



Joining Forces for Families (JFF)

2024 Annual Report

Dane County Department of Human Services

Prevention & Early Intervention





*Community-based services
Informed by neighborhood voices
Powered by local partnerships*

Background:

In 1993 Joining Forces for Families (JFF) opened its doors in two Madison Neighborhoods, Broadway Simpson and Vera Court. This initiative set out to tap the insights and talents of people living and working in Dane County communities to better inform and support accessible services for families.

JFF Reach:

In 2024, Joining Forces for Families now serves:

- All 8 cities, 34 towns, and 18 villages of Dane County through 17 neighborhood-based offices covered by 16 Community Social Workers and 2 Housing Program Leaders.
- 9 JFF Social Workers are bilingual, with 8 able to provide support for families who speak Spanish and 1 providing support to Hmong families.
- 19 unique private agencies or local community organizations have dedicated space in JFF offices. These co-located partners provide over 50 additional staff to bolster services and supports available to communities.

Services:

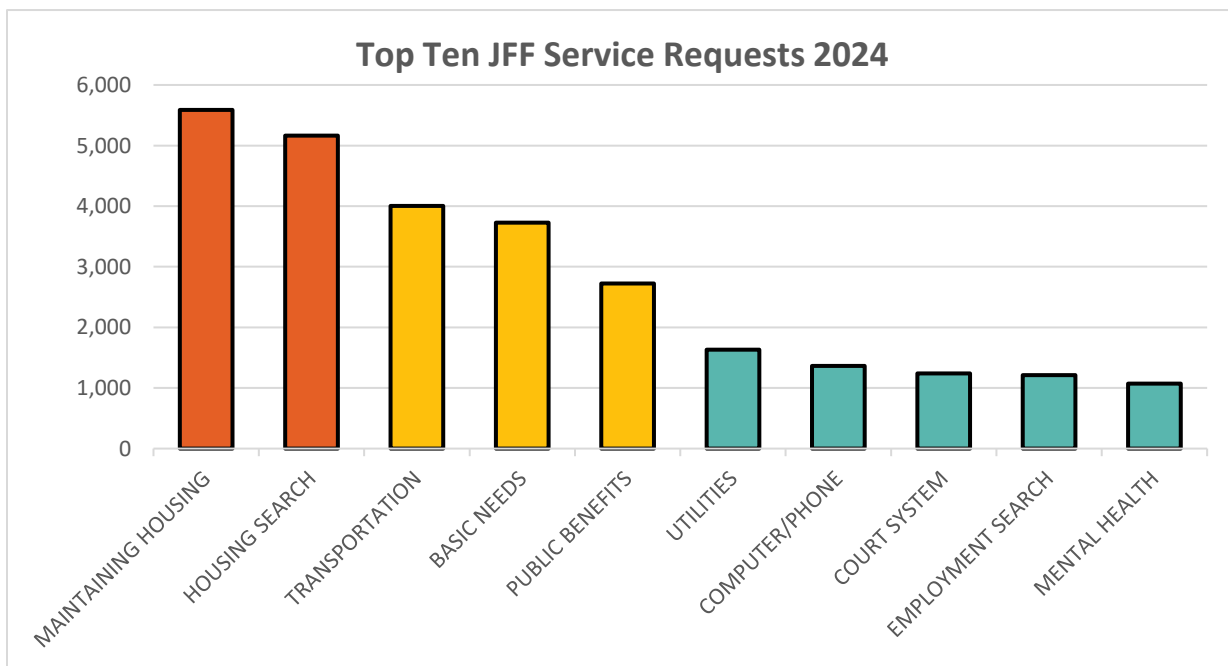
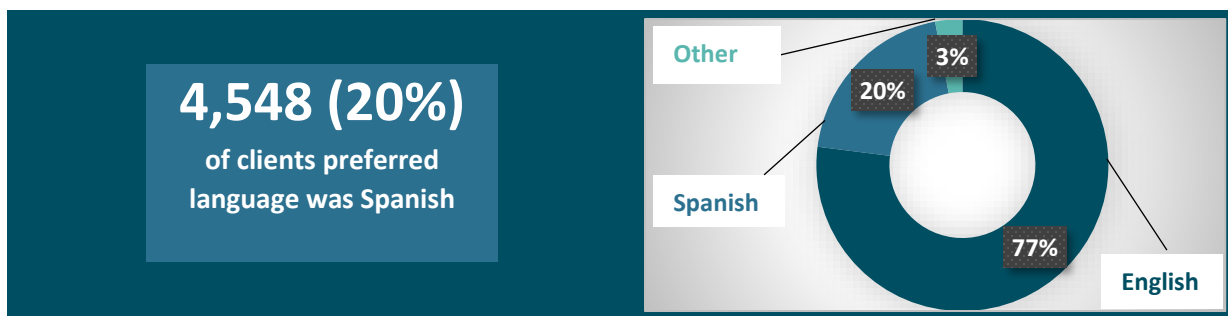
Each JFF worker staffs at least one office that is uniquely responsive to its neighborhood context, allowing direct access to services in the community. From these locations our staff:

