

PROTECTING CHILDREN & FAMILIES AGAINST VICTIMIZATION



Submitted to DCF
September 30, 2022

2021-2022 Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse
Civil Legal Services Program

**WISTAF**
Funding Civil Justice

4600 American Pkwy, Suite 104 | Madison, WI 53718
phone: 608.257.6845 | toll-free: 877.749.5045
email: service@wistaf.org | www.wistaf.org

Protecting Children & Families Against Victimization

2021-2022 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

In 1891, the United States Supreme Court wrote on behalf of a unanimous Court, “... no State can deprive particular persons or classes of persons of equal and impartial justice under the law. The concept is so central to our legal system that it is summarized in an inscription on the U.S. Supreme Court building – *EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW*.”

However, meaningful access to the court system and professional legal assistance remain barriers for Wisconsin’s most vulnerable. Add to that the isolation and stigma that so often plagues victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, and you have a socio-economic crisis threatening a cycle of dependency on public assistance.

In State Fiscal Year 2022, the Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse (DVSA) Civil Legal Services Program was both the means for and the proof of the State of Wisconsin’s important work to halt that cycle of dependency and foster healthy, independent families.

“The opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice.”

~ Attorney Bryan Stevenson, in *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*

Background & Data Collection

During the two-year 2021-2023 Wisconsin state budget cycle, \$1,000,000 of TANF funding from the Department of Children and Families’ (DCF) budget was allocated to the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF) to administer and fund a program for the provision of domestic violence and sexual abuse legal services to TANF-eligible Wisconsin residents. This report covers the \$500,000 distributed for services provided from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022, which marks the seventh year of this vital program. It outlines the management processes that WisTAF used to grant the funds to legal services providers and domestic abuse shelters, and provides specific data on services provided with the funds.

Per contract number 437004-G22-0001825-000-01 between the Wisconsin Dept. of Children and Families and the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, WisTAF required grantees to submit fourth

quarter and annual reports following conclusion of the 2021-2022 grant cycle, which were used to compile the service and financial information contained in this report. The annual report was designed to elicit the information that WisTAF needed to determine that grant recipients provided high-quality domestic violence and sexual abuse legal services to TANF-eligible clients in all parts of Wisconsin through the efficient and effective use of DVSA Civil Legal Services grants.

The grantees' accomplishments – what they were asked to do, and what they achieved – demonstrate the immense need for supportive legal services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse. The investment was valuable not only in helping the individual clients who were served with the funds, but also in encouraging Wisconsin's economic health and the preservation of families. Legal services providers were successfully able to ensure the safety and stability of vulnerable families; remove barriers to employment; retain housing for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse; and obtain child support and other economic supports for families facing uncertainty and, in some cases, imminent danger.

DVSA CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

About WisTAF

The Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation created in 1986 by the Wisconsin Supreme Court *to aid the courts and improve the administration of justice by administering funding for legal services to persons of limited means in non-criminal matters*. WisTAF brings Wisconsin's legal and financial communities together to generate funds, which are used to make grants to nonprofit organizations providing civil legal services to Wisconsin's most vulnerable residents. Since its inception, WisTAF has distributed more than \$64 million to Wisconsin civil legal services providers, to help low-income Wisconsinites obtain information, advice, and/or representation critical to ensuring families' health, safety, security, and independence. The Foundation currently manages multiple sources of income, which are used to fund six grant programs, including the DVSA Civil Legal Services program. A nonpartisan, experienced fund administrator and grantmaker, WisTAF is the state's designated channel for the administration of low-income civil legal services funding in Wisconsin. More information about WisTAF's programs and services can be found online at www.wistaf.org.

Program Development & Resources

Per Wis. Stats. § 49.175(1)(j)14, which provides for grants to WisTAF of \$500,000 per fiscal year to fund this program, WisTAF prepared a plan for using the funds, dated October 21, 2015, which was approved by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). Upon plan approval, WisTAF staff developed and implemented the grant application, approval, distribution and reporting/evaluation processes used to fund eligible services from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. Pursuant to adoption of each State of Wisconsin Biennial Budget since, WisTAF has entered into a contract with DCF specifying the conditions for use of the funds. WisTAF's volunteer Board of Directors and paid professional staff oversee funds and administer the program.

WisTAF's 15-member Board of Directors is comprised of three judges (appointed by the chief justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court), nine attorneys and three non-attorneys (appointed by the State Bar of Wisconsin president). In addition to its other functions, the board is responsible for making all grant funding decisions. These dedicated volunteers bring a wealth of diverse legal, social services

and other professional expertise to WisTAF. Upon joining the board, members are assigned to one or more of the following committees, depending on their experiences, leadership roles and preferences: Grants/Evaluation Committee, Finance Committee, and/or Executive Committee.

Currently, WisTAF employs 3.75 full time equivalent (FTE) staff members. Grant program management is provided by the full-time executive director and program manager.

In July 2021, representatives from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation signed a new contract:

- Contract Number: 437004-G22-0001825-000-01
- Contract Term: July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2023
- Commodity or Service Description: Provide legal services in civil matters related to domestic abuse, sexual abuse, or restraining orders or injunctions for individuals at risk under Wis. Stat. § 813.123, for individuals eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Assistance Listing: 93.558 Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- The contract was amended in March 2020 (A01 - allocation update) and October 2020 (A02 – allocation update).

