

# PROTECTING CHILDREN & FAMILIES



2024-2025 Domestic Violence and  
Sexual Abuse Civil Legal Services Program

Submitted to DCF  
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# Protecting Children & Families

## 2024-2025 Domestic Violence & Sexual Abuse Civil Legal Services Program

### Introduction

Equal justice under law is a fundamental principle of the American justice system. It's a difficult promise to keep if we don't ensure that those most at risk have meaningful access to legal assistance.

The barriers to meaningful access to legal assistance are not just financial. 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 2025, the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation's (WisTAF) Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse (DVSA) Civil Legal Services Program was both the means for and the proof of the State of Wisconsin's effort to halt that cycle of dependency and foster healthy, safe, and independent families.

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

***~ Atty. Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption***

### Background & Data Collection

During the two-year 2023-2025 Wisconsin state budget cycle, \$1,000,000 of TANF funding from the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) budget was allocated to WisTAF to administer 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, 2024 through June 30, 2025, which marks the tenth year of this vital program. It outlines the management processes that WisTAF used to grant the funds to subrecipient legal services providers and domestic abuse shelters and provides specific data on services provided with the funds.

Pursuant to a contract between the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, WisTAF required grantees to submit annual reports following conclusion of the 2024-2025 grant cycle, which were used to compile the service and financial information contained in this report. The annual report they completed was designed to elicit the information that WisTAF needed to determine who was served, where they are located as well as the type and impact of the services that grant recipients provided to TANF-eligible clients. Our goal is to ensure that high-quality domestic violence and sexual abuse civil legal services are provided in all parts of Wisconsin through the efficient and effective use of this funding.

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 supporting 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.

## 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 \$87 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 five 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](http://www.wistaf.org).

### Program Development and Resources

Pursuant to 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 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. WisTAF's contract with DCF specifies 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 the Grants/Evaluation Committee, Finance Committee, or Executive Committee, depending on their experiences, leadership roles, and preferences..

Currently, WisTAF employs 3.75 full time equivalent (FTE) staff members, plus a limited-term, part-time position. Grant program management is provided by the full-time grants program manager and executive director.

In June 2023, representatives from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and WisTAF signed a new contract:

- Contract Number: 437004-G24-0002248-000-01
- Contract Term: July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2025
- 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)

## **Grant Notification and Application Process**

Current grantees and potential applicants were notified of the availability of DVSA funding by email. Foundation staff also posted information on the WisTAF website for public access.

WisTAF received eleven grant applications by the application deadline. 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, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

## **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 2024-2025 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 and Decision Process

WisTAF's Grants/Evaluations Committee was responsible for reviewing applications and making a funding recommendation for board consideration. Staff also provided input on the applications and applicants based on their knowledge and experience in providing daily oversight for the program.

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 experience serving the eligible target population; current and historical financial stability and longevity; demonstrated partnerships, collaborations and community support; the programs' geographic reach; 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 eleven applicant agencies. WisTAF's full board discussed and unanimously approved the recommended allocations on June 19, 2024. A summary of the requests and awards is shown on page 4.

| Applicant                                   | Counties to Be Served       | Requested        | Approved         |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| CASDA                                       | Bayfield, Ashland, Douglas  | \$74,074         | \$62,100         |
| Centro Legal                                | Milwaukee, Waukesha         | \$61,853         | \$57,500         |
| End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin-RISE           | Statewide                   | \$45,000         | \$20,700         |
| Golden House                                | Brown                       | \$75,000         | \$36,600         |
| HAVEN                                       | Lincoln                     | \$25,000         | \$19,400         |
| Indianhead Community Action Agency          | 9 northwest WI counties     | \$50,000         | \$48,800         |
| Kids Matter Inc.                            | Milwaukee                   | \$50,000         | \$39,000         |
| Legal Action of Wisconsin                   | Oshkosh, Racine, Kenosha    | \$75,000         | \$66,100         |
| Rainbow House Domestic Abuse Svcs           | Marinette, Oconto, Florence | \$21,958         | \$22,000         |
| The Women's Center                          | Waukesha                    | \$22,000         | \$14,600         |
| Wisconsin Judicare (dba Judicare Legal Aid) | Northern 33 WI counties     | \$75,000         | \$63,200         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                |                             | <b>\$574,885</b> | <b>\$450,000</b> |

## Disbursement of Funds

Grantees began submitting expense reimbursement requests to WisTAF in August 2024 for eligible services provided beginning July 1, 2024. 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. WisTAF's administrative expense reimbursements were calculated based on its approved cost allocation policy/procedure. 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 grants program manager coordinated 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 grants 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 2025, Wipfli LLP conducted an independent single audit of WisTAF's financial information and management, which included the DVSA program. Wipfli submitted the audited financials to the DCF Audit team as required.

