

Domestic Abuse Program Annual Report 2023

"I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for your support. I am so thankful for a second chance at life. I really don't know where I'd be or if I'd even be alive if it wasn't for [the help of my local domestic abuse program] and finally finding strength. I had to make the choice, but you carried me along the way. I will forever be thankful for that. One day I want to have the strength to share my story and maybe help others find a way out."

– Wisconsin Survivor, 2023



Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Domestic Abuse Program

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) Domestic Abuse Program administers state and federal funding dedicated to providing shelter and supportive services for survivors of domestic abuse and their families. This funding is critical to the ability of domestic abuse agencies across the state to provide safety to victims and their children when they need it most.

“Through evidence-based best practices, we can improve outcomes for survivors.”

– Rainbow House, Marinette



What is Domestic Abuse and Why is it a Public Health Concern?

Domestic abuse is a pattern of coercive, controlling behavior, by current and former spouses and dating partners, that can include physical, emotional or psychological, sexual, or financial abuse ([National Network to End Domestic Violence](#)). Domestic abuse is experienced by one in three women and one in four men in their lifetime.

Due to the high rates of domestic abuse in our society, it is a significant public health concern that profoundly impacts the overall health of individuals and families.¹ In 2022, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin’s annual Homicide Report showed 96 domestic violence-related homicides, an increase of 20% from the previous year. Nationwide, a 2021 study ranks Wisconsin 8th for the number of domestic violence related homicides, which means that in 2021, one in every six domestic violence homicides in the nation happened in Wisconsin.² Furthermore, The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, a world-leading birth cohort study, demonstrated that nearly two-thirds of households reporting parental abuse were estimated to have co-occurring child maltreatment.³

In addition to being a severe public health issue, domestic violence in Wisconsin is a serious economic problem that requires intervention. According to a new study by the Sojourner Family Peace Center, the state’s largest provider of domestic violence prevention and intervention programs, the estimated annual number of victims in Wisconsin is 94,299, with \$657.8 million in annual economic losses statewide.⁴

1. Center for Disease Control, October 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/communication-resources/intimatepartnerviolence.pdf>
2. End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, October 2023, <https://edaw-webinars.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/16123358/2022-Wisconsin-Domestic-Violence-Homicide-Report.pdf>
3. National Institutes of Health, December 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10709161/>
4. Luthern A. The cost of domestic violence in Wisconsin? A new study estimates annual economic losses at \$657 million – and growing. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. October 2022.

“We’re seeing a trend in our own community and across the state of increased risk for lethality. We’ve been focusing successfully for years on risk reduction through high-risk team case management. Prior to implementation of this interdisciplinary team approach, we saw a homicide every 12-18 months in our service area.

Following implementation, we went nine years with only one homicide. We attribute this to better proactive safety planning and holding perpetrators accountable through team efforts and improved communication.

However, since October 2022, we’ve experienced four domestic/family violence related homicides in our two counties. None of the victims in these four fatalities had connected to services. Domestic abuse incidents are the most predictable form of homicide.

What we can predict, we can work to prevent.

Not one of the high-risk team cases we’ve staffed in the past five years has resulted in fatality.”

– Rainbow House, Marinette



\$14.3M

CY2023

**DCF Investment in
Statewide Domestic Abuse
Funding to Support**

44 Shelter Programs



**74 Non-profit
Domestic Abuse
and Sexual Assault Agencies**

**9 Tribal Domestic Abuse
Programs**

**3 Technical Assistance
and Training Providers**

Addressing Domestic Abuse in Wisconsin

The goals of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) Domestic Abuse Program are to:

- Provide accessible, trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive crisis, safety, and support services for victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children;
- Provide accessible, effective, and culturally appropriate services to survivors of domestic abuse from traditionally underserved groups and from across the life span;
- Educate the community about issues related to domestic abuse;
- Promote a coordinated community response to domestic abuse; and
- Promote the social change necessary to end domestic abuse.

“I’m super grateful for all the help, resources, and tools you provided to help me get back on my feet.” – Shelter Client
Christine Ann SA & DV, Oshkosh

Wisconsin DCF Domestic Abuse Funding

In calendar year (CY) 2023, DCF administered \$14.3 million to local domestic abuse programs to provide core support services for survivors, as well as services to children and underrepresented groups, including immigrants and refugees. Nearly \$1.9 million was also administered for prevention, training, and technical assistance to domestic abuse programs.