Grant Notification & Application Process

Potential applicants were notified of the availability of 2021-2022 DVSA funding via direct email. WisTAF staff also posted information on the WisTAF website for public access. Online grant application materials were made available to potential applicants on February 26, 2021.

WisTAF received thirteen grant applications for combined requests totaling \$692,215 by the March 12, 2021 application deadline. (See Appendix Table 1: 2021-2022 DVSA/TANF Civil Legal Services Grant Applicants and Requests.) All applicants were required to meet the following provisions and criteria in order to receive funding consideration.

Grant Purpose and Funding Cycle

Grants were to be used to provide legal services in civil matters related to domestic abuse, sexual abuse, or restraining orders or injunctions for individuals at risk under s. 813.123 (TANF-eligible clients) from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022.

Eligible Client Populations

Grant recipients were required to verify that clients served met TANF financial and non-financial eligibility requirements. Any individual meeting Wisconsin's W2 eligibility requirements was automatically deemed eligible. Individuals concurrently enrolled in any of the following programs also were considered automatically eligible:

- Wisconsin Works (W2)
- Transform Milwaukee/Transitional Jobs
- Received Wisconsin Shares child care assistance
- Received the Wisconsin Caretaker Supplement
- Participated in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program

Grant Applicant Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to apply for 2021-2022 DVSA Civil Legal Services Grant funds, applicants were required to meet the following requirements:

1. The applicant had to demonstrate that it provided, planned to provide or caused to be provided domestic violence and sexual abuse legal assistance to TANF-eligible clients; and,
2. The applicant had to be a civil legal assistance organization, a domestic violence shelter or be an organization that qualified as a 501(c)(3) exempt organization; or
3. The applicant had to otherwise demonstrate the charitable purpose of the organization and project.

Grant Application Review & Decision Process

WisTAF's eight-member Grants/Evaluations Committee was responsible for reviewing applications and making a funding recommendation for board consideration. Application materials were made available to all board members.

Each member of the Grants/Evaluation Committee was assigned as "primary reviewer" on up to three applications. Primary reviewers were responsible for thoroughly reviewing the assigned agencies' application materials and presenting a summary to the full committee during its May 4, 2021 meeting. Each member of the Grants/Evaluation Committee also served as "secondary reviewer" on up to three additional applications. Secondary reviewers acted as information resources during the grant application discussion. In addition, grant program management staff reviewed all applications and served as an information resource during the meeting.

Following presentation and in-depth discussion of each application, the committee used a two-step process to: 1) determine whether an application merited funding, and 2) allocate the funding amount to be awarded. Factors considered included the applicant's ability to identify and serve the specified target population; current and historical financial stability and longevity; demonstrated partnerships, collaborations and community support; the programs' geographic reach/service area; and whether applicants were able to use prior cycle funds effectively and efficiently, if applicable.

As a result of this process, the committee recommended funding all thirteen applicant agencies. The full board discussed and unanimously approved the recommendation on June 9, 2021. (See Appendix Table 2: 2021-2022 DVSA Civil Legal Services Grant Awards.)

Disbursement of Funds

Grantees began submitting expense reimbursement requests to WisTAF in August, 2021 for eligible services provided from July 1, 2021 through July 31, 2022. WisTAF verified expense eligibility and supporting documentation; monitored administrative vs. direct expenditures; aggregated subrecipient requests; and submitted reimbursement requests to DCF via the SPARC online portal. WisTAF remitted expense reimbursements to subrecipients upon receipt from DCF. WisTAF included a monthly expense reimbursement request for the funds needed to administer the grant program in the monthly expense reimbursement requests submitted to DCF. This process was repeated in each subsequent month of the grant contract period.

WisTAF subrecipient grantees provided eligible services and received expense reimbursements totaling \$450,000 by the conclusion of the funding cycle.

WisTAF's program manager coordinated grantees' monthly expense reimbursement requests; tracked the services provided and amounts spent on direct and administrative activity; and maintained ongoing communication with grantees in the event of reporting discrepancies or to clarify and/or request information. The executive director was responsible for the financial accounting for the DVSA funds that flowed through the Foundation.

The program manager coordinated all WisTAF Grants/Evaluation Committee activities associated with the DVSA grant. The executive director coordinated all WisTAF Board of Directors activities. In the spring of 2022, Wegner CPAs conducted an independent audit of WisTAF's financial information and management, which included the DVSA program. Wegner CPAs submitted the audited financials to the DCF Audit team as required.