- *Offer individualized support to families in need of information or other services*
- *Identify and connect families to available resources and advocate to support these connections*
- *Help families navigate complex housing, mental health, and other basic needs systems*
- *Coordinate with community service providers and others to best support families*
- *Utilize discretionary funds to offer limited support to increase stability and meet basic needs of families actively engaged with JFF services*
- *Collaborate and partner with others to build capacity in communities focused on the needs and opportunities expressed by local people*

Overview – Service Contacts

With 18 staff, Joining Forces for Families (JFF) covers all of Dane County and receives hundreds of service requests each month across a range of household needs. Information in this section is compiled from one week per month randomly assigned data collection summaries from JFF Community Social Workers. We use this information to extrapolate monthly contacts across our initiative with clients, professional interactions, types of services requested and language utilized.

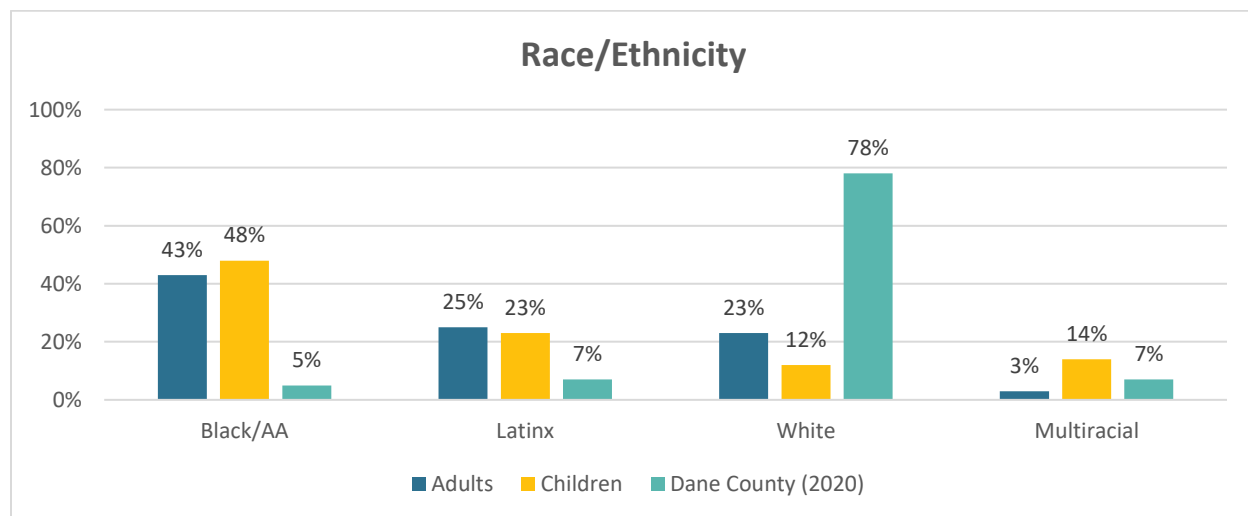
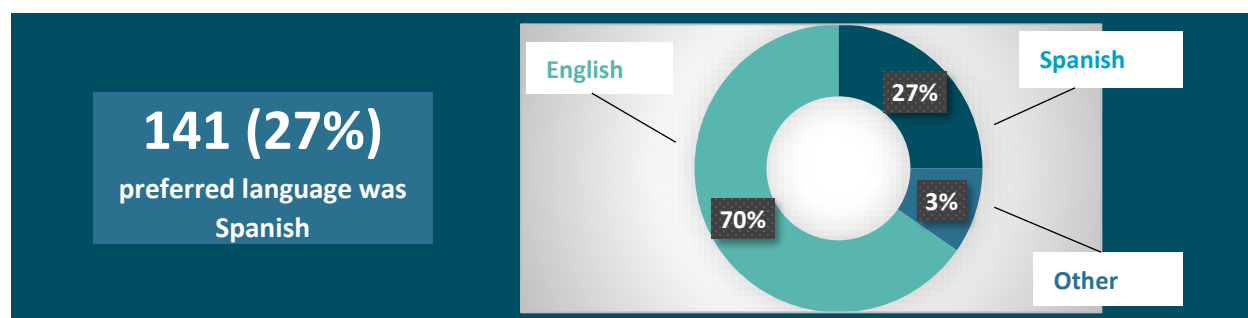
JFF 2024 service contacts estimate:



Overview – People Served with Some Intensity

While JFF staff have hundreds of contacts monthly, we work with some households more substantially over time. All data included from this point on reflects people that (1) received ongoing support across multiple contacts, (2) received intensive but short-term support from JFF, or (3) received financial assistance from JFF. After meeting one of these thresholds, families are entered into our database.

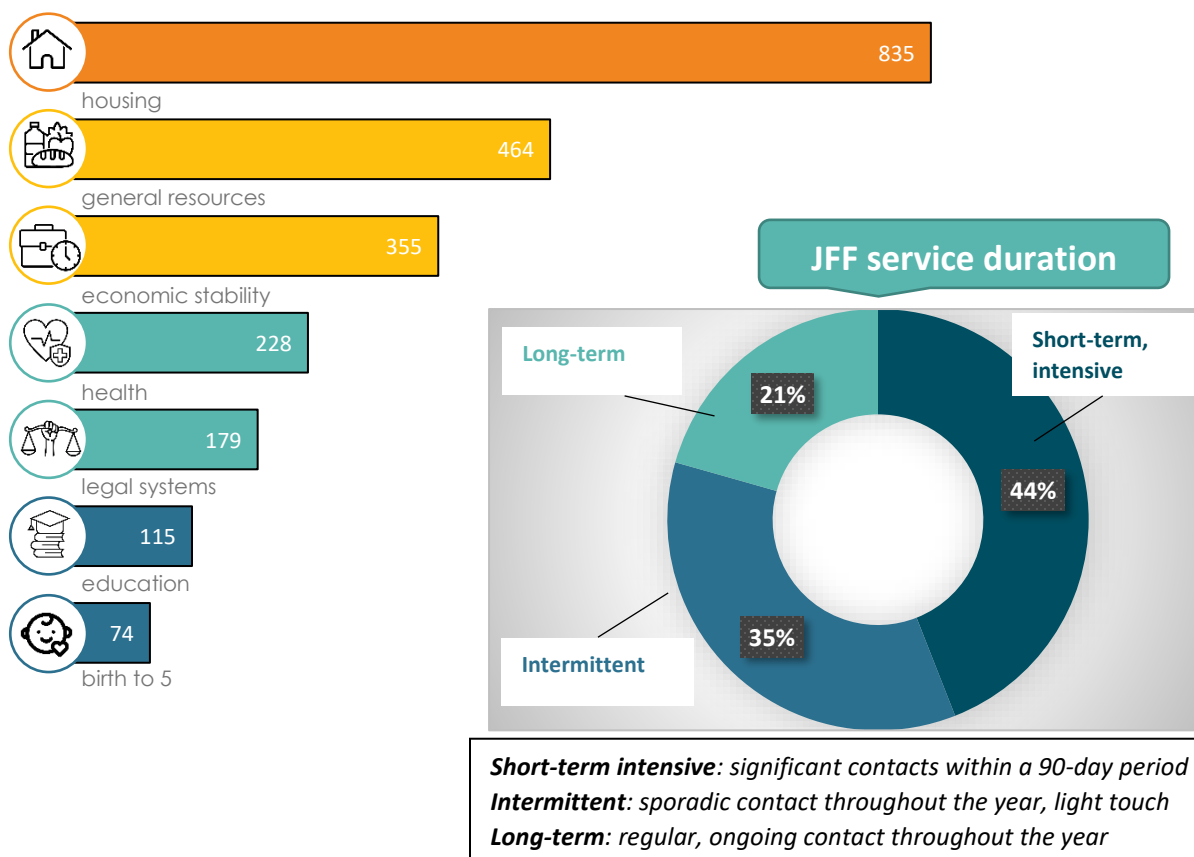
JFF worked intensively with 909 households in 2024. They included:



"Dane County, Wisconsin," United States Census Bureau, accessed February 14, 2025, https://data.census.gov/profile/Dane_County,_Wisconsin?g=050XX00US55025.