DCF Domestic Abuse Contracts fund 74 nonprofit domestic abuse, sexual assault, and dual DV/SA agencies; nine federally recognized tribes; and three technical assistance and training providers.



Services Funded by DCF in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023

Between Oct. 1, 2022, and Sept. 30, 2023, DCF domestic abuse funding provided 253,946 nights of safe shelter for 5,392 survivors and their children. **This was 33,931 more nights than in FFY 2022, a 17.5% increase over the prior year.** Of the 5,392 people staying in safe shelter, 44.1% or 2,382 of those were children and youth. DCF domestic abuse funding also provided 32,441 survivors with supportive advocacy, counseling, and other community-based services.

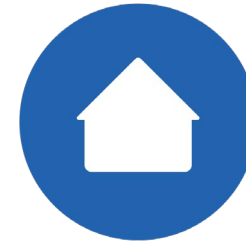
24-Hour Crisis Line: Programs provide or contract for immediate, live access to trained staff or volunteers on a crisis hotline so that survivors have access to assistance any day, any time.

Information, Referral and Follow-up Services: Programs have linkages and provide information and referral to community resources for those services which are needed and requested by survivors, but not provided directly by the program.

Advocacy and Counseling: Programs provide survivor-driven information, support, assistance, accompaniment, and intervention. These services may include individual support and safety planning, support groups, legal advocacy, and/or individual therapy.

In this fiscal year:

- 4,088 children received individual or group counseling
- 16,128 adult survivors received individual or group counseling support
- 16,340 adult survivors received legal advocacy (*Legal advocacy can include, but is not limited to, preparing paperwork for protection/restraining orders, accompanying a client to a protection order hearing, and all other advocacy within the civil justice system.*)



253,946
nights of shelter
provided

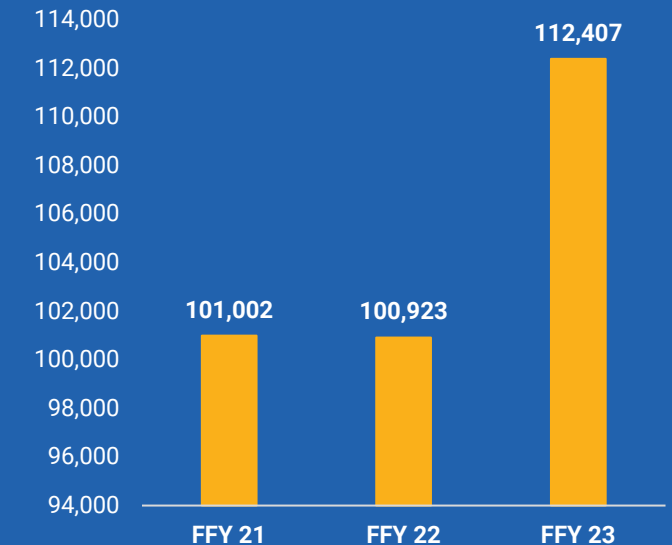
FFY 23 Crisis Line Calls

10/01/2022-09/30/2023



112,047

Increase in Calls over 3 Years



"I'm truly grateful for the staff that had my back to the fullest."

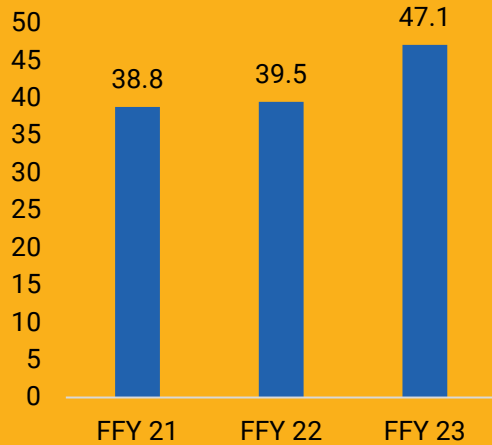
– DV Client, CASDA, Superior

Providing Safe Shelter for Wisconsin Survivors

FFY 23

10/01/2022 – 09/30/2023

Average Length of Shelter Stay (in days)



33,931

more nights of shelter provided



67.5%

of shelters turned away survivors due to lack of capacity

Services Funded by DCF in FFY 2023 (cont.)

