

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
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Investigative
Report Synopsis

OIG Case # 25-0046-I

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OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
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October 22, 2025

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse. The following synopsis is a condensed version of the full report provided to City management officials and does not contain all investigative information.

During an ongoing investigation of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement's (MONSE) SideStep program, the OIG reviewed information concerning a lack of case management, data tracking, grant billing, and community-based organization's (CBOs) scopes of work.

Background

MONSE piloted the SideStep youth diversion program between January 2022 and 2024 in the City of Baltimore's (City) Western District. MONSE administered the program with the Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). According to the initial program announcement, SideStep provides youth who are 17 or younger with an alternative to the formal justice system and assistance from CBOs to improve their lives and help them reach their potential.¹ Youth who encountered BPD and met the following criteria were eligible for SideStep:

- First-time offender
- No active warrants
- Charged with a qualifying Category 2 offense
 - Shoplifting
 - Larceny
 - CDS Possession
 - Destruction of Property
 - Misdemeanor Assault
 - Unauthorized Use

In March 2023 and February 2024, MONSE announced a total of \$820,000 in funding to 15 CBOs and one evaluation consultant.² Both funding announcements mentioned a citywide scale-up following the launch of the pilot program. In 2023, MONSE hired an evaluation team (Evaluator) for \$24,999 to evaluate SideStep's pilot implementation and how it assists the youth and families.

The SideStep Standard Operating Policy (SOP) and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between MONSE, BPD, and DJS detail the referral process. When BPD encounters a youth and has probable cause for a Category 2 offense, BPD contacts MONSE's SideStep Youth Opportunity Coordinator, (YOC), who will contact the youth's parent/guardian within 48 or 72 hours to invite participation.³ If the invite is

¹ <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MDBALT/bulletins/34f4e19>

² <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MDBALT/bulletins/38a5997>

³ The MOU states contact will occur within 48 hours but the SOP states 72.

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accepted, the YOC will extend an intake appointment to the parent/guardian and the youth. During intake, the YOC conducts a Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS), Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey (ACEs), and a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) screening. The YOC will use the results to inform the service and case plan for the youth. The YOC shall use the CBOs to address the needs of the youth and encourage restorative and transformative justice while focusing on effective case management.⁴ Figure 1 below details the diversion process.

Figure 1: Diversion process workflow based on workflow within MOU



SideStep is not currently operating as the pilot ended in 2024. Since the completion of the pilot, MONSE has recommended the Citywide expansion of the program.

Evaluation

The Evaluator’s scope of services included obtaining feedback from staff, youth, and stakeholders, assessing the program’s impact in West Baltimore Communities, and determining if the Sidestep process provides youth development, family and community engagement, and written diversion agreements. The Evaluator’s performance metrics also included the number and types of diversion plans developed and the number and types of youth who participated and completed the program successfully or unsuccessfully.

The Evaluator completed its assessment on December 30, 2023. The OIG received a copy and reviewed the Evaluator’s report (Exhibit 1). The Evaluator’s assessment identified several issues and concerns with the program:

- Lack of available data regarding diversion options, completed diversion cases, and follow-up activities for successful diversion efforts (Pg 4).
- MONSE did not provide the Evaluator with access to participating youth and their parents/guardians (Pg. 6). Ultimately, the Evaluator concluded it did not have sufficient ground to offer recommendations because they were unable to access and analyze a complete data set. The Evaluator claimed the most impactful data deficit was the lack of access to SideStep youth and families, for whom the program is designed to serve (Pg. 21).

⁴ During witness interviews, the terms service providers and CBOs were used interchangeably. For the report purposes, service providers will be referred to as CBOs.