Note on discrepancy between contract expense period and state accounting period: In May 2019, DCF notified WisTAF that Wisconsin Statute 49.175(1)(j) limits Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funding to Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF) to \$500,000 each fiscal year. TANF-funded expenditures in a state fiscal year (SFY) may not exceed the amounts provided under Wis. Stat. 49.175. DCF tracks compliance with TANF allocation limits provided in the statute using the state accounting system STAR, not the SPARC system that WisTAF is required to use to report expenses. Expenses in SPARC for a given month are not recorded as an expenditure in STAR until the following month, e.g. the June expenses reported in SPARC are reimbursed in July. This means June expenses are counted as July expenses in the STAR accounting system, and counted against the following year's contract amount, even though they were technically spent under the current contract. So while Wis. Stat. 49.175 specifies allocations for the SFY (July 1 to June 30), from a practical standpoint, DCF looks at expenses entered by contractors in SPARC from June to May (paid in the financial system, STAR, from July to June) to ensure DCF is in compliance with statutory expenditure limits. In terms of financial impact, the June 2021 expenses that were paid to WisTAF in July 2021 (\$113,869.28) counted against the SFY 2022 contract even though they were incurred/spent under the SFY 2021 contract.

While DCF has proposed language in both the 2019-2021 and 2021-2023 state budgets that would allow the Department to count all reported expenses within the annual contract cycle to the SFY allocation, this language has not been approved. The accrual vs. cash-based accounting discrepancy will carry forward into each future contract year/grant cycle, however, DCF has verified that they are contractually obligated for those funds to WisTAF, likely to be remitted following the conclusion of the final contract governing this grant program.

Grant Oversight and Compliance Monitoring

WisTAF engages in a systematic process to evaluate successful usage of WisTAF funds and monitor compliance with contract and program requirements.

1. Provider Risk Assessment and Performance Monitoring

As the administrator of federal funding via the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Civil Legal Services (TANF) grant program), the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF) has an obligation to

identify and assess risks associated with the usage and administration of grant funds for each of the subrecipient agencies (“providers”) receiving funding.

WisTAF has chosen to use the risk-based approach in evaluating and monitoring providers’ administration of funds. (Note: WisTAF may not waive federal audit requirements for any providers meeting federal criteria for needing a program audit or a single audit in accordance with the Uniform Guidance.) Per the Wisconsin Dept. of Children and Families Provider Agency Audit Guide, WisTAF will determine whether the risk factors associated with programs and providers point toward a lower or higher risk, and will use the results of these individual factors to assess whether the provider’s overall risk is low, moderate or high.

WisTAF assesses risk and monitors performance using a variety of methods including: provider site or remote visits, regular provider reporting and review of additional documentation and relevant materials. Risk assessments are performed in a systematic and rational manner. WisTAF documents all results.

Provider monitoring visits

Pursuant to WisTAF’s obligation to evaluate each provider’s risk of noncompliance with federal statutes, regulations and the terms and conditions of the subaward, WisTAF conducts site visits or “remote visits” (via video conference), allowing for in-depth and interactive discussions regarding such factors as:

- The provider’s prior experience with the same or similar subawards;
- Whether the provider uses this grant funding to partner with a nonprofit law firm, private attorney or other legal services provider to provide eligible client services, and if so, the nature, scope, specific roles and systems/processes used in client screening, billing/compensation, and performance monitoring;
- Whether the provider has new personnel or new or substantially changed systems;
- The results of previous audits including whether or not the provider receives a Single Audit, and the extent to which the same or similar subaward has been audited as a major program;
- The extent and results of federal awarding agency monitoring
- Review of program records (within the confines of client confidentiality requirements), if deemed necessary

Participants typically include at least one WisTAF staff member, one WisTAF Board member, provider agency senior management and program staff.

Regular provider reporting

WisTAF requires providers to submit quarterly reports describing activities performed by the provider using this funding; outcomes achieved; the number of TANF-eligible adults receiving services (including client demographic data); and other qualitative and/or quantitative data the provider wishes to report.

Providers also are required to submit expense reimbursement requests detailing the amount of direct and administrative expenses incurred for eligible client services. Providers also must submit applicable supporting documentation accompanying expense reimbursements. All reimbursement requests are reviewed for reasonability and mathematical accuracy by WisTAF's grant program manager and verified by the executive director prior to submission to DCF.

Review of additional documentation and relevant materials

WisTAF also conducts a desk review of materials submitted by prospective grantees as part of the grant application process. The following materials typically are reviewed:

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws or other governing documents
- Determination letter from the IRS (recognizing the subrecipient as exempt from income taxes under IRC section 501(c)(3))
- Most recent Form 990 or 990-EZ, including all supporting schedules and attachments (also Form 990-T, if applicable)
- Most recent audit report and management letter received from subrecipient's independent auditor
- Most recent internally-prepared financial statements and current budget

Ongoing monitoring of providers varies based on the nature of work assigned to each and WisTAF's assessed level of risk. Ongoing monitoring activities may involve any or all of the following:

- Regular contacts with subrecipients and appropriate inquiries regarding the program.
- Reviewing programmatic and financial reports prepared and submitted by the provider and following up on areas of concern.
- Monitoring subrecipient budgets.
- Offering providers technical assistance where needed.
- Maintaining a system to track and follow up on deficiencies noted at the site or "remote" visit in order to ensure that appropriate corrective action is taken.
- Establishing and maintaining a tracking system to ensure timely submission of all reports required of the subrecipient.

2. Setting and Communicating Clear Expectations

Once an agency has received notification of a WisTAF grant award, a representative of that agency must sign a grant conditions contract agreement, which provides clear guidelines for the agency's use and management of the funds. Each DVSA grant recipient was required to sign such an agreement prior to receiving 2021-2022 funding. WisTAF also incorporates conversations regarding expectations into our subrecipient monitoring activity.