Intervention Services

JFF workers provide an array of services informed by family need and unique community contexts. This section summarizes type and length of services provided. **By far the most common need JFF sees in communities is related to housing (835 families, 92% of those served).**



JFF Collaboration with Service providers

JFF prioritizes collaborative work with community partners to best support families and increase positive outcomes.



406 (45%) households received cross-systems teaming where JFF staff partnered with one or more community agencies to support a family

¹ Icon attribution – Housing icon: Created by il Capitano from Noun Project. General Resources icon: Created by Fahmi Hidayat from Noun Project. Economic Stability icon: Created by Larea from the Noun Project. Health icon: Created by Sulistiana from Noun Project. Legal Systems icon: Created by Lili Steingrum from the Noun Project. Education icon: Created by El Hikami from Noun Project

Intervention Services – what we are seeing and doing

Housing (835 households)

Of the 835 households that JFF has worked with, multiple families experienced substantial challenges to maintaining stable housing:

148
18% experienced doubled up homelessness

87
11% lost housing

60
8% experienced literal homelessness

22
3% had an eviction hearing

18
2% had utilities disconnected

Despite these challenges, families experienced positive outcomes while working with JFF staff:

506
62% maintained housing while working with JFF

115
14% got into market rate housing

65
8% got into subsidized housing or accessed a Section 8 voucher

166
20% prevented utility disconnect or got reconnected

203
24% listed a JFF worker as their public housing authority advocate for ongoing support focused on maintaining their subsidized apartment

Economic Stability (355 households)

133
41%

got/maintained public benefits with JFF support

got connected to an employment program
and/or obtained a work certification or license

51
14%

111
34%

got a job with JFF support

\$39,276 reduction in medical bills via JFF support. Reduced a single bill by \$10,159 for one family.

Legal Systems (179 households)

51
31%

were connected to legal services or obtained legal aid with JFF support

38
23%

navigated successful court resolution with JFF support

39
24%

obtained services and/or resources from the Dane
County Victim Witness Services Office
*(*This was the only category with no unmet needs reported.)*



DCDHS Collaborations

30 (18%)
coordinated with
Immigration
Affairs Office and
20 (12%)
coordinated with
CPS or Youth
Justice

Community Collaboration on Renter's Rights:

Large-scale collaboration with JFF, residents, Legal Action, Dept. of Civil Rights, Building Inspection, TRC, Urban Triage, Wayforward Resources, Madison Tenant Power, and Madison Police. Multiple "know your rights" events with language access services held in West Madison to offer knowledge on renter's rights and respond to substantial concerns regarding area landlord practices.

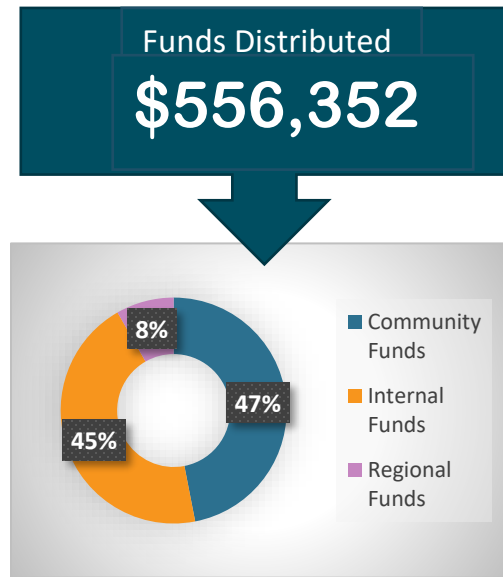
Transportation

JFF distributed 5,285 Round Trip & 4,295 Single Ride Madison Metro Bus Tickets totaling \$20,150, for assistance with clients getting to work, medical appointments and other household necessities.

505 households received gas cards from JFF, totaling \$13,450, to assist with a variety of family, medical, employment and other needs.

Financial Assistance – Funds Distributed

Two in three households (594, 65%) received financial assistance while working with JFF in 2024. For all community and regional funding, JFF provided substantial support and advocacy in helping people navigate application processes and/or accessing this assistance.



Internal & Community Funds Used to Keep Family Housed:

In May 2024 an Allied Drive resident lost housing and was living in his car temporarily. During this time he stayed connected with JFF and came to the office to “recharge”. While working to access stable housing, he crossed paths with the Beacon, Urban Triage, Allied Wellness and finally found housing in October. JFF **Internal funds** and Allied Partners **Community Funds** helped pay some of the cost of rent / security deposit so he could finally secure housing. The JFF office was a refuge where he could access bus tickets, computers / fax / printer, essential pantry, and housing search support.

