

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Zero Youth Corrections Action Committee Announces Third Round of Grants to Two Milwaukee Organizations Working on Youth Justice: *SunSeeker MKE and Pathfinders***

MILWAUKEE, WI - The Zero Youth Corrections (ZYC) Action Committee announced a combined \$400,000 in funding for two local organizations – SunSeeker MKE and Pathfinders – for work on projects to prevent the impact of the criminal legal system on young people in Milwaukee.

The ZYC Youth Opportunity Grant represents the third funding initiative of a combined effort from representatives from Milwaukee County’s Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), Children, Youth & Family Services (CYFS), the Milwaukee Turners, and Public Welfare Foundation.

“Collaboration with grassroots providers is key to preventing youth from entering the justice system. DHHS is proud to work with our community partners on creative and innovative solutions to best serve our young people. These new and expanded partnerships with SunSeeker MKE and Pathfinders will offer additional support to youth and their families in our community,” said David Muhammad, Deputy Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). “We will continue to build a collaborative table to provide young people what they need to prevent deeper system involvement.”

In the process of designing and implementing this initiative through three rounds of funding, the Milwaukee County Zero Youth Corrections Action Committee met with hundreds of county residents through a series of forums with youth, activists, community leaders, and impacted families - including groups led by and for young people, and meeting with youth currently incarcerated at the Vel R. Phillips Youth and Family Justice Center.

The Milwaukee County Zero Youth Corrections Action Committee members created funding guidelines based on community input to identify local organizations that are best suited to prevent young people from becoming impacted by the criminal legal system.

“Direct investments to local organizations drive real change. Zero Youth Corrections’ approach to funding and partnerships provides the needed resources to community organizations who are paving the way for a transformative approach to justice,” said Public Welfare Foundation Program Director Jed Oppenheim. “Community-rooted organizations like Pathfinders and

SunSeeker MKE are developing effective solutions to help young people stay out of the carceral system, and they deserve our investment.”

Wisconsin's criminal legal system disproportionately impacts Black, Brown, Immigrant, and Indigenous youth. ZYC wants to see that change in Milwaukee, and is building processes for the community to lead the work of reimagining youth justice. Funding will be used to help create innovative solutions to prevent young people from being impacted by Wisconsin's criminal legal system, including interactions with law enforcement and the mass incarceration system.

Emilio De Torre, Executive Director of the Milwaukee Turners, noted, “The Milwaukee Turners are very proud to be partnering with Milwaukee County DHHS, CYFS, and the Public Welfare Foundation for the third round of funding to move toward our shared goal of Zero Youth Corrections. This is an incredibly innovative investment into community-created solutions because at the end of the day, we keep us safe and we must take care of each other.”

The total amount of funding being awarded this cycle is \$400,000. In perspective, it costs more than \$400,000 to keep one young person for one year at the Department of Juvenile Corrections. The Zero Youth Corrections Committee acknowledges that \$400,000 is a fraction of the investment that needs to be made in order to create systemic change in youth justice and reduce racially disparate impacts. By continuing to partner on this first step, the Committee hopes to promote increased funding for local youth programming, catalyze investment from system and community partners, and encourage Milwaukee to imagine a future with Zero Youth Corrections.

The ZYC Youth Opportunity Community Grant is how we are seeking to transform what’s possible in Milwaukee. Our goals over the past few years of funding have been to reduce the impact of the criminal legal system on young people by supporting community-driven solutions. This initiative promotes safety, accountability, and well-being for youth and families, with a long-term goal of achieving Zero Youth Corrections in Milwaukee County.

This year we will be introducing the Youth Justice Community Table, where 10 to 12 organizations, plus the Round 3 Grantees, will gather to break down silos, provide trainings and expand capacity, develop an understanding of systems change, and come together on tactics including narrative change. Organizations will be compensated for their participation. We are honored to continue building with community to achieve the change we seek.

The Zero Youth Corrections initiative was funded by a matching contribution to ARPA Dollars, and the initiative is currently funded through September 2026.

Learn more about this grant at [milwaukeeeturners.org/zyc](https://milwaukeeeturners.org/zyc)

More information about the two groups being funded:

**SunSeeker MKE** - Will receive \$214,000 to fund “Youth Philanthropy & Community Care Fellowship - Investment in community / Divestment from Prison,” which empowers system-impacted, intersectionality diverse youth to lead narrative shifts, advocates for divestment from imprisonment systems, and invest in community-centered solutions lead by youth. This is SunSeeker MKE’s first year receiving ZYC funding.

**Pathfinders** - Will receive \$186,000 to fund “Power of Paths Youth Action Board - Zero Youth Corrections Committee,” which enhances capacity to develop youth leaders to advocate for systems change to meet the needs of Milwaukee youth, focusing on the intersection between youth homelessness and the criminal legal system. This is Pathfinders’ second year receiving ZYC funding.

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