3. Long-term Relationships

With a relatively small pool of regular grantees covering the entire state, historically WisTAF has been able to stay in frequent contact with grantees on an informal basis. This helps us to learn about individual grantee agency problems before they develop into serious issues, and to direct grantee agencies to appropriate assistance as requested.

Initially, the DVSA Civil Legal Services State Appropriation grant program was atypical in that several grant recipients were not traditional legal services providers per se, but rather domestic abuse shelter agencies with which WisTAF had no prior relationship. In the initial 2015-2016 grant cycle, WisTAF offered assistance to support the development of DVSA legal services programs to all grantees. This provided a proactive opportunity to help them determine what they needed to do to be successful and meet the requirements of the grant. We have continued to maintain strong, supportive relationships with these agencies in subsequent grant cycles.

2021-2022 EXPENDITURES, CLIENTS SERVED & OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

“Brianna” lived with her partner, who was physically, verbally, and financially abusive. Due to the intensity of the abuse, Brianna’s mom provided her with The Women’s Center’s (TWC) number, and she reached out to inquire about the temporary restraining order (TRO) process. Because her abuser still lived in her home, Brianna was unable to safely leave to come to TWC’s office in person. Brianna’s Advocate scheduled phone appointments when her abuser was out of the home to offer support remotely. The Advocate helped her build a safety plan, and Brianna indicated she wanted to file a restraining order against her abusive ex-partner and remove him from her home. In a phone appointment, the Advocate helped Brianna electronically file a TRO. They guided Brianna through the process and provided her with emotional support as she feared he would have a violent reaction to being served notice of the order.

The same day that Brianna filed the TRO, the abuse escalated to the point that law enforcement was called. At the scene, law enforcement provided Brianna with TWC’s contact information, but she shared she had already filed the TRO with TWC, and it was granted. Brianna’s abuser was arrested, and she enforced the 72 hour no contact. He was removed from the home, which allowed enough time to have him served.

Brianna feared facing her abuser in court, and the Advocate offered court accompaniment as well as a referral to Legal Action of Wisconsin. TWC provided this referral based on the knowledge that Brianna had no income other than what her abuser gave her from time to time, and she has two minor children. Ultimately, Legal Action determined that Brianna was eligible to receive representation through the WisTAF DVSA grant, and they offered to represent Brianna at the hearing. Legal Action contacted Brianna to prepare for court, and both her Advocate and attorney accompanied her to the hearing. Brianna told the Advocate that she was grateful for the support and that she felt at ease knowing she did not have to face her abuser alone.

Before the hearing began, Brianna’s attorney gave her an overview of how the hearing could go. The Advocate helped her process her stress and talk through her concerns about providing testimony. Because of the preparation done before court, Brianna felt prepared to tell her story. When it came time to testify with her abuser in court, she was able to answer questions calmly and rely on the coping

skills reviewed with her Advocate to make it through the hearing. A four-year restraining order was granted. Brianna told the Advocate she was relieved that she could safely return to her home. She said she was thankful to have the support of TWC and Legal Action. Since the resolution of this case, Brianna was able to obtain and retain employment allowing her to maintain safe and stable housing for herself and her two children.

Expenditures

The following table summarizes 2021-2022 DVSA Civil Legal Services (TANF) State Appropriation Program expenses:

DVSA Civil Legal Services State Appropriation (TANF) Program Expenses (7/1/2021 thru 6/30/2022)

A. Direct expense	
1. Grantee direct expenses	\$409,541
Direct expense subtotal:	\$409,541
B. Administrative expense	
1. Grantee administrative expenses	\$40,459
2. WisTAF administrative expenses	\$50,000
Administrative expense subtotal:	\$90,459
Total expenses reimbursed:	\$500,000

Due to unanticipated circumstances and the nature of reimbursement-based grants, five agencies were unable to use the full amount of the 2021-2022 funds they were awarded. Such circumstances included instances where clients moved out of the grantees' service areas or who chose not to pursue further legal remedy. As such, \$24,574 was reallocated to grantees who incurred eligible expenses exceeding their original grant allocations.

During the 2021-2022 grant cycle, exceptional circumstances were widespread and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As one grantee described:

The most significant effects on our program this year were due to staffing issues, which particularly and severely affected the number of grant-eligible cases we were able to take. Like so many organizations, we have struggled to retain and replace employees over the last year. In the 2021-22 program year, we bade farewell to two experienced attorneys when they left for new positions. Our Board of Directors raised staff salaries and our Executive Director updated our employee policies and handbook in order to attract and retain attorneys and other staff members moving forward. We are extremely glad that we were able to hire three new attorneys between September 2021 and January 2022. The new additions have brought additional positive energy and enthusiasm into our office, while also requiring significant training, mentorship, and support as they learn to become excellent family law attorneys. They are continuing to grow their skills and abilities to manage heavy caseloads. Both this fact and the fact that we were down an attorney for over nine months in 2021 are reflected in our low program numbers for 2021-22, as we have had to consolidate and shift caseloads in order to ensure continued quality representation for our clients. We are grateful to be at full staff now and

look forward to the program year that began July 1, 2022, as we know we have laid a strong foundation for a more "normal" year of serving our client base and our community.