- The Evaluator noted SideStep’s SOPs state data collection and analysis will be essential to ensure that the diversion process is equitable and successful and that the YOC shall track outcomes of all cases at the time of closure including successful, partially successful, unsuccessful completion of any case plan goals (Pg. 17). The Evaluator determined SideStep is not in compliance with its internal procedures for tracking youth diversion activities. The YOC informed the Evaluator that data collection needs to be ‘refined’ and was “not being captured 100 percent.” The YOC acknowledged to the Evaluator that SideStep was not currently utilizing case plans as a foundational tool for measuring participant progress. The YOC referenced “light case management notes” that were documented in the database. The Evaluator was not provided with redacted versions of case notes and could not verify compliance (Pg. 18). The YOC proposed an option to hire an additional youth opportunity coordinator to divide the workload, which would immediately solve staffing issues in the face of expansion (Pgs. 19&20).
- The Evaluator found that diversion options are limited, and there was a belief that SideStep, from a staffing perspective, does not have the resources to be effective. Specifically, the Evaluator wrote that having one person who is responsible for internal policies and practices, service provider [CBO] coordination, and community relations requirements, ultimately sets up the program and its sole staff person for failure (Pg. 9).
- BPD officers collectively expressed varying levels of frustration toward the unending cycles of encounters with juveniles after the initial contact and referral. They acknowledged they had no real sense of what diversions are occurring post-contact and referral. Each officer reported that many of the youth they contact and initially refer to SideStep become engaged in more serious offenses, such as robberies or assaults. One officer wanted to have more engagement and follow up with youth after the referral while also facilitating mentorship opportunities (Pg. 12). The officers were not critical of the YOC’s responsiveness but were frustrated at the decision to allocate one individual for officers to call when they have a potential referral, which can often occur outside of traditional work hours (Pg. 11).
- The Evaluator interviewed one service provider [CBO] and was not provided with the opportunity to interview other service provider organizations [CBOs], but it was given access to non-organizational providers whose services are not under the umbrella of a community organization. Feedback was positive for the program and YOC, but a more precise understanding of long-term program objectives and communication post-diversion needed to be improved (Pgs. 14&15).
- The report found that BPD Juvenile Arrest Records indicated that although juvenile arrests increased, there had been a fall in diversion numbers in 2023. In 2021, 7.89% and 2022, 8.05% of juveniles were sent to alternative programs, and in 2023, 0.9%. The Evaluator attempted to run an analysis on the six qualifiable category 2 offenses. However, due to the unavailability of data, the Evaluator could not summarize and determine the impact of SideStep on the rate of juvenile arrest for the qualifying offenses (Pgs. 4&5).
- Based on the problems, issues, and challenges identified by the workgroup members, it was their firm judgment that the program is not ready for expansion (Pg. 10).

When asked by the OIG about the evaluation, MONSE’s Director (Director) explained that the Evaluator’s evaluation was helpful and evaluated the structure, but not the impact on SideStep reducing crime. The Director said MONSE agreed with a lot of the evaluation, such as refining the referral process. She added

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SideStep. The Director stated there were 51 participants during the SideStep pilot. According to the Director, 86% of the 51 participants did not recidivate within six months after enrollment.

The OIG reviewed correspondence and on May 13, 2025, the YOC provided DJS with a list of youth and requested that they provide the rearrest status within six months after their referral/arrest date. The list contained 55 names associated with case ID numbers. DJS returned the list to the YOC, and 24 youth had a notation of “yes” in the rearrest column, indicating a rearrest occurred. Two days later, the YOC asked DJS for clarification around the dates used in the spreadsheet and how many participants were rearrested within six months of the referral/intake date. DJS returned the list with 9 names noted with a “yes” in the rearrest within six months column. While the measurement of six months indicates 9 youth were rearrested, the initial spreadsheet DJS provided appears to show that 24 recidivated over a longer period. Additionally, the data that the YOC provided to DJS shows 34 individuals with successful program completion, 3 as unsuccessful, and 18 without any entry.

Regarding SideStep’s recidivism tracking, the YOC explained that they would contact DJS to obtain a list, which was typically done informally and at the last minute. He did not believe MONSE did a good enough job with following up with the youth. He added they are currently learning and developing a more formal process. The YOC opined that he would like to improve the discharge process when the youth complete the program. The YOC said he would like to create a mailing list to communicate potential future programs or hiring opportunities.

