

Navigating Intersecting Barriers to Health

Community Health Worker Sheray Wallace Helping a Family Get on their Feet

Joseph and Jeanne* recently immigrated to the United States to start a better life. However, they experienced multiple barriers to starting their new lives together. Through Sheray Wallace’s work at the Meadowood Health Partnership (MHP), Jeanne and Joseph found the opportunities they needed to start their new family on the right foot.

About two months after Joseph immigrated to the U.S., Jeanne got sick and lost her job. Since Joseph recently immigrated, he did not have all the paperwork he needed to get a full-time job. The job loss left the couple with no income, so they could not renew their lease and lost their housing. They did not know the resources available in the community that could help them get a job and find secure housing. Jeanne and Joseph stayed for a few days with a friend, but they did not know what to do next. That’s when they met Sheray.



Sheray Wallace, CHW and MHP founder.

Sheray is a Community Health Worker (CHW) and founder of the MHP. She founded the MHP because she saw a need to connect people to resources, including housing and employment. Since 2016, Sheray and the MHP provide various resources, information, and community learning opportunities. Through her efforts, the MHP is a “one-stop-shop” for community’s health and social service needs. For clients, the MHP is a place where people’s barriers and circumstances do not matter. What matters is helping them get back on their feet as human beings. In 2021, the MHP received additional funding from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WI DHS) to better support her work as a CHW using the CHWs for Covid Response and Resilience Communities (CCR 2109) grant.



Flyers posted in the MHP about free COVID-19 rapid tests and COVID-19 vaccines in English and Spanish.





[T]he MHP is a place where **people's barriers and circumstances do not matter**. What matters is helping them get back on their feet as human beings.

Sheray took multiple steps to support Jeanne and Joseph. First, she directed them to the county process for the Dane CORE application, which is used to support rent and utility payments for up to one year. Sheray knows the ins and outs of navigating housing in Madison through her strong connections to partners and her knowledge of resources like the Dane CORE application. Even though Jeanne and Joseph applied for funding, the management company wanted proof of income and an initial payment within 48 hours, which was quicker than the Dane CORE funding could be obtained. So Sheray pivoted with them. She negotiated an agreement with a local hotel for a 28 day stay for the couple, so they had more time to find a job and earn money first. The MHP paid the security deposit and hotel costs for their stay while they continued their job and apartment search.

A month was all the couple needed to get back on their feet. During the month they stayed in the hotel, both secured full-time jobs. With employer offer letters in hand, they were also able to show proof of income to secure an apartment. When Jeanne and Joseph found housing, the MHP provided a cashier's check for the full security deposit and one month of rent. With secure housing, the couple could focus on their new jobs and saving towards rent. Sheray's ability to secure short-term housing and fund the required move-in costs helped stabilize and empower the family. With their new home and job, Jeanne and Joseph can joyfully welcome their first child knowing that they have stability.

Sheray strives to eliminate racial and economic inequities in Madison by working at the intersection of multiple barriers to living happily and healthy. Her work with Jeanne and Joseph highlights how social determinants like housing and employment are often interrelated and difficult to obtain together. Despite these connected and compounding barriers, Sheray leverages her connections in Madison and empowers people to navigate through their circumstances so they can lead happy lives. The list of community members being helped by the MHP continues to grow, which means more people across the community are accessing the health and social service resources they need. By establishing the MHP in the community library [and] growing its program with CCR-2109 funding, Sheray strengthens community trust, provides a safe space for resource navigation, and promotes individual and community resilience.

Disclaimers

* Pseudonyms were used in place of client names.

This success story was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$9 million with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.