This sentiment was echoed by numerous other grant recipients. And, as in past years, WisTAF took proactive steps to determine the anticipated amount of unused grant funds, and put in place a process to reallocate funds to grantees incurring expenses that exceeded their initial grant awards. This resulted in the best possible utilization of all funds in the areas with the greatest need.

A Global Pandemic Long Before the COVID-19 Outbreak: One in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence mostly by an intimate partner. Before the pandemic, 243 million women and girls, aged 15-49 experienced sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the past year. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from those on the front lines, have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified. The sudden, unexpected social and physical distancing measures implemented statewide impeded grantees' ability to serve clients in the initial months of this grant cycle, at the same time they were witnessing a spike in the legal needs faced by domestic abuse survivors. The crisis worsened as stress mounted and was compounded by income loss, medical debt, the confines of close quarters, and the absence of typical support systems. For many, life as we know it paused. Domestic violence and sexual abuse did not.

Geographic Distribution of Funds

Family law cases involving domestic violence are among the most difficult legal cases an attorney can undertake. Statewide, many private attorneys refuse to take them because of the long hours they require to complete, and the emotional circumstances that accompany family law cases, which include abuse. Even domestic and sexual abuse survivors with means have difficulty finding the legal help they need, because there are few private attorneys in their county that take domestic and sexual abuse family law cases. The odds are stacked even higher against low-income domestic and sexual abuse survivors. There is increasingly little chance that they will find the legal help they need except through programs such as the ones funded by DVSA Civil Legal Services grants.

2021-2022 grantees were geographically limited by the relatively small amount of available funding and, in too many cases, staffing shortages. Some agencies receiving funding were small, and served one county. Other larger agencies served several counties. There was little overlap of service areas.

Due to insufficient funding and the constraints imposed by the pandemic, the program fell short of its goal of making civil legal services available to domestic violence and sexual abuse survivors in every county of the state. Grantees reported providing DVSA-funded services in 54 counties during this grant cycle. This compares to a reach of 49 counties during the 2020-21, 56 counties during the 2019-20 cycle, 55 counties during the 2018-2019 cycle, 56 counties during the 2017-2018 cycle and 37 counties in the 2016-2017 cycle. (See Appendix 3: Counties Served with 2021-2022 DVSA/TANF Funding and Appendix 4: Clients Served with 2021-2022 DVSA/TANF Funding by Judicial District).

As illustrated in Appendix 3, a few pockets remain underserved due to the limited funds available and the geographic reach of the 2021-2022 applicant pool. We hope to continue to expand the program's coverage and address these areas of need in the future, in the event the State's investment in civil legal aid is increased.

Clients Served

“Jada” was in a physical, emotional, and financially abusive relationship with the father of her child, until he was arrested and she came to Golden House (Green Bay). Golden House helped her find daycare in the area so she could search for a job. While meeting with her Golden House advocate, she also learned about her (and her child's) legal rights, and what she could do to protect them.

Jada decided a restraining order was the best option, so she used the assistance of Golden House's crisis advocates. Jada was also able to meet with an attorney to discuss options for child custody. Together, they explored legal remedies for regaining financial control, debt management, and clearing evictions from her record. As a result of Golden House's support and legal aid services, Jada found her own freedom. Free legal representation resulted in custody of her child. Today, they live independently, in safety.

The lack of attorneys willing and able to take domestic violence and sexual abuse cases is not the only factor that prevents clients from being able to get the legal help they need. Lack of money is a common obstacle faced by domestic and sexual abuse survivors, who may be cut off from financial resources by their abusers. Other factors such as disability or lack of transportation can also affect a survivor's ability to find an attorney.

In 2021-2022, DVSA grants were used to help more than 753 TANF-eligible individuals and their families, providing services ranging from limited advice to full representation in civil litigations. As the following charts indicate, ninety-two percent of clients served were women; the vast majority of clients served were between the ages of 18 and 61; and forty-six percent of clients served identified themselves as non-white.

