



Making Communities Safer Through Opportunities

My Backyard - Cohort 2

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Waleed Ahmad

Community Development Advocate

Racine, Wisconsin

waleed@ahmadfamilyservices.com

www.ahmadfamilyservices.com



Overview

My Backyard is a data-driven, innovative, and practical solution designed to reduce and prevent violence in Racine. This viable solution was developed using primary data collected from Racine community members, including business owners, students, parents, youth advocates, faith-based organizations, and justice-involved youth. "My Backyard" aims to reduce senseless violence in low- to moderate-income communities by stimulating economic development and improving safety. The program will focus on skills training, workforce development, business development, and building self-worth. It will also emphasize conflict resolution, de-escalation training, and instilling hope. "My Backyard" will launch in the area of Racine with the highest crime rate.

The primary data suggests that "My Backyard" will benefit individuals in Racine who are most impacted by generational cycles of hopelessness and struggle. Participants will have the opportunity to earn a Solid Foundation Certification and gain hands-on experience in financial literacy, business ownership, and real estate development, including carpentry, plumbing, electrical, and roofing.

My Backyard will utilize a multidisciplinary approach through four Cohorts to disrupt violence and retaliation. This will be achieved by establishing relationships between individuals and community assets through educational competition. These relationships will connect individuals to services that can save lives, address environmental trauma, and provide economic opportunities. Additionally, this approach will improve the physical, social, and economic conditions that drive violence.



Qualifications and Experience

Waleed Ahmad is a proud native of Racine, Wisconsin who has built a career spanning over three decades in human services, marked by leadership, community engagement, and program development. His professional journey has included work as a Male Responsibility/Gang Diversion Specialist with the George Bray Center, where he conducted outreach with at-risk youth and collaborated with families, schools, and law enforcement to address gang prevention. His extensive leadership experience includes serving as Vice-President of Racine NAACP and contributing to multiple boards. As a longtime community activist, he has coached youth sports and founded Ahmad Family Services Inc. His dedication has earned him numerous honors, including the 2024 Community Service Award and a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for his impactful work.

Target Demographic

The project will focus on middle and high school students who have excessive absences and multiple disciplinary actions during the 2024-2025 school year. Invites will also be extended to students who have had interactions with law enforcement.

Strategies

- **Trauma-Informed Approach:** My Backyard will acknowledge and address the impact of environmental trauma on individuals and the community, given the historical underinvestment and inequities in Racine. Data shows that generations of Racine residents, particularly Black residents, have been disproportionately underserved in

education and economic opportunities, leading to hopelessness.

- **Promote Healing and Resiliency:** Community-wide events will be held to address environmental trauma, loss, and healing.
- **Community Ownership and Engagement:** The project name and activities, such as pop-up events and community beautification, will encourage community ownership and participation in safety outcomes.
- **Safe and Healthy Activities:** My Backyard will provide safe and healthy activities for youth at risk for criminal or violent behavior. The program will operate Monday through Friday from 8 am to 4 pm, with occasional weekend events and activities.
- **Addressing community safety priorities such as Firearm Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Adverse Childhood Experiences, or Youth Violence.** We will present a short play, "The Value of Life," to highlight the statistics of these issues and their impact on victims' and perpetrators' families.
- **Examining the disproportionate impact of violence on specific groups and communities.** We will utilize the "Standing On Business" curriculum and data from the Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility, where over 60% of the population are Black males between 18 and 24 years old.
- **Planning and implementing community-specific services and partnerships that enhance community safety, connection, and well-being through preventative strategies.** "My Backyard" will organize community beautification projects to encourage resident participation and proactive change.


- **Contributing to a diverse community of practice that shares resources and expertise related to the collective impact and sustainability of a statewide approach to well-being, using a public health approach to violence prevention.** "My Backyard" demonstrates how community-based organizations can collaborate and work together for the greater good of the community causing a multiplier effect. My Backyard is scalable and more effective on a statewide level, as friendly competition and outcomes, are amplified by residents and neighborhoods wanting to support their local participants.

How Funds Will Be Used:

The funds will be used to support documentation, daily operations, food, educational training, staff, professional development service providers, transportation, venues, insurance, performance incentives, and administrative assistance to implement My Backyard as outlined in the detailed proposal.