Community funds

Locally resourced funds only available to people living in specific areas

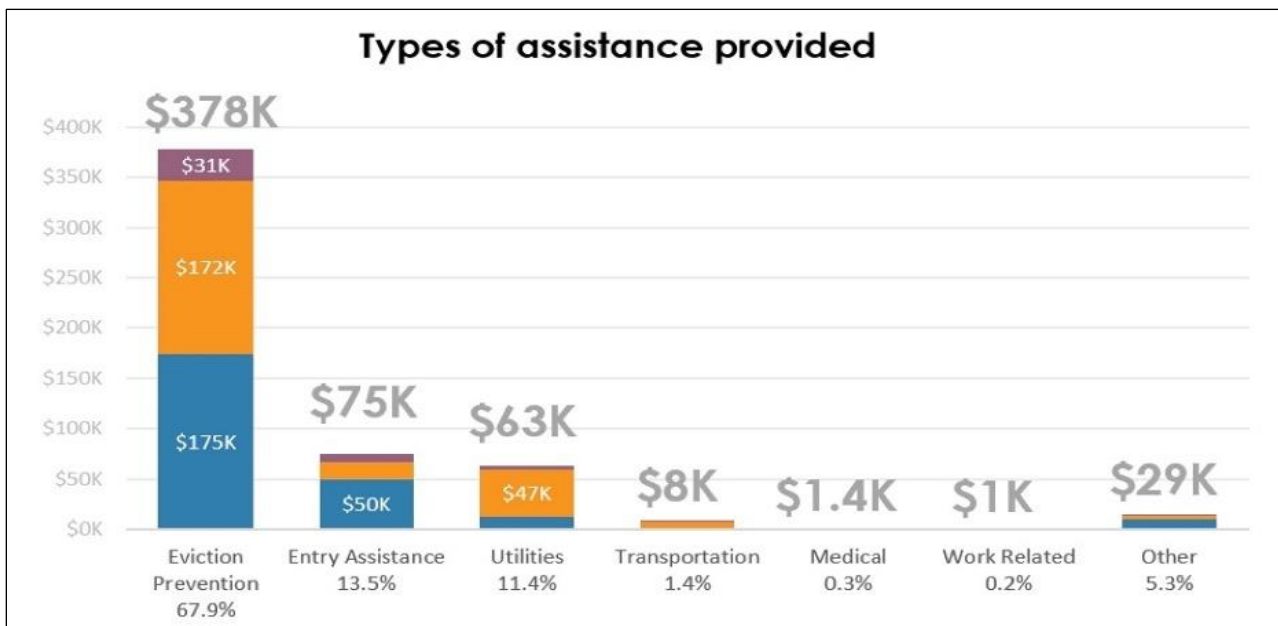
Internal funds

Each JFF worker has a limited Dane Co. budget to provide short-term financial support

