

2024

Annual Report



MY WAY OUT 

Message from the Executive Director, President, and Board of Directors

Ruben Gaona, Executive Director of My Way Out, Inc. & Karen
Coy-Romano, CFRE, MS, President, Board of Directors



Ruben Gaona
Executive Director



Karen Coy-Romano, CFRE, MS
President, Board of Directors

In the past three years, we have witnessed My Way Out grow into a cornerstone of our community and, most importantly, a lifeline for justice-impacted individuals returning home or striving to rebuild their lives after incarceration. Every year presents its own challenges as we work tirelessly to secure the operational funding needed to support our participants. Yet, each year also brings incredible success stories that highlight the profound impact of our team's work.

From someone completing our Building a Path to Success workshop, receiving a laptop, and securing a job within 48 hours of release—empowering them to provide for their family—to assisting individuals on the brink of homelessness find safe housing, these stories are a testament to the transformative power of our programs. One of this year's most inspiring moments involved a justice impacted woman participant fighting for asylum after losing custody of her children while being incarcerated. After enduring hardship and seeking help from law enforcement following 30 days of homelessness when released, she was connected to My Way Out. Through our Safe & Stable Homes Initiative and Emergency Trust Fund, we not only secured housing for her but also reunited her with her children. Today, they are moving forward together, demonstrating that our past mistakes do not define us.

Equally rewarding has been seeing participants from our first-ever Bridging the Tech Gap for Returning Citizens program now leading organizations and providing the same support they once received. Their commitment to expanding collaboration reflects our philosophy of "One Team, One Fight."

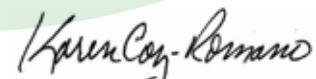
Looking ahead to 2025, we remain committed to innovation and meeting justice-impacted individuals where they are. By partnering with Milky Way Tech Hub and In Your Face Learning, experts in A.I. and virtual reality, we are exploring ways to bring immersive training in the trades directly into Wisconsin Department of Corrections facilities and the Milwaukee County Community Reintegration Center. Leveraging technology allows us to prepare individuals for meaningful employment before they even return home.

We are proud of the progress we have made and look forward to leading My Way Out into a future of continued growth, innovation, and impact. Thank you for your unwavering support, which empowers us to transform lives and create opportunities for justice-impacted individuals. Together, we are making a difference.

Sincerely,



Ruben Gaona
Executive Director, My Way Out, Inc.



Karen Coy-Romano, CFRE, MS
President, Board of Directors

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

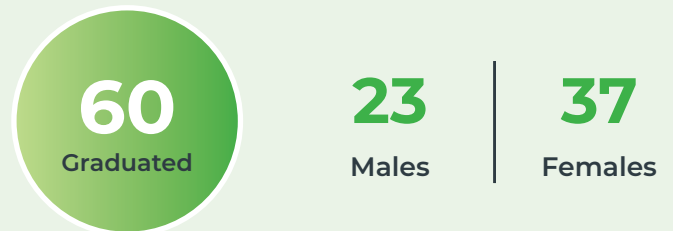
Reaching In, Helping Out

The Reaching In, Helping Out program by My Way Out, Inc. supports justice-impacted individuals across 28 Wisconsin correctional facilities. It bridges incarceration and reintegration through mentorship and resources, helping participants build confidence and purpose before release. “Reaching in” prepares those incarcerated with tools to overcome barriers, while “helping out” offers ongoing wraparound reentry support. The program has transformed countless lives, reflecting My Way Out’s commitment to dignity, hope, and second chances.