Note on ongoing discrepancy between contract expense period and State of Wisconsin 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's 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 are counted against the following year's contract amount, even though they were, in actuality, incurred and 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. Accordingly, the June 2024 expenses that were paid to WisTAF in July 2024 counted against the SFY 2025 contract even though they were incurred/spent under the SFY 2024 contract.

While DCF has proposed language in recent state budgets that would allow the Department to count all reported expenses within the annual contract cycle to the SFY allocation and conform to accrual based accounting best practices, this change has not taken place. The accrual vs. cash-based accounting discrepancy will carry forward into each future contract year/grant cycle. DCF has verified in written communications with WisTAF 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 TANF funding via the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Civil Legal Services grant program), 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. DCF does not allow WisTAF to waive federal audit requirements for any providers meeting federal criteria for needing a program audit or a single audit that would otherwise be required under 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 desk audit, onsite and/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.

#### *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 clients receiving services (including client demographic data); the areas of law where services were provided; 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 prior to submission to DCF.

#### *Desk reviews of WisTAF subrecipients*

WisTAF also conducts a desk review of materials submitted by grantees in accordance with WisTAF's risk-based monitoring plan/policy specifications. For example, *moderate risk* subrecipients receive a desk audit annually.

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 from subrecipient's independent auditor
- Most recent internally-prepared financial statements and current budget

Results of desk reviews are shared with subrecipients and a formal response identifying corrective action plans, if applicable, is required.

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 reimbursement. 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 for WisTAF, because several grant recipients were not traditional legal services providers, 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 these new grantees. This effort provided a proactive opportunity to help them determine what they needed to do to be successful and meet the requirements of the grant program. We have continued to maintain strong, supportive relationships with these agencies in subsequent grant cycles and we continue to identify and coordinate trainings for subrecipients related to federal fund administration and Uniform Guidance requirements.

## Program Results

*All names have been changed to protect client privacy/confidentiality.*

***Sam** came to Golden House looking for support in making a difficult call to law enforcement, and our advocates were by her side every step of the way. Sam was experiencing physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her boyfriend, the father of her 2-year-old child. Golden House accompanied her as she bravely gave her statement to the responding officer, ensuring she never felt alone in the process. The advocate working with her also connected her to Legal Action of Wisconsin. Legal Action was then able to remove Sam's abuser from her lease and walk her through her rights as a tenant and the legal protections available to her. Together, we helped her understand her options, file the necessary paperwork, and secure the documentation she needed to move forward without fear of retaliation. This collaboration gave Sam a renewed sense of control and stability in her own home. To further strengthen her safety and peace of mind, Golden House provided her with security cameras and door and window alarms, empowering her to move forward with greater confidence and reassurance.*

## Expenditures

The table on page 9 summarizes 2024-2025 DVSA Civil Legal Services (TANF) State Appropriation Program expenses:

### DVSA Civil Legal Services State Appropriation (TANF) Program Expenses

|                                         |                  |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>A. Direct expense</b>                |                  |
| 1. Grantee direct expenses              | \$405,000        |
| <b>Direct expense subtotal:</b>         | <b>\$405,000</b> |
| <b>B. Administrative expense</b>        |                  |
| 1. Grantee administrative expenses      | \$45,000         |
| 2. WisTAF administrative expenses       | \$50,000         |
| <b>Administrative expense subtotal:</b> | <b>\$95,000</b>  |
| <b>Total expenses reimbursed:</b>       | <b>\$500,000</b> |

Due to the nature of reimbursement-based grants, three agencies were unable to use the full amount of the funds they were awarded. As in past years, WisTAF took proactive steps to determine the anticipated amount of unused grant funds and put in place a fair process to reallocate funds to grantees who incurred eligible expenses that exceeded their initial grant awards. As a result, \$3,293.81 was reallocated to grantees who incurred eligible expenses exceeding their original grant allocations. This resulted in the best possible utilization of funds in the areas with the greatest need.

### 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 time commitment and the emotional circumstances that accompany these types of cases. Even domestic and sexual abuse survivors with means can 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 even less chance that they will find the legal help they need, particularly in rural areas, except through programs such as the ones funded by DVSA Civil Legal Services grants.