Shelter: Wisconsin Domestic Abuse Programs report that the housing crisis in many communities has impacted survivors' ability to find safe housing. From FFY22 to FFY23, the number of nights of shelter provided annually increased from 220,015 to 253,946. In the same span of time, the average length of shelter stay for a family in crisis increased from 39.5 nights to 47.1 nights.

Shelter can be provided in numerous ways. Domestic abuse programs work with survivors to provide the best option available depending on survivor needs and the availability of space and funding. DCF currently funds 44 domestic abuse shelters which provide residential and support services for survivors and their children fleeing violent homes. When shelters are full or the needs of a client warrant it, domestic abuse programs may provide hotel rooms or emergency funding to help a survivor remain safely housed.

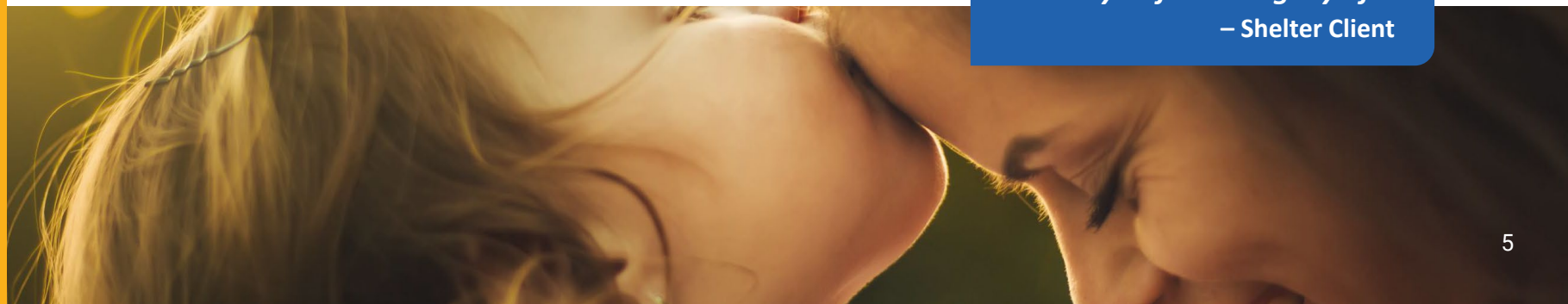
Sometimes however, there are not enough resources to safely shelter/house all survivors who need safety. In FFY 2023 alone, 67.5% of domestic abuse shelters had to turn away survivors due to lack of capacity to serve them and almost 13,000 survivor requests for shelter went unfulfilled.

In addition, the average length of stay in shelter increased almost 8 days in length from the prior year; a trend that advocates attribute to the shortage of affordable housing throughout Wisconsin.

Community Education: Programs educate individuals and organizations about issues surrounding domestic abuse. Many programs provide education to youth of all ages through programming in schools. Community education may include information about available services, information about abuse, prevention of domestic abuse, and the need for social change.

"Thank you for saving my life."

– Shelter Client



Children & Youth Provided Services, Shelter, and Support

Impacts of Domestic Abuse on Young People

People of all ages are impacted by domestic abuse.

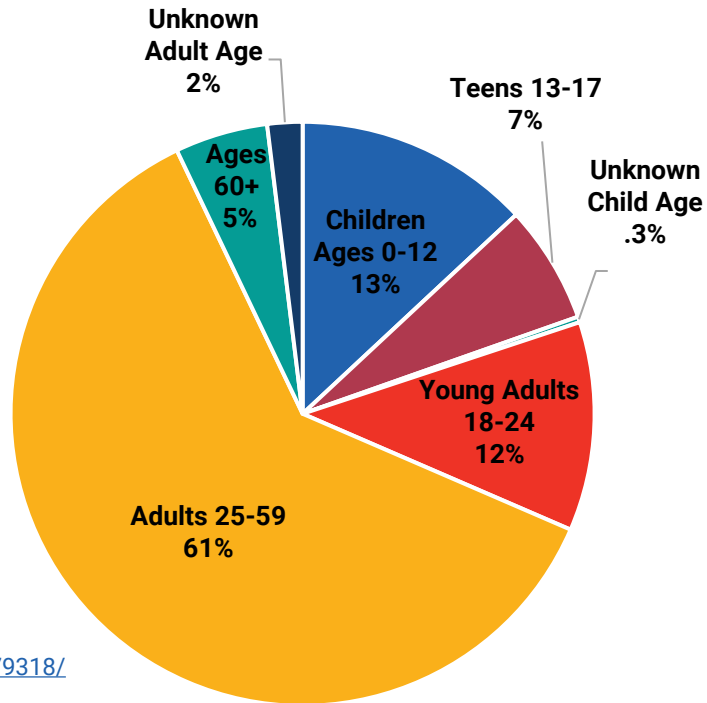
In fact, more than one in five clients served by Wisconsin's domestic abuse programs are under the age of 18 and another 12% are young adults between the ages of 18 and 24.