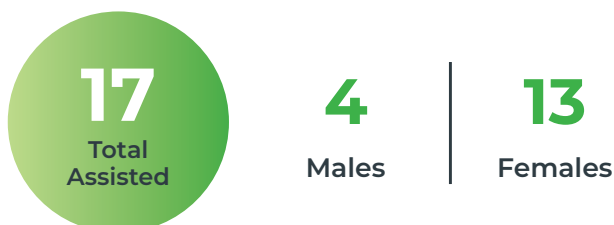
Building the Path to Success

The Building the Path to Success workshop is a 6-week transformative initiative by My Way Out, Inc., designed to equip justice-impacted individuals with the skills and mindset needed for successful reintegration. Conducted inside the Milwaukee County Community Reintegration Center, the program focuses on personal and professional development, addressing key areas such as goal-setting, financial literacy, rent smart, resume writing, interviewing skills, bridging the tech gap in technology by showing our participants where technology is and where it is going, and introducing virtual reality in the trades. By fostering self-awareness and resilience, the workshop empowers participants to envision and pursue a brighter future. Each session provides practical tools and strategies to overcome barriers, build confidence, and achieve long-term stability. This initiative exemplifies My Way Out’s commitment to turning challenges into opportunities, helping participants lay the foundation for a fulfilling, productive life beyond incarceration. With additional funding, this program can be expanded to Wisconsin DOC institutions.



Safe & Stable Homes Initiative

The Safe & Stable Homes Initiative by My Way Out, Inc. tackles a critical reentry barrier: safe, affordable housing allowing individuals to focus on securing employment. In partnership with United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County, the program offers up to \$3,000 in financial support to help justice-impacted individuals secure sustainable housing. Collaborating with landlords and community organizations, it fosters pathways to long-term housing solutions. This initiative underscores My Way Out’s commitment to empowering individuals, enhancing community safety, and breaking the cycle of recidivism.



Our Board of Directors



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Director at Large



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Nadiyah Johnson
Founder/CEO Milky Way Tech Hub



Nyra Jordan
Director, American Family Insurance Institute for Corporate and Social Impact



Francesca Mayca-Wegner
President/Chief Possibilities Officer HPGM

Quotes from Our Advisory Council Members

"I joined the Advisory council of My Way Out to better help connect my network of community influencers to the mission of My Way Out and bring more support to Men and Women returning to our community." - **Arvind Gopalratnam**

"The importance of direct service work to sustain and support individuals is critical to the success of our community. My Way Out is an exemplar of this work, focusing on dignity, knowledge, and skills to empower the system-impacted community members it serves. It is an honor to serve alongside system-impacted leaders who are a shining light of possibility, support, and compassion. "One team, one fight!" is a privilege to serve." - **Dr. Melinda Brennan**

"I joined My Way Out's Executive Advisory Council for a number of reasons. First and foremost, I believe strongly in Ruben and his team's work to serve the full person and their families. The team understands firsthand the challenges those who have been justice-impacted face. Through My Way Out, I'm invested in supporting those to not only survive, but thrive and make Milwaukee a better city."- **Tammy Belton-Davis**

"It's an honor to serve on My Way Out's Executive Advisory Council and contribute to its impactful mission. I joined the council because I deeply believe in the importance of empowering justice-impacted individuals, strengthening families, and reducing recidivism. By fostering collaboration and mobilizing resources, we're creating opportunities for prosperity and building stronger, more resilient communities. In addition, Ruben is a leader I admire and believe in, and his vision and dedication inspire my continued commitment to this work." - **Dr. Victor Amaya**

Looking Ahead

Our Vision for the Future



Over the past three years, we have actively empowered justice-involved individuals, consistently seeking their feedback to enhance our services. We are thrilled to announce that we have heard you, and we are committed to taking significant steps to not only prepare individuals for reentry into the community but also to equip them with the tools necessary for successful employment. This commitment will be realized through the expansion of our Building the Path to Success program. We are launching an enhanced 10-week curriculum that now includes an additional 4 weeks dedicated to our innovative Virtual Reality for the Skilled Trades initiative.



Each career cluster offers specialized simulations, such as MIG Welding Safety for welders in the Skilled Trades. Our Virtual Training Facility (VTF) further enhances this experience with more than 300 simulations, allowing trainees to develop skills for well-paying jobs. This training takes place in a supportive environment, guided by a digital coach, ensuring comprehensive learning. The integration of VR simulations has proven to enhance learning outcomes, increase engagement, and reduce recidivism. This innovative approach fosters clear pathways to living-wage jobs and facilitates successful community reintegration.