Regional funds

Sources available across Dane Co. or Madison with eligibility criteria

Types of assistance provided

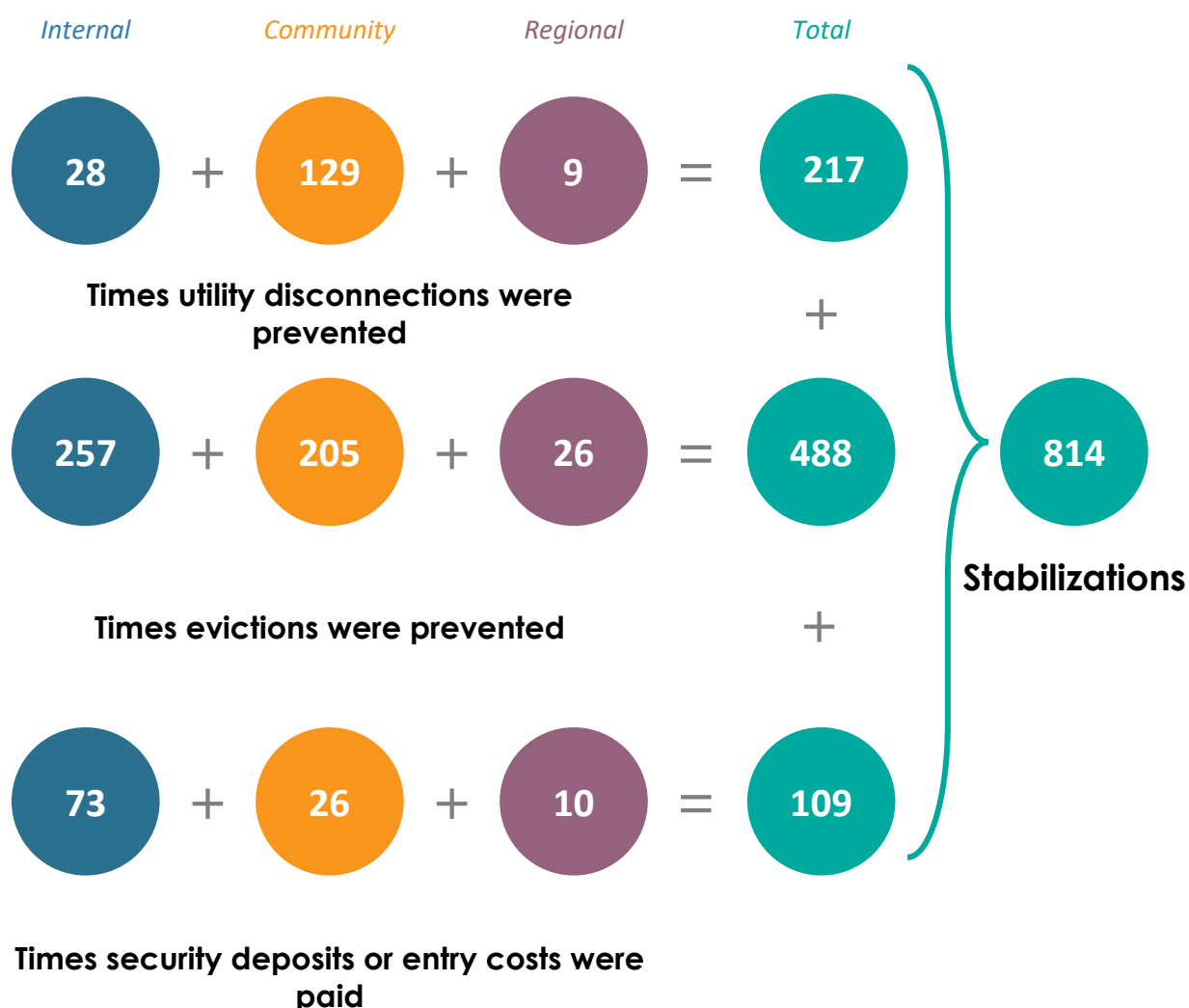


Financial Assistance – Short Term Outcomes

JFF stabilized families 814 times through financial assistance.

JFF works with a variety of community partners and regional funding sources to help households find and maintain stability. JFF makes sure clients are connected to available resources and offers support navigating destabilizing situations with landlords, systems, and community agencies.

