

**WTTW  
FY2023**

# Local Content and Service Report to the Community



*Firsthand: Life After Prison*



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## **WHO WE ARE**

WTTW is the PBS member station in Chicago. WTTW is committed to producing and presenting trusted, best-in-class content fueled by a distinctly Chicago sensibility. We engage our audiences by entertaining, inspiring, educating, and reflecting a diversity of perspectives. Our purpose is to enrich lives, engage communities, and inspire exploration. We produce audience-driven content that is essential to Chicago and beyond. We are engaged in the community. We foster a culture of innovation and creativity, and we strive for first-rate capabilities and sustainability.

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## **LOCAL VALUE**

WTTW is essential to Chicagoans, valued for high quality content and community engagement. The station serves a vital role in our region, serving approximately 1.1 million monthly households (or approximately 1.8 million viewers) in Chicago and its suburbs, southern Wisconsin, northwest Indiana, and southwest Michigan, and far beyond with our streaming content services. We provide relevant quality content and trusted news coverage to our diverse community across five distinct television channels – our primary channel, WTTW; our secondary channel, WTTW Prime; WTTW Create; WTTW PBS Kids 24/7; WTTW World; on our website at [wttw.com](http://wttw.com); and via the PBS app.

# KEY SERVICES

WTTW provided local, audience-driven content and community engagement initiatives across Chicago's diverse regions and neighborhoods.

## Audience-Driven Content

WTTW acquires, produces, and distributes best-in-class content that enriches lives, engages communities, and inspires exploration. We have identified the following principles to guide our decisions. Our content must:

- Create an emotional connection, entertain, and inspire exploration
- Be responsive to the needs of our audience and society
- Reflect diverse cultures, represent community voices, and offer unique perspectives
- Address relevant and contemporary interests

WTTW tells local stories, amplifying local voices and broadening horizons. WTTW prioritizes the creation and production of content that meets the needs, wants, and aspirations of our curious audience across traditional and digital platforms across three primary content verticals.

## News & Information

### LOCAL NEWS

Independent, unbiased, and trusted news is essential to a high-functioning democracy. Partisan news is pervasive, local news sources are shrinking, the line

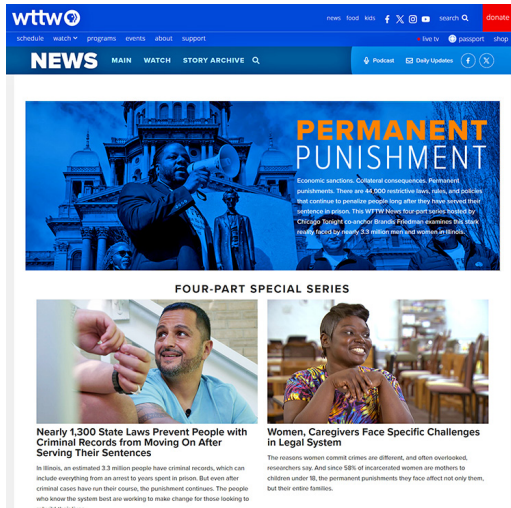
### LOCAL IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

In FY2023, *Chicago Tonight* reached almost 248,000 monthly households (330,000 viewers) across the region on television, and served more than 18 million streams.

between news and commentary continues to blur, and journalists are under attack. Trust in the media has been questioned and perhaps impacted in unknown ways, and local reporting is threatened by changing business models.

In the past fiscal year, WTTW debuted [an enhanced viewer experience](#) with a new production design and state-of-the-art technology to better serve our community. With a focus on our purpose and mission, we deepened our coverage with more original reporting and increased our footprint with a steadfast commitment to both television and digital journalism and distribution. We are continually reimagining our nightly news series *Chicago Tonight* to address changing media habits and expand our reach to a broader and more diverse audience. We continue to increase digital-first, text, and day-of news content production.

We focus our reporting in key areas: local news, analysis, and enterprise reporting on our city, state, educa-



Permanent Punishment homepage

tion, and criminal justice systems; the environment; science and technology; politics; business; and arts/entertainment.

WTTW News/*Chicago Tonight* and its sister programs *The Week in Review*, *Black Voices*, and *Latino Voices* are all available live on WTTW, wttw.com/news, Facebook, YouTube, and on demand across all of our digital platforms.

