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Contact: 608-422-7800 or dcfmedia@wisconsin.gov

Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse Presents ***Outstanding Achievement in Domestic Abuse Issues*** Awards

MADISON – Governor Tony Evers presented awards to honor four individuals for their contributions in assisting survivors of domestic violence in a special ceremony held today at the state Capitol. The ceremony was hosted as part of [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#), a statewide effort to raise awareness about the effects of domestic abuse.

This is the 33rd year the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse has selected recipients for the Outstanding Achievement in Domestic Abuse Issues awards.

"Each year, this ceremony is a powerful representation of our work to ensure that every Wisconsinite deserves to be safe and free of fear and violence, most especially in their own homes. Unfortunately, Wisconsin saw a record number of domestic violence deaths last year, and during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we are reminded that domestic violence is preventable and that there is much work we can do together to prevent violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, across our state," said Gov. Evers.

"Here in Wisconsin, we're fortunate to have so many dedicated individuals and organizations working together to support survivors and their families. This recognition honors individuals who have dedicated their time, efforts, and lived experiences toward serving those affected by domestic abuse, and it's a privilege to be here to help honor this year's four outstanding recipients," Gov. Evers continued. "Whether it's continuing to support statewide domestic violence services or implementing our new Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention, as governor, I remain committed to ensuring our state invests in the resources to support this important work, keep Wisconsinites safe in their homes, and make our state and our communities safer."

At the ceremony, Governor Tony Evers and council members presented awards in three categories:

Jewel Adams of Sun Prairie, Recovery Coach and Peer Supporter at Safe Communities and Lead Organizer at Freedom Inc., was honored with the ***Courage Award***. This award recognizes a survivor of domestic abuse who has turned adversity into triumph by creating positive change within their community to end domestic abuse. As a survivor, Ms. Adams uses her lived experience to create a safe space for survivors to heal as they navigate their recovery journey. She works to ensure women are invested in and people experiencing incarceration are advocated for and able to reclaim their dignity, power and hope. Her mentorship and advocacy made her an exceptional recipient of this significant award.

Ryan Graham of Eau Claire, Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care Homeless Systems Manager, was honored with the ***Sharon Lewandowski Justice Award***. This award recognizes survivors of domestic abuse who have overcome adversity and had the courage to survive, have empowered themselves, and serve as an inspiration for others. With more than 20 years of experience, Ryan uses his extensive knowledge to

help survivors experiencing homelessness by identifying needs and prioritizing their access to housing. Housing is the number one priority for survivors and his dedication and collaboration promotes safety, empowerment, and justice. The impact Ryan has made is immeasurable and has forever changed the lives of survivors.

Courtney Olson of Marinette, Executive Director of Rainbow House Domestic Abuse Services, Inc., was honored with the **Sharon Lewandowski Justice Award**. Courtney is a driving force behind many domestic violence initiatives, and her commitment to make a change in domestic violence incidences is relentless. After the unfortunate death of her colleague, she founded Hope Domestic Violence Homicide Response Project to better track domestic violence information for prevention and intervention efforts. Her leadership is not only seen in programs and policies but also in the lives of those she has touched through her empathy, courage, and action. Courtney's ability to be challenged, while staying focused on equity, trauma-informed care, justice and community engagement reflects the spirit of the Sharon Lewandowski Award.

Barb Fischer of Saukville, Executive Director of Advocates of Ozaukee, was honored with the **Patricia Waschbisch Lifetime Achievement Award**, which honors an individual who has provided exceptional services to many survivors of domestic abuse over the course of a career and who has promoted a vision of ending violence and achieving social justice. The award is named for and commemorates the legacy of an advocate who lost her life in a domestic homicide in 2013. Barb has dedicated her 42-year career to helping thousands of survivors gain access to the programming and resources to rebuild and grow. From serving on the Governor's Council for Domestic Violence and advocating for statewide program funding, to direct outreach and education efforts, Barb has led with a focus on what is best for survivors. Her creative problem-solving solutions and collaboration efforts increased access to services, program development, and knowledge sharing. Her commitment and passion are what made her an exceptional candidate for this outstanding award.

"These agencies provide a place where families can safely access counseling, legal advocacy, and housing so healing and rebuilding can begin. We are so grateful for their commitment to helping Wisconsin's children and families," said DCF Secretary-designee Jeff Pertl. "This work doesn't just change lives, it saves them."

Between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024, DCF domestic abuse funding provided 268,670 nights of safe shelter for 4,790 survivors and their children. This was 14,724 more nights than in 2023. Of the 4,790 people staying in safe shelter, 46.5% or 2,228 of those were children and youth. DCF domestic abuse funding also provided 30,568 survivors with supportive advocacy, counseling, and other community-based services.

Through strong partnerships and innovative approaches, individuals across the state are receiving specialized trauma-informed care that is allowing them to heal and become independent again.

Learn about the types of domestic abuse and where to find domestic abuse services at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/domesticabuse>.

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