

Dept. of Children and Families: Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse presents Outstanding Achievement in Domestic Abuse Issues awards

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MADISON – The Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse, in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, honored three individuals for their contributions in assisting survivors of domestic violence in a special ceremony held today at the state Capitol. The ceremony was hosted as part of [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#), a statewide effort to raise awareness about the effects of domestic abuse.

Since 1991, the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse has selected recipients for outstanding Achievement in Domestic Abuse Issues awards.

"The amount of passion, dedication and empathy that our partner agencies embody is awe-inspiring," said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. "They are vital to helping survivors and their families navigate their healing journey and rebuild their lives, and we can never thank them enough for their continued dedication to Wisconsin's children and families."

At the ceremony, DCF Secretary Amundson and Council Members presented awards in three categories:

Ashley Kanuscak of Green Bay received the *Courage Award*. This award recognizes a survivor of domestic abuse who has turned adversity into triumph by

creating positive change within their community to end domestic abuse. As a survivor, Ashley worked with the Refugee House in Jackson County where she served as a victim advocate. During that time, she worked to support others in their recovery journey by attending court hearings and SANE exams and advocating for safe housing for victims who had no other place to go to find safety. Most importantly, she empowered survivors to tell their story and gave them a safe space to heal from their experiences. Today, Ashley serves her community as the center director for The Boys and Girls Club of the Greater Chippewa Valley - Luna Center in Black River Falls and remains a consistent support for the children and families of Jackson County.

Damaris Becker of Milwaukee received the *Justice Award*. This award honors an individual for outstanding achievement in promoting safety, empowerment, and justice for survivors of domestic abuse and their children. Damaris is a founding member of the Latina Resource Center in Milwaukee, and a Partial DOJ Accredited Representative who has helped hundreds of women in the Latino community navigate the complexities of the legal system. Since joining the Latina Resource Center, she helped the center expand their services and has played an instrumental role in developing culturally specific advocacy for sexual assault victims, youth intervention programs, Spanish speaking domestic violence education groups, the Brides Walk against Domestic Violence event, and many community vigils. The impact that she has made in the Latino community is immeasurable and her work has forever changed the lives of the survivors she has served.

Mao Khang of Wausau received posthumously the *Patricia J. Waschbisch Lifetime Achievement Award*, which honors an individual who has provided exceptional services to many survivors of domestic abuse over the course of a career and who has promoted a vision of ending violence and achieving social justice. The award is named for and commemorates the legacy of an advocate who lost her life in a domestic homicide in 2013. Mao worked to help domestic abuse survivors at The Women's Community from 2001 to 2022. Throughout her years of advocacy, Mao did so many things to influence the way Hmong victims of abuse were treated and thought of. She created the Hmong event for women and children with General Vang Pao. This conference led to the General creating a committee of women to address cultural domestic abuse issues. Mao's selflessness and dedication changed how Hmong victims were treated and her legacy will live on in the many families she has helped.

On a single day in Wisconsin, approximately 2,500 victims seek assistance from a

domestic abuse program. Through a strong partnership between DCF and county and tribal partners, individuals are receiving specialized trauma-informed care that is allowing them to heal and become independent again.

Most recently, DCF implemented a Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) Pilot Program to serve domestic violence survivors and families through [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act funding](#).

DVHF is a proven, evidence-based practice that moves domestic violence survivors into safe, stable, permanent housing as quickly as possible. Once housed, survivors have access to supportive, holistic advocacy resources to rebuild their lives. Four key components of a DVHF model include: a survivor-driven approach, trauma-informed and mobile services, flexible financial assistance, and multifaceted community engagement.

Learn about the types of domestic abuse and where to find domestic abuse services at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/domesticabuse> or by following @WisDCF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).