



2023

ANNUAL



REPORT



# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Throughout my life, I have been interested in coming-of-age stories—those transformative, transformational moments in a young person’s life. What fascinates me is that they are almost always written in the first person from the view of the emerging adult. Never do you hear the story from the perspective of the person challenging that young person to accomplish something they didn’t think was possible, enlivening an excitement in them about what could be, and supporting them with love and security, just in case they didn’t succeed the first time.

What was your coming-of-age story? Who pushed you forward, gave you confidence, and supported your dreams and desires? I encourage you to go back and hear the stories of the people who made it possible for you.

If you are part of Operation Fresh Start as a staff member, board member, supporter, or partner, you are part of each young person’s story. At OFS, we measure success in high school diplomas, driver’s licenses, jobs, and enrollment in post-secondary education, but we live in each young person’s coming-of-age story. Our programs focus on completing high school, choosing a career, and career-specific training. But we specialize in providing young people with everything they need to write their coming-of-age stories.

For our young people, we build opportunities to let them know that we care. We focus on the moment when we encourage them to make a leap of faith into their potential. For you, it may have been a professor, a friend’s parent, or a mentor in the workplace. For many of our young people, OFS plays that pivotal role.

This is my last letter to you as Executive Director. I am headed into a different transition as I plan to retire in the spring of 2024. I have been honored to lead this organization with clear focus and meaningful outcomes. But being part of each young person’s coming-of-age story has had the most impact on my life. Thank you to OFS staff, board of



directors, and most importantly, participants for letting me be part of these inspirational stories.

Although Operation Fresh Start has been an institution in Dane County for fifty-three years, I feel that, in some ways, it is just now coming of age. The future holds such potential for each young person in Dane County to have the necessary support to write a successful future. OFS has the programming to broaden its impact and write even more success stories. You are a vital character in each Fresh Start story written by our young people. Thank you for playing an important part.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Markle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gregory Markle  
*Executive Director*



## MISSION

Operation Fresh Start empowers emerging adults on a path to self-sufficiency through education, mentoring, and employment training.

## VISION

All emerging adults ages 16-24 are assets in our community.

## VALUES

Commitment • Community • Empowerment • Equity • Work

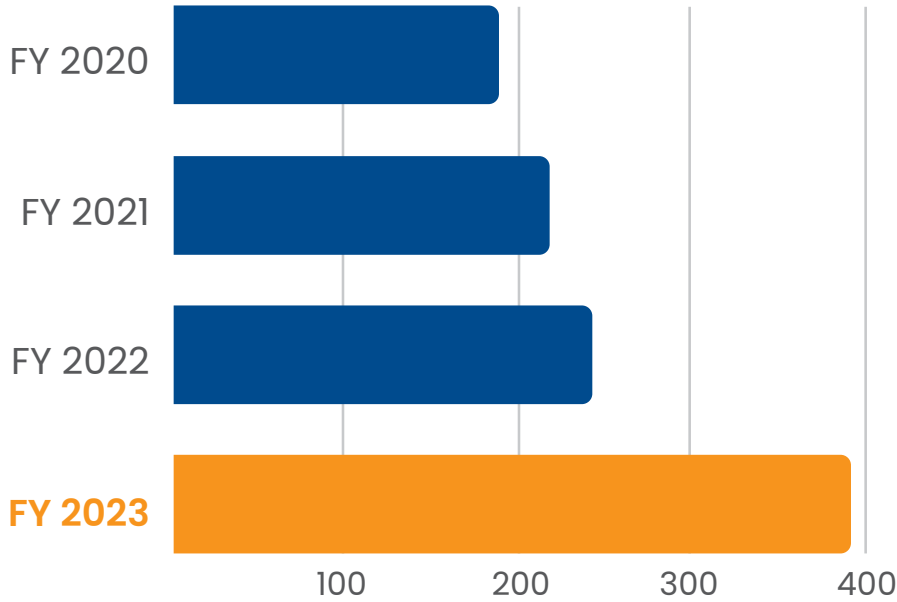
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# BY THE NUMBERS

October 1, 2022–September 30, 2023

## 393 participants served at OFS (ages 16-24)





## ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS...



**38** driver's licenses



**40** learner's permits



**42** pre-apprenticeships

**66** OSHA certifications



**65** CPR/First Aid certifications

# LEGACY

Legacy provides young adults ages 16–24 a small group setting and mentorship as they earn their high school diploma, driver’s license, and develop employment readiness skills. As AmeriCorps members, participants engage in 1,000 hours of paid work that directly benefits their communities: either affordable housing construction or conservation work. Rolling admission means participants are accepted any time of the year and program completion takes about 9–10 months. After graduation, OFS staff continue to support graduates as they transition into post-secondary education or life-sustaining employment.