My Way Out Partnership and VR Training Impact

Our strategic partnerships, particularly with organizations like Transfr, are revolutionizing workforce development for justice-impacted individuals through collective-impact models. These initiatives, using hands-on VR simulation training with real-life workplace scenarios, are crucial in providing access to education and skill-building, paving the way for sustainable employment. Participants will have access to over multiple occupations within various career clusters in the Career Exploration Facility (CEF). These clusters include:

- Manufacturing
- Skilled Trades
- Warehousing & Storage
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Public Safety
- Automotive
- Healthcare



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Special Recognition

goes to the following entities who have made it possible for **My Way Out, Inc.** to serve over 800 returning citizens in 2024

Roots & Wings Foundation

Provides critical unrestricted funds to continue to maintain our operations and support staff.

United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

Reducing Barriers to Employment &

Advancement: Provides critical operational funding for our pre-release 6-week Building the Path to Success program in the Milwaukee County Community Reintegration Center thereby reducing barriers to employment through specific strategies.

Safe & Stable Homes: Provides up to 3 months of rent assistance for 20 returning citizens with children while they seek permanent employment.

Greater Milwaukee Foundation/Otto Bremer

Grant supports Building the Path to Success program.

Milwaukee Bucks Foundation

Bridging the Tech Gap program support.

Bureau of Justice FY24 Smart Reentry Program/ Dept. of Health and Human Services

My Way Out, Inc. will serve as a subcontractor for a special housing initiative with Milwaukee County enabling My Way Out to fund partial operating costs and one current staff member to focus on housing access and housing task force collaborations

Client Testimonials

MG - "I've been inspired by My Way Out because they have been assisting me with finding a job with my background that I have. I've been truly grateful for the support partner advocating for me with my housing and legal issues that I have. They take the time out of their day to follow up and make sure everything is alright with me even with their busy schedule they have. I plan on continuing to work with My Way Out to receive resources that I might not be aware of in the future. Thank you for all that you all do!"

JS - "Enjoyed taking your Building a Path to Success because it showed us how technology is going to be in the future and how to budget and save money, and how to rent the right way from a landlord."

TC - "I am incredibly grateful to My Way Out for their unwavering support during my reentry journey. One of my dreams was to open my own barbershop, and through their network, I was connected with A.N., the owner of Revival the Barbershop. A.N. not only provided me with essential tools and mentorship but also helped me start taking clients immediately. This guidance was invaluable in opening my own barbershop."

DL - "Thank you for taking the time to teach me things I didn't know. Showing me that you guys care about my future, made me care about my future. Taught me how to identify landlords, build a resume, get credit cards, open bank accounts. I didn't know these things and I thank you for everything and believing in me. Cause this is my way out and y'all showed me that."



2024 Donor Recognition

Visionary (\$100,000 - \$250,000)

United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

Champion (\$50,000 - \$99,000)

**Roots & Wings Foundation
Bader Philanthropies
Greater Milwaukee Foundation**

Trailblazer (\$15,000 - \$49,000)

Milwaukee Bucks Foundation

Partner (\$5,000 - \$14,999)

**Otto Bremer Trust
Bob Barker Company Foundation
Mary Burke**

Collaborator (\$1,000 - \$4,999)

**BizStarts
Bank FiveNine
Potawatomi
ACLU-Milwaukee
Fidelity Charitable
Cassandra Stasiewicz
Karen Coy-Romano**

Friend (\$100 - \$999)

**American Endowment Foundation
Tisbest Philanthropy
James & H.C. Benton Rev.
Thomas A. Rave
El Jalapeño Restaurant LLC
INPRO
Isaac Narvaez
Andreas Schroeder
Theodore V Anderson
Brian Tobiczynk
Jet Constellations
Francesca Mayca-Wegner
Vincent Vogelsang
Michelle Velasquez
Samantha Kitzerow
Tammy Belton-Davis
Reyna Morales**

In-Kind Contributions

SOLUTIONS UNLIMITED
Leadership & Transformational Change Management
Milky Way Tech Hub
Revival Restaurant & Lounge
Midwest Bookkeeping & Tax Solutions, LLC
Synergy Technology Advisors
BizStarts Community Market
Wantable Cafe
Digital Bridge



MY WAY OUT 

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