When making grant allocations, WisTAF strives to ensure that there will be coverage for clients in all parts of the state. The \$75,000 per grant cap makes it challenging to achieve this goal, because some of WisTAF's subrecipient agencies cover multi-county areas or entire regions of the state, while others may only serve a single county.

Although funds were granted to agencies that, collectively, serve victims in every county, our subrecipients reported providing DVSA-funded services in 44 of Wisconsin's 72 counties during this grant cycle. Other sources of funds, including VOCA and VAWA, were likely used to serve clients in additional counties.

**Additional investment of TANF or other funds by the State and elimination of the arbitrary \$75,000 per award cap is crucial to expand the program's coverage and address areas of known unmet legal need going forward.**

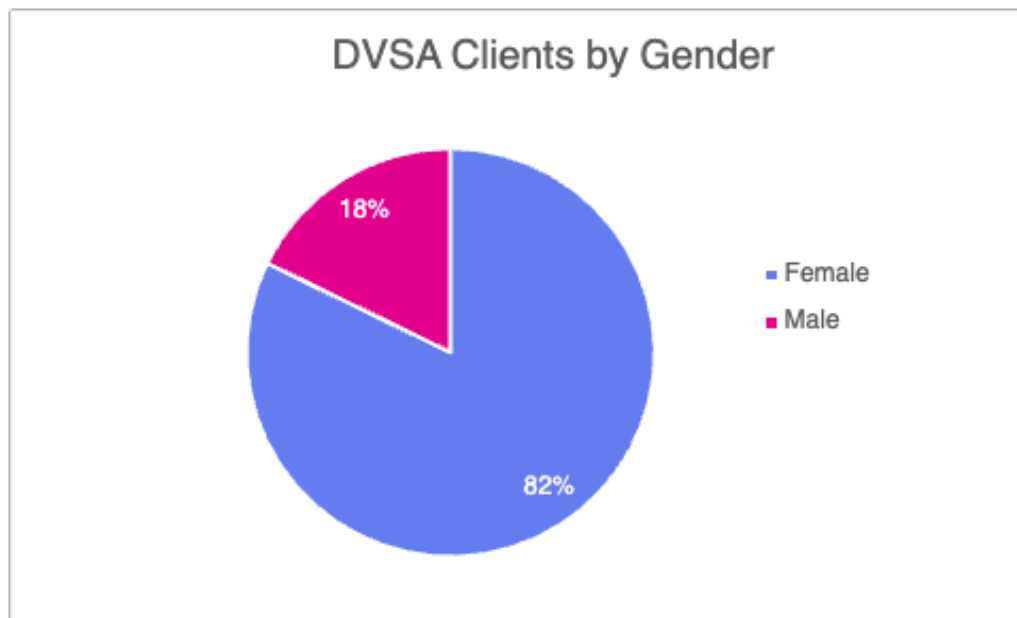
## Clients Served

*Alicia had already gone through a difficult custody battle with her ex, Jeremy, before she came to Centro Legal for help. She knew how complicated the court process could be. Jeremy made her post-judgment case even harder by dragging his feet at every step. The prospect of Jeremy taking their kids for unsupervised visits, despite choosing not to see them for many months, was terrifying for Alicia given his history of abusive behavior and well-documented addiction. She needed help from an attorney to navigate court hearings and ensure the safety of her family. With her Centro Legal lawyer's help, she was able to avoid the stress and uncertainty of trial. Alicia's lawyer negotiated a final agreement that brought the case to a close: Jeremy agreed to undergo regular drug tests, participate in reunification therapy with the kids, and engage with other services to support his recovery. Upon completion of all required steps, Jeremy can begin to have limited, but gradually increasing, amounts of time with the children, starting with supervised visits. With this Court-approved agreement in place, Alicia can trust that she and her children will remain safe, and Jeremy will get the help he needs..*