## Highlights from supervisors’ speeches at 2023 graduations

- “I think that one thing you really gained during your time here is a lot of confidence.”
- “He was so open with the crew and brought everyone into the conversation. He has the ability to make people feel comfortable and welcome.”
- “She is the hardest worker on the crew, always out of the van first. She’s always hauling more than the guys.”
- “He’s someone who took time figure out who he is, what he wants, and put a lot of energy into his identity.”
- “His personality and sense of humor made him a wonderful teammate, especially during difficult times of growth for both the crew and myself.”
- “The impact that you’ve had on the greater Madison community, the work that you’ve done for the ecosystem in Dane County Parks, and the amount of work that you’ve done on yourself is incredible to see.”



## 4 AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECTS

1126 & 1130 Mifflin Street, Madison

1104 & 1108 Kamperschroer Way, Sun Prairie

**1,188 ACRES IMPROVED**  
in city and county parks

# 93 young adults enrolled in Legacy

39 high school diplomas

28 pre-apprenticeship certificates

14 driver's licenses

17 learner's permits

44 OSHA certifications

40 CPR/First Aid certifications



## LIFE SKILLS WORKSHOPS

Financial Literacy

Sex Education

Healthy Relationships

Self-Advocacy

Cooking

7,000 breakfast & lunch meals enjoyed



# BUILD ACADEMY

Build Academy is a full-time, hands-on, paid training program for ages 18–24 with a starting wage of \$15/hour. Tier 1 participants gain experience in residential construction, working on home renovations or new-construction projects. Tier 2 participants gain experience in commercial construction, working alongside industry professionals on multi-million dollar projects. Participants also earn certification in OSHA, CPR/First Aid, and pre-apprenticeship certification from the Wisconsin Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards. Successful program completion includes placement into a life-sustaining career in the trades.



## Build Academy Projects

### TIER 1

9 local houses  
3 local businesses  
OFS build out

### TIER 2

Epic Systems *with* JP Cullen  
UW Credit Union *with* Findorff  
UW Health Medical Park *with* JP Cullen



**36** participants served  
**\$20<sup>27</sup>** average pay at exit

**15** WI Carpenter  
Pre-Apprenticeship  
Readiness Certificates



## Interview: Lavon

### Why did you want to work in the trades?

"I got into construction because my dad did maintenance work and inspired me, also the benefits and money!"

### What did OFS give you?

"Knowledge and information about the in's and out's of construction. It also got me mentally prepared to be on time, ready to learn. If you're willing to learn, OFS is willing to teach."

Lavon joined Build Academy in September 2022. He recalls how inviting everyone was on his first day. That day, he installed OSB (oriented strand board) on a roof and liked the project so much that he considers having his own roofing company someday. For now, he's been with Common Links Construction since completing Build Academy in May 2023. Lavon says that showing up and being determined have helped him succeed. While at OFS, he also obtained his driver's license, pre-apprenticeship readiness training, and the right mindset to be successful!



# CONSERVATION ACADEMY <sup>9</sup>

Conservation Academy is a full-time, hands-on, paid training program for ages 18–24. Earning a starting wage of \$15/hour, participants train alongside industry professionals working in parks, natural areas, and neighborhoods throughout south central Wisconsin. Participants build their professional network and earn credentials that employers are looking for. Successful program completion includes placement into a career in conservation, land management, parks, forestry, or landscaping.



**12** participants served

**887** acres improved

**1,400+** trees and plugs planted

**\$1 million** saved in seed collection efforts with Dane County Parks & other partners

## CA PARTNERS



Photo credit: Shane Otto



## Spotlight: May

May came into Conservation Academy in January 2023 with a crew that was nearing program completion, but they kept up with everyone and later became a leader for their peers. May was always willing to work hard and continually learn. They have a big interest in plants and foraging for edible species and is well versed in native and non-native species in our area. While at OFS, May earned their certifications in CPR/First Aid, Pesticide Applicator, OSHA, SAWW Chainsaw, Wildland Firefighting, and WI Conservation/Forestry Pre-Apprenticeship Readiness. This past fall of 2023, May enrolled in Madison Area Technical College's Urban Tree Technician program and already has a job in the industry!

