



# CHW Profile Project

## Kimberly Wilson-Lawson Wellness First

*This month's Central Ohio Pathways HUB Community Health Worker Profile Project features Kimberly Wilson-Lawson. Kim has been a CHW and supervisor with the African American Alzheimer's and Wellness Association, specifically working with the Wellness First program, for two years. Health Impact Ohio's Communications Manager, McKenzie Carter talked to her about what it means to be a CHW.*

**McKenzie Carter:** What inspired you to become a CHW?

**Kim Wilson-Lawson:** You know, I think the inspiration really just comes from my innate desire to help people. So it's always been in me to reach out, and not just help, but also empower.

**MC:** What does it mean to you to be a CHW?

**KWL:** You know, the first thing that comes to my mind when I think of a CHW and what it means to me is a bridge building. And for me, bridge building means that you're meeting a client, you're assessing them, looking at all of their needs, and believe it can be multiple needs. But then you begin to build this bridge, and you know you can't stop halfway in between that bridge building. It's also not successful. So really getting that client to the other end - setting goals and being able to reach the other side. And I came up with a cute little acronym for CHW, which means to me, "Completing Home Work". So, you start the process, you're either meeting them in their home, or you're meeting them in the community, and you start this process of setting goals and giving homework to both yourself and the client. And the ultimate goal is to "Complete that Home Work...CHW."

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**MC:** Bridge building is such a creative and accurate analogy for CHWs. I'd love to know your favorite parts or aspects of the work that you do, and your favorite parts of your job.

**KWL:** Yeah, I would definitely have to say seeing the client go from point A to point B, and empowering the client would probably be my most favorite part of my job. And then, I hold both the roles of CHW and supervisor of CHWs, so I get to hear multiple stories of success, and that's very inspiring to me. And I would have to say we also work with the City Attorney Zach Klein Diversion Program, and at this point, Earl Lawson, who actually spearheads that, has reported that there's been a 92% success rate. That's just exciting to know about clients that actually went to court because they either needed some food, or stole diapers, or some necessity that drove them there, and instead of putting them in jail or giving them time, they get to go through the Wellness First program, get some rehabilitation, some linkages and bridging to services, which actually in the long run helps to get their record expunged.

**MC:** That's exciting, especially with such a high success rate! Could you go more in-depth with the diversion program? Tell us how many clients you've seen, how many people go through the program successfully?

**KWL:** Yes definitely. In total, we have seen approximately 183 clients since the beginning of Wellness First's involvement working with the program, which would have been since the earlier part of 2020. So that's a huge number of clients who have actually gone through the program, which we try to keep them in there for 6 months. I'm really proud to say that some say "We don't want to exit, even after the 6 months, just keep us on, we just enjoy the services!" So that's really exciting.

**MC:** That's such an amazing program, thank you for sharing! What is one thing about your role, either as a CHW or as a supervisor, that you wish more people understood about the work that you do?

**KWL:** That's such a good question, and I thought about it, and said to myself, I think the most important thing is for individuals to understand that what seems like a small step, a very small step for a client, is really huge for them. And that could be just simply getting up and going to fill out an application, and getting that job, or looking for housing, and finding the housing. Or it could just be going to a food pantry to get food. Little things to us, I think we need to understand that can be a huge step for the clients that we serve. Even to filling out a PHQ9, to check their mental status. Some might say, "no, I don't want to do that" but, those who take that step, that's huge for them! That's information they might not want to share, but it's a huge step.

**MC:** Definitely. Even going back to your homework analogy that you mentioned earlier, even if the homework seems annoying, or boring, or small, or pointless, by the end of the semester you add up all those small steps and realize all the work that you've done, and recognize how much you've really gotten done.

**KWL:** Now you get the reason why I call it Completing Home Work! Exactly right. Even with the Diversion Program, initially there are assignments that Earl gives to these clients, and it is like completing that homework. And every two weeks when he calls to check in to see how they're doing, he's checking up to see that that homework gets completed.

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**MC:** How does your work as a CHW impact your community, or the community that you serve?

**KWL:** I guess we already sort of talked about it with the Diversion Program, but not only do we serve those in the Diversion Program, but we also serve expecting moms. And that's another huge piece to this, because a lot of these expecting moms don't know about the many resources that are out there and available to help walk them through this whole process. And then after birth, being able to connect them to a lot of services like how to breastfeed properly, where to get diapers, and formula, and so on and so forth. I really believe that the impact is really wide and deep as far as what we do in the community. And now we have this huge presence in the Nepali community, and that continues to grow, so we are also able to assist that population.

**MC:** That's amazing, it sounds like you're really involved in your community, Do you have any final words that you would like to share?

**KWL:** You know what, I would say just being a part of this great work is such an honor, and definitely one of your first questions was why did I decide to be a CHW, and get that certification? And it only ends on that note, being able to help people, being able to see change, and enabling them, and empower them to sustain themselves. I think that is definitely a great thing to accomplish in our community.

**MC:** Absolutely, I would agree. Thank you for all the work that you are doing and have already done!

**KWL:** Thank you, McKenzie, for the opportunity, and I look forward to continuing to help those in the community.