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**\$250K GRANT TO HELP YOUTH IN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYTEM BUILD SKILLS,
BE SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Local program to be based on successful initiative in New York

Racine – The Racine County Human Services Department has been awarded a \$250,000 grant aimed at helping youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system build their skills and become successful school and community members.

An “Innovation Grant” from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families will launch a local program based on the highly-successful *Arches Credible Messenger* program in New York City, which has significantly reduced its youth prison population by bringing services for youth and their families into neighborhoods. County Executive Jonathan Delagrave announced the grant in his budget speech on Tuesday, October 9, 2018.

The Credible Messenger program partners with children, families and case managers to serve as a mediator and mentor and help children function within the community – without further involvement in the justice system. Program staff, or “Credible Messengers,” work with youth in group sessions and individually to promote positive behaviors. They support the child’s well-being, help change or break generational cycles and address challenging life circumstances.

“Messengers” will include a mix of people who themselves have been involved in the juvenile justice system, who work in the private and nonprofit sectors, and who are respected residents of the community. Through this program, Racine County aims to reduce the number of adolescents engaging in high-risk behavior and connect children and families with resources to build life skills.

“We are thrilled to receive this grant. The Credible Messenger program compliments our prevention and early intervention efforts to build critical skills in children and reduce the likelihood of Racine County youth being involved in the justice system,” said Hope Otto, Racine County Human Services Director. “Ultimately, the Credible Messenger program will reduce recidivism for felonies and violent crimes, improve social skills and strengthen community connections.”

The program will serve 70-75 youth who reside in specific geographical areas within the Racine Unified School District.

For more information on the Credible Messenger program, contact Kerry Milkie, Youth and Family Manager, at 262.638.6511 or kerry.milkie@racinecounty.com.

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