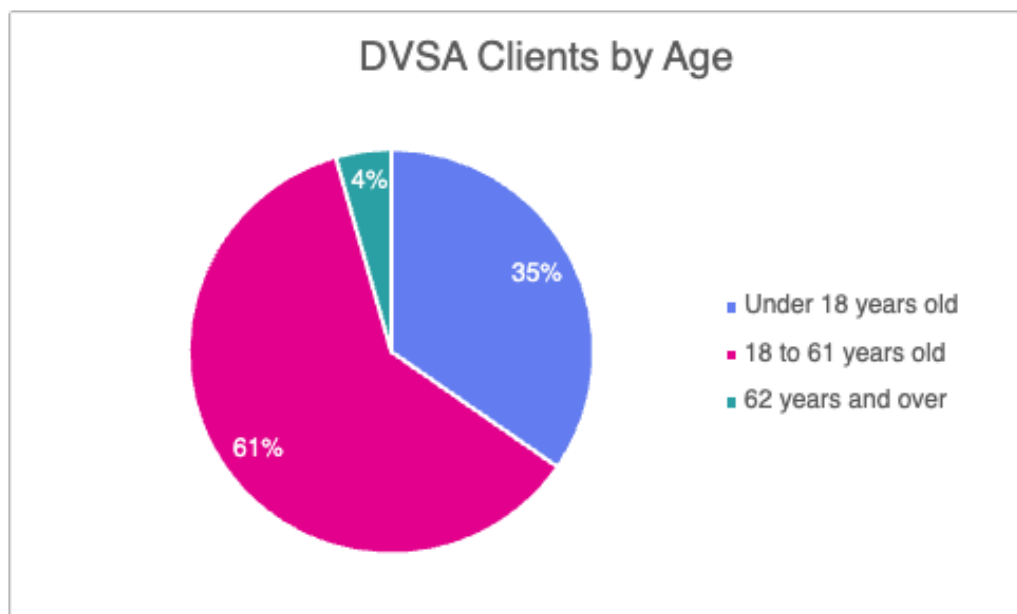
The lack of attorneys willing and able to take domestic violence and sexual abuse cases is not the only factor that prevents clients from being able to get the legal help they need. Lack of money is a huge obstacle faced by domestic and sexual abuse survivors, who may be cut off from financial resources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

In 2024-2025, DVSA funds were used to help at least 633 TANF-eligible individuals and their families, providing over 900 services ranging from limited advice to full representation in civil litigation. The following charts provide demographic information about the clients assisted through this program.

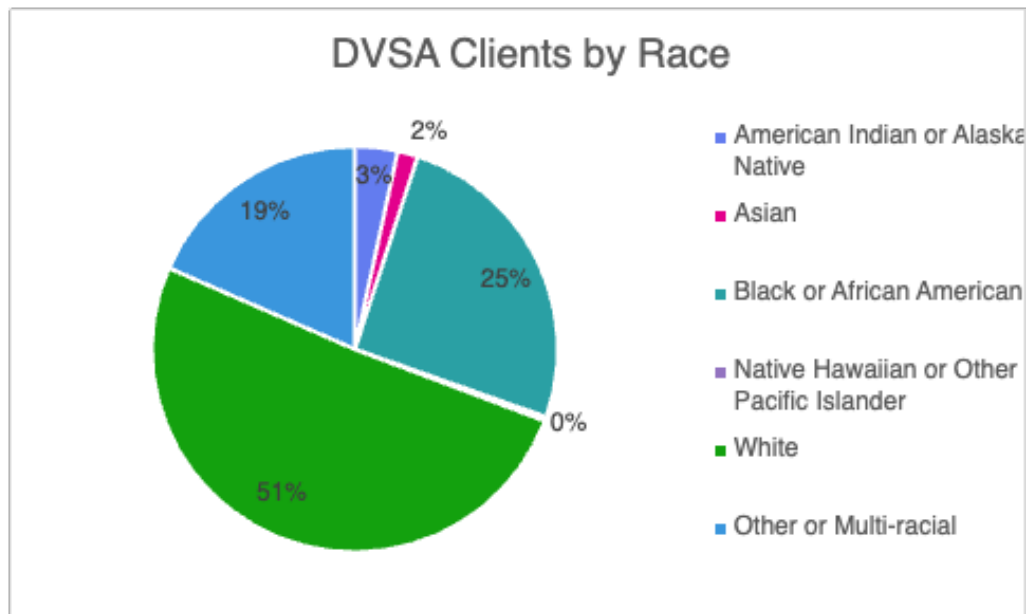
**Chart 1: 2024-2025 DVSA Civil Legal Services Clients Served by Gender**