Chart 1: 2021-2022 DVSA Civil Legal Services Clients Served by Gender

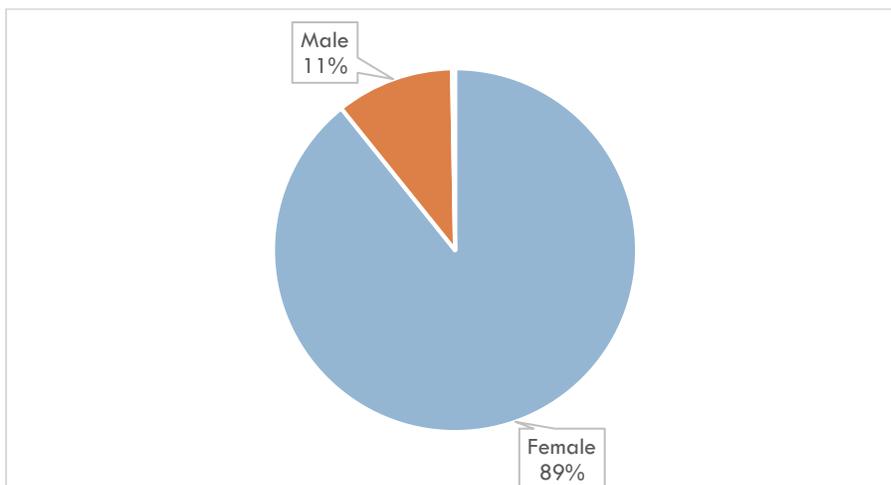


Chart 2: 2021-2022 DVSA Civil Legal Services Clients Served by Age

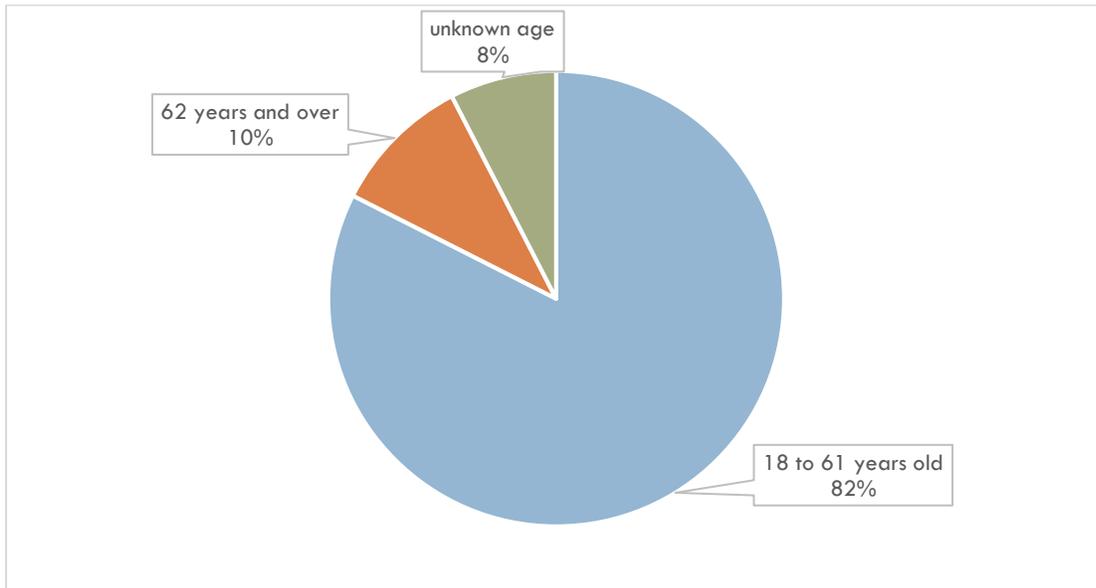
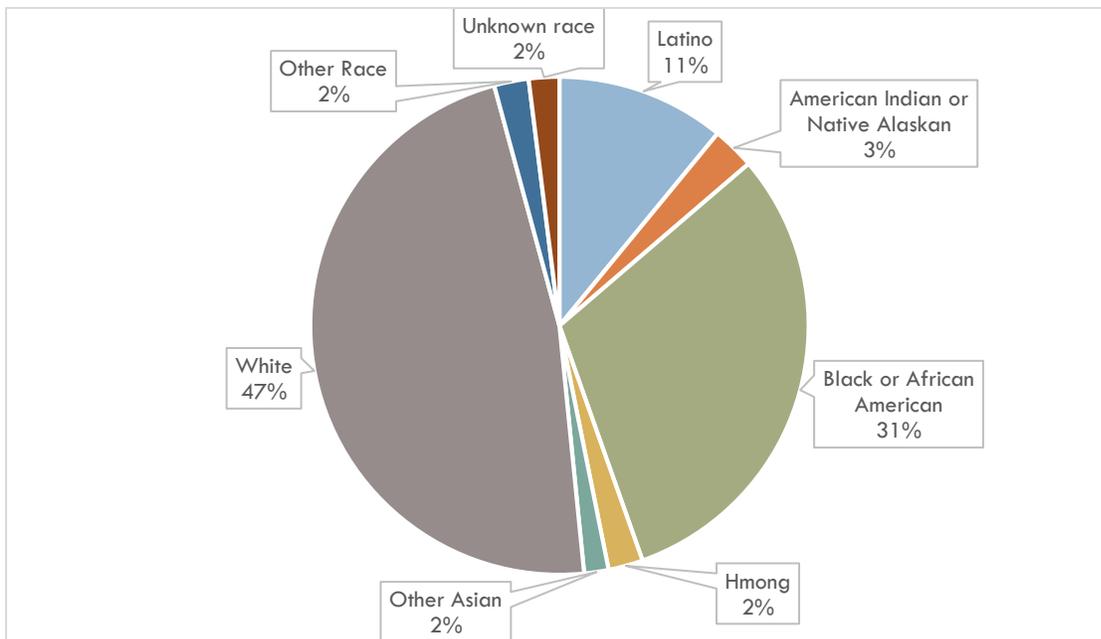


Chart 3: 2021-2022 DVSA Civil Legal Services Clients Served by Ethnicity/Race



In order to provide the most accurate information about case outcomes, WisTAF asks grantees to track only the individuals directly served during the grant period. The easiest way for grantees to do so is to report only cases closed during the period. This means that any reporting is necessarily conservative,

since there are always open cases carried from one reporting period to the next. 2021-2022 DVSA grantees reported that was the case in this funding cycle. Most had opened cases for TANF-eligible individuals with DVSA funds, but had not been able to bring some cases to their conclusion within the grant cycle, given the complex nature of cases and the limitations on court access and scheduling.