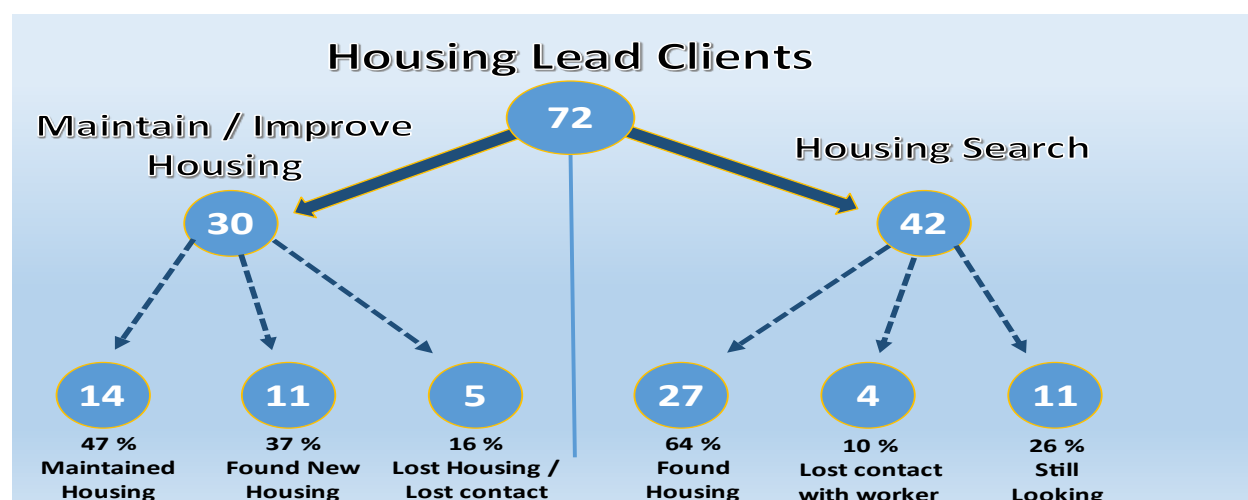
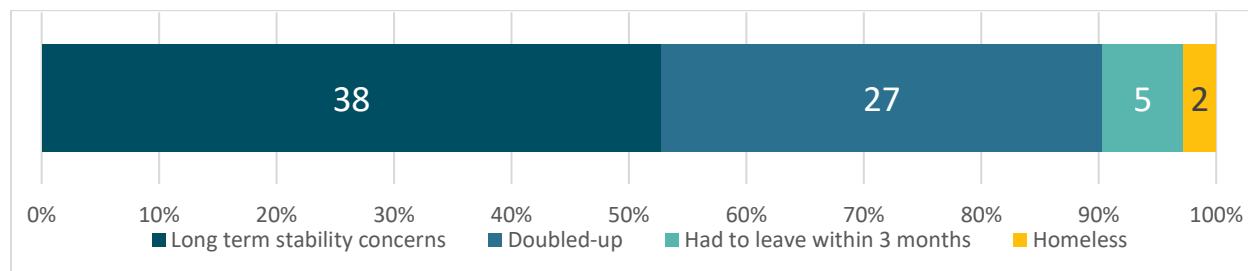
JFF provides limited financial assistance to families focused on housing stability. These funds are utilized to prevent evictions, help people get into housing, and occasionally to maintain utility connections.



Spotlight – Housing Program Leader Outcomes

Two JFF Housing Program Leaders carry a limited caseload in order to provide significantly higher levels of service designed to achieve better housing outcomes. Clients referred to Housing Program Leaders include: 1) Those with an imminent need to access housing (homeless, doubled up, or had to leave their apartment within 3 months), and; 2) Those at risk of losing housing who want to maintain their current place, access a more affordable apartment or find improved housing.

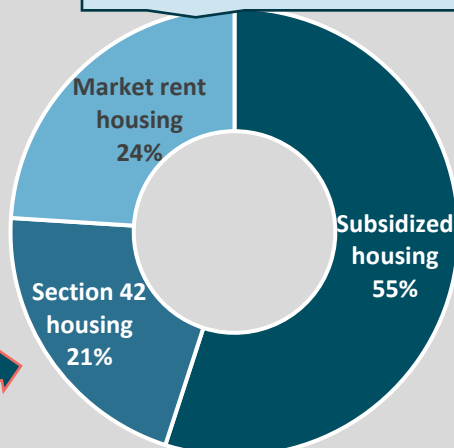
In 2024, **72 households** received intensive assistance from JFF Housing Program Leads.



In Total...

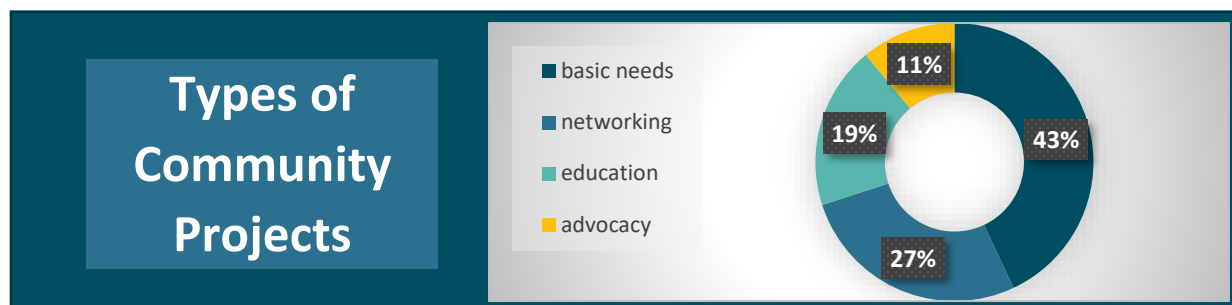
- **72% success rate:**
52 of 72 at risk households found or maintained housing with 11 still looking
- **53% improved their housing status** by finding new or more affordable places to live

Where did people move?