CBOs Use of Funding and Scopes of Work

A review of Workday invoices for SideStep CBOs showed the City issued approximately \$694,798.86 to CBOs for the program.⁵ The OIG reviewed Workday CBO invoices, and several did not have supporting documents uploaded to Workday. It appears the CBOs used MONSE’s invoice template to request reimbursement for line items including professional fees, travel and transportation, meals and entertainment, supplies and materials, indirect costs, and other expenses.

The CBO contracts submitted to the City’s Board of Estimates (BOE) noted that the grantee [CBO] will perform under the pre-arrest remote diversion program to provide support in programming that offers young people suspected of certain unlawful behaviors a meaningful opportunity to avoid the harms of the justice system (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Excerpt of BOE Memo for Fiscal Year 2024 Contract

BACKGROUND/EXPLANATION:

The Baltimore City Council, approved funding for the Pre-Arrest Remote Diversion Program in the FY24 budget. The Grantee will perform under the Pre-Arrest Remote Diversion Program to provide support in programming that offers young people suspected of certain unlawful behaviors a meaningful opportunity to avoid the harms of the justice system for the Sidestep Pre-Arrest Remote Diversion Program.

The OIG reviewed information that indicated CBO funds may have been used on non-SideStep youth. Correspondence from August 2024 showed MONSE’s Chief of Staff (COS) responded to a CBO

⁵ This was calculated based on a Workday invoice review and the OIG will continue the investigation to verify the total spent.

that there were some capacity challenges at MONSE and BPD, and there was a need to make sure MONSE built the right support infrastructure around the YOC role.

DJS Funding

MONSE's interagency agreements with DJS for Fiscal Years 2023, 2024, and 2025 included a \$200,375 grant award per year for the YOC's salary and benefits and case management software costs. The DJS agreement shows that the City provides an invoice with supporting documentation to receive payment of the funds.

A review of the Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 grant awards in Workday, the City's human capital and financial management software, indicated that MONSE had not submitted an invoice to DJS for these funds. The grant awards in Workday showed \$172,518.23 is ready to be billed for Fiscal Year 2023, and \$150,157.08 for Fiscal Year 2024. The review found that the full award amount for Fiscal Year 2025 appears to have been submitted to DJS for reimbursement.

MONSE clarified in their response that the amount spent in Fiscal Year 2023 was \$166,599.16 and \$191,176.01 in Fiscal Year 2024. The OIG learned from DJS that MONSE has not yet billed DJS for reimbursement of these funds.

Case Plans, Site Visits, and Outcomes

In the DJS interagency agreements, MONSE wrote that the YOC would be responsible for case management, including contacting, scheduling, and meeting with youth and/or families to complete the diversion intake process and connecting regularly with youth and CBOs. The OIG obtained a copy of the SideStep SOP used during the pilot. The SideStep SOP stated that diverted youth shall not be referred back to BPD or DJS for failure to engage or unsuccessful completion of diversion case plan goals. However, the YOC explained that this sentence in the SOP was not accurate. The YOC clarified that if a youth fails to comply with the program or does not make progress, he could refer them back to BPD. According to the YOC, he did not refer any youths back to BPD.

The SideStep SOP defined success based on the individual youths' case plan goals. The outcomes included: successful, partial, unsuccessful, and inability to successfully engage for intake. When asked about the level of detail in case plans during the pilot, the YOC stated it needed improving and was not what he wanted. The YOC explained that he was on call 24 hours a day and felt burned out. Although the work was a lot, which the Evaluator's report corroborated, the YOC described it as his dream job.

During the YOC's interview with the OIG, he stated success is based on program completion and following through on the agreement with the CBOs, participation, and attendance. He stated that some CBOs' programs are more structured with attendance sheets, others may be task-oriented, and youth may work on a capstone project. The YOC said he would typically get verbal feedback from the CBOs regarding the youth. The YOC stated he would check in with the youth every two weeks. Regarding site visits to the CBOs, the YOC said he would try to see them in action when the youth were there, but sometimes would go when no youth were present. Later in the interview, the YOC clarified that site visits will occur without the youth there. The YOC added that site visits would mostly occur once and then mostly communicated with the CBOs by phone.