# DRIVE

Drive is a free driver's education program in partnership with 4 Lakes Driver Training School for young adults ages 18–24. Participants complete coursework to obtain their learner's permit, complete five behind-the-wheel lessons, and take the DMV road test to earn their license, with the same instructor supporting them throughout.

An often-forgotten challenge for emerging adults in Dane County is the inequity around driver's education. The State of Wisconsin stopped providing driver's education in high schools in 2004, which created a ripple effect of obstacles for low-income families who are not able to afford private instruction.



*Tanner and Michelle earned their learner's permits and celebrated with Theдора, program coordinator.*

**28** participants

**26** learner's permits

**4** driver's licenses

*A driver's license is the 2nd most required qualification for employment*



Options provides an alternative way to finish high school, assisting young adults in earning their high school diploma, GED or HSED. OFS staff help participants identify the path that's right for them and provide continuous support while participants complete coursework.

Ericka, program coordinator, is a mentor to participants, helping them build self-confidence, explore career options and build a clear pathway to achieve their goals. Participants receive assistance to overcome barriers such as transportation, technology, employment, mental health care, childcare, and more.

There are limited high school completion programs that accommodate non-English languages other than Spanish. This past year, Options supported two participants who spoke little English. A young woman from the Kurdistan region spoke Kurdish and Turkish wanted to become a nurse but needed to graduate high school in the US to attend college. A young man from Uganda who spoke Luganda wanted to finish high school and get a well-paying job. The young woman was referred to Madison Area Technical College's ESL classes and the young man was referred to the Literacy Network. **Ericka, program coordinator, recognizes the massive barrier these two participants faced and hopes to provide more opportunities for such young adults.**

**16** participants

**9** high school diplomas



*USCellular donated 25 wireless hotspots and 2 years of service to OFS. These have been a huge help!*

## DRIVE TO SUCCEED

Drive to Succeed offers mentoring for justice-involved young adults. Through partnerships with the Dept. of Corrections and Metro High School (located within the Dane County Jail), Ericka, program coordinator, supports young people in navigating the criminal justice process, satisfying fines to obtain their driver's license, and earning their high school diploma. Drive to Succeed is a collaboration with JustDane, a nonprofit with expertise in supporting individuals reentering society after a period of incarceration.

**2** cohorts

w/ a third starting Dec 2023

**14** participants served

**5** high school diplomas

**1** driver's license

***One participant joined Build Academy and another will join in January after attaining his diploma!***

# CAREERSCAPE

CareerScape Counseling assists young adults ages 17-24 in Dane County with exploring career options, preparing for employment, or transitioning into post-secondary education. CareerScape works with participants one-on-one to determine their career goals and create a development plan. Participants receive holistic career counseling, including:

- Identifying career interests that align with skills and personal values
- Developing a resume and cover letter
- Helping to secure professional attire
- Teaching interview skills and facilitating mock interviews
- Registering for post-secondary education
- Overcoming barriers to employment (transportation, mental health, childcare, etc.)
- Coordinating job shadows
- Connecting with local resources, organizations, and employers

**80 participants served**

**90%** of participants completed or revised a resume

Participants saw a **\$11<sup>77</sup>/hr** pay increase with a median pay rate of **\$19/hr**

**10** participants were co-enrolled in CareerScape and Drive

CareerScape was rated **4.2/5** on average out of 33 surveys



## Employers & Job Shadow Partners

- 4 Scenes Cleaning
- 5 Below
- Amazon
- Certa-Dry
- Dane County Public Health
- Earthscape Landscaping
- ETC
- Gold Fish Swimming School
- Gunderson Mortuary
- Hilton
- Home Helpers of North Madison
- JW Remodeling
- Kohls
- Kwik Trip
- Madison City Parks
- Mendota Mental Health
- Oak Park Place
- Play Haven
- Reach Dane
- Ross
- Subway
- Sun Prairie Health Care
- Talamore Senior Living
- Traditions Lighting
- United States Post Office
- UPS
- UW Health
- UW Hospital
- Walmart Auto Dept.
- Zimbrick Automotive

## **SALIX'S MORTUARY APPRENTICESHIP**

Salix was a senior at MG21, an alternative high school in the Monona Grove School District. The school's principal introduced him to Aram, CareerScape coordinator, as someone specifically interested in mortuary science. Following an initial meeting, Aram arranged a tour at Gunderson Funeral Home for Salix. The tour allowed him to explore the interdisciplinary skills required to work in the funeral business, from the science of preparing bodies for burials to providing empathic counseling for the bereaved.