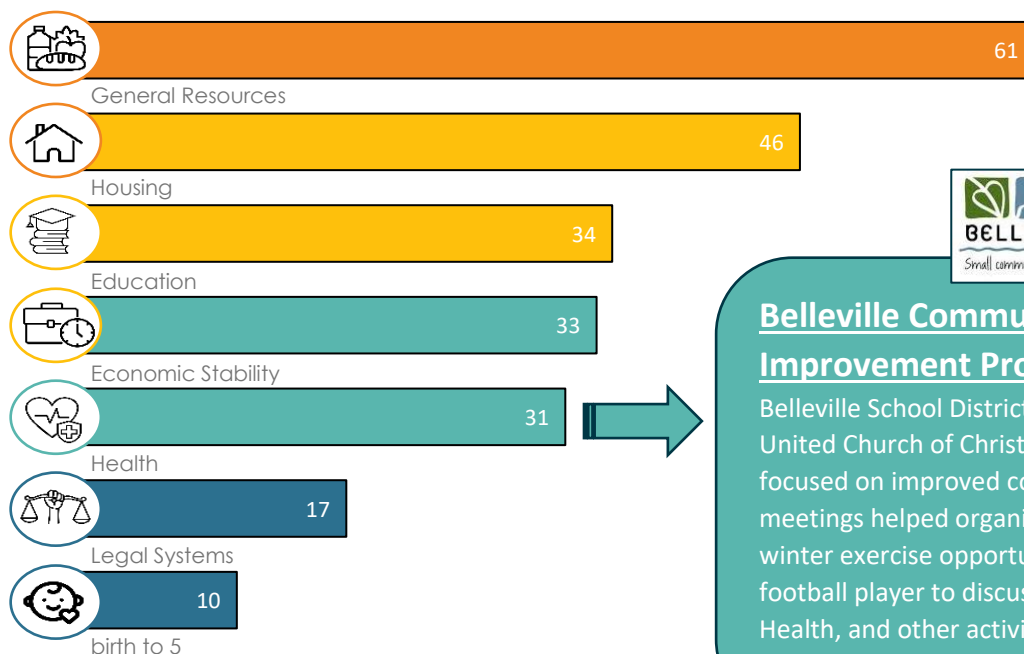


Collaborative Efforts

One unique aspect of JFF is our dual focus on supporting people and working with entire communities. JFF staff attend or facilitate neighborhood meetings that bring organizations, residents, and/or other stakeholders together around area needs, challenges and opportunities. These conversations can lead to local projects, campaigns, and other efforts targeted at issues important to the community. These issue-based projects are focused on building local capacity around issues that matter to people.



JFF collaborations by issue *(some projects focused on multiple needs)*



Belleville Community Health

Improvement Project: JFF joined with Belleville School District, UW Extension, and First United Church of Christ to offer various initiatives focused on improved community health. Monthly meetings helped organize snow shoe walks, winter exercise opportunities, a visit from a UW football player to discuss his journey with Mental Health, and other activities to benefit the community.

Spotlight - JFF Collaborations With Community Partners



A robust collaboration with JFF, Public Health, Sunshine Place, Sun Prairie School District, Centro Hispano, City of Sun Prairie, Colonial Club Senior Center, Neighborhood Navigators, and community members. In partnership this coalition provided community wide training on mental health, Narcan, and drug impairment for educational professionals. In 2024 they received a five year \$625K grant from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to hire a project coordinator and expand upon these efforts.

Law Enforcement Collaboration: In SW Madison Focused Interruption Coalition provides alternative response capacity for Madison Police to better support families and decrease potential involvement with the criminal justice system. JFF partners with Focused Interruption Coalition, MPD, Meadowood Health Partnership and others through weekly meetings, teaming cases, and consulting to improve outcomes and respond to often urgent needs of families visited.



health resources . information . advocacy



**Meadowood
Health
Partnership**

Critical Incident/Mass Violence Response Team: 5 JFF workers were part of this multi-disciplinary effort to prepare for critical incidents locally. On 12/16/24, three JFF workers along with other volunteers responded in the aftermath of the Abundant Life School Shooting.

Hmong Professionals Group: JFF organizes a monthly meeting to collaborate with Hmong professionals in Dane County. These meetings provide opportunities to network, understand important challenges, and identify opportunities to work together.



Special thanks to the tireless work of JFF staff in communities across Dane County. Your perseverance through difficult times, creativity in supporting people, and relentless focus on what matters to families makes a difference, even when it is difficult to see.

Report prepared in collaboration by Betsy Strahin, Erica McNeil, David Marshall, & Michael Bruce.