

# Securing a Future for Wisconsin's At-Risk Kids (SĀF-ARK)

## *A concept paper for saving the kids we lose*

What if we could permanently alter the trajectory for Dane County's most at-risk kids? The fact is, we can. The SĀF-ARK (pronounced "safe ark") program will fill the gaps present in traditional service systems that contribute to persistently poor outcomes for many at-risk youth.

### The Need

At-risk kids disproportionately experience poor social outcomes, including truancy, school failure/dropout, suspension/expulsion, law enforcement contact, substance abuse, and high rates of out-of-home placement. The systemic factors contributing to these outcomes include:

1. Lack of early identification, using research-based criteria for kids at highest risk for poor outcomes.
2. Lack of a systemic mechanism for "tracking" and monitoring progress and setbacks for these youth to ensure that services are accessed and provided at critical points of vulnerability.
3. Lack of knowledge of and access to community resources, even though helpful resources often exist.
4. Lack of care coordination of sufficient intensity and duration, such that caregivers often are provided with disparate and poorly coordinated services and guidance.

### The Solution

The SĀF-ARK program aims to address each of the systemic factors above, and consists of the following phases:

1. Research design and data management: University research partners will identify participant selection criteria and methods, ensure effective participant protection protocols are in place, and design the overall study and evaluation components.
2. Participant identification & enrollment: Using research methods, the project would identify the 200 most at-risk kids in the county. Youth would be enrolled on an opt-in basis, with the following age groups each representing 25% of the total population: Ages 3-5; ages 6-8; ages 9-11; ages 12-14.
3. Participant status tracking: An app would be developed that would allow parents, teachers, and other appropriate persons to provide input on how each youth is doing. The database will track and monitor progress and setbacks for each youth, and connect kids and families with services when risk factors are triggered.
4. Intensive coordination / service connection: The SĀF-ARK program will "pull out all stops" to ensure that the child and family get what they need so whatever the hurdle is can be overcome. To enhance family engagement, a proven model of parent peer support will form the backbone of this program element.

### The Benefits

Once SĀF-ARK is fully operational, we anticipate that participating youth will have significantly reduced rates of incarceration, truancy, dropping out of school, discipline referrals, suspension / expulsion, out-of-home placement, and involvement with law enforcement. Given the high costs of youth placements in settings such as the state mental institute (\$401,500, annualized), juvenile corrections (\$144,905), residential care centers (\$137,094), and group homes (\$75,289), a relatively small success rate will cover the anticipated \$1.5MM cost for this 3-year demonstration project.

### Project Partners

- **Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.,** Lives in the Balance – World-renowned creator of *Collaborative & Proactive Solutions*
- **Wisconsin Family Ties** – Developer of one of the nation's leading parent peer support models
- **Child Study Center at Virginia Tech & TBD Wisconsin research partner** – Research design and data management
- **TBD Wisconsin State Agency partner**