Combined, 32% of people receiving domestic abuse services are under the age of 25, the age at which the scientific community has determined the prefrontal cortex/executive functioning portion of the brain to be fully developed.¹

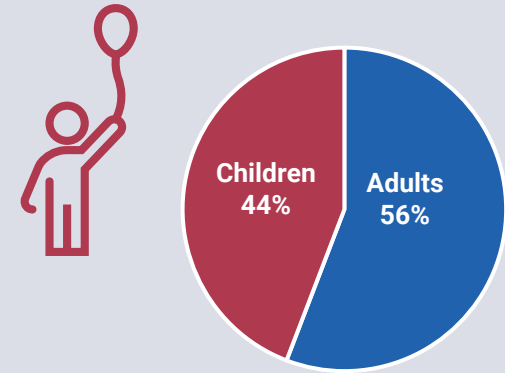
This means almost one third of those receiving services experience trauma related to domestic abuse while their brains are still developing. It is important to note that childhood trauma is a significant risk factor for mental health conditions later in life.²

1. National Institutes of Health, April 2013, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23579318/>
2. Science Direct, June 2010, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S014521341000089X>

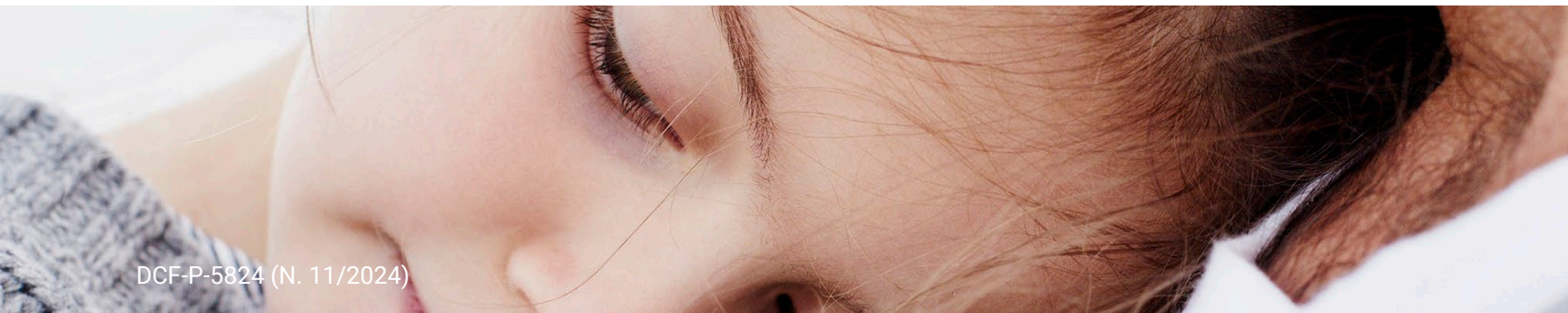
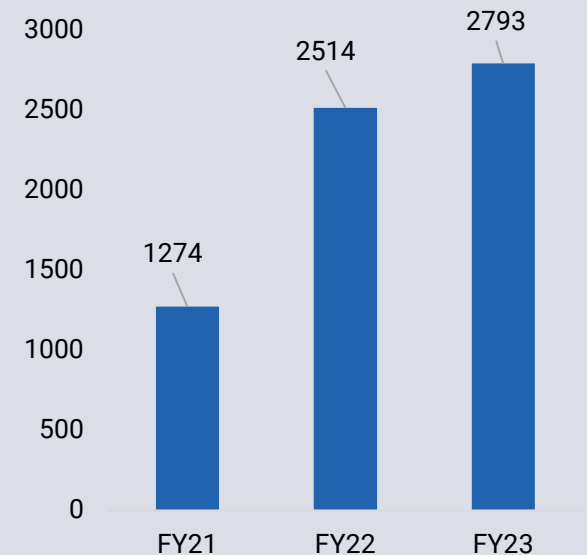
20 Percent of Advocacy and Counseling Services were Provided to Children