The Director said the SideStep pilot's primary measurement of success focused on recidivism. The Director explained that recidivism would be tracked for the six months after the youth's referral to

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regarding program expenditures, explaining that “the advance funds of \$25,000 you received for your grant could be used for your program and were not restricted to Side-Step participants only.” Another CBO responded that classes took place in a secure youth facility and could not share the names of the youth who attended due to confidentiality. The CBO stated that they contacted the Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center to see if they could share attendance records.

Some of the SideStep CBOs’ scope of work also appeared to be inconsistent with SideStep’s age eligibility requirements. To be eligible for SideStep, a youth must be 17 or younger. A CBO’s scope of work listed the objective of co-facilitating focus groups involving young people up to the age of 25. Another CBO’s objectives referred to preparing participants up to the age of 24 for the workforce.

During the COS interview, she stated the SideStep program predated them, and did not “know much about SideStep.” When asked what their understanding of the program’s purpose was, the COS said she did not ask about and it was not on their radar. The COS explained that she was focused on MONSE’s finances due to the departure of a MONSE chief and setting up MONSE’s School-based Violence Intervention Program. The COS acknowledged that she did review some SideStep information in preparation for this year’s budget hearings.

The Director confirmed CBOs could use the funds for other youth who may not have been referred from SideStep. The Director stated that MONSE expected SideStep to be scaled up faster, and more referrals would go to the CBOs. However, she said it became clear that referrals would be limited, and CBOs still had work occurring. The Director explained that if there was a way to support CBOs’ general efforts, and it was a part of their approved scope of work, she did not have an issue with them using funds for their general work. The Director added that CBOs would accept youth referrals from SideStep as part of the agreement.

The YOC explained that he was not sure if the funding for CBOs was solely for SideStep youth. When asked if there were any evaluation criteria for how the CBOs were providing services to the non-SideStep participants, the Director said she did not know. The Director added that the CBOs’ payment structure was decided before their leadership role. For the future, the Director does not expect the structure to look similar to what it was during the pilot.

Findings

The OIG learned the City paid the Evaluator \$24,999 for an evaluation that was limited in recommendations due to the lack of available data and access to the youth and parents the program served. As noted in the Evaluator’s evaluation and OIG interviews, MONSE’s lack of formal case plans, data collection, and follow-up with youth, has potentially created an inconclusive outcome for the pilot program’s performance. The OIG learned that the YOC maintained a heavy workload during the pilot.

The OIG also found that recidivism rates may be higher after the six-month referral date, which MONSE used as a performance metric. The OIG formally requests further clarification regarding the recidivism rate that occurred for the pilot after the six-month metric. The lack of follow up and insight into the long-term recidivism rates, including arrest types, is data that can be collected to help inform the improvement of the program.

According to MONSE’s response, the City appears to have a total \$357,775.17 that has not been billed to DJS for the grant. The OIG recommends that MONSE review the DJS grant award billing for all fiscal years and work with DJS to bill and receive any outstanding funds. The investigation found evidence that

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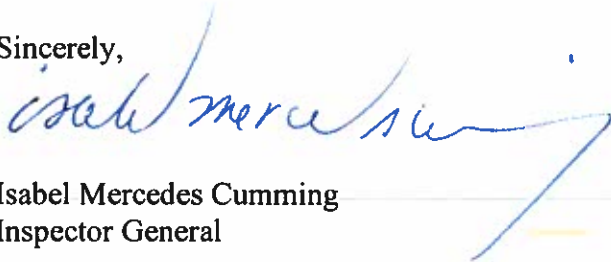
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MONSE allowed CBOs to spend contract funding on non-SideStep youth if it was within the CBOs' scope of work. Nonetheless, MONSE did not appear to review or monitor the CBOs' contract performance for the services provided to non-SideStep participants with City funds.

The evidence obtained during the investigation causes concern surrounding the upcoming Citywide expansion of the program without further follow-up review of the pilot program. As a result, the OIG will be continuing the investigation and will provide a full report at its conclusion with recommendations.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

- CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council President
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor

Exhibit List

1. Evaluator Report

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