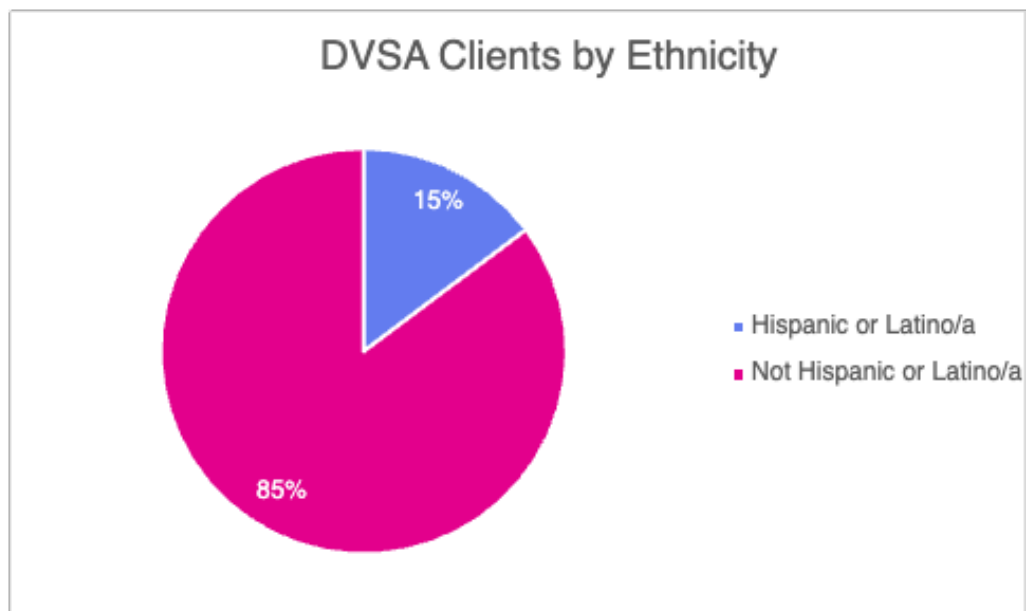
**Chart 2: 2024-2025 DVSA Civil Legal Services Clients by Age**



**Chart 3: 2024-2025 DVSA Civil Legal Services Clients Served by Race**



**Chart 4: 2024-2025 DVSA Civil Legal Services Clients Served by Ethnicity**



## Services & Outcomes

*Maria, a survivor of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, was referred to RISE Law Office by a private attorney who recognized the severity of her situation but could not take her case pro bono. Maria's husband refused to pay child support, and the court kept sending the parties to mediation, which kept failing, despite the history of domestic violence in the case. When we met with the client she was both fearful of continued interaction with her abuser and unable to attend another mediation due to transportation barriers. One of our attorneys attempted to request a reschedule or virtual option for Maria, only to be met with hostility and discriminatory remarks from a court-appointed mediator, who yelled at both the client and attorney and questioned their ability to speak English based solely on their last names (which are of Hispanic origin). After this interaction, it was obvious to RISE Law Office that she was not going to be successful on her own, so RISE took her case and was able to successfully obtain temporary orders on custody, placement, and child support. We also were successful in getting specific language for safety provisions in place that the father had to use an appropriate car seat and remain sober when transporting their child. This grant was instrumental in helping to protect Maria and her young children.*

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 or experience to undertake domestic violence and sexual abuse cases that include complicating factors such as housing, employment and public safety. In addition, cases 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 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 services into civil legal services areas of law, each of which measured multiple types of case outcomes for services provided and funds successfully received or recovered for clients. Grantees reported over 900 client services provided with 2024-2025 DVSA funding. Most cases addressed multiple legal issues, resulting in multiple services per case.

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As in past years, the most common areas of law where civil legal services were provided in this program are family law, guardianship, public benefits, and victim rights.

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

**~ U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia**

## **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 to the next generation, 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 2024-2025, DVSA grantees reported that they **helped their clients receive or recover at least \$1.9 million as a result of the legal services provided through this program – a 3.8x return on investment for the State**. Without those financial outcomes, these families may have continued to live and raise children in the kind of environment that tears families apart, increases public costs, and destabilizes communities.

Moreover, WisTAF recently commissioned a study on the economic impact of civil legal aid in Wisconsin and found that **civil legal aid produced annual economic impacts totaling \$176 million — a return of \$8.40 for every \$1 invested**.

## **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 these 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 civil legal aid provider staff and attorneys who work so 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.

We invite you to view our [latest Annual Report](#) for information about WisTAF's mission and impact. For questions about the information contained in this report, please contact:

- Jeff Brown, Grants Program Manager [jbrown@wistaf.org](mailto:jbrown@wistaf.org) / 608.257.6844 or
  - Rebecca L. Murray, Executive Director [rmurray@wistaf.org](mailto:rmurray@wistaf.org) / 608.257.2841
- 

*The Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation (WisTAF) is the leading state-based funder of legal aid in Wisconsin. WisTAF works with civil legal aid organizations in Wisconsin to increase access to justice. We oversee funds and invest in services and programs to help people resolve legal problems. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, WisTAF was 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. The organization is committed to the vision that all Wisconsinites will have equal access to justice, regardless of their income. Visit us online at [www.wistaf.org](http://www.wistaf.org).*