## FY2023 HIGHLIGHTS

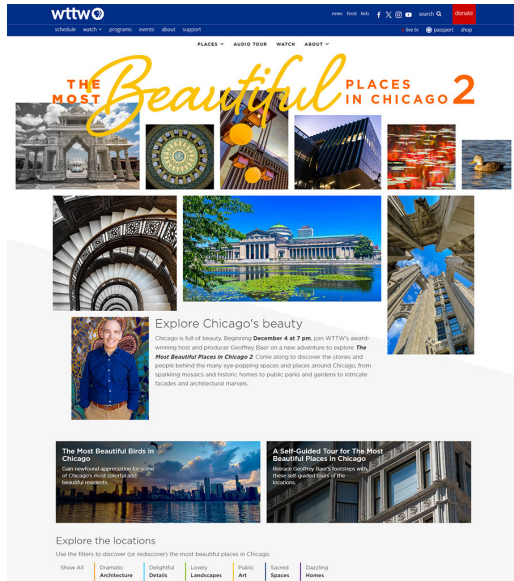
**2022 Midterm and 2023 Municipal Elections** – In advance of the 2022 midterms and 2023 municipal elections and subsequent runoff contests for Chicago mayor, city council, and other city offices, WTTW reported on the races, held virtual and in-person candidate forums, and launched comprehensive digital **Voter Guides** that provided profiles of the candidates and their key issues and a searchable map by ward or Congressional district, and provided helpful explainers tracing what happens to your ballot after it is cast, and outlining why Chicago's elections are nonpartisan.

**Permanent Punishment** – In October 2022, WTTW News launched a four-part series, *Permanent Punishment*, in connection with the *Firsthand: Life After Prison* initiative. The series, hosted by Brandis Friedman as part of WTTW's *Chicago Tonight*, explored different aspects of the continuing restrictions formerly incarcerated people face after paying their debt to society. Included was an examination of the special challenges faced by women, the difficulties in finding good jobs and housing, and some possible solutions. The series was honored with a Peter Lisagor Award for exemplary journalism.

**Chicago Tonight: Black Voices and Chicago Tonight: Latino Voices** – These two weekly series provide thoughtful and accurate coverage of current events to inform and engage the public, and create opportunities for real conversation and a platform for different voices and perspectives. The *Voices* series offer a mix of analysis and features on a wide range of topics, including arts and life, entrepreneurship and innovation, and equity and justice across the sectors of our society and in the Black and Latino communities in Chicago. The producers work with a range of local



2023 Voter Guide



The Most Beautiful Places In Chicago website

grassroots organizations in story selection to ensure that coverage reflects the needs of the community.

**WTTW News Community Conversations** – On the last Monday of each month and inspired by the *Voices* weekend programs, WTTW brought together viewers and community and thought leaders for a dynamic conversation around the issues affecting the lives of Black and Latino Chicagoans, using topics in the shows as a springboard for discussion. Topics in FY2023 included gun violence in the city; educational disparities in communities of color; the impact of the mayoral election; Chicago's status as a sanctuary city and its response to arriving migrants; screenings and discussions surrounding *Making Black America: Through the Grapevine* and two *Chicago Stories* documentaries – *Ida B. Wells* and *The Birth of Gospel*; and more.

## JOURNALISM TRAINING

**WTTW News** also continued to provide fellowships and internships for aspiring young journalists.

## LOCAL IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

Throughout the year, WTTW served its local community and beyond with content that entertained and enlightened audiences, with the goal of enriching their lives.

## Entertainment

Collaborating with the Chicago filmmaking community, WTTW created local signature franchises that reflect our audience's ongoing interests across key genres – local history; lifestyle and food; society and culture; and science, nature, and natural history. We celebrate the vibrant life of Chicago and its many talented content creators to tell its stories.

## FY2023 HIGHLIGHTS

***The Most Beautiful Places in Chicago*** – In this Emmy-nominated television special and website that premiered in March 2023, host Geoffrey Baer gave viewers a lively tour of innovative and uniquely magnificent spaces and places across the many neighborhoods of Chicago, shining a spotlight on their creators and others who tell the stories of how these came to be, why they are meaningful to the people who live and work nearby, and why Chicagoans should all know their histories. The companion website includes a photo collage of more than 25 architectural marvels, parks, sacred spaces, public art, and more, with capsule descriptions and fun facts about each; Geoffrey's exclusive audio tour of some of his favorite beautiful places, customizable for anyone who wants to join him; a web-extra video where viewers can meet Chicago's mermaid sculpture and the artist behind its once-mysterious origins; and a place for viewers to submit their own picks for most beautiful places.