Outcomes Achieved

“Michelle” found her way to Centro Legal through a partnership with Sojourner Family Peace Center. She had put on a brave face during her long-term marriage to “Mike,” and theirs seemed like a perfect family from the outside. Behind closed doors, however, Mike was extremely abusive and manipulative to Michelle and their four children.

Michelle made several attempts to leave her marriage, including an initial attempt to file for divorce. Unfortunately, the legal system and the web of manipulation Mike had built were too complex and intimidating for her to escape. When she finally was able to break free, Michelle was in dire financial straits. She found herself unable to hire a private attorney to file her case and recognized that she would not be able to maneuver through the divorce process on her own. When Sojourner Family Peace Center connected Michelle with Centro Legal, we took her case free of charge, and she was able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Mike refused to cooperate with the divorce process and attempted to thwart Michelle and her attorney at every possible moment. Because she had an experienced, capable attorney, however, Michelle’s divorce was finalized in the spring of 2022 and she received extremely favorable court orders. She kept her house, received a child support order, and, most importantly, was granted sole custody and primary placement of her children. Thanks to Centro Legal and with this solid new foundation beneath her feet, Michelle is now able to build a healthy, safe new life for herself and her family.

“Without access to quality representation, there is no justice.”

~ U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia

The outcomes of each case not only affect the individuals receiving legal help, they affect the Wisconsin court system, which runs more effectively and efficiently when legal professionals are available to expedite cases.

They affect local resources such as homeless shelters and police and rescue personnel, by removing people from dangerous situations and providing the legal help they need to become independent. They affect local economies, allowing employees who had previously missed work days due to abuse to keep regular work schedules, benefiting the employer as well as the employee.

Many private attorneys don't have the resources to undertake domestic and sexual abuse cases that include complicating factors such as housing, employment and public safety. In addition, many poverty law legal cases – including those that involve domestic or sexual abuse – are complex, sometimes simply because what may have begun as a common and easily resolved legal problem is rarely

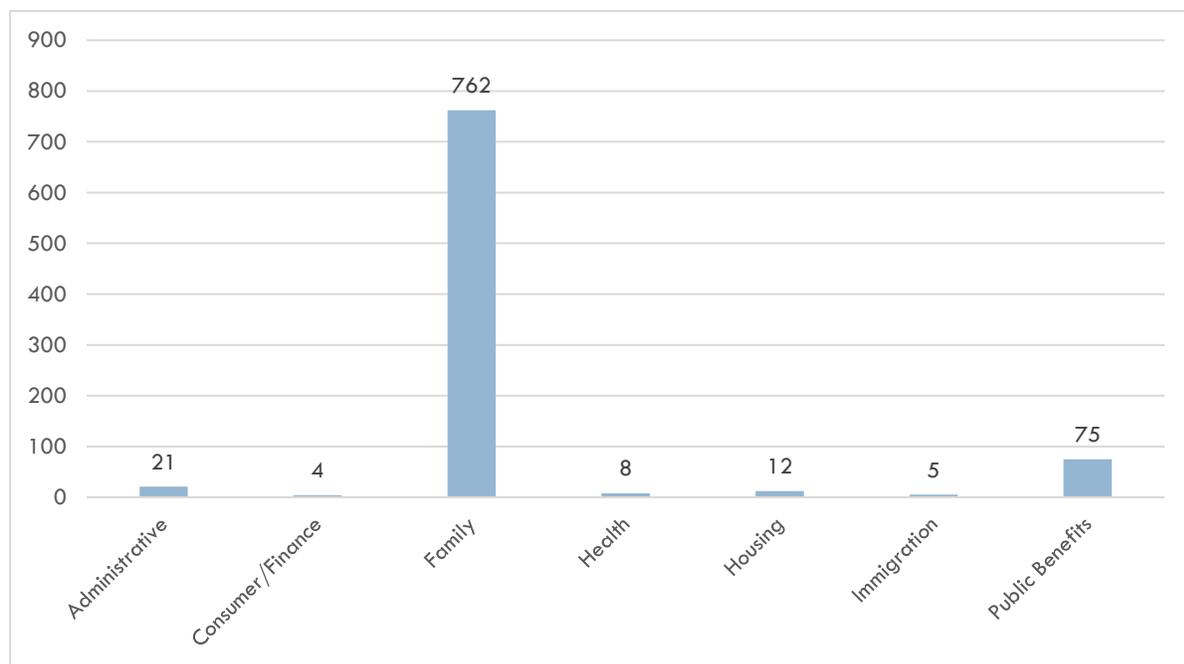
addressed in a timely fashion, and continues to grow in size due to a lack of funds available to pay a private attorney.

In order to determine the number, type and financial impact of services provided by DVSA grantees, WisTAF used an outcome-based reporting system based on similar systems used to report civil legal services to the federal Legal Services Corporation. WisTAF organized the reported outcomes into 17 civil legal services categories, each of which measured multiple types of case outcomes for services provided and funds successfully received or recovered for clients. Grantees reported 887 outcomes made possible by 2021-2022 DVSA funding. Most cases addressed multiple legal issues, resulting in multiple outcomes per case.