44% of Shelter Residents are Children
FFY 23
10/01/2022-09/30/2023



Healthy Relationship Presentations Provided to Youth



Between September 2022 – August 2023 the Average Amount of Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) funding allocated per survivor



\$995

WI-DVHF provides trauma-informed mobile advocacy and flexible financial assistance to victims of domestic violence.



DCF-P-5824 (N. 11/2024)

Housing Insecurity: The Impact on Domestic Abuse Survivors

In Wisconsin, the threat of homelessness remains a significant barrier for families attempting to escape domestic abuse.¹ While emergency domestic abuse shelters, a common and critical mechanism for providing immediate shelter, are located throughout the state, they are often at capacity and spaces are extremely limited – a phenomenon that has been intensified by the increased violence associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.² To address this phenomenon, DCF has taken a proactive approach to creating safety for survivors.

Domestic Violence Housing First Pilot Project

The Domestic Violence Housing First Pilot Project (DVHF) is an evidence based and trauma informed practice that moves domestic abuse survivors into safe, stable, and permanent housing as quickly as possible, reducing or avoiding the need for emergency shelter. Once housed, survivors have access to supportive, holistic advocacy resources to rebuild their lives.

This pilot project started in December 2021 with DCF issuing awards to nine domestic abuse agencies from around the state: Embrace (Ladysmith), Cia Siab (La Crosse), The Family Center (Wisconsin Rapids), Safe Harbor (Sheboygan), Harbor House (Appleton), Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (Madison), The Women’s Community (Wausau), Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse (Superior), and the Milwaukee Center for Children and Youth (Milwaukee).



12,934

survivor requests for shelter went unfulfilled

1. Boxall H, Morgan A. Intimate Partner Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Survey of Women in Australia. Australia’s National Research Organization for Women’s Safety to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children; 2021:102.
2. Bullinger L, Carr J, Packham A. COVID-19 and Crime: Effects of Stay-at-Home Orders on Domestic Violence. NBER Work Pap Ser. 2020; (27667).

"I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for your support. I am so thankful for a second chance at life. I really don't know where I'd be or if I'd even be alive if it wasn't for Embrace and finally finding strength. I had to make the choice, but you carried me along the way. I will forever be thankful for that. One day I want to have the strength to share my story and maybe help others find a way out."
– Survivor, Embrace, Ladysmith



Domestic Violence Housing First Pilot Project (cont.)

“Safe and secure housing is one of the most critical needs for domestic abuse survivors. Indeed, survivors self-identify stable housing and the resources to maintain stable housing as one of their most pressing needs.”¹ At the same time, severely limited funding combined with serious housing shortages have made it extraordinarily challenging for domestic abuse programs throughout the state to provide adequate housing services and assistance to their clients.

The WI-DVHF pilot program is designed to address these housing challenges and allows providers to trial and implement innovative and unique solutions that are consistent with the DVHF philosophy. The aim of flexible financial assistance is to reduce any type of barrier faced by a domestic abuse survivor in acquiring safe and stable housing. This project will be administered through December 31, 2025.

Research to Assess the Effectiveness of the DVHF Approach

December 2021- December 2023

In implementing DVHF in Wisconsin, DCF contracted with the University of Wisconsin-Madison to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot sites’ implementation of DVHF on the lives of survivors, including those from previously understudied communities.

As of December 2023, 64 participants completed the baseline assessment in full (including eight Hmong participants who completed the survey via verbal interview).