Salix was then encouraged to apply for Gunderson's apprenticeship program, which required a day of job shadowing. In preparation for this experience, Aram coordinated with East Madison Community Center's First Impressions program, which provides job seekers with professional attire. Aram and Salix visited the clothing closet together and selected a stylish gray suit for Salix to wear to his job shadow. Upon completing the job shadow, Gunderson



invited Salix to join the apprenticeship and ultimately hired him.

Working with MG21 and Gunderson, Salix worked at the funeral home on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the school year, allowing him enough time for his studies to ensure a spring graduation. Recently, Salix was promoted to Crematory Specialist at Gunderson, a position which requires great care and aptitude!

## **DONOVAN'S TRANSITION TO NURSING SCHOOL**

Donovan had a deep desire to transition into a new career but needed more direction. Aram, CareerScape coordinator, and Donovan discussed what types of work he enjoyed, which he didn't, his values, and his interests. Then, utilizing the Bureau of Labor Statistics website and Madison Area Technical College's list of programs, Donovan generated a list of ten potential careers. During subsequent consultation meetings with Aram, he narrowed the number to five. After the third meeting, Donovan knew that he wanted to pursue nursing.

With Aram's support, Donovan applied for Madison College's two-year Associate Degree Nursing program and was readily accepted. With his seat

secured, Aram and Donovan worked together to apply for FAFSA, draft scholarship essays, and utilize tuition reimbursement services offered by his current employer. Donovan now had a financial safety net that allowed him to move forward with confidence.

Supporting an empathetic Black young man to pursue a high-paying career in nursing challenges enduring stereotypes surrounding the profession. Navigating post-secondary education without familial support can be daunting and halt the pursuit of ambitions. CareerScape seeks to break down these barriers and allow young adults to realize their potential.



# CAREERPOINT

CareerPoint is our newest program dedicated to preparing young professionals ages 18-24 for success and guiding them into a great career. They learn new concepts and strengthen their skills with Essential Skills training while earning a stipend. Once they are feeling confident and ready to implement those new skills in the workforce, they start a paid job training hosted by one of our community partners. Every step of the way, participants are supported through mentorship by their employer and the CareerPoint team.



**Designed and implemented by Lydia, program coordinator, and a board of advisors, CareerPoint launched in September 2023 with a pilot cohort of 3 young adults!**



# New program opens new pathways for young adults

Published November 28, 2023 on our blog

CareerPoint recently celebrated the graduation of its pilot cohort on November 16. This new program is for young professionals ages 18–24 to develop career readiness skills, start a job training with a local business, and receive ongoing mentorship to ensure their long term success. In September, CareerPoint officially launched with three participants who grew quickly as a team with program coordinator Lydia Partee and community partner UW Credit Union.

Over the course of eight weeks, Lydia led the group through a wide variety of professional development with classroom conversations, team building exercises, field trips, and guest presenters. They covered goal setting, resumes, public speaking, self-care, advocacy, presentations, budgeting, and more. They worked with Takeyla Benton on storytelling from a place of empowerment, RCC Sexual Violence Resource Center on workplace harassment, and toured different UW Credit Union branches. Following completion of the eight weeks, the cohort formally interviewed with UWCU and is working toward an employment path in the finance industry.

“I’m super proud of the cohort,” said Lydia Partee, “The four of us collaborated to build this program together. They will be a part of the legacy of CareerPoint.”



Each of the participants brought their own personality to the program and have discovered career paths for themselves. Torin, an avid learner, wants to combine their analytical thinking with individualized problem solving as a financial specialist or in the IT department. Trish, passionate about her community, wants to specialize in financial literacy and homeownership to empower Black and Brown communities. Syenna, a Legacy graduate and self-starter, thrives with networking and will excel in upper management.

