Disability Resource Center



Carissa Pagel-Smith - Aging
& Disability Resource
Center Section 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.

2021 Overview: The Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) found new and creative ways to support our community throughout 2021. We launched a new health and wellness program for older adults (PALS - Physical Activity for Lifelong Success), we developed a new caregiver support program, and we hosted a virtual Aging Advocacy Day for La Crosse County residents. We were the first in the state to reopen Senior Nutrition Program congregate dining sites, and we worked to address social isolation driven by the pandemic through

local partnerships. We did all this while undergoing a major staff transition, with three long-term employees retiring, and six new employees joining our team. Finally, we listened to our community through listening sessions and a survey that helped us create our 2022-2024 La Crosse County Aging Plan. In 2022, we will toward meeting goal in that plan of becoming “top of mind,” actively utilized, well-known, and accessible to all.

Employee Spotlight



Teng Vang has worked as an Economic Support Specialist in the Human Services Department for almost five years and focuses on helping older adults apply for long term care benefits.

“I really enjoy what I do now,” he says. “I come to work every single day expecting to help a lot of people.”

Vang was born in a refugee camp in Thailand and moved to La Crosse County at a young age. He graduated from Holmen High School and has a degree in economics from the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse.

At the county, he’s part of a team that helps people work through the application process for programs like BadgerCare, FoodShare, and long-term care benefits for older adults and people with disabilities.

“It can be complicated for people, but we are here to help, and never to judge,” Vang says. “All our conversations are confidential, and I try and take people through the process step by step.”

Looking Forward

PROJECTS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As we enter 2022, a variety of increased resources has created exciting new opportunities for how we can assist our community as it emerges from the pandemic. For example, for our 2022 budget the La Crosse County Board approved **18 new positions** that bolster capacity across our behavioral health, youth justice and economic support service areas. We will work to use these and other new resources strategically in 2022.

Vexing human services issues, including an epidemic of substance abuse and entrenched homelessness, continue to pose community challenges. At the same time demographic shifts, such as an aging population, create the need to plan for future human services demands.

In 2022 our Department will be **engaged with community partners** with the aim of ensuring coordinated approaches around all of these issues, while making the most of our resources. We will do this work while keeping relationships at the center, and continuing to advance our vision to “**put the human back in human services.**” Below are some of our exciting plans for 2022:

- The Family & Children’s Section will continue to prioritize and focus efforts around its **transformation**, strategy and vision work.
- Integrated Support & Recovery Services (ISRS) Outpatient Clinic will be offering acupuncture treatment as an expanding **substance use recovery** support service.
- Two community Economic Support Specialists have been added for 2022. These positions, which will be **located in the community**, will provide in-person assistance and application processing for FoodShare, BadgerCare/Medicaid, Wisconsin Shares Child Care Assistance and the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP).
- In accordance with the **2022-2024 Aging Plan**, to better determine community needs and identify opportunities, the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) will investigate where people are at with the greatest need, work to cultivate relationships, and engage all stakeholders in conversation.
- JSS is expanding capacity of service in System of Care (SOC) by adding two additional specialist positions that allow for response to **chronic absenteeism** in outer school districts within La Crosse County. Two housing social workers will also be added in La Crosse Area Family Collaborative (LAFC) to address the needs of clients across La Crosse County Human Services.

Questions or Comments?



608-784-4357 (help)



lacrossecounty.org/humanservices



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Goals and Oversight

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

Mission: Enhancing Self-Sufficiency and Quality of Life with Respect for the Dignity of the Person Served.

Organizational Vision: One Department One Mission One Culture

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MEMBERS (2020-2022)

Tina Tryggestad, Chair
Kim Cable, Vice Chair
Maureen Freedland
Thomas Jacobs
Jamie O'Neill

Noelle Weber Strauss
Dr. Laurie Logan
Ebony Hyter
Susan Waukon



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