Chart 4 illustrates the most common areas of civil law in which outcomes were reported by grantees using 2021-2022 DVSA funding. Family law-related outcomes accounted for 86 percent of all outcomes reported.

- Family (762)
- Public benefits (75)
- Administrative (21)
- Housing (12)
- Health (8)
- Immigration (5)
- Consumer/Finance (4)
- TOTAL (887)

Chart 4: 2021-2022 Outcomes by Area of Law



Financial Impact: Funds Received or Recovered

Many survivors of domestic and sexual abuse are unable to access jointly held funds to which they are entitled because the abuser controls the family's finances. This means that people continue to remain in an unsafe environment, since they don't have access to money for food, rent, and clothing. This is an even larger problem when children are involved. Without legal help, survivors are left with the choice to stay with the abuser and continue to expose their children to abuse, potentially perpetuating the cycle, or to leave the abuser and try to establish their own financial support not knowing if they will have access to safe housing, employment, or other necessities.

In 2021-2022, DVSA grantees reported that they helped their clients recover more than \$871,541 in family law-related cases. Without those financial outcomes, these families would have been dependent on public benefits and other public support systems. Or worse, they may have continued to live and raise children in the kind of environment that tears families apart and destabilizes communities.

CONCLUSION

WisTAF is pleased to report continued successful management and implementation of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Civil Legal Services program to help TANF-eligible clients with much needed DVSA legal services. We are confident those services enhanced the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' efforts to stabilize Wisconsin families and help them to be safe, secure and self-sustaining.

We offer sincerest thanks to the domestic abuse shelter agency and legal services provider staff and attorneys who work tirelessly to help clients gain the outcomes needed to achieve long-term health and self-sufficiency. We thank DCF and all who have been instrumental in securing continued DVSA civil legal services funding. We look forward to continuing our role in the efforts to help vulnerable families become thriving members of Wisconsin's great communities.

Respectfully submitted by:
Rebecca L. Murray, WisTAF Executive Director

With report preparation assistance from WisTAF Program Manager Carlos Arenas.

Appendix Table 1: 2021-2022 DVSA/TANF Civil Legal Services Grant Applicants and Requests

Page | 16

PRIMARY APPLICANT	GEOGRAPHIC AREA SERVED	PARTNERING AGENCY	REQUEST
Center Against Sexual & Domestic Abuse (CASDA)	Superior, Douglas, Bayfield, and Ashland Counties in northwestern Wisconsin	n/a	\$52,215
Centro Legal	Primarily the greater Milwaukee area	n/a	\$60,000
Community Justice, Inc.	Dane, Columbia, Crawford, Jefferson, Rock, Sauk, Iowa, Juneau, Lafayette, Dodge, Waushara, Green, and Marquette Counties	n/a	\$65,000
End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin	Statewide	n/a	\$50,000
Golden House	Brown County	Legal Action of Wisconsin	\$75,000
HAVEN, Inc.	Lincoln County	Frokjer & Hersil LLC	\$20,000
Indianhead Community Action Agency	Primarily Burnett, Washburn, Sawyer, Rusk, Taylor, and Clark Counties	Lawton & Lawton, S.C.	\$75,000
Kids Matter Inc.	Legal representation in Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties; Statewide legal information and county specific procedural information	n/a	\$75,000
Legal Action of Wisconsin	39 counties of southern Wisconsin	Christine Ann Center	\$75,000
Rainbow House Domestic Abuse Services, Inc.	Marinette and Oconto Counties	Wisconsin Judicare; Law Office of Aaron M. Krzewinski	\$35,000
The Women's Center	Southeastern Wisconsin	Legal Action of Wisconsin	\$15,000
Wisconsin Judicare, Inc.	33 counties of northern Wisconsin	n/a	\$75,000
Women and Children's Horizons	Kenosha County and surrounding area	Legal Action of Wisconsin	\$20,000

Appendix Table 2: 2021-2022 DVSA/TANF Civil Legal Services Grant Awards

Page | 17

GRANTEE AGENCY	2021-2022 DVSA GRANT AWARD AMOUNT
Center Against Sexual & Domestic Abuse (CASDA)	\$37,500
Centro Legal	\$50,000
Community Justice, Inc.	\$50,000
End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (RISE)	\$20,000
Golden House	\$37,500
HAVEN, Inc.	\$20,000
Indianhead Community Action Agency	\$50,000
Kids Matter Inc.	\$35,000
Legal Action of Wisconsin	\$37,500
Rainbow House Domestic Abuse Services, Inc.	\$22,500
The Women's Center	\$15,000
Wisconsin Judicare, Inc.	\$55,000
Women's and Children's Horizons	\$20,000
TOTAL:	\$ 450,000

Appendix 3: Counties Served with 2021-2022 DVSA/TANF Funding



Individuals/families in 54 (shaded) counties were served with 2021-22 DVSA/TANF funding.

Appendix 4: Clients Served with 2021-2022 DVSA/TANF Funding by Judicial District