Dina Thao, Talent Acquisition Consultant, and Erin Bykowski, Financial Inclusion and Education Manager, were both instrumental in the success of the first run of CareerPoint. A standout component of all OFS programs is ongoing mentorship, and Erin and Dina are committed to that. “Investing in our community through mentorship and job creation is something we’re proud to continue partnering on with Operation Fresh Start,” said Erin.

Lydia will continue checking in with her participants for the next year to address any concerns should they arise. “I’m so excited to see each of them grow and to continue to support them as they embark on their new endeavors,” she said. For 2024, she is eagerly planning with business partners to expand the career pathways available for young adults.



***New cohorts are coming in 2024!***

# FRESH START SOCIETY

*Cumulative donations of \$1,000 and above. \*In-kind gifts.*

1901 Inc.	Edgerton Contractors, Inc
2nd Market Capital Economic Opportunity Foundation	Electronic Theatre Controls, Inc (ETC)
Alliant Energy Foundation	Epic Systems Corporation
AM Construction Services	Estate of Deborah Schroeder
American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation	The Evjue Foundation, Inc.
American Family Insurance*	Fabick Rents*
American Players Theatre*	Festival Foods
Anonymous	Findorff
Ascendium Education Group	First Business Bank
The Boldt Company	Grainger, Inc
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Donald A. and Marilyn M. Anderson Foundation, Inc.	Kraemer North America
Doug and Sherry Caves	Kyle Olson
	Lake Ridge Bank
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Leanne and Reed Widen  
 Leslie Frisinger  
 Lincoln Contractors Supply\*  
 M. Janaan Sampson  
 Madison Community Foundation  
 Madison Gas and Electric Foundation  
 Madison Investment Advisors, LLC  
 Marc and Kim Flood  
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 Martin and Theresa Evanson  
 Mary Burke  
 Mead & Hunt  
 Michele and Tom Zindars  
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 Morgan Stanley Foundation  
 Mortenson  
 Otto Bremer Trust  
 Out of the Box Advisors\*  
 Paradigm  
 Patricia Robinson  
 Patrick and Darcy Kelly  
 Patrick Bremmer  
 Peter and Amy Cavi  
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 Pieper Electric, Inc  
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 TruStage Foundation  
 UW Credit Union  
 UW Credit Union Community Giving PT Fund (a component fund of the Madison Community Foundation)  
 UW Health  
 Walter and Londa Dewey  
 West Bend Community Foundation's  
 West Bend Mutual Insurance Company Charitable Fund  
 Widen Family Foundation

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



## OFFICERS

**Erica Nelson • President**

*Executive Director, LIFT Wisconsin*

**David Lonsdorf • Vice President 1**

*Retired, Family Medicine Doctor*

**Salli Martyniak • Vice President 2**

*Principal, Community Matters, LLC*

**Trish Howen • Treasurer**

*Vice President of Finance & IT, QTI Group*

**Jeffrey Russell • Secretary**

*Vice Provost for Lifelong Learning; Dean of Continuing Studies; Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

## MEMBERS

**Bea Christensen**

*Retired*

**Lau Christensen**

*Retired, Christensen Associates*

**Richard Jones**

*Assistant State Public Defender, Wisconsin State Public Defender*

**Kyle Olson**

*Director of Field Operations, JH Findorff*

**Andy Pascaly**

*Finance, Epic Systems Corporation*

# VOLUNTEERS



**2,100**  
volunteer hours

# FINANCE REPORT

October 1, 2022–September 30, 2023

## OPERATING BUDGET

### INCOME

Grants & Contracts	\$5,193,221
Donations	\$615,000
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$5,808,221</b>

### EXPENSES

Program Services	\$5,437,624
Management & General	\$409,284
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$5,846,908</b>

EXCESS (DEFICIT)	(\$38,687)
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## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

### ASSETS

Current Assets	\$2,576,904
Other Assets	\$115,186
Property & Equipment	\$3,479,847
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$6,171,937</b>

### LIABILITIES

Liabilities	\$357,860
Unrestricted	\$5,814,077
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$6,171,937</b>

# PARTNERS & FUNDERS





**2670 Milwaukee Street  
Madison, WI 53704  
(608) 244-4721**

*To learn more about our programs, how to donate and volunteer,  
and our participants' impact on Dane County, visit us at*

**[www.operationfreshstart.org](http://www.operationfreshstart.org)**

**Follow us on social media!**

**@OFSMadison / Operation Fresh Start**