Goals


1. Develop 3 small businesses focused on retail and real estate development
 - Each new business will have 4 partners ages 13 through 18
 - Each participant will take a pledge to avoid criminal activity
 - Each participant will establish a bank account
 - Each participant pledges to refrain from drug use
2. Age groups for participants:

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- 13 - 14
 - 15-16
 - 17-18
3. The real estate development division of the business will participate in the renovation of one Single Family Home and one Commercial property within the city of Racine.
- Participating youth businesses will manage a phase renovation process but mirror each phase.
 - The controlling party of the property will meet and explain to the participants how the renovation has added value to the property.
4. The retail division of the business will operate pop-ups selling their products or products of supporters of the project.
- The pop-up will consist of a tent and two tables.
 - The business will participate in a created event for them to showcase their pop-up.
 - The business will participate in festivals and fairs as a vendor

Deliverables

My Backyard will deliver the following:

1. 12 new entrepreneurial-spirited youth ages 13 through 18 in Racine
2. 12 new bank accounts
3. 12 more work-ready youth with top-notch professional and soft skills
4. 1 newly remodeled single-family home

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5. Plan and implement prevention strategies that align with the activities within the scope of the WCSF listed in the proposal.
 6. Provide monthly progress reports to the Department of Community Safety
 7. Provide monthly financial reports to the Department of Community Safety
 8. Comply with WCSF reporting requirements, including Subrecipient Risk Assessment, Civil Rights Compliance, and Affirmative Action Compliance

Milestones

I. *My Backyard* Team Established in Racine by April 21st, 2025

Private Partners, Executive, and Integrity Teams are identified

II. Recruit, Screen Applicants, and Start Training Participants by May 15th, 2025

Launch a marketing campaign to acquire qualified participants

III. Acquire Training Properties by June 1st, 2025

Training properties will be acquired through local real estate agencies, and organizations or from sale by owners.

IV. First day of in-person activities June 16th, 2025

Daily Monday thru Saturday activities start June 16th thru August 23, 2025

V. Complete Renovation of Training Properties by Sept 30th, 2025

Renovation of the properties completed. **[The timeline is longer than normal based on the teaching and training aspect of the project.]**

Expected Outcomes

Unified Safety theorizes, based on primary data, that My Backyard will inspire more spending with local businesses and the desire for individuals to own a home who never thought home ownership was possible. The wording was very intentional to say never thought versus thought they could never own a home. The wording speaks to the mindset of those who have lived in low to moderate or underserved communities their entire lives. Self-efficacy and financial security will be elevated for each participant who completes the program. The impact will be evaluated by non-criminal behavior involving violent crimes and the participant furthering their education.

My Backyard will create value for individuals who are most apt to commit or be victims of violent crime in and around the Racine metro area. Each one of these individuals will have received training in Plumbing, HVAC, Electrician, Inventory Management, and Project Management. They will be offered an opportunity to acquire certifications and licenses in the industry that interests them most.

Why It Works

4 individuals per business will develop accountability and communication skills

1. Benefits

- Incentives of Necessity - Upon completing each project phase, participants will receive a \$100 deposit into their IDA (Individual Development Account).

- Individualized mentoring and training on various trades.

2. Responsibilities

- Follow the Code of Conduct and learn civic responsibilities
- Participate in Community Beautification Efforts
- Commit to not become a part of the legal system within the next 24 months
- Pledge to obtain the next level of available education to include certifications

3. Skills and Business Development

- Providing Real Opportunities - (P.R.O.) workforce development program
- Standing on Business - economic development pathway for socially and economically disadvantaged youth

4. Certifications

- **Solid Foundation Certification:** This supports youth and young adults 12-26 in opening banks, and starting a business through a teaching methodology that teaches self-efficacy, the value of a life, consequences, conflict resolution, entrepreneurship, environmental trauma extraction, civic engagement, merchandising, and financial literacy.
- **Quickbooks Made To Order:** Participants will receive introductory Quickbooks training, enabling them to create budgets and personal financial statements. This skill is crucial, as they will be asked to evaluate their purchasing decisions. Initial training will be conducted in person, followed by daily virtual training five days a week for the project's duration.



Daily Activities

Monday through Saturday

8:00 am - 8:29 am - Breakfast

8:30 am - 8:59 am - Morning Affirmations

9:00 am - 10:59 am - Solid Foundation Certification Training and Quickbooks

11:00 am - 11:59 am - Discussing Yesterday (Reflections)

12:00 pm - 12:45 pm - Lunch

12:46 pm - 12:59 pm - Personal Time

1:00 pm - 4:00 pm - Racine Rising

* We may adjust our daily schedule from time to time to ensure a successful day.