Preliminary findings include:

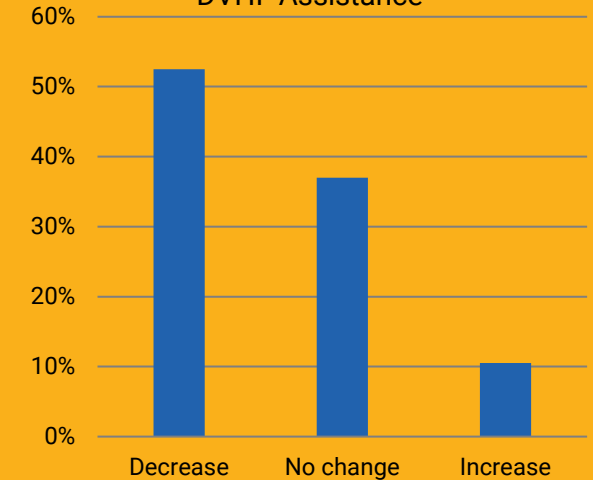
- **More than 50% of survivors surveyed reported a decrease in exposure to domestic abuse.** (See graph)
- The average amount of money distributed to survivors was \$995 and the median amount was \$724. (See previous page for graphic)
- Most of the respondents are women with children; more than 40% of women report having a disability.
- The largest funding categories were: 1) rent and security deposit, 2) personal transportation and vehicle maintenance, and 3) utilities.

1. Stylianou AM, Pich C. Beyond Domestic Violence Shelter: factors associated with housing placements for survivors exiting emergency shelters. J Interpers Violence. 2021;36(17-18):n94 40-n9462. doi: 10.1177/0886260519858393



Results of Implementing DV Housing First December 2021-December 2023

Survivor Reported Decrease in Exposure to Domestic Abuse after DVHF Assistance

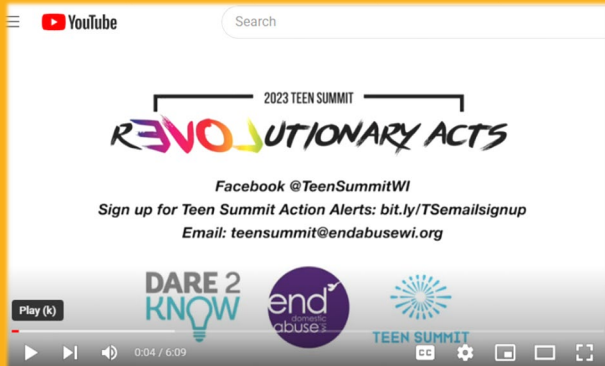


Between September 2022 and August 2023, **\$825,466** was distributed to participating WI-DVHF organizations.

“The scope of meaningful financial support we’re able to offer with DVHF is transformative. It’s profoundly different.”

– DV Program Advocate

2023 Teen Summit Highlight Video (click on image to view)



“One of my highlights was learning about other people's stories and how these problems happen more than you think, and you are not the only one going through it.”

– Teen Summit Youth Participant

“I really love how there were different people of color who came together and shared their culture and experiences.”

– Teen Summit Youth Participant



Preventing Domestic Violence: The Critical Work of Ending the Cycle of Violence Statewide Prevention Initiative

DCF Domestic Abuse Program Funding supports the *Statewide Domestic Violence Prevention Initiative*. This initiative, which is managed through a subcontract to End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, is a comprehensive approach to teaching Wisconsin’s youth how to build healthy relationships. Its key components include subgrants to local agencies for primary prevention activities; a media/social marketing campaign, strategies for youth involvement and leadership; and the annual Teen Summit on Healthy Relationships.

All components are interconnected and reach diverse parts of the state to educate youth on the importance of building healthy relationships throughout their lifetime. This critical work shapes the lives of young people, and they can carry this experience forward to create a kinder, gentler world.

Annual Teen Summit on Healthy Relationships

The 2023 Teen Summit was held in person May 19-21, 2023, with over 600 people attending. The Summit is the largest and most diverse event of Wisconsin’s domestic abuse movement, bringing youth, parents, educators, activists, and mentors from all over Wisconsin to learn about healthy relationships, teen dating violence, and sexual assault within a larger anti-oppression framework. The Teen Summit includes educational and enthusiastic plenary speakers, as well as topic-related workshops and performances and plenty of opportunities for teens to network with peers from around the state on a deeper level.