Photo: Liz Farina/Market © WTTW

Firsthand: Life After Prison - Tawana Pope

**Firsthand: Life After Prison** – Throughout 2023, WTTW’s Emmy Award-winning multiplatform initiative explored the personal, firsthand perspectives of five individuals returning to society after spending time in prison, and the challenges and opportunities they faced as they sought to restart their lives while carrying the stigma of a criminal record. In addition to the five documentaries telling their stories, included on the website are five expert talks by community and thought leaders; text and visual journalism exploring re-entry barriers to education, the roadblocks encountered by older adults emerging from prison, efforts being made to reduce recidivism, and more; community conversations extending the reach of the project into Chicago neighborhoods; a discussion guide for schools, libraries, and other community organizations; and special news coverage.

**Special Content** – WTTW created immersive, original, and local digital content for Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, LGBTQ Pride Month, and Native American Heritage Month, and a [microsite](#) for Ken Burns’ series *The U.S. and the Holocaust*.

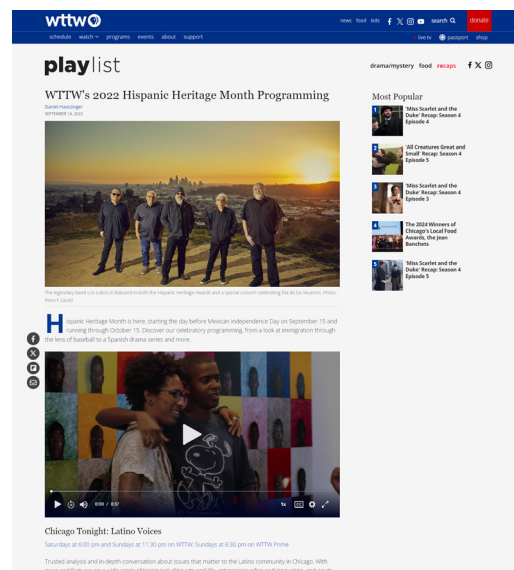
## LOCAL IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

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## KIDS AND FAMILIES

Research shows that parents and caregivers trust WTTW and PBS Kids content. Every day, children laugh and learn with the characters they’ve come to consider trusted guides and friends. This trust is at the center of everything we do and especially in what we share with the very youngest members in our communities and their families who depend upon us.

As we work to ensure that our content aligns to and leverages PBS initiatives and themes, WTTW presents the best children’s media content from PBS Kids



Hispanic Heritage Month programming 2022



Nature Cat event - family with Daisy

across our platforms – live and on-demand – to encourage and engage the curious explorer in all of us.

Our content encourages and engages the explorer in all of us, and we will continue to build a reputation as a leader in children’s content and services. Notably, WTTW continues to serve as co-producer of *Nature Cat*, the popular national STEM-based PBS Kids series that encourages children ages 3-8 to go outside and explore the outdoors, while learning about a variety of scientific topics along the way.

## Community Engagement

As a trusted organization with purpose at the heart of all we do, WTTW has a unique opportunity to reach beyond our television, radio, and digital platforms to build personal connections with people across Chicago’s many communities. We do this by meeting

### LOCAL IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

Through our children’s television and digital content and services, WTTW reaches Chicago-area communities with educational, inspirational, and commercial-free media content every day.

people where they are and working in direct partnership with local organizations and residents to enrich lives, engage communities, and inspire exploration. Our focus is on three distinct but connected areas.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

We believe kids are innately curious, born explorers; our content can support them on their journey. Through our children’s television and digital content services, WTTW reaches Chicago area communities with educational, inspirational, and commercial-free media content 24 hours a day, every day. We are ex-



WTTW Kids Learn & Play event



WTTW Fall Festival

tending this relationship by providing educational tools, materials, and support to positively impact children, families, and teachers.

Gaps in readiness persist between Black, Hispanic, and Native American students. According to the 2022-2023 Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS), just 22% of Native American, 18% of Hispanic and 24% of Black Illinois kindergartners demonstrated readiness in all three developmental areas (Social & Emotional Development, Language & Literacy, and Math). Focusing on these three developmental areas, WTTW continued to offer free [WTTW Kids Learn & Play events](#), a series of biweekly collaborative, playful, and participatory learning experiences live in the Forest Preserves of Cook County, and Chicago Public Libraries.

Chicago Public Library hosted Nature Cat for its 150th birthday celebration, and the costumed character also stopped by to visited patients at Lurie Children's Hospital outpatient center, handing out

## LOCAL IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

In FY2023, WTTW's educational content for kids reached more than 246,000 households monthly, or 464,000 viewers, and the station's community engagement events geared to kids and families attracted approximately 42,175 attendees.

do-it-yourself activity packets and keepsake plush toys.

