

Overview

Freedom, Inc. has engaged low income communities of color in Dane County, WI since 2003, working to end violence against people of color, women, those that non-traditionally gender identify, youth, and elders, to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Mission

“Our mission is to achieve social justice through coupling direct services with leadership development and community organizing that will bring about social, political, cultural, and economic change resulting in the end of violence against women, gender-non-conforming and transgender folks, and children within communities of color. FI works to challenge the root causes of violence, poverty, racism and discrimination. Our belief is that people who are most affected by these issues must have voice, power, resources and choice, in order for true social change to happen.” – Freedom, Inc. website



Constituency

- People of Color
- Asian & Pacific Islanders
- Ages 10-65+
- LGBTQ
- Foster Children
- Relative Caregivers
- Homeless
- Disabled
- Immigrants/Undocumented
- Formerly Incarcerated

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Madison

Access to Housing

Including concerns around accessing adequate and quality (e.g., older homes with lead paint) housing to meet the basic needs (e.g., safe spaces) of families and their children.

“[Parents are concerned about] safe and adequate spaces for [children] to play, like do we have a playground? Why don’t we have a sidewalk in this community? Why can my kid only play in the parking lot? There’s a lot of concern around that, which is [part] of this housing conversation.”

Healthy Food

The availability and quality of food children consume are having harmful effects on children’s health.

“I think a lot of people are concerned [about] getting enough food for [their] families [and] children...there are also folks who are like, ‘Is this also proper food? Is this nutritious food? Is this healthy food?’ I think about the childhood obesity rates, so much of it is due to just the difference in the quality of food here versus other places. I think about childhood obesity and the things that lead to it...there’s asthma that we see a lot... issues around asthma...Skin issues, like there’s so much: eczema, dermatitis...diabetes...there’s so many issues that come through food”

Adequate and Quality Education for Children

“A big concern [for me] is how are they testing [our children] and are they gaining literacy skills? I think an adequate education [also] includes having some cultural specificity, [by] not being backwards in terms of how folks of color are being viewed.”

Structural and Institutional Racism

“There’s certainly concerns for folks who are undocumented, and [who will] care for their children, like parents who have younger children who may have been born here and younger children brought here...there’s real care and concern for the wellness of that child and how that child is being brought up. I think that a lot of folks, especially parents of black children always [have] concerns...I think there is an added [layer] onto the concern around what it means to be raising black children...Like understanding the school to prison pipeline or ‘is my kid going to be killed by a police officer? Are they going to wind up in jail?’ I think there’s more in the air around consciousness of... or at least having tools to express concerns around state violence.”

Local Conditions, Cont'd

Environmental Concerns

Including their potential impacts on children's health. In Dane County, vehicular emissions are a large source of PM 2.5 (damaging particulate matter). In 2011, there was a reported increase of 22% in vehicular traffic emission, since the year 2000).¹

"I think there are also kind of environmental concerns...things that we understand to be environmental justice issues that we are concerned about. I think people are concerned about their kids having asthma or these babies having all of these allergies, or skin things, or it's being expressed as skin issues. And I also feel like, especially with what happened in Michigan around the water crisis... the water poisoning... I think people pay more attention to those sorts of things... And also Standing Rock... I think people are like 'oh...my children.' You know?"

Psychological Well-being of Children of Incarcerated Parents

In Wisconsin, approximately 600,000 inmates report having children under the age of 18, with a majority of mothers and 30%-40% of the fathers having lived with their children prior to imprisonment.²

"I've seen people talking about the impact in their own lives that prison and incarceration has on their families and [their children]... and especially babies...like having time away from their babies or what's going to happen to their kids... There's been a lot of conversation around that and I've been able to be part of it. So the way that like folks are... child protective services take kids and they are further displaced into the foster adoption care... family members can only take some and not others, or whatever the situation might be."

Infant Mortality

Which disproportionately impacts Black children.

Affordable and Culturally Competent Childcare

"There's not a lot of options for our kids. When I say our kids I'm talking about kids of color. I suppose if you had money, and not a little money, right, but enough money to have some private specialized person that could care for your child, but other than that, there's not enough. I'm thinking about folks who know black culture, folks who know Southeast Asian cultures, there's not enough. What does exist in Madison are very white. But I think about the mental health also of our babies. Are they being affirmed, are they being loved, are they seeing images of themselves being positively reflected, are they able to express emotion without being criminalized, how are they interacting with these things around them?"

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Dane County

17.3% of Dane County 7th-12th graders currently have **asthma**.

42% of African American infant deaths are sudden unexpected infant deaths. Perinatal conditions account for the largest amount of deaths in the 0-1 age group in Dane County, with a rate of 295.4 per 100,000.¹

23.2% of Dane County 7th-12th graders are overweight or obese; 9.1% are obese. African American, Latino, Hmong and mixed race youth have significantly higher rates of overweight/obesity than White youth.¹



In Dane County, the rate of food insecurity exceeds 1 in 3 for some of the most vulnerable groups, including households that contain a disabled person (37.7%), Hispanic households (34.5%), African-American households (34.6%), single mothers (34.9%), and households below 100% of the federal poverty level (37.3%)³

Allies/Partnerships Working on Children's Health

- **Sankofa Community & Behavioral Health** – Madison, WI
<http://www.sankofabch.org/>
- **Cambodian Buddhist Society of Wisconsin** – Fitchburg, WI
<https://www.facebook.com/cambodianbuddhistociety/>
- **Kajsiab House** – Madison, WI
<https://journeymhc.org/community-based-services/#kajsiab-house>

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

- **Provide services around gender-based violence for parents**, many of them being queer, immigrant, or elder parents. Services include wellness plans and protections for the young children, helping find shelter for the parents and their children, getting enough food, or making sure that children are enrolled in services. They also help make sure that children are connected to the social services programs available to them, whether it be food programs, WIC programs, or even helping families register for school services, and making sure people can get connected to daycare services.
- **Engage community members in political education and leadership development programs** which include understanding how their particular experiences around violence are connected to modern issues of social justice, and also getting people skills and tools to be able to create change.
- **Active in the movement for black lives**—campaigns around ending police violence, specifically organizing for community control of the police. There's a specific campaign around ending violence targeted at black women and black queer people.
- **Neighborhood advocacy**—15 year history of using community accountability models.

“When people in the community or within our homes, harm one another or use violence against one another, we actually do work that’s transformative that keeps people towards wholeness, healing, but also as towards justice.”

Freedom, Inc. Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **Youth Socio-political Leadership and Development** – Built up group of young leaders who have organized several campaigns around particular people’s experiences with police brutality, legal support, etc. One example is a black teen named Genele Laird who was assaulted and brutalized by police officers outside of a mall. Young folks who have been part of our organization as young teens, who’ve been trained to organize and lead the entire campaign, said she was beaten, brutalized, and arrested by police officers. They organized to get her out of jail and were able to free her.



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

- **Multicultural organizing through collective analysis** – organizing between POC communities, particularly Black and Southeast Asian, work with investment heavily in culturally-specific work, in black liberation and Southeast Asian liberation.
- **Leadership development** – investing in and recruiting as many people in high momentum areas where there is police violence.



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1. Annie E. Casey Report <http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-for-results/>
2. <http://dept.camden.rutgers.edu/nrcfi/files/Factsheet7-Incarceration.pdf>
3. Hunger and Food Security in Wisconsin and Dane County <https://www.publichealthmdc.com/documents/foodSecurityWhitePaper.pdf>