Families interacted with other WTTW Kids characters Daniel Tiger and Katerina Kittycat at *Be My Neighbor Day* events in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood and in Aurora, Illinois where kids partook in children's concerts and activities and helped neighbors in need via a successful baby goods drive.

WTTW Kids at-home engagement opportunities continued including a newly expanded online *Explore*



Be My Neighbor Day event





South Chicago Dance Theater story on *Chicago Tonight*

*the Outdoors* Nature Cat winter camp, WTTW Kids monthly activity calendars, and four newly created tree-themed do-it-yourself activities as part of *Nature Cat* season 4-5 initiative. WTTW Kids, with Nature Cat and Daisy, presented demos of these newly created activities across the Chicago area.

WTTW reached viewers outside of Illinois as part of the WTTW produced *Nature Cat Road Trip*, stopping in Dayton, Ohio and in Massachusetts with the *Nature Cat Backyard and Beyond* traveling museum exhibit, where Nature Cat met with fans and shared DIY nature activities.

## ACCESS TO THE ARTS

WTTW is a strong and treasured brand with a reputation as a steadfast champion of the arts and encourages everyone in our community to explore Chicago's rich, extensive, and diverse arts scene by highlighting the work of the city's best performing and visual artists. WTTW's *Chicago Tonight* programmed segments focusing on emerging artists, the diversity of Chicago's dance community, local businesses that support artists and collectors pre-

serving their art, as well new exhibitions. We believe that arts and culture are important for the health of the city, both for the economy and the city's life.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Where conversations around civic and societal issues can dissolve into stereotypes and shorthand, we will work to surface and spotlight the people, ideas, and stories behind the headlines. And across our platforms and in the community, we strive to create a forum for discussion and encouragement of diverse opinions, authentic communication, and mutual understanding.

In FY2023, WTTW hosted numerous virtual screenings and panel discussions in connection with local and national content and programming, serving our local community with content that explored relevant topics including poverty, racial inequality, religion, Chicago and world history, and much more. These events highlighted WTTW-produced series, films by local filmmakers and aspiring student producers, and PBS documentaries. Many of the screenings featured films focusing on Black, Latino, Asian,



*Making Black America* virtual conversation



The U.S. And The Holocaust panel event

Jewish, or Native American people and their stories, including *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, *Making Black America: Through the Grapevine*, *Let the Little Light Shine*, *Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom*, *Becoming Frederick Douglass*, and *The Big Payback*. In addition, WTTW held behind-the-scenes previews and discussions of two original multiplatform productions, *Ida B. Wells* and *The Birth of Gospel*.

WTTW strengthened its partnership with PBS Books by co-hosting four live Facebook events that attracted more than 31,000 viewers – a conversation with *Walk with Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer* author Kate Clifford Larson; *Come Up: An Oral History of the Rise of Hip-Hop* with award-winning *New York Times* staff and author Jonathan Abrams; and Amber Cabral discussed her latest book *Say More About that ... And Other Ways to Speak Up, Push Back, and Advocate for Yourself and Others*, and also her book *Allies and Advocates*.

## LOCAL IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

In FY2023, WTTW continued to drive in-person and virtual community engagement events which attracted more than attendees. During the most recently completed fiscal year WTTW hosted more than 100 Community Engagement Events reaching more than 100,000 people. Another 14,124 viewed our community engagement events on WTTW's YouTube Channel, extending the reach of our engagement efforts.

Finally, as mentioned, WTTW held community conversations throughout the fiscal year for *Firsthand: Life After Prison*, and produced a discussion guide for the series that has been uploaded to PBS LearningMedia.



Photo: Tipping Point Photography

Firsthand: Life After Prison event

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# SUMMARY

It is WTTW's duty to advance and support our city by inviting people to explore new worlds, dive deeper into issues that matter most to them, and learn as we grow. We achieve this through world-class content, engagement in our community, and opportunities for adults and children alike to explore their world.

This means delivering trusted news and public affairs content; kids content that nurtures; and arts, music, and entertainment content that cultivates curiosity and opens doors and minds. It means going out into neighborhoods and building authentic connections with people of all ages to help them discover new possibilities, blaze new paths, and realize their dreams. It means focusing relentlessly on our audience and leveraging technology to meet them where they are. It means being valuable, valued, and essential.

WTTW will continue to evolve and innovate – producing and presenting unique, quality content that stands out in the media marketplace. The trust and equity WTTW has built over the years – and earnestly maintained – have made us a respected voice in the community. We are a media organization that tells true Chicago stories with the depth, clarity, and insight that the people in our region crave, and strives to make a meaningful, ongoing, and lasting impact on Chicago and on society at large.